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Oral history interview with Richard Ritter, 2005 August 2

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Richard Ritter and his wife, fellow artist Jan Williams, on August 2, 2005. The interview took place in Bakersville, North Carolina, and was conducted by Joan Falconer Byrd 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.

Richard Ritter, Jan Williams, and Joan Falconer Byrd 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

JOAN FALCONER BYRD: This is Joan Falconer Byrd interviewing Richard Ritter and Jan Williams on their farm in Bakersville, North Carolina, on August 2, 2005, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Disc one, session one.

I think if both of you would talk a little bit about some of the background information, about where and when you were born, your family background and also your background in art.

Richard, do you want to-

RICHARD RITTER: Well, I guess we'll start with where I was born.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: In Detroit, Michigan. Born there only, and I lived in a small town called Novi, in Michigan.

MS. BYRD: And you were born about, was it-

MR. RITTER: Nineteen-forty. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Nineteen-forty?

MR. RITTER: October 25.

MS. BYRD: Okay. And you have brothers and sisters or-you have a brother.

MR. RITTER: I have two brothers and two sisters. I came from a family of five children. My dad was a tool and die maker. My mother was a homemaker, or mom, I guess you should say. Grew up on an 11-acre farm.

MS. BYRD: Oh. That's neat.

MR. RITTER: My dad came from Michigan and-I mean, from Detroit. He was raised there and so was my mom. Neither one of them-I think my mother might have graduated from high school, but my dad did not. So he decided when he moved to Novi, he wanted to raise animals, so we raised-

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: A hundred of everything.

MS. BYRD: Seriously?

MR. RITTER: So there's where the love of ducks and stuff that you may know about comes from.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: His background was as a tool and die designer, or toolmaker.

MS. BYRD: Hmm. He was a tool and die maker and also had the farm, so he was doing both at the time?

MR. RITTER: He's doing both. Right.

MS. BYRD: And that's-

MR. RITTER: Actually, we grew up at a lake for about four or five years, but then we moved to Novi-

MS. BYRD: All right.

MR. RITTER: -where I went to school.

MS. BYRD: Now you-I know you were educated sort of broadly, as far as art goes.

MR. RITTER: Yeah. I guess it's called broadly because I spent a long time in art school, but-[they laugh]-it was over a period of time. I graduated from Northville High because Novi didn't have a high school, but it was a very good high school. We had a lot of things going on there. It was a very good educational institution. Some of the ones now, I wonder what happened in those span of years, because, you know, I went there in the '40s and '50s, and in Northville I had a wonderful education.

And I didn't do that well. Sports saved me-[they laugh]-because the coach didn't have to get a letter from anybody in the school saying what your grades were; he went and checked them every week, so I kept a C average, and somebody said, "Oh, you can raise your average if you take an art class. He gives-this guy gives As." [They laugh.] And I said, "Well, I'm going to do that."

MS. BYRD: I've heard that one. Yes.

MR. RITTER: So I went and met Mr. Van Haren, a wonderful teacher who really stimulated his students. We did a huge mural, big art projects, and I found myself spending more and more time in his department. And when I went to go to school, I decided I'd go into the arts. And I signed up at a university, and then I went and saw an art school and decided the university was not for me, so I went to the art school instead, which is much more art and less of the things that I got Cs in. Anyway-[they laugh]-but about that time, too-I don't know how much detail you want-the Vietnam war had come up and they were drafting-not drafting at the time, rather. So I went down to the navy because I thought, well, I'll go in there because both schools had put me on probation for six months because my grades were so wonderful.

MS. BYRD: Oh, my word. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: So I walked into the navy office and met another good gentleman, I think. And he said, "What would you like to do?" And I said, "I want to become an artist." He said, "What the hell are you doing here?" [They laugh.] So I went back, decided that the art school was where I'd go, and I spent four years, or three and a half actually.

MS. BYRD: Now which school was this?

MR. RITTER: This is-well, it was called the Society of Arts and Crafts.

JAN WILLIAMS: It's the College for Creative Studies now.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: I think they have around 2,000 students, and it's doing very well in the middle of Detroit, near Wayne State and near the museum, so it's a nice cultural area.

And I took advertising design, because I thought that would be a good way to make a living, and it was. Three and a half years of school, but I took a lot of fine art. More fine art and crafts than most advertising-most of the advertising and design students didn't take any. Maybe a few drawing classes, maybe one painting class, but I took as much as I could take, and it ruined it for advertising for me, because I went into advertising and I was going to get married, decided I'd better get a job, quit school, got a job in advertising because it was there and they were hard to get back in-let's see, that would have been '63. Worked about six years in advertising, and eventually really decided I wanted to go back to school, after threatening one of my bosses.

MS. BYRD: Now, would you be willing to tell that story the way you've told it to me before?

MR. RITTER: What's that?

MS. BYRD: Well, that you sort of picked the guy up. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: Yes. Well, if you want that kind of detail. Actually, I worked in a studio. I had seven bosses, which was unusual. Studios are what supply ad agencies with their artwork at that time, and they still do. There's lots of studios. They call them studios. And that's where the artwork is done for the agency-big art agencies. And unfortunately, there were two employees and seven owners.

The rest of the owners were really good. I had this one boss who would bring his drawings in, and we'd doctor them all up and clean them up and made them look good and presentable, and the clients would really love them, and so he always brought these sketches, and I guess one day I'd been working-we worked really long hours in advertising-another reason I decided to quit-but he brought these thumbnails in and so I just blew them up and he was-he just thought they were the best drawings he'd ever taken to a client.

So he took them, and the client literally threw him out of the room with his drawings, you know, so he brought them back and blamed me and I-I guess this must have been when I was feeling I had had enough of advertising-and I actually pinned him against the wall and tore his drawings up. So the other bosses walked in that night when I was redoing all his work for him and said, "You probably should look for employment somewhere else," so-[they laugh]-so that's when I decided to go back to art school.

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: I'd already decided to take a class in jewelry, and I realized it was going to take me two and a half years to get that last quarter done because I was changing my major, part-time, and part-time is really hard to do. And I went back to school. They let me teach advertising, which was kind of a little hard, because I didn't believe in it anymore, but I got to take all the free classes I wanted to take.

So I took a metals class, and actually sold and taught jewelry for two years in that school at Arts and Crafts.

MS. BYRD: Did you complete a degree in metals? Did you-

MR. RITTER: I have a certificate.

MS. BYRD: Certificate. That's right.

MR. RITTER: Because I still didn't do those C classes. So I did that, and Gil Johnson-

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: -who now lives near us, in fact, he's down here about-I believe Gil might have been down here before I came down, but he lives in a Quaker community called Celo; it was founded with those beliefs; and I helped him build a glass shop. And I literally took the glass to combine with my jewelry and fell in love with glass-simple.

MS. WILLIAMS: And this was at Arts and Crafts.

MR. RITTER: It was still at Arts and Crafts; so Arts and Crafts was one of the first schools to have glass in Michigan, if not the first school. And I spent one semester in there and I was done with my class-they'd given me my certificate-and I actually had enough credits to have a major in advertising and crafts, but when I looked back at the certificate, it just says crafts on it, so-but I only went to the furnace 11 times, which means you gather out of the furnace 11 times.

Gil had 17 people in the class and a little 40-pound pot furnace we built, or day tank rather. And I was teaching jewelry at a school in Birmingham, Michigan, Bloomfield Hills, called BAA back then-Bloomfield Art Association. And they paid a whole lot more than Arts and Crafts paid-[they laugh]-so-and they had a brand new director there who was into current things, and he said, "Can you build a glass shop?" And I said, "Sure." I really had never built a glass shop. [They laugh.] I'd helped Gil build one, so we had a building out back. And so we built it, and first furnace I built, the bricks floated to the top-

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: -from the bottom the first time I fired it, you know, so-

MS. BYRD: Oh, my word.

MR. RITTER: But my former father-in-law knew a furnace builder that built little furnaces, which was unheard of back then. He built it in about a day; we were back in business.

So I blew glass all summer long, so that by the fall, I might be able to teach students something. And we built, with the students' help, built the shop, and I had, like, 13 students.

MS. BYRD: Now, what type of glass were you melting then?

MR. RITTER: Back then I was melting wine bottles.

MS. BYRD: My word!

MR. RITTER: There was not what students have today; they can learn-what took me eight years, they probably can get in one good semester, I would hope. But there is so much glass available now.

MS. BYRD: Yes, and you've had to teach yourself always.

MR. RITTER: Yeah. Right, I didn't buy a blow pipe; I made it. My dad was a tool and die maker. He made the head and welded it on a piece of black pipe, and that was my first pipe.

I made my own tools because I was a jeweler. They were all the wrong size, but I'd seen them in a book. So I didn't really study from anybody other than Gil, for those-you know. He had only gone to one class himself with [Dominick] Labino, so it was the blind leading the blind, which was what happened that fall when I was teaching the students. But there was such enthusiasm for what we were doing.

MS. BYRD: Do they still teach glass at Bloomfield Hills?

MR. RITTER: No, they've closed it s few years ago. Yeah. The shop's still sitting there, but it's closed.

MS. BYRD: Now, you came from there down to Penland [Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC].

MR. RITTER: Well, what happened is I actually sold my jewelry at America House [Birmingham, MI].

MS. BYRD: Oh, that's interesting.

MR. RITTER: One in New York and one in Birmingham, Michigan. That's the only two commercial outlets they had that I know of, maybe they had more. It was all part of American Crafts, and my former wife worked there. And I saw Mark Peiser's glass there and I said, "Well, where is he?" And she said, "He's at a school that has a glass program in North Carolina." So I called Mark. I called registration; I couldn't get in; it was full. So I called Mark and talked to him and he said, "Oh, I'll get you in."

And so I came down for one class, '71, I believe, and virtually stayed after that. I mean, I went back to Michigan for a short time, but I-after Peiser, Dick Marquis was the next instructor, so I went to-this is where Bill Brown comes into my life, I guess.

MS. BYRD: The director?

MR. RITTER: The director of Penland. I went to him. What was nice about Bill, you could go see the director anytime you want to because he always showed up for lunch, dinner, and breakfast. Breakfast? Nah, breakfast not always, but he had an open door policy at 4 o'clock and everybody could come and talk-anybody who wanted to-so I always did, because he was really an incredible man. And I said, "Could I stay on to take a class with Richard Marquis, because he's working with murrini and I have been working with very simple murrinis on my vessels."

Richard Marquis had just come back from Italy. And Bill said, "Well, sure you can." And then I said, "The other problem is I don't have any money. I've spent it all being here for two, three weeks." And he said, "Well, what can you *do*?" I said, "Well, your annealers need to all be repaired and rebuilt," and he said, "Well, do it!" And didn't move me out of my private room. I spent the time repairing those ovens and rebuilding them.

And the weekend that I was leaving, Bill came up, and-experiences with Dick Marquis and Mark Peiser and all the others-it was so exciting back then. Glass was about a dance. There was a performance. Yes, you were making some object, but a lot of us I don't think really cared too much about the object. It was more a matter of doing it, you know. Working with the material, the way it was cold one minute, and then flexible the next. But he came up to me at a dinner and said, "How would you like to teach next year?"

I said, "Sure." So I went back and taught one more year at the BAA, and I came down to Penland. And while I was teaching, I asked Bill if I could become a resident. He said, "Sure." He really was the one who decided on residents, other than the fact that he always went by recommendations from the other artists, you know, like Fritz [Dreisbach] or other former resident artists.

MS. BYRD: Mm-hmm [affirmative], the people-the other people who were teaching there.

MR. RITTER: Right. Or Mark Peiser or, you know, that was all part of it. It wasn't something-Bill didn't sit you down in a room and say, "Let's go over this person." It was more at these casual meets. In fact, Bill Brown didn't believe in an office. He did not want to sit in an office and have you schedule times to come to see him. If it was important enough to see him, he would just do that. It was a very interesting teaching philosophy, I thought, that he had.

MS. BYRD: Why don't you bring this story along to the point where you and Jan met and so on, and then we'll have Jan bring us up to date.

MR. RITTER: Well, okay. I was a resident for a couple of years. I won't tell you how many, because it was a very long time, but-

MS. BYRD: But I think it's-[they laugh.]. I mean, if you know how many years is it was, we could get it down.

MR. RITTER: Well, Jan-I met Jan in 1974, and I'd been there since '70-latter part of '71, I think, or '72.

MS. BYRD: I think it must have been '72, from what you said.

MR. RITTER: So I taught my very first concentration class at Penland, which is an eight-week program, not the summer program. It's an extended program, so you can really delve into what you're doing with the students. And that is when I met Jan; she was one of my first concentration students with Richard Jolley, Jack Wax-the only one who's not in glass that I know-I don't know what Dave's doing; I heard once he was in glass, but I never heard but-

MS. BYRD: Dave-what's his name?

MR. RITTER: I don't remember Dave's last name. [To Jan] Do you remember his last name?

MS. WILLIAMS: It was Platoff.

MR. RITTER: Platoff? Something like that. Anyway, then [John] Murphy was another student, but he's a gaffer for a big-

MS. WILLIAMS: -film studio. Paramount.

MR. RITTER: Film studio. Yeah.

MS. BYRD: Oh, really?

MR. RITTER: He loves it. Well, his parents were in the theater, so I think it was natural for him to go into that kind of direction.

MS. BYRD: Murphy?

MS. WILLIAMS: John Murphy.

MS. BYRD: Okay. So it was a great-obviously fabulous session.

MR. RITTER: It was best and hardest class I've ever taught. They worked me to death. [They laugh.] We did everything in that class, didn't we? I mean, just the more I could throw at them, the happier they were. And they came up with projects.

So we had eight weeks of just-everybody was exhausted at the end, so from that-you know, what I really enjoyed about what Bill instilled in us is: I wasn't a teacher, and they weren't my students and we never had a pecking order. And so we were all just working together to learn, and that's the philosophy that was instilled in the school for years and years.

When he sat down at the round table at dinner, it didn't matter whether you were a board member-probably better if you weren't-a board member or a student or somebody who just walked in off the road; he wanted to know about you and what was going on. And so we all adopted that philosophy, I think, especially back then, because it was the '70s. We all taught for nothing, literally. We never had to worry about anything while we were there either. But Jan was a student and it wasn't a student-teacher relationship. It *was* a student-teacher relationship; we didn't do anything else. So after that class-I can't remember the exact scenario. I think Jan went home for a while.

MS. WILLIAMS: No, you had a show coming up at the Yaw Gallery [Birmingham, MI].

MR. RITTER: I had a show-right.

MS. WILLIAMS: And you asked me to stay and help you through that show.

MR. RITTER: And so she'd stayed, and helped me do the show. I had two assistants.

MS. WILLIAMS: That was later on.

MR. RITTER: Later on, so-

MS. WILLIAMS: But that, at that point it was just me.

MR. RITTER: But Jan worked for me for couple years-

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

MR. RITTER: I can't recall.

MS. WILLIAMS: Two years.

MR. RITTER: Must've been at least two years before we ever got together.

MS. BYRD: Why don't we go ahead and have you, Jan, pick up from the beginning with you, and then we'll get the two of you to talk about these things together.

MS. WILLIAMS: Let's see. I was born in Manhattan, actually, New York City, 1952. Raised on a 100-acre farm in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, to parents who-my father was a gentleman farmer, didn't farm the land, but he had a chemical market research business in New Jersey, and pretty much left every day, and my mother-my mother was just wonderful and spent her days just raising kids-I have a younger brother and an older sister, younger sister, and the four of us just had a great time on the farm. And sort of grew up in an area that was rich with theater and music and art, and so I was exposed to art at a very early age, a lot of exposure to art.

And we traveled; we went to Europe. From the time I was little-I'd been to the Louvre by the time I was four years old.

MS. BYRD: Oh. [They laugh.]

MS. WILLIAMS: So I grew up really having a lot of exposure to painters, basically.

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

MS. WILLIAMS: Mostly to painters, and loving it, although in high school, I really took more of an academic kind of track, but loved growing up on the farm. My mother still lives there on that farm in Bucks County, so she's lived there over 50 years.

But when I was in high school, my senior year, I decided that I'd had all the academics that I could really muster, and I had kind of thought I might want to go into archaeology or something of that sort, and that I should take one art class. And I took something called applied arts, and much to my surprise when I showed up the first day, it was a ceramics class and I was absolutely stunned and disappointed. [They laugh.] And I went home to my mother I said, "Oh, my gosh! It's a ceramics class." [They laugh.] Here I finally took one art course and what am I going to do? She said, "Well, you're going to try it and see how it goes."

Well, within a week, I was totally hooked, and immersed myself. It was the reason I got up in the morning and went to school. The whole senior year, sick as a dog, I would drag myself and fortunately had-my first period class was English, second period class was the art class-the ceramics class-and third period class was study hall, so I stayed all the way through art and then study hall, and got as much of ceramics as I could.

So when I graduated, I went to the University of Delaware, because they had a ceramics program, and my teacher at that time was Victor Spinski. He was a great teacher; he was an inspiring teacher. And at the end of the first year-I can't say that I was a really happy student there-and when we talked, he said, "Well, really, what's wrong?" And I said, "Well, you know, really I want to do more art. I'm just not getting enough art. I'm spending a lot of time doing all these academics, and I did that in high school. I want to do art." So he said, "Well, you need to get out of the university and go to an art school." And I said, "Well, where?" And he told me about Philadelphia College of Art. He said he had friends who taught there, and he actually gave me a recommendation.

And I got on a train and went up with my portfolio and decided to go there. And that, sort of, experience changed my life. I had the most fabulous three years in Philadelphia at that school. I felt like I got the most wonderful education. I got a B.F.A. in crafts. I had some teachers that I just thought were terrific-I adored them. Wayne Bates was one of them. Ed Eberly was another one. And then there was another teacher who was teaching ceramics my sophomore year and he-let's see, my favorite teacher there was Petras Vaskeys. Petras was-he did work with moulds; that was his specialty.

And in my junior and senior year, I decided that he was the person that I was going to key into for my work, that I was really going to study and get as much from Petras as I could. And he was just a charming, charming man.

MS. BYRD: And this is the-

MS. WILLIAMS: Really wonderful guy.

MS. BYRD: Molded ceramics?

MS. WILLIAMS: All ceramics still. In my junior year, the end of my junior year, my ceramics instructor, Roland Jahn, was looking for students to sign up for his glassblowing class.

So there was an opportunity to take glass at the school, and I had always as a little girl gone every summer to West Virginia to visit my grandmother in Hurricane, West Virginia. And every summer we went and we saw the Hurricane glassworks and we also saw Blenko [The Blenko Glass Company, Milton, WV], and so I saw glassblowing every summer of my life. And in those days, you walked behind and stood behind the gaffer, you know. And so when I got to PCA [Philadelphia College of Art], and I was just totally interested in ceramics, my junior year, I had the opportunity to take glass and-

MS. BYRD: Roland?

MS. WILLIAMS: Roland Jahn.

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

MS. WILLIAMS: Roland walked into the pot shop, and he said, "I desperately need some students for my class." [They laugh.] And I was sitting there and I thought, wow, glassblowing. I never even thought that I could do that. So I said, "Well, sure. I'll do it. Yeah. I'll do it." And so I signed up for it, and that was a defining moment for me, because from the moment I started blowing glass, I knew I just totally loved it.

My junior year I gotten to know this wonderful student named Florrie [Flo] Perkins. And Flo Perkins is also a glassblower today. Flo and I just had a great time in school, and she had come to Penland the summer before.

MS. BYRD: Ah.

MS. WILLIAMS: So when I was graduating, anyway, from school, and trying to decide what to do and thinking about going to graduate school to continue in pottery because that was kind of really still my major, but I was kind of waffling and thinking I'd like to change to glass, she said, "Well, you got to go to Penland," because she had been here the year before, and I am thinking George Thiewes was her teacher.

MR. RITTER: He was there.

MS. WILLIAMS: I think-

MR. RITTER: He was a resident artist during that time.

MS. WILLIAMS: George Thiewes.

MR. RITTER: He just started being a teacher.

MS. WILLIAMS: Right. Was her teacher, but anyway she just said, "I just had the best time, and you would really learn so much, and that will help you to decide whether you want to stay in glass." So I had gotten a great job out of school at the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, with a program led by Wayne Bates-a fantastic teacher and mentor.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: And I was in the first group that went upstairs, and they really hired me because of my mould experience, everything that Petras had taught me. And we would just go upstairs and out of the archives pull out the old moulds that were broken and pull out tiles and pull off moulds. So we were actually all involved. I spent the whole summer making moulds, and then trying to reproduce the glazes, and it was just so much fun. I just absolutely adored it; but in the back of my mind I still thought I did want to try out glass.

So I did finally go to Penland, and that's when I met Richard, who was the concentration teacher, and just the experience of being at Penland, of being in a very small group of very dynamic students. And, of course, Richard Jolley, Jack Wax, John Murphy, David Platoff-it was also much fun and so hard work.

And then Richard had fabulous visiting artists come. He had Fritz come, and Fritz was, well just-Fritz had come to PCA, to Philadelphia College of Art, when I was a senior and I had just-you know, he was so wonderful, and so to see him again and I have to admit, I was somewhat intimidated in the class, because Richard and David and Jack

Wax were darn good glassblowers. And here I was, this little sort of dilettante or something-I don't know, I just felt a little bit inadequate. And so our first assignment-Richard gave us very loose assignments, but he liked to give assignments, and he had given us an assignment to do functional pieces. And so I wasn't much of a glassblower, but I made these itsy-bitsy, little, tiny glasses-little tiny, tiny cups and saucers, and then I decaled little roses on them and they were, like, a clear purple, and they had little cups and saucers.

And, well, I was so embarrassed by putting them on the table. Fritz decided he was going to do a crit of this functional work, and I was so embarrassed about my pieces that I held them on my lap and everybody else stuck their goblets-let's see, Jack Wax had a goblet that he'd blown a ball in the middle that had a free-floating heart that would jiggle, you know.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes. [They laugh.]

MS. WILLIAMS: And, I mean, I can't even tell you what Richard-I mean what the different-they had all done great stuff.

MS. BYRD: You're talking about Richard Jolley? Because we have the two Richards -

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. Richard Jolley had done this incredible thing, and they'd all done great stuff.

Now, John Murphy, he was just starting, so everything was wonderful for John. He was just such a pleasure to have around, but anyway, during the process of the crit, listening to Fritz-he made me feel comfortable, and I slowly stuffed the pieces up on the table when nobody was looking. I just kind of stuck them up there. Well, he did the whole crit and he didn't say anything about my pieces until the very end, and then he said, "Okay, now I have to tell you, I really want to talk about these pieces here," and he said, "I have to tell you all, boys, all that you've done is just a pile of shit." [They laugh.] That's what he said.

MS. BYRD: Really?

MS. WILLIAMS: And then he said, "But these pieces-now, these are really something, because these have real soul in them. See?"

MS. BYRD: Ah.

MS. WILLIAMS: And then he made me feel so good-

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: Because I felt so inadequate.

MS. BYRD: And you were the only woman in the class, which must have been hard-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. But, he just made me feel like, even though I didn't have the technical ability, that I could intellectually, and I could creatively, do something as good.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: You know, that's what he was-

MS. BYRD: Absolutely.

MS. WILLIAMS: He talked to us a long time about how technique was really not-although it's very important-that what was really important was creativity. So at the end of the eight weeks, Richard asked me if I wanted to stay and work for him, until he had his Yaw [Gallery] show. And I think your Yaw show was, like, in February or March.

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

MS. WILLIAMS: March, maybe. So it was-I was really kind of taken aback and was like, "Oh, my gosh. I have this great job at the Tile Works at home and what do I do? What do I do?" Because that was really hard to give up, you know.

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

MS. WILLIAMS: But I decided to stay at Penland. And so I did stay, and I worked with Richard, and at the end of that time, he had this wonderful show at the Yaw Gallery, and then I just kept working for him.

MS. BYRD: Tell me again. The Yaw Gallery was in Birmingham?

MS. WILLIAMS: Birmingham, Michigan.

MS. BYRD: Michigan.

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

MS. WILLIAMS: And today doesn't handle glass. She does basically metalwork, jewelry-beautiful.

MR. RITTER: She has a wonderful gallery. She just supported her artists so well. I mean, she still does. She doesn't do glass anymore, but she was always my favorite gallery to do business with.

MS. BYRD: So she was very important in getting you started.

MS. WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And at the end of two years, I had the opportunity to go to Egypt with my mother, so I basically took off; and I think it was when I was in Egypt that I really, really started to realize that I loved Richard and, you know, missed him. And when I came back, I asked Bill if I could be a resident artist. And then again, that was what you did: you went and you asked Bill, "Can I be a resident artist here?" [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: It's amazing-

MS. WILLIAMS: And he said, "Well, sure." You know. "What do you want to do?" And he said, "There isn't another glass studio," because at the time I think Rob was in the studio. And-

MR. RITTER: That was Conner?

MS. WILLIAMS: Or no, I guess you were still in the studio at that point, but you were just about ready to leave, and Rob was coming in.

MS. BYRD: So, Richard, you were still artist in residence?

MS. WILLIAMS: He was about ready to go.

MR. RITTER: Yeah. Back then it was a two-year program, and you could ask to stay on, and I did.

MS. BYRD: Okay.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. You were there.

MR. RITTER: And Bill never counted the times that I taught the concentration as part of your residency.

MS. BYRD: I see.

MR. RITTER: He felt he was taking you away from that residency, so-

MS. BYRD: True.

MR. RITTER: If I taught fall and spring, which I did several times in a row, which is why when I said I was a resident for five years, I wasn't really-

MS. BYRD: I understand. That's a very good point.

MR. RITTER: I had a studio; I was up teaching, so he didn't count that time.

MS. WILLIAMS: Also, the resident artists had the responsibility of maintaining the studios.

MS. BYRD: That's hard.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, now there's a tech and all these-this formula that they have, but back then it was really the residents who took care of-

MS. WILLIAMS: The residents were the ones who took care of the studio and-

MR. RITTER: That sort of ended with me.

MS. WILLIAMS: Did it? Oh, but Rob taught-took care of it, too.

MR. RITTER: But I stayed on.

MS. WILLIAMS: That's right.

MR. RITTER: And taught while Rob was teaching concentration-

MS. WILLIAMS: That's right.

MR. RITTER: I still did the concentrations and then eventually-

MS. WILLIAMS: Right.

MR. RITTER: -built a small building to work in, next to the Penland glass studio, and still maintain it. So it did sort of end at that point.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. I had a residence studio without a furnace. So when Richard had finished up his residency and we got married, Richard was without a studio, so we were like kind of like, well, what do we do now? Well, that was when he asked Bill if he could temporarily build a little facility there behind the glass studio-

MS. BYRD: I remember that place.

MS. WILLIAMS: The glass studio, and he took-was it an old shed?

MR. RITTER: A shack.

MS. WILLIAMS: It was an old shed and he built it in. And he put a furnace and then I built a furnace, so we put my furnace and his furnace in that little building. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Two together in that small space.

MS. WILLIAMS: And so that was great fun. And it was fun because Richard would do really insane things like gather-he wanted to do really big pieces, so he would start the piece down in the Penland glass studio. He'd make his gathers down there, and then he would walk up-he'd go back and forth; he'd make really big gathers in the, you know, in the big studio or he'd finish up. It was crazy. Carrying through the woods, you know, up the path through the woods.

MS. BYRD: But you could heat them up all right in-

MR. RITTER: Well, there was a big enough mass of glass.

MS. WILLIAMS: They were big enough that he'd gather this huge gather and walked through the woods until he got out to his building-

MS. BYRD: Oh, amazing.

MS. WILLIAMS: And then he could finish the piece off up there. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: But you had the annealers and so on that would-

MS. WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah. He had-

MR. RITTER: Oh, yeah. I had a complete shop up there. I just didn't have the ability to-that big a tank. I didn't have that big a tank in it.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. RITTER: A tank was, you know, very small, so I'd work as long as I could out of that tank, then I'd go down to the other shop and possibly finish it down there with a big gather-do a big gather and go back up to the other shop.

MS. WILLIAMS: Walk back through the woods. Everybody thought it was pretty funny.

MS. BYRD: Now-

MS. WILLIAMS: And it was.

MS. BYRD: Well, that's amazing. When was it you two were married?

MS. WILLIAMS: In '76.

MS. BYRD: Seventy-six?

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

MR. RITTER: Seventy-seven.

MS. WILLIAMS: Seventy-seven?

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

MS. WILLIAMS: Oh, you're right, '77. Sorry. [They laugh.] Seventy-seven, yeah, and March 12.

MR. RITTER: Right.

MS. WILLIAMS: Seventy-seven. And our son was born in '78. And in '77 we moved-Richard had a wonderful farm up in Michigan, an 80-acre farm, and we went up there-[they laugh]-and built a great studio, little studio, and had a little tiny house-

MR. RITTER: Another shack.

MS. WILLIAMS: It was a great studio, though.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, it was.

MS. WILLIAMS: And that's where we had Richie, but we missed Penland too much. We missed Penland an awful lot, and Richard, you know, during the time that I was pregnant, he worked setting up mobile homes for his brother during the week, and then came back up and worked on the studio on the weekend and then-you know, just so we could keep afloat.

MS. BYRD: Where did this brother have his mobile home business?

MR. RITTER: In Novi [MI].

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: Novi?

MR. RITTER: The place we lived was Cass City, Michigan, about three hours away.

MS. WILLIAMS: Cass City, Michigan. Wonderful, wonderful place.

MR. RITTER: I'd go down there during the week and work four days or five days, and then I'd come back to the shop, up and back to the farm on the weekends.

MS. BYRD: Okay. I remember a piece that you did called *Cass City Cows*.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. That was, that was mine. That's right.

MS. BYRD: It was one of yours?

MS. WILLIAMS: That was mine. Yeah. But the thing is it was-

MR. RITTER: It's the only time that we ever used the signature cane, too.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. Richard used a signature cane.

MR. RITTER: It's a little beetle-we called it the "Cass City Bug." Most anything made then has a beetle on it.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: Well, we've talked about your life, but we haven't talked much about your work. So we'll start Richard off. You told me about the first work you did at Penland, when you first did your murrinis?

MR. RITTER: I did murrinis almost from day one.

MS. BYRD: From day one. Why do you prefer this?

MR. RITTER: Probably the first pieces I made at Arts and Crafts, no murrinis. But, you know, I had a really extensive-when I say advertising design, I was trained really as a figure illustrator. So I took a lot of painting classes. I mean, more than some of the painting students. And-because I thought that would be good for doing figures and drawings.

Well, by the time I graduated, it died. You know, I'm an old dinosaur here because the camera had taken over people stuffing cards with figures or backgrounds, so I became a graphic illustrator. I went from that into doing logos, and all the other things they sort of trained us to do, so-but I did everything. And I was in a small studio, so I did everything. If there was a house ad, I'd paint a house or whatever, you know, but-or design some feature graphics.

So I had that in my background, and so I think I always knew that I wanted to put my imagery in or on-at that time it'd be on. So I was doing little, little circles, very simple, back in the cases up there [motions to cases in the studio], but there begins the decoration on the surface. A lot of us in the early '70s, including Mark and I, were influenced somewhat by [Louis Comfort] Tiffany. Remember all the feathering-

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes.

MR. RITTER: -and line work and that sort of thing. So I did a little of that before I went to Penland. And when I went to Penland, which we just talked about, I was putting little dots of pattern with silver nitrate on the surface of glass.

MS. BYRD: When you were working with Peiser?

MR. RITTER: Before I was with Peiser.

MS. BYRD: Okay. Before.

MR. RITTER: And then when I got there, I was still doing the same thing, and that's why when Mark said, you know, Dick Marquis is coming, who does very-you know, doing a little more intricate-actually, we didn't really know what he was doing, but we knew he'd learned a lot over in Italy. And he'll be teaching murrini process, and back then we called it *millefiori*, you know, so I often do some of those. The first thing that Dick ever showed me was how to build letters, murrini letters.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes, and you said you worked on his *Lord's Prayer*.

MR. RITTER: A little bit for the *Lord's Prayer*. Right. I can't remember if that was exactly that time, or the next year, when Dick came back. I suspect it was the next year.

MS. BYRD: The next, yes.

MR. RITTER: The next summer, when he came back and taught again; by the time I was there as a resident, I helped him build the letters some. The first class that I took at Penland, I had a slot at 2:30 in the morning. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Oh. Maybe you could explain that because there was blowing around the clock and so-

MR. RITTER: Blowing was all around-yeah. Twenty-four hours a day at the shop-we had so many students-and even at that I only got an hour and a half.

MS. BYRD: Hour and a half in the middle of the night?

MR. RITTER: Right.

MS. BYRD: Gracious.

MR. RITTER: So I didn't see Mark very much.

MS. BYRD: No.

MR. RITTER: I'd try and get up for some of his demos, but it was pretty hard. But I did learn from Mark was how important it was to understand the material. I mean, maybe I had some of that before I went there, I don't know, but it really instilled on me-I think the fact that Mark made his own batches-we had started to make our own batches by this time, in our own colors.

And when I go back to my days as a student in Detroit- I don't know if you want me to go back-but when I go back to my painting, I took so much painting that I had this one instructor-

[Audio break.]

He made his own oil paints. I mean, from the oxides, the whole thing-

MS. BYRD: My word. Yes.

MR. RITTER: He thought we needed to know that, if we never used it again. So we had one whole year of that. So we did; we mixed our own oils and painted with them. And I think that that kind of hands-on-and knowledge about how we could get richer colors when we mixed our own-if you wanted a paint that was a little more reddish, you could make it.

And so that's when I think I acquired whatever to-still to this day I make my own batch. And most of my colors-[inaudible]-are things that I have made and so that part's what I've got from Mark. And it's funny, when I look back at Dick Marquis, I don't feel-how am I going to say this-that the best thing I ever learned from him is some of the processes for making murrini, because they were pretty cut-and-dried, standard. But what I did learn from Dick Marquis was that whatever you wanted to do, you could do it. It didn't matter. Because when I met Dick, I had this hang-up of everything had to be centered and done a certain way. And one day, just a little bit later on down at my studio-when I was a resident at Penland, there was Mark, Dick Marquis, George, and myself-

MS. BYRD: Thiewes?

MR. RITTER: We decided to make a gondola. You know, a big gondola with a basket beneath it.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes.

MR. RITTER: Now on the gondola we put the word "art." And Dick and I were in charge of doing the word art. And then the blow pipe, I realized I had the art upside down. And I said, "Oh, crap. We're done." You know, I goofed. And Dick Marquis looked at it and said, "Oh, no." He opened the other end, got another hot pipe, and stuck it on there. We jacked-this is not going to make sense to people, but jacked it down and started over. He had reversed it, and to me, when I saw that, we can do anything we want to do, so I gave up the whole idea about centering and, you know, what was more important was getting that project done.

MS. BYRD: Yeah. What you did-well, just make that a little clearer. What you intended to have as the neck became the base?

MR. RITTER: Right.

MS. BYRD: So-

MR. RITTER: So the art word was reading art when it was on top of the gondola-

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: It would've been upside down the way I was doing it. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: That's nice.

MR. RITTER: Which are all very simple nowadays and obvious to most glass people, but back then we-you know, there was nothing-this is a good and a bad thing. I mean, I'm digressing here but-

MS. BYRD: It's okay.

MR. RITTER: There was nothing in front of us of how to do something, so it was all brand-new, and so that-that excitement-but it also had no limits. I'm afraid sometimes when I see some glass nowadays that they're all hung-up on getting their technique perfect rather than is the piece worth anything? [They laugh.] All I'm saying is, aesthetically, is that it may be perfection as far as technique, but is it anything? And I don't mean in the sense that there's not really good artists out there, because there are, but I see a lot of works like that. For instance, the Italian movement: when it came around the first time, back in the '70s, we all said, "Yeah. They do it really well in Italy. Let them do it." [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: So it wasn't so important to what we were doing, you know. But-where are we here? I think one the questions in there about "Who's your mentor?" or whatever, but I don't really have anybody that sticks out. There's been a lot of people that I've admired. Even like with Dick Marquis, it's not so much his murrini building, it's his-you know, you just go ahead and you get an idea and you do it.

And Peiser's the same way. Even though a lot of people think, oh, he's really all about the technique or the achieving a certain thing, but it's really more getting the aesthetics right on that piece.

MS. BYRD: Well-

MR. RITTER: A lot of the artists back then were that way, I think.

MS. BYRD: I was going to get you to talk about your first murrini. You used to joke about it being like a tick.

MR. RITTER: My first murrini-okay. All the murrinis before those were all like little gathers; you know, you gather one color, you gather color and then make a circle or square or whatever you can make out of it, but the tick was the first thing that was made of bits brought over, so you were actually building it out of parts-

MS. BYRD: So you were building-

MR. RITTER: -they were hot, but you were building in parts.

MS. BYRD: So what you do is, say, you have a crystal pull, and then you get color on the outside of that?

MR. RITTER: Oh, no, no. To do the murrini, you have a shell, right? You have a-what's the body of a bug called? I can't remember but-

MS. WILLIAMS: The shell, yeah. The wings, yeah.

MR. RITTER: But anyway, there's line in the middle, so you do a flat piece of line work, first; that's a bar of glass flattened.

MS. BYRD: Ah, I see. Okay. Good.

MR. RITTER: And then two half-rounds are put on each side. And then heads that you applied to it, and the legs. And then I believe that one is white.

MS. WILLIAMS: I think you dipped it.

MR. RITTER: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: And you did all this-

MR. RITTER: One of the things I had going for me that a lot of people don't have now is I had hot colors, so I can dip in. I don't have to bring over hot bits.

MS. BYRD: Ah. That's a very good point.

MR. RITTER: So I could do both. I can use hot bits and I can dip.

MS. BYRD: Okay. And were you able to do this working by yourself?

MR. RITTER: Yes.

MS. BYRD: So you just hang up the pipe?

MR. RITTER: I could. I think I probably had help doing that bug, but it's interesting you bring that up, because the training for us back then was that we wanted to be able to do everything. In fact, I even did it with my students. I wanted everybody to be able to, if they could, build it themselves. I didn't want-and we didn't use somebody else. So the way I do murrinis really evolved even today. I still only make a cane two feet long, because I want to control it.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, the whole idea was to be different than glass as a traditional medium.

MR. RITTER: We wanted to get away-and that's what the studio glass movement was about. We didn't want a designer who had never touched glass-Bill [Brown] would talk about this-to design a piece and then somebody else execute it.

MS. BYRD: And you remember Bill actually did design some of the-[inaudible].

MS. WILLIAMS: Right.

MR. RITTER: Well, Bill was a designer. In fact, he tells his story about going to Steuben [Steuben Glass Works, Steuben County, NY], and maybe you've heard the story when he worked there, and designing a piece and going down to the floor, and the gaffer's making it, and in the middle of the process, the gaffer's got this incredibly beautiful bowl-I'm saying bowl because I can't remember exactly what it was-and Bill said, "Stop! That's better than what I've drawn." And the man looked at him and said, "You draw this and I'll make it for you." And he closed it up and did what Bill had drawn. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: But I think we all were about hands-on, you know, because you-Jan was saying the other day, I'm

not a planner. I don't think of myself as a planner. And my work comes from the work before it. Things I've done before grow out of what I'm doing, rather than me sitting down and-in fact, if I was to sit down and color pencil and draw everything out and really get it down, I'd figure it'd be done. I wouldn't have to make it; it's already-there it is. So I really like that process of what grows out of what I've done before.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, it's sort of like-

MR. RITTER: Now, I have sketches. I've got loads of sketches, you know. My last series that I'm doing right now came from a sketch 25 years ago.

MS. BYRD: My word.

MR. RITTER: And I carried it. In fact, in the Mint [Mint Museum of Craft and Design, Charlotte, NC] show when they did the Penland exhibition ["The Nature of Craft and the Penland Experience." July 2004-January 2005], they framed it and put it in to show the drawing. And these pieces grew out of that drawing that I carried around in my studio. Every studio I had, I'd had it pinned on the wall. But I never did it, until three years ago.

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

MR. RITTER: And then I decided to go ahead and do it. And so even though what you're looking at doesn't look anything like that drawing now, the first two did.

MS. BYRD: Do you ever use a drawing, say, over several years? Or you have a drawing that you realized once, say, in the '80s, and then you go back to it now. Do you ever do that?

MR. RITTER: Well, this one was done in the '70s, this drawing.

MS. BYRD: But I meant-you said you've never used that to make a glass piece, so I wondered if you ever revisit them and say, why-

MR. RITTER: Yeah. Sure. I got a couple hanging in there now that I still want to do some day.

MS. WILLIAMS: I think what he is trying to get at was that during the evolution of the individual piece itself-we were talking about this earlier-the process-that's why it's so important when the artist gets to be the gaffer, when the designer is the gaffer, that the process is part of the creative development. His pieces particularly, because everything starts as he starts applying all the imagery; he has to react to what happens as he applies. And you can't pre-design that; I mean he lays everything out in ovens and plans with what kind of imagery he is going to put on, but it all has to evolve as it's built.

MS. BYRD: Especially because you use the colder processes-

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

MS. BYRD: Cold-pack murrini, say-

MR. RITTER: No, I will line up a big furnace, you know, a big annealer full of glass, and be making a piece and decide I need one more of something and run in the other room and try and warm it up and throw it in that oven so I can pick it up, or sometimes I get done, and half the stuff that I laid out is still in the oven. I didn't use it.

MS. BYRD: So in other words, you have to heat the murrinis up before you incorporate them.

MR. RITTER: Yeah. They have to be heated up to, like, a thousand degrees, or else they'll break when you pick them up if they are any size at all. Little teeny things like quarter inch, you can get away with, but if you want to do a face or one of these characters I do, they've got to be heated up, or else they'll crack, or smear, or whatever.

MS. BYRD: Well, could we talk a bit about how you got into the more and more intricate murrinis?

MS. WILLIAMS: That's why he married me, I think, to pull cane.

MR. RITTER: To pull cane, right. It's really hard to say, I mean, because it all evolved over such a long period of time.

MS. WILLIAMS: But the Kaete murrini was-

MR. RITTER: The Kaete face-who was a dear friend of mine-she went to Penland with me back in 1972-we were Penland's first unwed couple-[they laugh]-which Jane Brown was never really very happy about, but anyway. She

meant a lot to me, enough that my daughter is named after her. It really always comes back to how special Jan is. Most women probably would not let you name your child-[they laugh]-after-

MS. BYRD: That's actually true. I thought that just as-it went through my mind.

MR. RITTER: [Laughs] But anyway, that's my daughter's name, is Kaete. But anyway I did a portrait murrini. I decided to do her face, and it required lots of cane-it's done inside of a ceramic ring to hold the cane in place, and it's little threads of glass stacked that are about the size of your hair or bigger to make all the forms for her face. And it took a lot, miles and miles of threads to be pulled.

MS. BYRD: So-

MR. RITTER: So I did need help.

MS. BYRD: Yeah, and the threads now were just these-

MR. RITTER: Square, little rods.

MS. BYRD: Okay. Square rods because you pulled-

MR. RITTER: Right. And I thought-

MS. BYRD: Between two pipes?

MR. RITTER: I'd come up with the incredible idea of squaring up rods.

MS. BYRD: Okay.

MR. RITTER: Right. I don't very often think I'd come up with some kind of idea, because by making them square I had no voids-

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: When you put round circles together, you have voids.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: And in fact, I did a talk at a conference in Neenah-where was that museum [Bergstrom-Mahler Museum, Neenah, WI]?

MS. WILLIAMS: Neenah.

MR. RITTER: Neenah, I think.

MS. WILLIAMS: Neenah, Wisconsin.

MR. RITTER: Right. And one of the Bersham paperweight makers from Europe was watching my slides, and they were still doing theirs, after all these centuries, round.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: And he saw that square rod and said-best thing he'd ever seen. And I think the name-ah, I'm terrible with names-from Corning. He's a writer.

MS. WILLIAMS: Bill Warmus.

MR. RITTER: Bill Warmus. We were sitting there with this paperweight maker, and the guy got up, and went to the phone, and called home to tell them to square up the rods. [They laugh.]

I actually went to Corning several years later and was looking through their large archives, and the Egyptians did a really good job with square canes-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Well, otherwise what would it do? Get a little bubble in there?

MR. RITTER: Yeah. It's just harder to work. But anyway, you get better detail, I think. Now, when it gets really, really tiny, it doesn't matter what size it is or what squareness it is.

MS. BYRD: Did you ever say how you square it? Just really quickly, do you put it into a mold?

MR. RITTER: We, we did-no. We just do it on the marver.

MS. BYRD: Okay.

MR. RITTER: Because it can be-

MS. BYRD: Just flatten it out.

MR. RITTER: It doesn't have to be that square, because when you make something large, it's like a photo. You do a large neg[ative]-of course that doesn't mean anything with digital anymore-but when you make a large neg and you print that or you reduce it, it becomes a sharper image. Same thing with the cane. Those corners become sharper as you pull it down.

MS. BYRD: Oh. How interesting.

MR. RITTER: And whatever you do on the outside of a murrini, or that blob of glass, and you pull it quickly, it will stay. You could make a flower. If you pull it fast, you'll get-or you do a deer head. Pull it fast, it'll be there.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, how large across was the ring?

MR. RITTER: It was eight and a half inches.

MS. WILLIAMS: Eight and a half.

MR. RITTER: And about four inches high.

MS. WILLIAMS: And how long did it take to build?

MR. RITTER: Took me eight months.

MS. BYRD: My word.

MR. RITTER: But I was halfway done with the Kaete head murrini, and somebody came to my studio and picked it up. And it went all over the floor, so I came in to my Kaete head and looked on the floor after-had worked on it for a month and a half-

MS. BYRD: Did you ever know who did it?

MR. RITTER: No.

MS. BYRD: You never did?

MR. RITTER: It was, you know, we were open. You know, the studios were open to visitors and we didn't really-

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

MR. RITTER: But anyway, I decided to glue it together after that. So everything got glued together with cement-with rubber cement after that-

MS. BYRD: Oh, I see. I had no idea you did that.

MR. RITTER: So they're all dipped in rubber cement at each end and put together that way. In fact, it allowed me a lot of space. See, this is what I'm saying-[inaudible]. Before, I had to stack all of those little canes really tight beside each other, and if I wanted an eyebrow, I had to build it right in place.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: Well, once I used the rubber cement, I could actually rub those-take five or six canes and put them together and make it into an eyebrow and stick it in there.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: So-and it looks-process-wise it really speeded things up.

MS. BYRD: So you taught yourself.

MR. RITTER: And it stayed there, and it did speed things up.

MS. BYRD: Now, was Marquis using round canes, then, when he was making his *Lord's Prayer* [1973]?

MR. RITTER: Oh. I think he used both. When we did the *Lord's Prayer*-no, no. They were squared off.

MS. BYRD: They were square.

MR. RITTER: But that was after I'd started-you know, I already got to doing square things but-

MS. BYRD: Really? You were doing the-but when was the Kaete murrini?

MR. RITTER: Well, no. I did it before the-the square cane before that. I mean, because I did butterflies and all kinds of things.

MS. WILLIAMS: Before the Kaete murrini, yes.

MR. RITTER: They were quite elaborate.

MS. BYRD: So you came up with your own process for squaring before you were-

MR. RITTER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I've only done what I call two portraits: my mom, dad, and my sister, all in one portrait, and then the Kaete head, so-

MS. WILLIAMS: The *Lord's Prayer* must have been in '73. When was that?

MR. RITTER: I don't know. It was over a period of time, but he-it took him several years to make all those different canes. There were all different letters and stuff. And then he'd run out of some, and he'd have to build more and-

MS. BYRD: And we can always hear when you did your portrait head of your family.

MR. RITTER: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

MS. BYRD: The heads of your family, because that was about the time-

MR. RITTER: Nineteen seventy-six.

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MR RITTER: I did it for the centennial.

MS. BYRD: Bicentennial.

MR. RITTER: Bicentennial, rather. Yes. I did that for that year.

MS. WILLIAMS: Because we were using all the Kaete head murrinis in the pieces when I started working for you, that Yaw show. Those were the Kaete murrini pieces.

MS. BYRD: So, Jan, you didn't help make the cane for that?

MS. WILLIAMS: No.

MS. BYRD: But did you help make the cane?

MS. WILLIAMS: The portrait.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, pulled miles and miles and miles, and then, of course, Richard ended up teaching spring concentration, and after that, and that was when I believe they built the new studio, but Rebecca came to work for you. And her name was Rebecca Kleister. I can't remember how you spell her name, but she came and worked also, so the two of us were pulling a lot of the rods for the family portraits.

MR. RITTER: Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMS: Miles and miles and miles of it. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Now do you have any idea how many pieces you've used that murrini in? You were so identified with that.

MR. RITTER: Oh, you mean the family portrait one?

MS. BYRD: Yes. The family portrait.

MR. RITTER: Oh, 10 maybe.

MS. BYRD: Because-

MR. RITTER: Not many. This is about the time I also cut back before that, I did murrinis and pulled miles of them, and used them, and used them, and used them. And I got really sick of that.

MS. BYRD: Well, I remember you've got a story to tell about that.

MR. RITTER: I can't remember what year that was. What year was that that I decided that I never wanted to do murrinis again?

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, it was just before we went up to the farm, so-

MR. RITTER: Seventy-eight probably.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Or '77.

MS. WILLIAMS: Seventy-seven.

MR. RITTER: Yeah. At one point at Penland, I had decided-probably too many gin and tonics also-but I took all my-which was a mistake-should have kept one of each-took them all and melted them down, and threw them in the furnace, and for about three years I didn't-or two years-didn't do any murrinis. That's when I did those big platters that Bill and Jane Brown have, and I think I have a couple here, that are just line work and color. I did it. Well, I did them for more than that, I think.

MS. WILLIAMS: A year. You went back to murrinis after about a year.

MR. RITTER: After a year or two I really wanted to get back into imageries, but I went back to it in a different way. I felt like before that, it was a cookie jar, and I kept going back to the cookie jar, which had the same things in them. And now-and I still do it this way-I design it pretty much for the piece. I won't make miles and miles. Now, like the pieces with the dragon flies, I've got several, but I don't have hundreds.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. But you used to make me crazy, because when I first met you, you would put, you know, everything I'd learned in design school, you did just the opposite in terms of color, and line, and pattern. And when I started working for Richard, I took one of every murrini and put it in a cup up on the shelf, and after about two years, and it was shortly before he ended up throwing everything in the furnace, one day, he found that cup and he went, "Oh, murrinis!" And he just took it over to the oven and shook them out like shaking salt, you know, out into the annealer, and straightened them up, and then he did a piece with all the different murrinis. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Oh, I see.

MS. WILLIAMS: And I used to think how, you know, how sort of interesting and haphazard his approach to dealing with it was. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: I don't know if I want to bring this up. One of the classes I hated when I went to Arts and Crafts was color and design. I thought it was the most boring class I'd ever had in my life. I mean, they had all these theories and we had to do these color wheels and-

MS. BYRD: Like a 2-D [two-dimensional] design class?

MR. RITTER: Yeah. It was awful. I mean, it was just-I did it. I had to get a grade, you know. I was not going to get anymore Cs, so-

MS. WILLIAMS: See, I loved design class. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: But I didn't like-and it was probably pretty much near what we had, because we had to do all the wheels and stuff. And when I was at Penland, the best color and design class I ever went to-now, maybe color and design is the wrong word to use for it, this is about color-was Paulus.

MS. WILLIAMS: Paulus Berensohn?

MR. RITTER: He taught a special color class one day-and I was an instructor, but see, back then, instructor/teacher didn't really matter, and so we all went in there, you know, as if it was a dance class or something, or a movement class. And he taught us things with color and I loved it. I just thought it was more about feeling in yourself rather than somebody saying these are contrasting colors and you don't put them together, or whatever, you know.

MS. BYRD: Yes. Not a rule, it was-

MR. RITTER: Well, he did this very simple thing where we cut up all these colored cards and you put them in a bowl. And you were supposed to reach in there-this is going to sound really weird; now they are going to think that I'm crazy-[they laugh]-and you were supposed to try and feel whether it was a warm or cool color.

MS. BYRD: Oh, my.

MR. RITTER: And pull it out. And most often it would be right.

MS. BYRD: Goodness.

MR. RITTER: But then the other thing was the randomness of putting the colors-you put enough of them in and they'd work. It didn't matter. In other words, all that theory stuff before, he didn't care about and neither did I.

MS. BYRD: Ah, was this a one afternoon sort of thing?

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

MS. BYRD: Was this one of these, sort of, short-term-

MR. RITTER: Yeah, short-term. It wasn't a semester class or anything. It was just an afternoon class.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: But it was wonderful. I really liked it.

MS. WILLIAMS: It was interesting for him having that experience with Paulus. I had an experience with Paulus coming to the PCA when I was there. He blew us all out of the water, just-you know, so I think how much-there are some people early, you know, that really had such influence in the movement, whether they were potters or glassblowers or the crafts, you know, the contemporary craft movement was just growing and there was a lot of interchange from that.

Paulus came in and he was so kind of-how do I describe it-so low key and kind of dreamy in a way, and we were all-we have been in all, sort of, high tech ceramics, and then he took a little weed, and he threw it on the floor with a piece of clay and pulled it up and everybody just kind of went: "Ah!" like we were startled at that approach.

MS. BYRD: It's interesting that you responded to the same people.

MR. RITTER: Yeah. Well, I think that's how our-Jan and I grew out of really having a very good understanding of each other, but also being alike in some ways as far as our feelings towards art and people, and it grew from there. And so we really grew out of a friendship, not a, you know, one-night passion that, you know, I've got to live with that person forever, but it didn't grow that way.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. We were friends a long time.

MR. RITTER: A long time.

MS. WILLIAMS: That was very fun, but, I mean, the work was always the central thing. You got up every day and went to work. You didn't think about Monday through-

MS. BYRD: No.

MS. WILLIAMS: -Saturdays, do you? When you're just doing something you love, you just-we worked every day, week after week, because it was great fun. And it seemed like every day there was something new that came along.

And what was so great about Penland was here was Mark [Peiser] over here, and any little problem or any little exciting thing that was going on, you'd kind of share that. Wow! Look what I've figured out. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: Well, when you talk about the studio glass art movement, that's why that is today where it is, and

to crafts in general, I think.

MS. BYRD: Because?

MR. RITTER: Because of the sort of teacher mentality. We all shared. There were no secrets. You know, if you've figured out what I'm doing and you can do it better, that's great.

[Audio break.]

MS. BYRD: This is Joan Falconer Byrd interviewing Richard Ritter and Jan Williams on their farm in Bakersville, North Carolina, on August 2, 2005, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number two, session one.

And we were going to talk a little bit more about that whole experience with your throwing the murrinis into the furnace.

MR. RITTER: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: Was that something premeditated, or was it just something that occurred after you'd had a certain amount to drink that evening? [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: Well, it had been coming on.

MS. BYRD: It'd been coming on?

MR. RITTER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I mean, I think I knew-well, I was getting tired of it, and I needed a change.

MS. BYRD: Okay.

MR. RITTER: I guess consciously maybe I didn't know it. I mean, I wasn't talking to anybody about wanting to change or-

MS. BYRD: Jan didn't know? Did you see it coming?

MS. WILLIAMS: No. Absolutely not. But, of course, I pretty much still at that point was the apprentice, you know, the assistant in a glass studio, and so he might not have told me that, but in the meantime I was stashing away murrinis again. [They laugh.] So when he did do the big melt of everything, fortunately I had some things put away, which I still have. The one or two of the family portrait canes. There are very few of those around at all. I don't think we even have one good Kaete portrait.

MR. RITTER: I didn't melt those down though. I didn't throw the family portrait-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, but I think you used those all up, but-

MR. RITTER: I didn't have them. I didn't make any.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Because they were left quite large.

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

MS. BYRD: Oh, I see. You're indicating what? Two inches on the side?

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

MS. BYRD: Or larger.

MS. WILLIAMS: Some of the family portraits you pulled down were small.

MR. RITTER: Yeah. I made buttons out of them for a shirt.

MS. WILLIAMS: You did a few. And then you put some in pieces, and then when Richard and I got married, we-

MR. RITTER: Yeah, there was-I did put a few in-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: -like paperweights. It would-actually, when I hired Rebecca and Jan, I did paperweights to pay my

gas bills. I was behind on my propane-so we decided to do this, so-

MS. WILLIAMS: You did a production.

MR. RITTER: It's actually a pretty fun-I've thought about doing it again, because I gave a certain parameter for doing the paperweights, but Rebecca and Jan really designed them.

MS. WILLIAMS: We would use his murrinis but-

MS. BYRD: Oh, I see.

MS. WILLIAMS: -we could do with them what we wanted based on-under certain parameters.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: Or even suggest making some kind of murrini. We would make it and what it was-it was sold as Ritter Glass, and their initials were on it.

MS. BYRD: I see.

MS. WILLIAMS: Of course, if he didn't happen to like one, he would throw it out on the cow field. [They laugh.] And some of those have resurfaced in flea markets.

MS. BYRD: Oh, really?

MS. WILLIAMS: There used to be a cow field right up behind the grinding shop, and if there was one he didn't like he'd just go [whoosh sound] and throw it out back. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MS. WILLIAMS: And some of those have come around, haven't they?

MR. RITTER: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: Well, tell me. You used some of those-at least one of those family murrinis in the bicentennial piece? That-

MR. RITTER: Actually it's-yeah. There's two bicentennial pieces-three. There's three bicentennial pieces, that I think of them in that way anyway-

MS. BYRD: Okay.

MR. RITTER: Corning [Museum of Glass, Corning, NY] has one, and it has several murrinis around in a band, but it's red, white, and blue background. That's the bicentennial piece. I can't even remember the size anymore. I think of it as large, but I know it's not. [They laugh.] Maybe nine inches or something. And it was sold. When I sold it-Fritz [Dreisbach] was the one who arranged it-I didn't notice until many years later because he thought it was-was something anyway. Anyway, they called me, and at that time they asked me the price, I didn't know what to say, so I sold that back then-must have been '77 by then-for $350.

MS. BYRD: This was to Corning?

MR. RITTER: Yeah. And I thought that is a lot of money; I've made it now. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Oh, that's nice.

MR. RITTER: Anyways, so they've always kidded me ever since then, but then I had two small ones. One I've given to Jan and one I kept myself. It had stars on the background, and one's sitting in the cabinet over there.

MS. BYRD: Well, was there an exhibition that glass artists made these bicentennial pieces for? Because I know Billy Bernstein made bicentennial pieces.

MS. WILLIAMS: It must have been for that. I don't know though.

MR. RITTER: I don't remember.

MS. BYRD: Or you're just doing it for fun, essentially.

MR. RITTER: I don't think I did them. I wasn't involved in that, but I think I would have remembered the

bicentennial. I may have got involved in doing a bicentennial because of-[inaudible]-but, again, the family portrait took about eight months to build or something; just pulling all the cane for it.

Now, there are larger murrinis within that were, like, flower patterns and a dress and stuff, were made ahead of time. It isn't all stacked little things of cane. There's, I think, stars in the background or stuff, so-were made ahead of time from-one thing, I'll use whatever I can to make a murrini. I mean, if it has to be a mold that I make first, I'll do that-

MS. BYRD: To get a specific shape?

MR. RITTER: Right.

MS. BYRD: Like a star? Are the stars-

MR. RITTER: Right. Star is a good one. For a while, though, they were all hot built, which means you go in a glass shop and you build them all out of little bits of color. Like the family portraits are portraits, I call them. The other faces that you see there, I call those caricatures and they're done-and their parts are made hot and put away and redone and picked up later. There are other hot parts, so-like the hair of the little girl is done ahead of time.

MS. WILLIAMS: I was trying to remember when you started doing those. Was that-

MR. RITTER: I thought that was here.

MS. WILLIAMS: I know, but was it, like, '83, or when did you start doing the portraits? I can't remember. I have to look back.

MR. RITTER: The caricatures?

MS. WILLIAMS: Caricatures, yeah.

MR. RITTER: Yeah. As soon as we got over here: '80, '81, '82.

MS. BYRD: Now, what year was it that you came back to Penland?

MR. RITTER: Came back to Penland in-

MS. WILLIAMS: Richie was a year and a half old, so-

MR. RITTER: Eighty?

MR. RITTER: Seventy-nine?

MS. WILLIAMS: Seventy-nine, I believe, is when we came back.

MR. RITTER: Actually, this is a weird way to think about it, though, that about that same time, maybe a little earlier, I discovered crystals and layering. I'd never thought about, like, layering before.

MS. WILLIAMS: After he let the murrinis go, that's when he really started-

MR. RITTER: That's when I did-

MS. WILLIAMS: -doing layering of opals and crystals.

MR. RITTER: -which, you know, I've done a lot in the past, and took it to that kind of height, you know, where I've done a lot of matrix of clear glass with layers and layers of murrinis.

But the very, very first piece, when I think about it, goes back to a vessel made at Penland, when I was in that little shop, and I was putting colors together, and I happened to put a crystal bit in there and I saw what happened. So this is where we go back again to what I do-a lot comes from accidents, you know, or planned accidents or whatever you want to call them, where you grow on that idea and you elaborate on it.

I'm not a big person to do a lot of reference looking. I don't go back and see things that I want to duplicate. I may have seen it and forgotten about it, you know. I enjoy looking at cold glass or paintings or whatever, but I don't think they directly influence me.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, you've been forced into-when we were in Cass City, imagine living on an 80-acre farm out in the middle of the most beautiful, beautiful countryside, but there were no artists, you know, so we made friends with the farmers, the laborers. We had a wonderful, wonderful experience for a year and a half up there. I mean,

they came and helped us build our studio. They bought our glass. They came to our open houses, and they were teachers, and they didn't know a lot about art, but they supported us. It was really wonderful.

And then even the little local bank-Richard went in to take out a loan to do a show at Habatat, and they said, "Well, what do you have that you can show me?" And this wonderful banker in Cass City said, "Bring me your portfolio." Whoever heard of such a thing? That would never happen today.

MS. BYRD: No, indeed.

MS. WILLIAMS: "Bring me your portfolio." And he lent us money to do a show, but about that time is when we had a call from Mrs. [Joan] Mondale's secretary. We were living up at the farm, and I think Richie was just a baby. And she called, asked Richard if he would do some plates for this very fancy dinner set they wanted to do, to use at the vice president's residence.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: And, of course, he said, "Well, no."

MR. RITTER: I said no. [They laugh.]

MS. WILLIAMS: "I don't do plates." And so, you know, they had a nice little conversation, and then got off the phone. And I'm like: "What?!" [They laugh.] I'm like, "You told her *what*? You don't do plates?!"

MR. RITTER: She called again couple of weeks later and I said, you know, "I really don't do functional work." I don't do functional work anymore. [They laugh.]

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: And then, what, a couple of days later, Mrs. Mondale called.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. So it was like: "Yeah, I think I'll try to do this."

MS. BYRD: Oh, how nice. That is-

MR. RITTER: I said okay. I said, "I'll do them."

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: I'll try it. I'll send you some samples.

MS. WILLIAMS: But see that-

MR. RITTER: I'd never done a plate.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Really.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, that was all due to John Glick, right? He was one of the potters-

MR. RITTER: Potter in Michigan.

MS. WILLIAMS: You know John Glick?

MS. BYRD: Yeah. I don't know him, but I know his work.

MS. WILLIAMS: John was the potter who was commissioned to do the plates-the dinner plates-so John recommended Richard.

MR. RITTER: So I spent about a month trying to make these silly plates.

MS. BYRD: Now, these were some dessert plates or-

MS. WILLIAMS: They were dessert plates. And everybody in Cass City, just about, ended up with a dessert plate, because-[they laugh]-we did so many that didn't work.

MR. RITTER: Because it was a burgundy red, and if you know about oxides and stuff, burgundy red is very hard. I never quite got the burgundy red.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: But I think what Jan was getting at, too, is I started putting simple images into these things and, again, with a little bit of layering.

MS. WILLIAMS: Little murrinis, little flowers, little patterns, and he started seeing-

MR. RITTER: I don't know if we have any here or not.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. He started seeing what would happen when he built the thing, and opened it up, and what would happen to the murrinis on the inside, and that just-

MR. RITTER: Because it-all the bowls you see are blind side.

MS. WILLIAMS: You can't see what you're doing.

MR. RITTER: By that I mean I don't know what I have inside, other than having done enough of them, thinking, this is what's going to happen.

MS. BYRD: That's amazing to me.

MR. RITTER: You know, Joan, but some people wouldn't realize it. This is all built from the side, right?

MS. WILLIAMS: When you blow the form, yeah.

MR. RITTER: And the pipe, so that when we open it up, I'm as surprised as everybody else is, so-

MS. BYRD: [They laugh] Well, not quite, but almost. [They laugh.]

MS. WILLIAMS: But all of the platters came out from the Mondale commission.

MR. RITTER: The platters all came from that little-

MS. WILLIAMS: -which was a really was a big turning point, I think, in Richard's career to have that opportunity and to try something different. And, wow, something came out of it.

MS. BYRD: So all the open forms really began-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, all of them.

MS. BYRD: That is amazing. I wonder if she knows that. Do you think she'd be interested?

MS. WILLIAMS: I don't know. I don't know.

MR. RITTER: No. I don't think she-she might, because she's very interesting, well-informed on the crafts.

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

MR. RITTER: And does it herself, you know, so-

MS. WILLIAMS: And she's a potter herself, so she really-

MR. RITTER: Well, what it was-it was done because when they moved into that house; it was the first house given to the vice president from the navy, I guess.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes.

MR. RITTER: In fact, the navy funded it all. There was no American art or anything in the house. The furniture-

MS. WILLIAMS: It was all European.

MR. RITTER: All European.

MS. BYRD: That's amazing.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Dinnerware. Nothing. And of course, Mrs. Mondale was-well, you know. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: So she organized this place setting and furniture, all kinds of things made by American artists, and that was her goal.

MS. BYRD: She was a real advocate-still is.

MR. RITTER: Right. Unfortunately, it was all moved out with the next one.

MS. WILLIAMS: [They laugh] The next vice president didn't appreciate it.

MS. BYRD: So do we know where it has gone?

MR. RITTER: Yes, Vice President Gore became interested in finding the artwork.

MS. WILLIAMS: Gore came into the vice president's residence.

MR. RITTER: His wife, Tipper, is that her name?

MS. WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Tipper.

MR. RITTER: She's very interested in-I don't know where our picture is?

MS. WILLIAMS: It's over there.

MR. RITTER: American arts and crafts too, so they decided-all the stuff had been-

MS. WILLIAMS: -packed up.

MR. RITTER: Some of it-I guess we can't say-[they laugh.]

MS. BYRD: It might have been broken?

MR. RITTER: A lot of it disappeared. I don't know what that-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: And-by somebody. And anyway Mrs. Mondale's secretary, who I should remember her name-

MS. WILLIAMS: Shirley Koteen, maybe?

MR. RITTER: Yeah. That's it.

MS. WILLIAMS: Was that her name?

MS. BYRD: Yes. I think it was.

MS. WILLIAMS: Shirley Koteen. Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Yeah. Anyway, Shirley took it upon herself, I guess, to find everything she could find, and she found a lot of the art, and got it back. And she found my dessert dishes in some little bitty museum in Washington, D.C., in the basement.

MS. BYRD: Oh, my word.

MR. RITTER: And returned it, and so we all-Richie and I-went to a Christmas party-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes. The Gores invited them up.

MS. BYRD: Wonderful.

MR. RITTER: Where they used our plates again.

MS. BYRD: How nice. Shirley Koteen was with the Gores, or the Mondales?

MR. RITTER: She was with Mondale, I think.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: She was [with the] Mondales.

MR. RITTER: And she spent a lot of years even before the Gores were in there-

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: -trying to find where all this had disappeared to.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: Some of it was sold-just disappeared.

MS. WILLIAMS: I don't really know what happened to it.

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMS: I just know there was an article my sister sent from Washington saying "The Case of the Missing Crafts."

MS. BYRD: Oh, I see. That's exciting-

MS. WILLIAMS: They didn't know where they had gone.

MS. BYRD: In the sense that they did find a great deal of it.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: I think they found a lot of it.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. Maybe they found all of it. We don't really know. But that was really fun, to have something evolve out of that.

MS. BYRD: Oh, absolutely.

MS. WILLIAMS: And Richard did platters, and platters, and platters, and platters, for a number of years, and started incorporating more and more and more murrinis. And then one day he decided not to anymore.

MR. RITTER: But that goes back to one of those things that-where you just say, "Never say never. I'm never going to do that again," which I did. So I quit the platters and went on to another-actually, I had orders for about 27 of them, and Habatat Gallery to this day won't forgive me for quitting.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: I said, I'm going on to something else. I don't want to see another platter. And I went into what's called a Pocket series, which I still have many, many of them because they didn't sell. [They laugh.]

MS. BYRD: Didn't sell as well.

MR. RITTER: So I was using that as a teaching tool that, you know, my idea for changing wasn't monetary. My idea for changing was because I wanted to change.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: I wanted to do something else, and it doesn't always pay off.

MS. BYRD: Well, you have mentioned Peiser's-

MR. RITTER: Aesthetically for me it did, but not for my income.

MS. BYRD: And Peiser's much the same way, because he would change regardless-

MR. RITTER: Same thing. Mark would do the same thing. He would change because he wants to move on.

MS. BYRD: Shows a lot of courage.

MR. RITTER: I think maybe that's one of the things I learned from Mark. I don't know, could be. Is the fact that once I achieve my idea and I can-glass is done a lot times in series, just because it's so hard to do. I mean, if I

could first time sit down and get the idea done-oh, you know, there's the piece-I would actually be done with that series. There would only be one. But generally it takes me a couple of years-[they laugh]-to get to that point where I've finally done the piece. I'm not going to do any better with this.

MS. BYRD: So that's the way you see it. You see these building up and then you say, "That is it. I've done it."

MR. RITTER: Right. I've got that piece, and I generally keep that piece, and then I move on. And it doesn't mean when I move on that it's going to be-it's going to take maybe a couple more years, or a year, or whatever, to either lead to something else, or I'm tired of it. But when I mentioned about the platters, you shouldn't say, "Never, never," because a few years back, I went back to doing platters.

MS. WILLIAMS: And that was when you had Simone Travisano working with you, and Simone-well, Simone worked with you when you did all of the large Grail pieces-

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

MS. WILLIAMS: And then she worked with you again when you did the larger platter forms.

MR. RITTER: She worked for me through a bunch of series, about three of them.

MS. BYRD: You usually now work with two assistants, or one?

MR. RITTER: The last few years, maybe one. Now, I don't use assistants hardly at all.

[Audio break.]

What it is, it's now I can do the hot work in a couple of months with an assistant, and then the rest of the time I don't really use them.

MS. BYRD: I see, and you're talking now about etching?

MR. RITTER: Right, because these are pieces that are put together-three or four pieces to make one. So those cores that you see there were made with an assistant.

MS. WILLIAMS: But I mean, make no mistake about it: assistants have been the best part of our studio experience.

MR. RITTER: Oh, yeah. We're looking for another one right now. We tend to use the students from Penland because they're there and they're wonderful, but you know that you're only going to have them, and this is something that I learned from Fritz: you want them to move on.

MS. WILLIAMS: The good ones all go.

MR. RITTER: The good ones, you want to move on, because if they stay here forever, they don't grow. I mean, they're growing with you, but they're not growing with their own work. Sometimes I don't think they even understand it, because you'll say, well, time for you to go, and they don't want to go.

MS. BYRD: And-

MR. RITTER: I've had that before.

MS. BYRD: Yes, and it would be selfish of you not to say that.

MR. RITTER: It'd be very selfish of me and for me to keep somebody who has all this talent; so we've helped lots of kids-I don't know if you can call them kids, but a lot of glass artists-to get into a college or-not financially, of course, but write the letters or know the glass people-

MS. BYRD: No, I know what you mean.

MR. RITTER: Or maybe even think about what school they should go to.

MS. WILLIAMS: I think many of them, after working with us, realize how really, really difficult it is to make a living at a studio. This is it: the glass is our living, and so some of them have admitted, wow, I'd better go to grad school. Most of them-

MR. RITTER: Most all-the ones that we know that have really moved and done well have gone back and gotten their master's.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: I have very few who come here and already have their master's, because then they're really beyond me. They really should be doing their own thing.

MS. BYRD: Yeah, into their own.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, then they are most of the time, you know.

MS. BYRD: Have their focus.

MR. RITTER: So you don't plan to keep-I think Simone might have been the one we had the longest maybe, or Susie, I don't know.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, and Susan Clausen was an amazing artist. I mean, we could name so many kids who were amazing artists in their own right, and who contributed to the work in such a tremendous way.

MR. RITTER: I think, when I look back at some of my work, that that has the best quality to it, or I achieved what I really wanted to do, is when I had a really good assistant, so-but that they helped you get that.

MS. BYRD: Somebody who you had-

MR. RITTER: Understood what you were doing. Sometimes you get an apprentice, they don't understand what you're doing. They come to get this-the small pay or whatever it is. I don't know what they've come for sometimes, because I've had bad ones. And I'm terrible. I'm very bad about letting somebody go early, so that-Jan does that.

MS. WILLIAMS: Very rarely, though.

MS. BYRD: Oh, it must be hard.

MS. WILLIAMS: But that's almost-honest to goodness-

MR. RITTER: When I find myself not going up to the studio-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Jan will say, "What's going on up there?"

MS. WILLIAMS: It really-we've had some-

MR. RITTER: But generally I'd say they're-on a whole they've all been really great.

MS. BYRD: Now, you consider them apprentices?

MR. RITTER: You know, I've used that word, and a lot of times I really would like to come up with something better, because a lot of times they're not apprentices.

MS. WILLIAMS: I think they're assistants more than that.

MR. RITTER: They're more of an assistant, or somebody else. And for a while there, I did actually put their initials on my pieces. It'd be Richard Ritter, and then their initials.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, because we felt they had such an impact on the pieces.

MR. RITTER: But I haven't done that lately because they haven't been quite that involved.

MS. WILLIAMS: But, like David Naito who worked for us, he went on to Alfred, he was an incredible-I mean, he just was such a pleasure. And some of these kids-part of why you have an assistant is because they bring new life in. And I think one of the things, if you talk to any of the artists around here, these are hard times for studio artists, because it's become very expensive to live, much more so than it ever was before in terms of just operating.

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMS: And so it's tough for all of us to be able to pay assistants. And because of that, we're missing something really vital within the studio context that's contributed such might-you know, in a mighty way-to the development of the work.

MR. RITTER: Well, when Susie was here, we made so many murrinis. I mean, she was really into that process, and so was I.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, it was a good process.

MR. RITTER: And she made her own. She did use the studio, too. I tried to make that available to students, but, like when Simone was here, she didn't do very much of her own work, but we literally didn't shut the shop down for two and a half years-never turned the furnace off.

MS. WILLIAMS: She was such a hard worker and she-

MR. RITTER: -and that's when we made an awful lot of work.

MS. WILLIAMS: She could intuit what Richard was doing with the hot work like nobody else ever has.

MR. RITTER: You know, there are students-I mean, there's assistants that you'll go to reach for a tool and instead of saying, "Give me those jacks," they're already in your hand. Do you know?

MS. BYRD: Yes, I can imagine.

MR. RITTER: Right. And she was one of those.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, the good ones.

MR. RITTER: And so was she-and so were you.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: When Jan worked for me, I never had to really, more than once or maybe never, had to say anything. Like with Susie, they were always there, and the next thing was ready; same thing with Simone.

MS. BYRD: Well, what is the working relationship between you two? Do you work on the same pieces at all now?

MS. WILLIAMS: When Richard's hot-when we're gluing the hot pieces, when we actually do it, I'm always there. I help with the actual blowing.

MR. RITTER: She's in there. Most of the time when we're doing the hot-

MS. WILLIAMS: I assist him.

MR. RITTER: We have another assistant in there.

MS. WILLIAMS: Right, so it'll be two of us. I'm usually that second person.

MR. RITTER: Some of it's physical now.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: I can't lift what I used to lift because-well, what was it, four years ago, I broke my back. I fell off the roof, and then a year and a half ago I got hit by a car.

MS. BYRD: Oh, no. I didn't know that.

MS. WILLIAMS: So it kind of just threw things-

MS. BYRD: Oh, I'm sorry.

MR. RITTER: So it kind of messed certain things up.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes.

MR. RITTER: And it's the same old story, though, that you-I don't know how I'm going to relate this to the glass, but when Dave came back to help me because I'd broke my back-

MS. WILLIAMS: David Naito. Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, and Richie. Our son Richie took a year off school.

MS. WILLIAMS: He just came home and said, "Dad, I'm coming home."

MR. RITTER: You know, from Cullowhee and-

MS. WILLIAMS: You know, that was something.

MR. RITTER: The school was great.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: But Richie is another person.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: He had never really worked in the shop, but I still never had to tell him anything to do. He just did it.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, he was-

MR. RITTER: But he grew up around it, I guess.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: But what I was getting at with the process that leads to other things that I'm-I have always been hands-on, to the point I don't give you the pipe, even though you're assisting me. You may take it back and reheat it, but I am going to put murrini parts on. I'm going to do the gathering. I'm going to shape the piece, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, right? You're going to help keep me cool, but you don't do it. I do it. [They laugh.]

Yeah, even to the point of going to pick up the pieces; I always went over there, and it was a struggle. It was awful for it. I've been doing this for 20 years, and I'm trying to see under there, and they're trying to guide me, and I said, "Don't let me go in," and I-anyway. It made it a lot harder. And I physically had a brace on. I could not go over there and do this, right? So Dave would do it. He would come over, but I could grab it with a tool and put it down better than I ever could before. I mean, because I-

MS. BYRD: Oh, so he'd be holding it, but you'd have your-

MR. RITTER: Right. I'd have ahold of the pipe with diamond shears.

MS. BYRD: Yes, yes.

MR. RITTER: And guide it on there right exactly where I wanted it.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MS. WILLIAMS: And we felt like smacking Richard, because we could have done this all these years and didn't. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: And first time we did it, I said, "What have I been doing all these years struggling?" I'd hurt my back because I'd do these contortions, which he didn't have to do, because he's not trying to see the piece, right?

MS. BYRD: Yes, yes.

MR. RITTER: But it led me on to speeding the process up and handling the whole-actually, more controlled where I wanted the parts to go, because sometimes we'd get off, and I'd go, "Oh, why did you guys blah blah blah?" but it was me.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: But, so that came out of an injury, not being able to do it, but also it really helped the process.

MS. BYRD: And so you continued to do that?

MR. RITTER: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: So that's why I would get somebody to come in-

MS. BYRD: Well, that's good.

MR. RITTER: Whenever we do the big pieces; and the same thing with Rich.

MS. WILLIAMS: He was longer, though. We will have someone else very soon because we're going to get hot again, but, I mean, it is a sadness for us that we can't have someone like we did with Simone for a year at a time, but times are a little different. I've been here-

MR. RITTER: Well, Simone's been here in different periods of time.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: And like Dave, he came back because he knew I was hurt. He didn't really need to come back here.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: He just gave us his slot up at the-wherever-up in Boston or wherever he was working for somebody-and came down here. So in two months' time, we got all the parts that I'd been working with-

MS. WILLIAMS: It was great. For a year, really.

MR. RITTER: For a year, or maybe a year and a half.

MS. WILLIAMS: We're ready-we've used everything up. We're ready to get another assistant.

MR. RITTER: They're gone.

MS. BYRD: It was an incredible story about you breaking your back and Jan saying, "Don't get up." I just remember hearing that.

MS. WILLIAMS: Don't get up. [Laughs.]

MS. BYRD: Just don't.

MS. WILLIAMS: You know something, though? Our friends came out of the woodwork. People came over from Penland.

MR. RITTER: See, that's the support group we have here.

MS. WILLIAMS: Just-I mean, everybody offered, "I will come be your gaffer. You just sit at the bench." And, you know, it forced Richard to think differently.

MR. RITTER: And they-we even got little certificates for food from Ingles or a check for $100 here-

MS. BYRD: Oh, really?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. I mean, the artists just-

MR. RITTER: Oh, yeah.

MS. WILLIAMS: It was wonderful. The artists helped us. But it forced Richard, because he could do nothing, to sit with the brace and work on waxes, and that was one of the things-

MR. RITTER: That's where all these castings came from.

MS. WILLIAMS: Sally Rogers came over and helped him do some castings.

MR. RITTER: These wings are all castings now.

MS. WILLIAMS: You know, people just-

MR. RITTER: The first one-Sally helped me do the first one.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: And so the castings have all come from that series, too. I wanted a certain scale and more sculptural look, and the wax-I've always worked-you know, the wax goes back to my jewelry days.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MS. WILLIAMS: He used the tools that he'd packed up for 20 years.

MR. RITTER: So I knew casting, so that wasn't a problem, so-it's just like electroforming. That's all from my jewelry days of putting metal with glass.

MS. WILLIAMS: And now our daughter is very-she's been very involved in the last year with working with the waxes.

MR. RITTER: Well, she's doing-

MS. WILLIAMS: She has a great sense of design-

MR. RITTER: Yeah, and her-she's helped me do a couple patterned ones, but they're not-there's nothing here that you could-

MS. WILLIAMS: That she's done, but it's been wonderful having the kids get involved as they've grown older, and it's amazing how much they gleaned from us, even though we didn't think of ourselves as teachers, per se.

MS. BYRD: And you said Kaete is going to Massachusetts College of Art [Boston, MA]?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Right.

MS. BYRD: And will she be doing glass?

MR. RITTER: Iron.

MS. BYRD: Oh, iron.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, she'll be doing iron.

MR. RITTER: She beats on that old anvil.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: She's making the stands for my pieces now.

MS. WILLIAMS: And then last year-I mean, two years ago-William designed a murrini that Richard-

MR. RITTER: Yeah, the dragonfly you see, he said, "Dad, why don't you do a dragonfly?" I said, "I'm not going to do it. But, I said, if you do the drawing, I'll do the dragonfly." The next day a drawing is sitting on my table.

MS. BYRD: Oh, that's wonderful.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. So that's the one we did.

MR. RITTER: The dragonfly was taken from that drawing.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, and that one was the one-we got a video camera and we videoed the whole process of making it with a state grant that we got from the Arts Council, so that was kind of a fun thing-

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MS. WILLIAMS: -to video it and to record the process of making that murrini, so-

MS. BYRD: But your children, then, have never felt that it was expected that they learn-

MR. RITTER: No.

MS. BYRD: -glass, but they just hung around and sort of picked it up and-

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

MS. BYRD: They sort of plug in in different ways, it sounds.

MS. WILLIAMS: It's interesting that a lot of our friends who have children that-same thing-that kind of-

MR. RITTER: Well, Richie, he's not in the arts, but he really has a good eye. I mean, just in the things he's

designed, a web page and everything; it's a little nicer than some web pages you see, because he has that aesthetic sense that comes-[inaudible.]

MS. BYRD: Yes, it's a very nice webpage.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, he does. He's done a little more creativity with it, a little-and he knows where to put something on a page. And you see a lot of web pages that are-they got the information there, but they sure are ugly.

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: And not well conceived, as far as the aesthetic part goes.

MS. WILLIAMS: But one of the reasons we stayed here at Penland was not only that there's this tremendous exposure-we can go over slides all summer long, you know, almost every night-but that access to students-to young people that if we haven't had someone who was a student of ours in the class, maybe it was a student of a colleague or-

MR. RITTER: Well, we teach there about every three years now, or every two years.

MS. BYRD: You've seen it change over the years, but you still feel drawn to it?

MS. WILLIAMS: That relationship of student/teacher-

MR. RITTER: It's still good.

MS. WILLIAMS: That closeness is fantastic at Penland. It's still-

MR. RITTER: One of the good things Penland has done really lately, too, is they-we have more full-time scholarships, not enough, but more of them. I mean, I really like the work-study. I think it's a good thing, but the full time really allows some kids-because most of your work-study ones are kids that don't have enough money to come there, and so it's nice to be able to offer someone a full scholarship to come and enjoy a class. Getting more and more of the full scholarships.

MS. BYRD: Now, one thing that you had said you wanted to talk a little bit about was Mark Peiser's influence. And I know you had told me years ago that you started out very early on with Mark, and you came up with a melt that you have essentially been using ever since, and that you are able to use now murrinis that you made many, many years ago-

MR. RITTER: I can still use-my glass still fits what I made in 1974.

MS. BYRD: It seems amazing to me.

MR. RITTER: Basically. There might be a little change, probably-let's see. I started using fining agents in '78, I guess. So anything from '78 on, I could pick up and put in a piece of glass.

MS. WILLIAMS: But certainly seeing Mark Peiser melt all kinds of colors just gave us courage. You know, well, he can do it.

MR. RITTER: My first batch of crystal I made was terrible, and Mark said, "Well, just try this. Put some barium in it. That'll brighten it and also give it durability and stuff," and I-so whenever I'd have a problem, I'd go to Mark about glass, even though I've not gone too many times, because I've not changed my batch other than the quality of the ingredients that I put in it have gotten better. The silica I use or the sand is as good as I can find, or as good as I can afford.

MS. BYRD: Well, where does that come from?

MR. RITTER: Texas, but it's come from Canada, Texas. The best quartz I ever used came from here.

MS. WILLIAMS: Kona. Yeah.

MR. RITTER: The Kona Company in Mitchell County, but they closed it. And when they opened-the new quartz suppliers are too expensive for me.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: And he doesn't mill it fine enough for glass people. He does, but it's way-

MS. WILLIAMS: It's all for the microchip industry.

MR. RITTER: It's way too expensive.

MS. BYRD: I see.

MS. WILLIAMS: It's very expensive, very pure. So here's a-

MR. RITTER: And it's no longer a local industry. It's owned by somebody in Canada or something.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: That's changed.

MS. BYRD: That would be rather nice to think of your having that supply here and then having the circle of artists working with that-

MR. RITTER: I suspect if we followed it up, we probably could get it. I guess we never have gone and found the right guy to go talk to. The workers sometimes will bring me a little bag of it, but-

MS. WILLIAMS: It's so pure. It's so pure what they're working with, and that's why it goes to the Silicon Valley.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, you wouldn't have to do anything about the colors in it, because there wouldn't be any.

MS. WILLIAMS: But back to Mark, I think Mark was always the person that, when we just had a puzzle we couldn't solve, it's like it was-Mark was always that person. Well, it's time to call Mark Peiser.

MS. BYRD: Now, you're talking about mixing colors now?

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, mixing colors, firing a furnace, using a crucible, any of the kind of things that are just-you know, why is our acid not working right or-and it's-

MR. RITTER: Mark and I built-our color-pot furnaces aren't from anybody's design. We built them ourselves. We designed them ourselves. They may be able to think of it or they may be modeled after a Brauns furnace. It was self-supporting crucible inside a furnace, because we felt that that we could wrap the heat around the glass; you get a better quality glass, rather than a flame that-and it comes down on top of a cane.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: And you're constantly radiating-you're losing your temp through the wall. Well, Mark and I built one about the same time, and he had his burner going in one way and I had my burner going in another way. And I designed mine after talking to my father-in-law. And he said, "Well, there's this old wives' tale about the equator. On one side of the equator the water goes down one way." So I designed it for the-

MS. WILLIAMS: For the northern hemisphere.

MS. BYRD: Okay.

MR. RITTER: Which is clockwise.

MS. BYRD: Clockwise. Right.

MR. RITTER: And Mark didn't. He put his the other way around. We both fired up about the same time, and his didn't work, so we both-

MS. BYRD: So you think that was it?

MR. RITTER: He rebuilt his.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: To this day, we don't know if that really was the problem, but we-that's how close we worked-

MS. BYRD: Did you laugh about it?

MS. WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah.

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

MS. WILLIAMS: Because-

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: He said, "Well, the only thing I can come up with that's different is mine's going the wrong way." But it-what I'm trying to get to is we often worked on projects that-we helped each other, yeah, so to solve some way or another. We not always came up with the same solutions, but it got down to the fact that if I needed a bag of-if I ran out of something, I went over to Mark's and got it, because it could take three days to get it shipped here. The same thing. I got a list on my wall that's probably 20 years old: what I owe Mark, and what he owes me, and we never collected on either one, so-

MS. BYRD: Oh, isn't that fun? That's nice.

MR. RITTER: And we probably never will. because we won't be able to figure it out. Do a lot of-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, you're going to forget it pretty-

MR. RITTER: It's too long a list.

MS. WILLIAMS: They're going to forget it. They'll forget about the list.

MS. BYRD: It'll probably even out.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, when we get to that age where we-hmm?

MS. BYRD: It'll probably even out anyway.

MR. RITTER: Well, it has. We don't know where we're at. He's missing a crucible and I have one, I give it to him, so he's-but Mark-I don't know. I can't say enough about Mark as far as he's probably the most dedicated to quality in anything he does. I mean, if you look at his furnace, it's a piece of art. Especially that he just built this-he wanted to have a pouring furnace, which means the glass pours out the bottom, so you never dump a pot or anything.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes.

MR. RITTER: Because he's always-the work he's been doing lately, he had to pick a crucible up, pour it into the mold, and put it back, and it's always such a big hassle. And now he's got a furnace that he pours out of, and it worked really well, but the furnace itself is just an incredible, beautiful thing, just well molded.

And now instead of just pouring things, he actually builds glass shapes. To come up with how to pour this little thread and-

MS. WILLIAMS: -stream of glass.

MR. RITTER: I don't know if you've seen the new work but-

MS. WILLIAMS: Beautiful bowls.

MS. BYRD: I have seen just a few of them.

MR. RITTER: But the whole idea that he came up with this.

MS. WILLIAMS: That's again the process leading to-

MR. RITTER: Right, he never intended to do that with it, but he just realized-

MS. WILLIAMS: He saw that stream coming out and he thought, I've got to do something like that. Yeah, but-

MR. RITTER: Figure out how to cool it, and how to-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: That's Mark.

MS. BYRD: Well, let me ask you a question about how-

MR. RITTER: Sure.

MS. BYRD: How long do you keep your furnaces going? How long does the hot working take and-

MR. RITTER: Now?

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Oh, about two months, three months.

MS. BYRD: Two months. And that gives you enough-

MR. RITTER: It depends. I'm thinking of doing something new already.

MS. WILLIAMS: Uh-oh. Here we go. See?

MS. BYRD: You didn't know this?

MS. WILLIAMS: This is the first I've heard of it. Here we go again.

MR. RITTER: So it could be a year. I don't know.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: But right now, for what I'm doing, it's about three months out of the year, and I can't say it's three months solid. It may be on for two months and then shut off, and then down the road. Because what I'm going to do is I'm going to make some new murrinis, and so I'm going to turn both furnaces into color-pot furnaces-no crystal-to make the murrinis, and then I'll shut it down and put a color pot in so I can make what I call a core on these pieces, but just the thing I want to do might not involve a furnace at all.

MS. WILLIAMS: And the thing I always do is never talk to him about what he's thinking about, because I don't ever want to influence.

MR. RITTER: No, she always tells the one story about what I came up with years ago when we were doing the platters. I said, "I'm going to do white on white." She said-well, maybe you could say-probably explain it better.

MS. WILLIAMS: I thought, what on earth is he talking about? He's crazy. White on white? He's going to have a white vase-what on earth? No color, no murrinis? I was so depressed. You know, that was the fun of it. But what he was doing was taking white gathers, opal, and then gathers of crystal and then sandwiching over and over and over again and getting this very layered-

MR. RITTER: But I made white murrinis.

MS. WILLIAMS: -beautiful-

MR. RITTER: And white cane.

MS. WILLIAMS: -effect, like marble, and it was gorgeous and I really-I was so glad I hadn't said anything like, that's not a good idea. So I've always held my tongue, even though I've thought sometimes that might not be a good idea. That's his work. It's not my work. [Laughs.]

MS. BYRD: Well, we haven't talked much about your work, by the way, Jan. So why don't we pick up a little bit back there when you were working as an artist in residence.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, as an artist in residence, I really was very interested in two-dimensional work. I didn't have a furnace, although I have to say, anytime I needed to use the furnace-one time I went over and just rolled out tons of glass at Mark's studio, but I decided to do flat glass. And I was doing windows, and casting a lot of parts for them, and just having a wonderful time with it. But about the time that we started thinking about starting a family, I found out that working with lead is really a very dangerous thing. They hadn't come out with these more soldering-friendly leads that-or lead-free solders-that you use in windows. And I decided I had to quit, and that was about the time that I got pregnant with Richie anyway.

So basically, I stopped doing the flat glass, and for about two years, probably during the time I just had him as a little boy, I just basically helped Richard on his work. And I mean, worked right through the pregnancies right to the day, always was involved in the studio, but not necessarily doing my own work at all.

And then about the time we moved back to Penland, I started getting involved with doing some sandblasting. I had been doing some sandblasting on his pieces, and that's how I started coming up with the idea that I might like to do sandblasted images. And I did-of course, you use what you have around you at the time as your

inspiration-I did a lot of pieces with children, lots and lots of pieces of glass with children and animals. And they've continued to be a recurring theme in my pieces. It's just something that, to me, the imagery of children and animals is appealing imagery. It's something that I can use and turn into patterns and lines and make more than just a drawing of a child, but turn it actually into a patterned image. And that's what I was doing with those pieces. And I did the sandblasted pieces for three or four years. And then kind of found out that sandblasting didn't agree with me.

MS. BYRD: Even though you used all the protection you could-

MS. WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah. It just was not safe.

MS. BYRD: I know you told me Richard got you something-

MS. WILLIAMS: Right. Well, we bought the best-what was the best technology at the time; we got these masks from England that they use in the mines. But still, just somehow it just didn't work with me.

So I really quit working on the sandblasted work, and I think for a few years generally just helped Richard with the blowing, grinding, and then slowly got back, as my health improved, into sandblasting again, and continued.

MS. BYRD: So it affected-

MS. WILLIAMS: It affected my lungs. That's what it did.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: But we were just able to come up with better and better ways of doing it safely. And so I continued as anytime Richard needed sandblasting on his work; he drew all the imagery on the pieces, and then I did all the sandblasting on it. And-carefully, and I haven't gotten into any trouble with it.

And then over the years, I continued to do pieces, but only on a commission basis, my own pieces. So just now I've recently cast two pieces. I've kind of gone back full circle to what I was doing when I met Richard, which was my interest in mould making and going back to kind of some of the techniques that Petras taught me, and really enjoying that, and that's what I, kind of, hope to be doing in the future. It's kind of fun.

Richard and I really have been having some fun with learning to work with different casting materials, and that's something that we can do when we have the furnaces down and we're not-it's not so much that you're a slave to the furnaces, but when they're on, you're under this pressure to make the most of it.

MS. BYRD: Yes, I can imagine.

MS. WILLIAMS: You really try every day to charge, to use up the glass, to keep going, to keep charging until the one day you say it's time to turn it off, because I think the days, for us certainly, of having that furnace on for a year and a half at a time are over.

MS. BYRD: It gets to be expensive, I'll bet.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. It's very expensive. And it's just very interesting. It isn't so much the materials have gone up; propane's gone up, but nowhere near what just our everyday expenses for a self-employed person. You don't like to think of yourself as a business, but you are a business.

MS. BYRD: Well, but you have three children to put through school.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: I mean, that is major.

MS. WILLIAMS: It's been something, yeah. It's been something, but I think that what's always worked well is that if I need something, Richard will do it for me. And if he needs something, I will do it for him if I can do it. And he never particularly liked to sandblast, but really liked what the end result of it would be. So I'm happy to do that because that's something that I can do in the studio and I feel good about. I've always loved mixing color and messing around with that. Of course, that goes back to art school training. You know, kids don't get that kind of training today.

MS. BYRD: So you do some of the color mixing?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, initially, I did just tons and tons and tons of experimentations with colors, but we've kind of come down to a palette that we like to use. And Richard really likes his own palette, and that's one of the

reasons he hasn't gone the Kugler [Kugler Colors, Kaufbeuren-Neugablonz, Germany] direction, because he just-he really likes to have the colors that he wants to bring to pieces. He doesn't want to go to the crayon box and pick out the red.

So it's a little more work up front, I think, but also partly the-working with the murrini just-and working with the fact that you keep combining and rebuilding I don't know how to exactly to explain it, but he'll use the core of one murrini that he did three years ago. He will use it in a new piece, so everything has to really be made so that the coefficient of expansion is perfect.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: Everything has to be tested every time, and Richard is absolutely fastidious about every melt, which people talk to us and they think we're totally crazy, but every melt-every single melt, every color melt, every crystal melt-we pull a color test on it to see if it fits.

MS. BYRD: Okay. So this is one of these visual tests?

MS. WILLIAMS: Right.

MS. BYRD: Which means you have crystal on one side-

MS. WILLIAMS: Right.

MS. BYRD: And color on the other side, and you pull it out and see if it bends.

MS. WILLIAMS: You pull it out, and if it bends too much, you can't use it.

MS. BYRD: Okay.

MS. WILLIAMS: And we're absolutely just fastidious about making sure that it works, because we have too much time invested in the pieces.

MS. BYRD: Oh, absolutely. Certainly you do. And I know every time you add a colorant on metal-

MS. WILLIAMS: You change it.

MS. BYRD: It's apt to change.

MS. WILLIAMS: Right.

MS. BYRD: Changes the coefficient of its batch.

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

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMS: So anyway, so that's-it's the little technical bit of it that's kind of difficult, but it's really been rewarding, I think. And like I said, Richard's kind of developed a palette he likes. It's a kind of a softer palette. It's not quite as harsh. You know, it's not the crayon box. And I mean, the crayon box is huge now with Kugler. Nothing against that; that's wonderful, but if he wants the blue bluer, he doesn't want to have to order it. We just go downstairs and mix it.

MS. BYRD: Well, it's nice that other people are not using your palette. It's yours.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think it is.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, I don't like walking in a show and seeing all the same, which I used to in the past-go in and I'd see all the same colors in everybody's pieces.

MS. BYRD: And you knew exactly which one that was.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. And actually artists will rattle off. Oh yes, what color is that? And they'll rattle it off, you know, like Phthalo blue or number such and-you know, and it's always been just so funny to me because ours is-I wouldn't say it's haphazard, but so much of it is just lots of layering and lots of adding a little bit of this, and a little bit of that.

MS. BYRD: I was wondering if you would like both talk about where you get your ideas for your work and whether that's changed over the years.

MR. RITTER: You can go first.

MS. WILLIAMS: Me? No.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, because I think you get your ideas completely different than I do.

MS. WILLIAMS: Okay. Well, just very simply, I have always been-and that's why I like Richard's work and it appeals to me so much and I understand what he's doing. I love pattern. Patterns. When I doodle, I doodle in patterns, so I like to take the imagery of a child or an animal and I like to repeat it and turn it somehow into a pattern. And even on the newer work that I'm doing with castings, I really intend to use repeated imagery in order to get patterns. Your turn.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, but I think what you're forgetting is-and I may be wrong, but I think with Jan's work-because I'm going to try to get to mine through hers, I guess, but it's not only about patterns and stuff. I think her images are more personal, from life.

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

MR. RITTER: She takes her children or an object, a doll for instance, something from her childhood that meant a lot, and from that point of view I don't think of my work that way. And so I think her inspirations come from things that have happened to her.

MS. BYRD: But in a sense the fact that you did the family portrait and the Kaete-

MR. RITTER: Yeah, I guess that's somewhat related that way. I don't think of them that way, but they were trying to put my mom in glass, I suppose, in something that I thought would be there for a long time.

MS. BYRD: Has your mom died?

MR. RITTER: No.

MS. WILLIAMS: No, she's still alive.

MR. RITTER: My dad has, but I just wanted to do something that-oh, what's the right word? One of the reasons I went into glass is because I'm not very good with words.

MS. BYRD: You're doing very well today. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: In fact, I always thought when I went off to art school, the reason I went off to art school was because I couldn't write very well, so-you know-

MS. BYRD: All those Cs, I guess.

MR. RITTER: Yeah, right. But-and found something I could do. But, I mean, that's a personal inspiration maybe, but my ideas are kind of hard for me to say where they come from.

MS. BYRD: Well, they're primarily-

MR. RITTER: Lots of people say, "Oh, I see the ocean." Well, I don't think of them as the ocean; I love looking at the ocean, but I don't think of myself as inspired by the ocean. Always liked flowers, but that's not exactly why I'm doing flowers right now. But it's from a person-what was Bernie's last name?

MS. WILLIAMS: Bernie Adams.

MR. RITTER: Bernie Adams. I went up to do a little "show and tell" for a Michigan paperweight group at a convention years ago, and Bernie-to show how murrinis were made, because a lot of paperweights have a murrini in them.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yeah.

MR. RITTER: And when I was done with my presentation-there was about 30 or 40 of them-people, that is-they wanted me to help them pick out a paperweight. They had, like, ten paperweights from well-known-well, Paul [Stankard] was there, right?

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

MR. RITTER: I can tell Paul this story, but Paul was in it.

MS. BYRD: Paul Stankard.

MS. WILLIAMS: Mm-hmm. They wanted to commission someone to make-

MR. RITTER: There was a commission for their 20th anniversary.

MS. WILLIAMS: -that everyone would buy a paperweight.

MS. BYRD: I see.

MS. WILLIAMS: And they would all be the same.

MR. RITTER: And I was looking at them and I was saying -I was kind of leaning towards Paul's because his, I thought, was by far the better one there, and I know him so I don't know how much that influences, but-and then Bernie said-would I make them a paperweight instead? I said, "Bernie, I don't do paperweights anymore. I haven't done them in years." And he said-and it was obvious they wanted a floral background-you know, floral, but this man was an incredible person.

MS. WILLIAMS: He was a good-

MR. RITTER: He was one of my first students and he was 80 years old. I mean-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, he was one-

MR. RITTER: He was 70-something when he was my first student up in Birmingham, Michigan, and he came down and took a class at Penland and-anyway, he was just one of those people always-everything was positive. He just was-I can't say that's true with me, but he was so generous with his time and inspiration that when Bernie asked me to do it, he said, "Oh, by the way, I want a ladybug in it." And I went-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: It was-you know, a ladybug. Okay. So I went back.

MS. WILLIAMS: And we started making flowers.

MR. RITTER: Came home, made some flowers and some leaves, and Richie was here then, and-

MS. WILLIAMS: He helped you do the ladybug.

MR. RITTER: And I said, "I've got to do this ladybug." I didn't have any apprentices at that time. So he'd never touched glass and he did all the gathering for that bug.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Made this little ladybug, and we sent a piece back up to him, and I ended up making all 20 of them, all paperweights.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: But, out of that series, this Floral Core series.

MS. BYRD: Oh. Now, where was this then with the-

MR. RITTER: Michigan.

MS. WILLIAMS: Bernie lived in Michigan. Yeah.

MR. RITTER: He lived in Bloomfield, Michigan.

MS. BYRD: But this was some of-the art association up there that he-

MR. RITTER: He was a member of a paperweight club.

MS. WILLIAMS: They had just asked Richard to come up and give a little slide lecture one night and-

MR. RITTER: -come up and do a talk at the local library in Bloomfield Hills, actually. West Bloomfield, I think it was.

MS. WILLIAMS: Local boy makes good, see. You know? He'll have Richard-

MR. RITTER: But it's funny, see, there-I mean, you talk about inspiration. I don't know if that's an inspiration, but that's what led me to the series of imagery I'm doing right now.

MS. BYRD: Oh, that's-

MR. RITTER: I was doing something totally different. It was more abstract. That's when I was doing the blankets, yes, but not the way I'm doing blankets now. They're much softer, lighter, don't dominate the piece like they did in these things-in pieces in the '80s.

MS. BYRD: And what year about was this?

MR. RITTER: I'd have to look at a piece and see when it was.

MS. BYRD: Just roughly speaking.

MR. RITTER: I'm thinking.

MS. WILLIAMS: I think he started making the flowers.

MR. RITTER: Eight years ago?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. Maybe about eight years ago, because-

MS. BYRD: So mid-'90s?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: Maybe '98, something like that. I suppose if I looked one up, I could probably find it in a hurry, but that's-even the platters.

MS. WILLIAMS: Floral came out of that.

MR. RITTER: They were floral first, I believe. Yeah. And that's the last series, I think, and the floral and the-one of those-

MS. WILLIAMS: These Fluorescence series.

MR. RITTER: The Fluorescence, we called them, because they weren't really a bowl anymore. They were full of crystal, the one right behind you.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: And they came next. See how the-those are platters. You can't put anything in them.

MS. BYRD: I see.

MR. RITTER: They're full of glass.

MS. BYRD: And so, flat-

MS. WILLIAMS: But they're floral-there's still the floral imagery in them.

MS. BYRD: Yes, yeah.

MR. RITTER: But the floral-and then the core ones.

MS. BYRD: Floral core.

MR. RITTER: The core-the floral cores came afterwards. And that's when I got away from the crystal layering. You know, they're not buried in anything. They're right on the surface.

MS. BYRD: And those floral cores, as you call them, are these chemically bonded?

MR. RITTER: That's a nice word for glue, isn't it?

MS. BYRD: Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMS: I've been told by other people to call it that.

MR. RITTER: I have to remember that. I can never remember that, so I still call it glue.

[Audio break.]

MS. BYRD: This is Joan Falconer Byrd interviewing Richard Ritter and Jan Williams on their farm in Bakersville, North Carolina, on August 2, 2005, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number one, session number two.

I was going to ask you both to talk a little bit about how you got started exhibiting at craft fairs, also some museums, that sort of thing, and galleries as well.

MR. RITTER: Am I going to start since I'm the oldest? Let's see. I think the very first place I ever showed outside of this-let's say outside this school, because we always had student shows-and that was the Ann Arbor Street Fair back in '69. And I did a show there, the Ann Arbor Street Fair back then was just one little fair, you know, quite a few people. And it was run by the Pottery Association of Michigan. I don't know if it was the Potters' Guild or whatever. And they did a really nice job, and you had to apply to get in. And the first year I thought, I'll apply to four art shows, so I applied to Ann Arbor and got in, and three other little ones in Michigan, small.

And I went to the Ann Arbor Art Fair, and they-back then, they had award pieces. They'd pick a piece in the show to give the award for like-I don't know what you want to call it-best of show or whatever. Well, I won it. First time. And I thought, well, this is great, and I had good sales. Only other thing I can say about sales at that time, I'd like to say, I didn't sell to the public during the art fair. I sold to all the artists in that show. The artists for the first few years of the glass movement sold to other artists. In other words, the art world supported you, the artists themselves-a few collectors.

The reason I say that is because I sat at a table a couple weeks ago at a big thing, and collectors were saying how they were the ones that started the movement because they bought all the art. Well, the first couple of years back in the late '60s, they didn't buy any art.

MS. BYRD: You said the museums said that they-

MR. RITTER: No.

MS. WILLIAMS: No, the collectors were saying-

MR. RITTER: The collectors.

MS. WILLIAMS: That they made the movement.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: Private collectors. There were a few then. Jean Sosin, who bought-her very first piece of glass was mine. A big collector.

MS. WILLIAMS: Oh yeah, Jean Sosin was wonderful.

MR. RITTER: But anyway, because you had asked about museums, that piece was purchased by the museum-

[Audio break.]

They funded that award.

MS. BYRD: Oh, I see.

MR. RITTER: And they got the piece. And the piece, right back in '69 or '70, was in a museum.

MS. BYRD: And that went directly into which museum again?

MR. RITTER: Detroit.

MS. WILLIAMS: Detroit Institute of the Arts.

MR. RITTER: They had lost that piece.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: It was gone.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: But I know where it is.

MS. BYRD: Somebody stole it?

MR. RITTER: Somebody stole it.

MS. BYRD: Oh, for heaven's sake.

MR. RITTER: And years ago, I did a-I'm running through this as quick as possible. Years ago I went to a collector's house, and she was showing me a piece of glass that she owned. And I said, "Well, where did you get that piece of glass?" and she had bought it at a flea market, but it is the piece that came out of the museum. I even told her, but she was not interested in giving it back.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: But that was my first museum collection. It was in there for a year, so it was-a lot of times it was in the basement, I guess. And I think it disappeared while it was in the basement. I didn't know that kind of stuff went on that much, but anyway.

And then I started showing at a gallery, America House Gallery, in Detroit, a little bit. My first show in Ann Arbor was glass and jewelry, mainly jewelry. I was doing pewter boxes, little pewter boxes or toadstools. I don't know, but anyway, with little glass beads in them, which was how I started glass, combining glass with my jewelry.

MS. BYRD: I'd forgotten that.

MR. RITTER: So that was about the last year that I did jewelry and glass together. The next year I was only showing glass. I wasn't doing jewelry anymore. I sort of quit it. I was into some wedding band rings and stuff to help pay the bills, but what I wanted to say about-when I said I went to four of them, three of them were not juried, and I went to those and didn't sell anything to anybody, because they were, like, painted walnuts and-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, yes. [They laugh.]

MR. RITTER: -bead shows and-anyway, they weren't what I thought they would be. So I learned very quickly that you had to pick a quality art fair. And I started showing in '71 with Habatat Galleries, who out of all the galleries who supported their artists really well back then was that-they were one of them, and they're still around today. I'm probably in more museums and more books because of Ferd Hampson, the gallery owner at Habatat, than any other gallery. None of the other guys probably would like to hear that, but they are. And he's the one who just put us in a big-couple years ago-a big show in Mexico, one in Japan, a couple in Europe and-I can't name them all by name.

MS. BYRD: And he's been very important to you?

MR. RITTER: And acquiring pieces for the Detroit Institute of Art. People call and say, "What piece should I give to a museum?" and quite often he'll do mine. Not always, but over the years he's been very supportive, and probably, of all the galleries, he's done more to get things in print. And he had the first track lighting, which he is adding to, but he still had the first track lighting. First posters that I can remember came out of his gallery.

Now, [Doug] Heller was always right in there, but not quite the same. But Heller has a hands-on, a little different way.

MS. BYRD: Now, you were selling at Heller also in the early days?

MR. RITTER: Yeah. But in the early days, these galleries bought pieces. That has changed.

MS. BYRD: So the galleries bought the pieces?

MR. RITTER: Yeah, Heller always came to the art fair-

MS. BYRD: And then you sold-

MR. RITTER: He'd come to, like, Winter Park, Florida, and buy pieces outright.

MS. BYRD: I see. So Winter Park is another place that you used to sell-

MR. RITTER: That's another art fair that I used to-I never did more than four a year. I gave them up quite a few years ago, but I think the last-1980, maybe, the last one was. What, '80-in the '80s.

MS. WILLIAMS: It was-Richie was little when you did your last one.

MR. RITTER: Seventies?

MS. WILLIAMS: I'd say the late '70s.

MR. RITTER: No, no, had to be 1980. I think I still did one when we-yeah. Anyway, early '80s. Real early '80s I quit, because I realized they took more time than they were-I shouldn't say worth, but they took more time.

MS. BYRD: Well, when your work was so-

MR. RITTER: I priced myself out of the market, too.

MS. BYRD: When you started out, do you remember what you were selling your work for?

MR. RITTER: Thirty-five dollars, $15.

MS. WILLIAMS: Ten dollars.

MR. RITTER: Ten dollars.

MS. WILLIAMS: Ten dollars.

MR. RITTER: I did a complete wine set, wine glasses and decanter and a stopper, for $35.

MS. BYRD: Oh, my. And would this have been when you were working at Penland, or before you went to Penland?

MR. RITTER: Before Penland.

MS. BYRD: Before Penland.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, those family portrait pieces were $75 to $350.

MS. BYRD: Really?

MS. WILLIAMS: The small vases, like-

MR. RITTER: Yeah. In the early-

MS. WILLIAMS: -the one up there and-

MR. RITTER: In the early days. But one of the differences that strikes me when I think about it, when we're talking about it, yeah, they were a lot cheaper, but I sold them outright. I had the money the next day. What happened with consignment-you had to-somewhat your prices go up because of the value of pieces and because I'm doing fewer and they're more complex, but also you have to wait for your money, so-

MS. WILLIAMS: A long time.

MR. RITTER: -even though you may take it-some of these pieces, that's two years old. I will sell it eventually, but part of that price is the waiting time.

MS. BYRD: Well, do you sell a great deal out of your own gallery?

MR. RITTER: No, last year we sold 25 percent, and that was a record. Ever since Harvey got out of glass in the mountains-he was quite a draw for people to come, and also he really reached out to them. He encouraged them to come. Nobody's doing that now. None of us do that. We don't have that-the expertise or the way Harvey was able to get people to come up here. He would take the time to take care of them, take them out and make appointments with other people and he didn't bring them up just here for Harvey.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, Harvey was so incredibly supportive.

MR. RITTER: Harvey would bring somebody else and say, oh, go see-by the way, here's this person, this one person, and we'll call and see if you can see them. Rob or me or Peiser or whatever. Harvey came out of an education background; he was always teaching.

MS. BYRD: Okay. Well, you did want to talk a little bit about the education aspect.

MR. RITTER: I noticed in the questionnaire that they referred to, and I think they're probably putting it all under

one umbrella, but they talked about universities. I don't know where it was, but they referred to it a couple times, but I've always felt there's a little difference between an art school-some of the art schools don't like this as much-and a university in the fact that-well, for instance, you talked about one sculptor [at Western Carolina, where Byrd teaches].

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: Well, I had seven sculpture teachers. And you got so you knew which ones you wanted to take from that, so you take good or bad, but it-painting there was ten teachers.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, Richard and I both went to art schools, and to me, like I said, in ceramics I had five teachers, five potters-different expertise.

MR. RITTER: Ceramics, there was three, for instance. Three potters.

MS. WILLIAMS: Different expertise, but that's how-

MR. RITTER: A university and an art school may be similar in the number of teachers you have, because they're big departments generally in a university.

MS. WILLIAMS: Very often.

MR. RITTER: But I listen to some of the university people, like with photo now, and they don't even want their students-they're not even raising their kids to take drawing.

MS. WILLIAMS: They don't even have drawing as a prerequisite.

MR. RITTER: And I thought, my heavens. Because they say it's all computer. I think you still have to draw. The computer is not that kind of answer.

MS. BYRD: Yeah, we still insist on everyone drawing.

MR. RITTER: Well, sure. Of course. I took umpteen life drawing classes.

MS. BYRD: Well, you don't learn to see, I think, until you start drawing.

MR. RITTER: Right.

MS. WILLIAMS: I think sometimes that an artist is overwhelmed by the environment of the university, in that when-I certainly always did very well in academics in school, so it never had anything to do with not being able to handle the academic load that made me decide to go to an art school versus the university, but after one year at the university I just felt I wasn't getting enough art. I don't know how to describe it.

And so I really made the change and it was a happy change for me, but you just never know. So many of our friends went through universities. I think-I know that one of the questions they ask is about kids coming up and learning outside of academia altogether, because I think university art school are still so much about academics. Some artists just can't handle that workload. Penland is wonderful. Kaete is going from Penland to art school, and she's going to find there's a real change. There's not that freedom that you have at a place like Penland or Haystack. You have a tremendous amount of freedom to really create what you want to create; you're not satisfying an assignment or solving a problem that they want you to learn to solve.

So what happens is that at some point the realities of being an artist and receiving the letter from the gallery asking you to make a statement, you know, very often if you don't have a good background in being able to communicate, it's really tough. I think that it's beautiful to be able to just go to an art school and have the option of being immersed in it. And for some kids, I think it's really great that way because that's what they want to do. They don't want to go sit in a big class with 700 kids and study English, history, you know. But really, every student we've had here with us, we've just really tried to encourage them to keep goingm because your education is easy to get when you're younger.

MS. BYRD: Well, do you feel that people who go consistently to a place like Penland or move from one craft school to another can get what you got by going to an art school?

MR. RITTER: No.

MS. WILLIAMS: No.

MS. BYRD: What is it, do you think, that makes art school special in that sense?

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, or the university art, the discipline. You have a certain criteria, you have a certain set of skills that they want you to learn along the way, and they're important skills.

MR. RITTER: Well, Penland can-I'm not saying Penland is good for a beginner or good for somebody who's had a lot of work. I kind of think it's both, but I think you can only go so far. I mean, even people who've come there and do our core do generally go back to school at some point. A little more formal and-but Penland-I guess I can say probably because I'd already had my schooling in art school, then Penland was the right thing for me, because I saw it all-it wasn't so much the structure of Penland, and maybe that is a structure. There were so many different kinds of people that came through teacher-wise. Some of them were die-hard teachers. I used to always use this example of why I didn't stay in teaching. There were three kinds of teachers. This is what I saw.

MS. BYRD: Okay. That's all right.

MR. RITTER: Okay. This is just Richard Ritter. Oh, there's the teacher who was a heck of a teacher-great teacher. I mean, that's where all their creativity went. Then there was the person-and there were a lot of them, a lot of good teachers in my school that I went to, and I think a lot of good teachers in all the programs, probably all through the country.

Then there was the teacher who you never saw. He was lousy when he was in there, or she, but an incredible artist. I mean, that's what he was there for. The school was paying for this guy so he could do his art, but back then the only way they could pay for him was he had to teach. Right?

Then there was the one-now we're up to 200 teachers. Then there was one teacher that I saw that could be both, and I decided I couldn't do both. I couldn't be a really good teacher full-time. That's why I like to go off and do workshops, because I can just focus on being part of that group. That's teaching or sharing what I know and not worry about what I'm doing art-wise.

Now, it may influence me in some way when I get done with the program. I may come up with maybe an idea while I'm teaching them. That's partly why you do it. But I just felt that I wasn't that one teacher that could do both of them. [Laughs.] It's just so hard to do, but-

MS. BYRD: That's really true. Well, tell me, do you teach at other places besides Penland?

MR. RITTER: Oh, yeah.

MS. BYRD: Do you want to name some of them?

MR. RITTER: Oh, California, at San Luis Obispo; in Detroit, at the Center for Creative Studies; in Toledo, the Toledo Art Museum; in New Orleans at Tulane [University], just to name a few.

MS. BYRD: Have you been to Pilchuck?

MS. WILLIAMS: No, he's not ever been to Pilchuck. No.

MR. RITTER: No.

MS. BYRD: Or Haystack or-but you've done just sort of like-

MR. RITTER: So I had Penland as that alternative teaching, but most of the teaching things I've done have been in workshops within universities.

MS. BYRD: Okay.

MR. RITTER: So I just-I just never went back into teaching. I didn't like the politics either. I was in two departments, advertising design and crafts.

MS. BYRD: That would be incredibly difficult.

MR. RITTER: And I hated it, so-

MS. BYRD: Oh yes. Right.

MR. RITTER: Petty, petty stuff. And guess who was in the middle?

MS. BYRD: Yeah, how awful. It's not like that where I am, but I think in many places-complete polarization.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: They offered me somebody's job before he was even gone. I thought, well, they'll pick it up. With never having talked to him, they just-out of the blue the director says, "Well, he won't be here for long," and I happened to know this guy worked his butt off to do what he did, and I said, "When is it going to be me?"

MS. BYRD: Yeah. So you both really feel pretty good about the way in which you got your education?

MR. RITTER: Yeah.

MS. WILLIAMS: We loved our education.

MR. RITTER: And when my daughter was at Chapel Hill, I went down there and went into the ceramics department and for a major university, I thought it was-

MS. BYRD: It's known for art history, but not known for studio art.

MS. WILLIAMS: It's not-yeah, studio.

MR. RITTER: And that's what Kaete wanted to do.

MS. WILLIAMS: So she shouldn't have gone there.

MR. RITTER: No, but she got in on the academics.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: But that goes back-

MR. RITTER: Pure and simple.

MS. WILLIAMS: That goes back to the importance of challenging kids creatively, whether they're academically bright or not; the art may be their career choice, but often in schools they don't allow children to take that kind of track. They track the kids differently, and so-but we love teaching. For us, it's like a little vacation. It's a diversion. It's a wonderful-it's a two week or two and a half weeks and wonderful to be around the young people and meeting new people and-

MR. RITTER: And we even did a concentration at Penland about three or four years ago.

MS. WILLIAMS: And it was wonderful. It was really great. We had wonderful students, and I think that Penland is so fantastic because you-all levels of different people, people who have levels of interests and levels of skill and different ages can all come together and appreciate what's going on there and what's being taught there, and that's terrific.

MR. RITTER: And I think the one thing Penland has going for it, as an alternative, it has printmaking, photography, all these programs. Pilchuck's just glass. Not just glass; it's incredible with its glass, but you're not going to be exposed to Joan Byrd there unless she's taking a class or doing a thesis for them or something.

MS. BYRD: No, and one of the things they always say about Penland is the fact that there's the exchange between the different studios.

MS. WILLIAMS: Right.

MR. RITTER: Well, our-the first conversation with Jan, and see, I was teaching-Cynthia Bringle was down in the pottery.

MS. WILLIAMS: Cynthia Bringle was.

MR. RITTER: We met once a week with both classes together.

MS. BYRD: Oh, well, that's nice.

MR. RITTER: For a critique. So now at Penland they're suddenly trying to do this again.

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: They're trying-it's a good thing, but generally it was initiated just on our own between the teachers. And it was a concentration, so it was a lot easier to do that; the short week ones, we can't do them. There's just not enough time. But no, I think it was once a week or every other week we met.

MS. WILLIAMS: Oh, every other week or something. Yeah.

MR. RITTER: But it was really good, because the potters saw what we were doing totally different than what we did, and we saw their work differently, so it was really interesting.

MS. BYRD: And Cynthia has always been interested-

MR. RITTER: We still talk about it.

MS. BYRD: She's always been interested in glass.

MR. RITTER: Well, she was-when she helped me do glass. When I was down as a resident my first year, I didn't have helpers, and every once in awhile Cynthia would come in and say, "You need some help?"

MS. BYRD: Oh, really?

MR. RITTER: And I'd put her to work and-

MS. BYRD: That's very nice.

MR. RITTER: She was kidding me about it the other day.

MS. BYRD: That's fun. Would you say there's an element of play in the way in which you work or in the work of art itself?

MR. RITTER: Yeah, I guess. Probably more in the past than maybe right now. I don't know.

MS. BYRD: Okay. Now, what do you mean by that?

MR. RITTER: Trying to think how I can express it. I don't know, in some terms I think I'm looser about what I do, but in other ways I-and it's probably-it's self-inflicted that I want the pieces to be more than they are, and so that takes a little bit of the play out of it, and there's-I'm getting better at it and that's partly what these pieces are about. I got to-with these things-where I couldn't stand a piece of dirt in it or a bubble-it was a little too anal, even though they don't look like it when they're done.

MS. BYRD: The pure crystal.

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

MR. RITTER: With the new pieces I don't have that anymore, and it's kind of nice. I can live with-they don't mean anything to the pieces.

MS. WILLIAMS: But he's-make no bones about it-he's dead serious.

MS. BYRD: He sets such a high standard, I mean-

MS. WILLIAMS: I think Richard is-I think he's so serious about it. In the last two years he's tried to sort of loosen up a little. And especially starting to work in the clay-in the wax. It's allowed him to just be much more expressive, loose. You know, glass is a pretty tight medium in a lot of ways.

MR. RITTER: It can be.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, it is. It's just technically tight. And you cut it with a saw and you can't-the tools-everything-I know they talk about the fluidity and all that-but when it comes down to it, once it's cold, it's hard. And it's hard to work with, and it's-it's beautiful when it's hot, but everyone talks about how the cold-working part of it is the most difficult part.

MS. BYRD: Oh, that's interesting.

MS. WILLIAMS: And the least fun part of it.

MR. RITTER: There are a few people who like to grind and polish, but I'm not one of them.

MS. WILLIAMS: Very-yeah.

MR. RITTER: I think Kenny Carder went through that and probably from my point of view was more successful than a lot of them, and that's what all that sawing is about that he does: trying to break loose from all this hard-edged sort of-

MS. WILLIAMS: I still think that if you didn't get it in there and just enjoy the hot stuff, you wouldn't do it. It's fun. Every time you open the furnace, you don't know what you're going to see when you look in there. There could be a really bad surprise awaiting you.

MS. BYRD: I'm sure that's happened.

MR. RITTER: Oh, yeah.

MS. WILLIAMS: It's just that element of surprise. And then the whole ordeal of annealing, which is an ordeal. And to get through from the point of putting it away hot to opening up the oven and seeing it, it's time, and you wait for that. And sometimes the bigger the piece, the longer you wait.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes. How long does annealing take for these large pieces?

MR. RITTER: Those are probably about a week.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: For a big piece like the cast-lead crystal ones, annealing can go, like, 21 days.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: These went 20 days, these big pieces like that.

MS. BYRD: What was the-

MS. WILLIAMS: The Triolet [series, 1987-91]-

MR. RITTER: I forget what's in them. They were the longest.

MS. WILLIAMS: He would really say, what did I do-what's in there [the annealer]? What's in there?

MR. RITTER: I got so I put a murrini on top of the oven, so I-

MS. BYRD: Oh.

MR. RITTER: Oh, that's where the red piece is.

MS. BYRD: Well, how many annealing ovens do you have then, because you must have had-

MR. RITTER: About four. The other thing is, too, see, I really go back to, like, with Mark and I. There's no commercial ovens in there. I built them all; even the furnaces, I built. We built the shop.

MS. WILLIAMS: Everything.

MR. RITTER: To that wall right there [indicating the wall between the studio and gallery], and then this is done by somebody else.

MS. WILLIAMS: Everything had to be built, because it wasn't somebody building annealing ovens.

MR. RITTER: Well, it was-

MS. WILLIAMS: There wasn't anybody. Now there is. Now it's really incredible. Someone who really can even buy your ovens, your tools, everything from a catalogue.

MS. BYRD: Do you think that people who do that miss out on some of the-

MR. RITTER: I think they miss-

MS. BYRD: Or are they-

MR. RITTER: Well, maybe not so much on building equipment. That can be a little bit too much. I built it because I loved doing it. And I think it goes back to my dad, tool and die maker. I mean, we like using our hands and somewhat money-wise, too. I could build it much cheaper than I could ever buy it, and I couldn't buy it to start with.

When I built those furnaces I'm using now, you couldn't buy a furnace. We all had to build them, so from that point of view this might be the-but I do think artists lose something when they don't know what's even in glass.

From that point, yes, because you don't know all the things you can do with it. Some of these new people don't know it takes a different glass to cast with than it does to blow a goblet, and to me, that's a little shortcoming.

MS. BYRD: Now, when you are casting, though, are you able to use the same glass for your casting?

MR. RITTER: I can.

MS. WILLIAMS: We can, but we don't. We've been-

MR. RITTER: We've cast some of our glass, and some of it's lead, so that one over there, the copper one-

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. RITTER: That's our glass all the way through. Now, all the older pieces, except for the core pieces, are all my glass, but some of the core pieces now have lead glass on the outside.

MS. BYRD: And is it-

MR. RITTER: But it's not saying I won't go back and cast some of them eventually that-

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, we plan to.

MR. RITTER: The forms that are a little simpler, you can cast, but by casting, you can take a lot of the furnace. That piece up there, that copper one, that's not cast. That's made hot.

MS. BYRD: And would that be electroformed?

MR. RITTER: The electroformed part is made hot. It was done off the end of a pipe. Now, I can do that and I can get up to a certain size, but I can't-yeah.

MS. BYRD: Other than the murrinis, when did he get into doing the sandblasting and the cutting and all of that?

MS. WILLIAMS: Okay. That came about basically in 1976-and of course, you couldn't even grind it. You just could grind the bottom of the pieces early on, and that's all people could do.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: And then as we learned a little bit more about equipment and started polishing, and then when Harvey moved down here, it made a tremendous change in the way all of us could work with the glass, because he brought some equipment that none of us really had before-some very good polishing equipment. And he had an open-house policy. Richard went over there all the time really to polish the pieces.

And Richard had had diamond saws early on, because that came out of the lapidary tradition, and that wasn't a far-it wasn't a far fetch. And you could go to a little rock show and find somebody who knew darned well how to polish a rock, and they could tell you how to polish glass, and there were similarities. There really were some similarities, and it was just over the years, through cutting the murrinis, he started to network within the lapidary world, and then he finally found the saws that worked the very best for him.

And when we moved here, I believe he had first done some of the big sawing over at Harvey's. I'm not quite sure about that, but we did finally buy ourselves a big saw. And one of the things that is wonderful is now that technically kids can do so much so soon, and someone who's been in glass for a little time at all can have all this fabulous access to grinding equipment if they go to the right school.

MS. BYRD: Right.

MS. WILLIAMS: But it's when you get out in your own studio that all this becomes more difficult. If you have access to a school, you can do things and most of the equipment that we have, honestly, we were able to get used, used diamond saws bought at lapidary shows. And early on, Richard-we still, to this day, go to the gem shows, go to the rock shows, and try and find what we can in the way of equipment that might be of interest to us.

But Harvey-that made a big difference. Diamond grinding wheels, things we had never tried before, and that sort of opened up the idea that, well, maybe we can do something that's really cut and polished-really cut and polished well. If you don't have the ability to do that, you don't even conceive of the fact. I mean, you might wish, but it's once you cut the glass and you see how beautiful it looks cut, or how beautiful it looks when you cut through the murrini or through the cane and then polish it. It's only by the mistakes or whatever of trial and error that you figure out how beautiful the results are going to be, and then you try to figure how to use that.

MS. BYRD: Now, I had asked Richard a question about the element of play. And I don't think we discussed-

MS. WILLIAMS: No, I don't think I did.

MS. BYRD: I thought you might have something to add.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, I certainly-basically I talked about the fact that I'd just done commissions over the last 10 years. And always what I wanted to put in the commission was something that was of special significance to the child or the adult that went into the piece, and that it had to be-you had to look at it and know what it was, and they had to know what it was.

And it may sound ridiculous, but if a stuffed monkey was the thing they wanted-and I didn't lower myself at all-I would draw that stuffed monkey in the most beautiful, playful way that I could. Every object in the world can be a beautiful thing when it's drawn, everything, from just a plain hand to a foot, a ball. A ball can be a beautiful thing to sandblast.

And so I always tried to just let myself see-go away from the image and make it a beautiful drawing, so that the drawing, you could look at it and say, well, it isn't just a ball. It's the way the lines go together, and the way the image meshes with the image behind it is a beautiful-is a beautiful juxtaposition, but it isn't necessarily that it's a ball and it's a leg and that it's an arm. That may have been something I picked up in school, I don't know. But to me, I always wanted to have there to be a design element that I could stand back and pretend I did not know what any of the imagery meant, and that it would be a beautiful design. That's what's important to me.

And then you could step back and look at it and say, oh, yes, it's the dog and the stuffed monkey, and the little girl, and the picnic basket, and the too many ducks. That always was important to me. And-but like I said, if it didn't have the design element that it, in a way, worked and functioned as a kind of repeated pattern, I didn't really want to do it.

MS. BYRD: I watched you work in depth when you were doing your sandblasting, and you said you masked and you removed first the areas that were going to be blasted-

MS. WILLIAMS: The deepest.

MS. BYRD: -the deepest.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, and the same way on Richard's pieces. He will take the work, the piece that he's finished. He has an idea of-a very specific idea of what imagery he wants drawn on that piece, and so he will tape the whole thing with masking tape, and then he will draw over-he actually draws on the piece physically with a marker first. Then he puts a layer of tape over it and redraws it, then he puts a layer of tape and redraws it, and then he has-on his third layer we do our final drawing. So that he feels like the drawing really relates to what's inside the piece; that the drawing is not just floating on a surface, that it relates in some way.

MS. BYRD: Oh, so each time you're able to see that line through that tape.

MS. WILLIAMS: Through the masking tape, and you put another layer. So then he has three layers of tape.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: And he draws his final drawing, and that's when you're making the final drawing look beautiful and not relating it to what's underneath. Sort of an evolution in process of making sure everything relates in the beginning, but by the time he gets to the top, it all has to function and look like on a piece of paper, because by that time, the masking tape is just smooth. You don't see anything through it and he has a drawing.

And then basically I cut out every line that he's drawn and we have lengthy discussions over exactly how he wants it done, and then I just go at it and hope for the best. And basically with my pieces, it's always been that way. You just really don't know how it's going to end up, but you just hope it's going to work out.

MS. BYRD: It's an amazing relationship, seriously, to have the two of you working like that. And when he's put so much effort into hot-working the piece, and for you to have the courage to go into it, and-

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, if he didn't-if we weren't here in the same studio and if I couldn't call him down to the sandblaster when I felt uneasy-and there have been pieces that I've finished and he's said, "Oops, I didn't really want it to be like that," but at that point he wasn't in a position he could say, oh, dear. Oh, dear. So-I mean, it's just a matter of helping each other. He blows the forms for me to sandblast on, and I sandblast on his forms.

MS. BYRD: In other words, he blows the forms that you sandblast that are on your pieces?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, yeah, so-and I help him, but I mean, he actually does the blowing, so-element of play. Yeah, I think there's a certain element of play, but I think it's just making sure that it really reminds you of a time and place when you look at it and it makes you feel good, you know, that it makes the person feel good who commissioned the piece-that they can really look at it and see themselves in the bowl and relate, but I hope a stranger will relate to it somehow.

MS. BYRD: Well, do you receive commissions through galleries, or do people-

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, basically people come through. And I'm bad. I haven't done all the ones. There are people that would like them, but I don't do that many a year. There are very few pieces that Richard-that we sandblast. Really there aren't that many, so maybe a handful a year.

MS. BYRD: A handful of Richard's?

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

MS. BYRD: How many pieces approximately-I mean, these are so labor intensive. Do you know how many pieces Richard makes in a year?

MS. WILLIAMS: Richard makes generally about 20. Some years he's only done 10. When he was doing these pieces, the Fluorescence pieces, that were very full of murrini and full of crystal and heavy and a lot of grinding and a lot of polishing, he was only doing 10 a year. That was not good. That was not productive. We really needed to make more. So he didn't make very many of that series because it was so labor intensive.

Now, these pieces-the floral-core pieces, I think last year he made, maybe, 35 of them, and he's made 99 of that series over a three-year period, which for him, that's a huge number of pieces.

MS. BYRD: That's probably why he's talking about wanting to change.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, he is. That's why he's starting to talk about that. The Triolet series, which was a very-they were, like, a large, heavy, solid piece with facets cut on them; he did 75 of those, or maybe 78, altogether. And we could-if I had them today-people want them all the time, and we have three, and I will not let any of them go, so-I wish I'd kept more, but I didn't.

[Mr. Ritter leaves to work on water line. He returns later.]

MS. BYRD: There's been a lot of talk about inspiration from other artists, that you and Richard are really integrated with a whole community that involves artists, but also people in the town. You work as volunteer firemen-firepeople.

MS. WILLIAMS: And we're not the only artists who do that, actually, interestingly enough. One of the things that really is exciting about being an artist here is, number one, how well they have accepted the crazy artists, have accepted them in the fold. I guess when you go in a burning building with somebody, they're going to accept you; and Richard from early on-well, he's been now on the fire department, I think, 22 years, but early on he was very involved in the community. And many of the artists here are very involved in the community, in different ways, many through the Art Councils, some on-the animal rescue is huge. I mean, a huge number of artists are involved in Mitchell County Animal Rescue here. And certainly on our fire department alone there's a potter, a woodworker, and had been another woodworker and another potter in the past, and the two of us. And they just-we're just another individual that's there trying to help people, and it's really fun, and really a good way to get to know your community.

And early on, Bill Brown kind of protected the artists at Penland, and felt that they were so different from the people here, that people didn't go off the mountain much. Now, when you look at-Richard had hair to his waist, and this was in the '70s, so maybe there was a great difference, but there's just not that difference now between the local people.

MS. BYRD: Well, it's just so wonderful to hear, Richard having these two really severe injuries, that everyone rallied around. You said it wasn't just the artists.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was wonderful. I mean, people just absolutely-the fire department relief fund gave us $5,000. And when CERF called us-called Richard and said, "We'd really like to help you," Richard said, "I just got $5,000 from the fire department. I'm an artist who is so lucky that I don't have to ask,"-we really thanked them, but we said, "Save that for another artist who doesn't have what we have."

MS. BYRD: That's the Craftsmen Emergency Relief Fund.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, that was wonderful that they called us when they heard and said, "Can we

help?" but I mean, we, by virtue of just being volunteer firemen in North Carolina, we got $5,000, with no strings attached. And that really helped us tremendously, and then just people coming by and doing everything from gathering glass for us to-just wonderful.

And I think that we've had a lot of really crazy things around here. A lot of the artists lost their bridges and had some problems and terrible floods and-

MS. BYRD: Oh, the flooding has been very bad, hasn't it?

MS. WILLIAMS: It's really interesting how you all of a sudden just become part of your neighborhood. Everybody works together to help you.

MS. BYRD: Do you have anything else that you would like to say on this-on the tape, or disc?

MS. WILLIAMS: I can't think of anything else.

MS. BYRD: Well, it's been a great pleasure.

MS. WILLIAMS: It's interesting that we live a life of-somewhat of isolation up here; sometimes when we get out, we realize, wow, things have really changed. We get up to Penland and see all the incredible things the kids are doing now in glass, the incredible things they're doing in ceramics that I haven't seen, or wood. And I think we're here because we've got that exposure, and that's really wonderful.

[Mr. Ritter returns.]

MS. BYRD: We had something else that we were going to ask you about, and that was whether craft magazines have been important to you and whether specifically a cover article that you had in *American Craft* made a significant difference to you.

MR. RITTER: Oh, it did. It did. And it was wonderful, too. I mean, it was a nice article, plus being on the cover, and it was a great shot, and we still have the piece. We've kept it because of that, so it's probably going to be Richie's, I think, my oldest son. We give our children generally one of each series. I shouldn't say "we." Jan.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, what a moment, you know?

MR. RITTER: But it was such a nice moment. We got lots of incredible response and-

MS. BYRD: Did galleries respond or collectors?

MR. RITTER: Galleries. We sold a few pieces that month that we probably wouldn't have sold. We had one collector, which I don't know whether I should talk about or not, but anyway, he was new. And from Michael I'm really going to get in trouble with this one, but actually I talked about this once before on public TV and they didn't air it, so-

MS. BYRD: Well, that's-

MR. RITTER: Because it was from a gallery's point of view about collectors and what I think about them. But anyway, they're great to have, but also they can be interesting. I was going to say something else, but anyway, this guy saw it, and most people who saw it really liked it, but he'd already bought a piece of mine. But he was buying glass of everybody's with the idea that a year from now he could sell it and make a lot of money.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: That was the only reason-

MR. RITTER: And those kind of collectors, I'm really not much interested in.

MS. WILLIAMS: He was not really-

MR. RITTER: I think if you buy a piece of art, painting, wall art, tile-whatever it is, you should buy it because of the fact that you love it, you like it, you want it, you enjoy it, it does something for you. This wasn't his reason, I guess. And anyway he wanted to trade his piece he just bought from the Vitrum Gallery [Asheville, NC] for the piece on the cover, and I said, "It's really not for sale." And this has happened before with collectors, but this one I particularly remember, and-

[Audio break.]

He almost-I don't know if he returned that piece or not at the gallery, but I absolutely refused to sell it because

Jan was keeping it. There was no-it wasn't going out the door.

MS. WILLIAMS: On the cover of *American Craft*.

MR. RITTER: The cover of *American Craft*. It was-remember you and I had talked about, that once I get to a point with a piece for a series, I'm done with that series.

MS. WILLIAMS: That was the crème de la crème, you know.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: That was-

MR. RITTER: And so it was not a planned timing, but a perfect timing for that piece to get on the cover, as far as I was concerned.

MS. BYRD: Well, tell me what that feeling is like when you know that that is-does it feel like a revelation? Does it feel like a release, or relief, or-

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, you know in the craft world what it means, because we were at a Penland auction that summer-it had just come out-and whoever was the director-was Ken [Botnick] the director?

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

MS. WILLIAMS: He got up and said Richard Ritter had just been on the cover of *American Craft*, and everybody stood up and clapped. It was a big moment, wasn't it?

MR. RITTER: But that piece was one of the-I don't think there were many after that, because what I was trying to do with the proportions-and everything worked on the piece.

MS. BYRD: That's really what I was trying to-

MR. RITTER: It was a very strong imagery. Some people see a certain-it's interesting what people see in your work, too.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR. RITTER: They see that as a butterfly in the center. I don't see it as a butterfly at all. I see it as a colored pattern, to my eye. It has an eye in it that means something to me, but nobody sees it.

MS. BYRD: But what I was trying to get at, how do you feel when that last piece-you know, we say, "This is it. This is the last piece I'm going to make out of this series." How does it feel to have that piece that is-

MR. RITTER: Well, it's a good feeling, because you've gotten there and you're done. You get to move on to a new piece, to something new, but whether I'm jumping up and down for joy-no. [They laugh.] I don't have those extremes.

MS. BYRD: But I didn't know whether it was, like, you feel good because you've just done something that's perfect-

MR. RITTER: Something tells you-you know what? There's not a drawing of that piece that it should be. You remember we talked about doing drawings and sketches? But you just-something inside of you just says, that's it. It's done, and then I don't want to make any more.

MS. BYRD: Okay.

MR. RITTER: And I don't, apparently, but I don't say-don't say never anymore after the platter series that I said I'd never do and I went back 20 years later and did them again. So, was there something else I was thinking about? The waterline interfered.

MS. WILLIAMS: The other thing is, on the other side of it, to go to SOFA [Sculpture Objects and Functional Art Expo], or one of the huge shows, and run into the piece that was on the cover of *American Craft*.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: And you know it in a moment. You look at it and you go, I know this piece intimately. You know, the magazine sits in my living room. Every day I look at it. And it is an incredible-

MR. RITTER: Well, also in that same article they had a platter that was the same thing, one of the last platters-

MS. BYRD: Well, that's because you gave-

MR. RITTER: Sold to the same gallery. The one down in Asheville [Vitrum Gallery].

MS. BYRD: So that one was sold?

MR. RITTER: The white and black base piece was. And -

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah, when this came home, that was it; we weren't going to sell it.

MR. RITTER: And I think that platter sold because it was part of the article. And it was also, you know, one of the last platters.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, how do you really know what an artist means to say? You hope you look at the piece and you feel it, but not everybody understands art in the same way, and so-

MR. RITTER: Good.

MS. WILLIAMS: Which is a good thing. You know, everybody looks at it differently, but for some people they need the explanation. You know, they need that little bit of explanation and-I mean, we have piles of *American Craft* that have pictures of friends' work and pictures of Richard's work and, you know, we just can't part with them. [Laughs.]

MS. BYRD: That's neat, because people are apt to feel, you know, it's kind of like a newspaper or something and you don't keep it, but to you it's really important.

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, the thing is you can pull one of those down and look at it, and everything in it is still really good. Nothing's dated about any of it. You can look at one that's 20 years old and everything's beautiful. And that's a great thing.

MS. BYRD: You don't feel we've left any gaps?

MR. RITTER: I don't think so. I mean, I'm sure I'll think about things later, but-

MS. BYRD: Well, it has been a great pleasure being here, and I certainly appreciate all that you've done and I appreciate your time. I appreciate all the time both of you have spent.

Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMS: Thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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