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Oral history interview with Karen Karnes,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Karen Karnes on August 9 and 10, 2005. The interview took place in Morgan, Vermont, and was conducted by Mark Shapiro 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.

Karen Karnes and Mark Shapiro 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

MARK SHAPIRO: I'm sitting with Karen Karnes. It is August 9, 2005, and we're at Karen's house in Morgan, Vermont, and we'll begin.

So you were born in 1920-

KAREN KARNES: Twenty-five.

MR. SHAPIRO: In New York?

MS. KARNES: In Brooklyn, New York.

MR. SHAPIRO: And your parents were garment workers?

MS. KARNES: Garment workers, immigrants.

MR. SHAPIRO: From?

MS. KARNES: Russia and Poland.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. And you lived in a cooperative housing project, is that right?

MS. KARNES: Yes. After my second year, I guess, a cooperative colony in the Bronx.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was that an unusual situation?

MS. KARNES: Oh, I think so. I think it was the first one. It was the only one that was made by the garment workers to make this-to design and build a house that was just the right kind of house for families of working-class people.

MR. SHAPIRO: So was that-so everybody who you were around were also-

MS. KARNES: Workers.

MR. SHAPIRO: -working together and probably immigrant?

MS. KARNES: Maybe, maybe not. I don't know that that was a requirement.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: But they just were union, working-class people.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I was thinking about that being, sort of, a kind of social experiment, which becomes, maybe, thematic for you.

MS. KARNES: Well, it really was a social experiment, because I found out years later that they made the co-ops, they called them-what was it called?

MR. SHAPIRO: Like Peter Cooper Village, kind of-was that one of them?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, but it was another level. I mean, it wasn't really like that, because it was having to do with really working-class people.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. Because I think there was one on-when I lived in the furriers' district, there was one on 28th

and about-

MS. KARNES: But that was later. My mother lived there when she moved.

MR. SHAPIRO: But I know that was done by the ILGWA [International Ladies Garment Workers Union].

MS. KARNES: Yeah. But that was-that was many years after this one up in the Bronx.

MR. SHAPIRO: So did you have a sense of being part of something, of being different from people who were-

MS. KARNES: I think so, but that's how the world was. I mean, children take it for granted whatever they live in is the right thing, but they had-but we had a library, and we had art classes, and the Yiddish school that I went to, a restaurant.

MR. SHAPIRO: So the Yiddish school was preschool or kindergarten or-

MS. KARNES: It was not preschool, necessarily. I think people could have kept going through all-it was in addition to the regular school.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see, so it was this idea of keeping this European culture alive?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, the culture. Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And would you say that the general milieu there was very left wing? Kind of, everyone was communist?

MS. KARNES: Very, very left wing. Maybe everyone wasn't communist, but there were lots of people who were. We were definitely taught that that's the way the world was going to be or it should be, and we marched in the May Day parades, things like that.

MR. SHAPIRO: So when you went into public school, was it all kids from that project?

MS. KARNES: No, it was a mixture. Kids from there and kids from other places, but everybody mixed together. It was just a nice public school.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. And I think you referred to being a kid with keys around your neck, growing up with a lot of freedom.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, because my parents both worked, so we had keys and we could get into the building and into our apartment. People were trusted, just did what we wanted.

MR. SHAPIRO: And never had any sense of danger or lack of safety?

MS. KARNES: No, but I think the times were different then.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: I think there wasn't any danger, or if there was, we didn't know about it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. And I know in the film [Lucy Phenix. *From the Inside: The Work of Karen Karnes*. 2005] there's that woman who you talk about growing up with.

MS. KARNES: Sylvia [Manheim].

MR. SHAPIRO: Sylvia. Right. Was she your close or your special friend?

MS. KARNES: My friend.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: She's having her 80th birthday almost this day, very soon.

MR. SHAPIRO: And was she also living in that-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, she lived there, too, but she's been living in California. But the difference there is that her parents were really, really left, so she grew up really left and-

MR. SHAPIRO: So they were also organizing?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And so when you-there's this famous story about you deciding to go to [the High School of] Music and Art [now LaGuardia Arts, New York, NY] all on your own. Can you tell us that story?

MS. KARNES: Well, I guess I heard about it someplace, and I went down and applied. And I took the test and got in; came home and told my mother. It was fine.

MR. SHAPIRO: And was that very different for you when you walked in there? Did you feel that it was a very different environment than you'd been-

MS. KARNES: The High School of Music and Art?

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: Oh, I think so. Of course, I wasn't in high school yet. I was still in elementary school, so it wasn't-no, I didn't have anything to contrast it with. I didn't go to an ordinary school first.

MR. SHAPIRO: And so tell us about Music and Art at that time, what you remember about it.

MS. KARNES: Well, I mean, I started taking art classes as well as everything else, because that's what that course was: that you sort of took either music or art, but then you took all the other classes, too.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you have to take music as well, or you-

MS. KARNES: No. You were either a music person or an art person, but I'll try and remember who my teacher was. [Pauses, thinking.] I won't remember.

MR. SHAPIRO: That's all right. That's all right. Did you have close friendships from there, or were you traveling so far-

MS. KARNES: I was traveling so far. I mean, on the subway, we went from-I had moved to Brooklyn by then, so we children would be up in the subway and go back and forth, and I had friendships, but not really close. My friends in the Bronx, they stayed close.

Can you hear me with this terrible voice?

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah, I'm going to get you some water here.

MS. KARNES: That's not what's wrong with me.

MR. SHAPIRO: Just-

MS. KARNES: Maybe it'll come back. It's my condition.

MR. SHAPIRO: So at the time, I think you've said, there were no three-dimensional materials. It was very painting oriented?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, painting. Mostly painting and drawing, which was fine, but I didn't-

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you draw a lot?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, I drew and I painted. I didn't do any clay or anything like that until later.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you like drawing?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was it fun?

MS. KARNES: It was fun.

MR. SHAPIRO: So then what was the feeling from your parents about this direction that you took?

MS. KARNES: Well, they just loved me and accepted anything I did. They figured whatever I did was the right thing. It was pretty nice to have parents like that-but I did, so they didn't question it.

MR. SHAPIRO: And never feeling that you should be doing something more productive or-

MS. KARNES: Well, I should be trained to be a teacher, maybe. Of course, in high school you're not training yet, so it wasn't a danger until I got to college.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. And so then you went on to-

MS. KARNES: Brooklyn College [Brooklyn, NY].

MR. SHAPIRO: Brooklyn College. When you were thinking about college, was it-I mean, it must have been City College; it must have been other colleges. What-how did you-

MS. KARNES: Brooklyn was right there and I could walk to it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: And Brooklyn was just as good as-I mean, I had no feeling that the city was better than Brooklyn.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: And Brooklyn was just a block away from home. I didn't know about [Serge] Chermayoff and the good art department that they had there. I just fell into it, luckily.

MR. SHAPIRO: What luck.

MS. KARNES: What luck.

MR. SHAPIRO: So tell me about-can you remember what it felt like when you became a student there and what it was like to meet your professor, your beloved teacher?

MS. KARNES: Well, it was just good. I mean, God, the memory is far away.

MR. SHAPIRO: So at that time, the program there was also not so much three-dimensional materials. Was it painting again or-

MS. KARNES: No, no. It was like a Bauhaus course.

MR. SHAPIRO: So, design?

MS. KARNES: Design, which was fine. I liked that very much.

MR. SHAPIRO: And were you working with real materials?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Yeah. I'm trying to think. Oh, God.

MR. SHAPIRO: That's a long time ago.

MS. KARNES: A long time ago with a person that has no memory.

MR. SHAPIRO: Oh, you have a good memory.

MS. KARNES: No.

MR. SHAPIRO: So-

MS. KARNES: It was just fun. I mean, it was moving things around. And of course, Chermayoff was an architect, so we did things sort of like on the edge of design and architecture in houses, and that was fun.

MR. SHAPIRO: I had read in that interview, him talking about having his students design a kindergarten or something like that. I don't know. Like he gives-assigning them a project to think about. It sounded-

MS. KARNES: I wouldn't think he didn't, but I don't remember.

MR. SHAPIRO: It sounded wonderful. And did you feel that he wanted you to go into architecture? Did you feel pressured or encouraged in that direction?

MS. KARNES: Encouraged. He very much wanted me to. He really would have liked me to go to Harvard or someplace like that for architecture school, but I didn't do that, which was right not to do.

MR. SHAPIRO: I know in the previous interview with Paul Cummings you said, "I was very lucky not to go to Harvard," and I think there are probably very few people who could say that with as much sincerity and-

MS. KARNES: Well, when I got older, I realized what being an architect is. I think much of it isn't like he did it, playing around with form, line, and-

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: You have to know how to design, I think, like electricity and the water and technical things. And my real-what I should have done is what I did: work with materials. Could have been other materials, but I had-clay was the one, finally.

MR. SHAPIRO: And David [Weinrib] was there as a student at that time?

MS. KARNES: David was there. Yeah. He was-well, he was a student when we met at Brooklyn. He took me out on my first date and brought me a flower. Yeah, it was real college stuff.

MR. SHAPIRO: And he was a year older-

MS. KARNES: A year ahead.

MR. SHAPIRO: A year ahead.

MS. KARNES: Yeah. And then we did that dancing. We started dancing then. That's probably why I liked college, because I had a boyfriend. Then he went to Alfred [University, Alfred, NY] after the first year there.

MR. SHAPIRO: Oh, I see. So he was only there for a year?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And did he graduate or he just moved around?

MS. KARNES: No, he got a degree from Alfred finally.

MR. SHAPIRO: An undergraduate degree from Alfred?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see. So you were at Brooklyn first-

MS. KARNES: Well, I went through the whole course. I got-

MR. SHAPIRO: For three years?

MS. KARNES: I got my bachelor's there.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I think after that point you got married, right?

MS. KARNES: I went to Italy.

MR. SHAPIRO: What you call "the lost years," I think is what you called it in another interview.

MS. KARNES: Really?

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: Italy was lost years?

MR. SHAPIRO: No, no, no. Before when you were-

MS. KARNES: Oh, just going-

MR. SHAPIRO: Your three-year-two-year marriage or before you moved back to Pennsylvania to be with David?

MS. KARNES: Oh, in between when I finally went through college.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: Well, I was younger and more dramatic then.

MR. SHAPIRO: So from Brooklyn you go to Pennsylvania?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Where David is working-

MS. KARNES: He was a designer, had designed techniques for the factory there [Design Technics, Stroudsburg, Pen Argyl, PA], and he designed lamp bases and glaze treatments, things like that.

MR. SHAPIRO: And that's where you first discovered clay?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, he brought me a great lump of clay home to work with on the deck.

MR. SHAPIRO: On the deck? Where-

MS. KARNES: We had a big, wooden deck.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you'd never touched clay before then?

MS. KARNES: No.

MR. SHAPIRO: And what did you think? This is it?

MS. KARNES: It was wonderful.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: I don't have photographs of that period-of those things.

MR. SHAPIRO: Because you did some design work?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Well, I made lamp bases for them. They paid me \$25 a design.

MR. SHAPIRO: And were they hand-modeled, or how were they made?

MS. KARNES: Well, I made them as solid bases and they made a mold.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you carved solid clay away or-

MS. KARNES: No.

MR. SHAPIRO: -how did you know how to work with clay at that point? You just-

MS. KARNES: Just built it up.

MR. SHAPIRO: And David had experience already with clay or-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, he was there a few years, and he could throw some, and he could make glazes.

MR. SHAPIRO: So two years there or a year or-

MS. KARNES: Well, about a year and a half maybe. We went to Italy.

MR. SHAPIRO: So did you-what was it like to be working in a factory environment? I always think of that sort of Arabia model [Arabia factory, Helsinki, Finland]? Or that sort of-

MS. KARNES: Well, I didn't work in the factory. I just learned-I guess, watched the master throw there. But I had a wheel in the apartment. We had one of those kick wheels built.

MR. SHAPIRO: You're talking about Italy now?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see.

MS. KARNES: What were you thinking of?

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, I just meant when you were in Pennsylvania.

MS. KARNES: Oh, I was working outside. I wasn't in the factory.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you were doing freelance work for them?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: But they must have had access to the kilns and all that?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yes. Well, it was a functioning factory, but all I did was make the model, and then they made the mold and poured it and did everything.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you go in the factory and see how that was done and-

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it was fun. That was fun.

MR. SHAPIRO: So how did the idea come up to go to Italy?

MS. KARNES: Oh, it was really David's idea, because he wanted to travel, and we had some money from my wedding, and we met-it was a friend that we had that had worked in Italy in the Richard Ginori factory [Manifattura Ceramica Richard Ginori, Milan and Sesto Fiorentino] before the war. And he told us if we go there, we can just work at the factory, so that's what kind of inspired us of where to go, so that's where we went.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah. And so you just showed up and they said, "Come work here"?

MS. KARNES: No, we worked outside. I could go to the factory there, and I watched the school, the young people. They let me in there.

MR. SHAPIRO: And that's where you saw this first person throwing?

MS. KARNES: Throwing.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: But I left very quickly and made a wheel in my own house and put it there.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you were firing things at the factory?

MS. KARNES: They had some kilns. They were happy to fire.

MR. SHAPIRO: You were an exotic creature, if I might-

MS. KARNES: Exotic American young woman.

MR. SHAPIRO: I know you referred to it, you said it was a communist town [Sesto Fiorentino].

MS. KARNES: It was.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did that feel familiar in some way or-

MS. KARNES: Well-

MR. SHAPIRO: I mean, the factory.

MS. KARNES: Not necessarily, because I never considered myself political, so it didn't really matter.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. Well, had it been a right-wing town, might not have been as sympathetic.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, that's true.

MR. SHAPIRO: So this period-I think there were some things that were maybe published that you'd done in Italy or something. How did that happen?

MS. KARNES: In-well, I made-yeah, I don't have those-I don't have those photographs.

MR. SHAPIRO: I've seen them, though, somewhere.

MS. KARNES: It was in *Domus* magazine.

MR. SHAPIRO: How did that happen? Do you remember? Was that one of those things you brought back with you or-

MS. KARNES: No, it's things I made there. I don't know how I met him, the man who was the director for the *Domus* magazine, an architect [Gio Ponti, architect and editor of *Domus*].

MR. SHAPIRO: So-

MS. KARNES: You're not going to get anything very inspired here.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, no. We're just warming up.

MS. KARNES: Hope I warm up. I hope I warm up.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, I just want to-I want to just get all that-the steps.

MS. KARNES: Facts.

MR. SHAPIRO: The steps, just the facts.

MS. KARNES: I think the article would probably be more accurate.

MR. SHAPIRO: Okay.

MS. KARNES: Because they were near in time.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, that article goes basically to-well, I did have a question about Alfred. And you were-so you had this fellowship, which was to work with [Charles] Harder.

MS. KARNES: With Harder when we got back, right.

MR. SHAPIRO: And did that make you have a separate status from a normal student there?

MS. KARNES: Yes, because I didn't have to do anything. I just worked.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. And so you could get a degree without fulfilling any course requirements?

MS. KARNES: Right. Well, I took a glaze chemistry course.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: I thought I should have that. I guess I-well, I didn't get a degree.

MR. SHAPIRO: But originally you were on a track to get a degree.

MS. KARNES: Thought I'd get a degree, right.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. And you-was it a very collegial place to be at that time for you?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yes. Good, nice people. I should remember their names. They're all famous potters now.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I think you said that you didn't have as much-most of your contact was with Harder, not other faculty?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, not [Daniel] Rhodes.

MR. SHAPIRO: Not Rhodes or the other students so much or-

MS. KARNES: Well, he looked at the work, but I just did the work.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: I suppose even then I could work by myself.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: But, you know, when you're in a place that's happening, you sort of see what's going on, so in that sense I was just aware of the other students working there. And it was nice being at Alfred in our apartment. Lovely.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was it unusual to be a married student at that time?

MS. KARNES: I think it was probably unusual, but we were older than the other students.

MR. SHAPIRO: And so then you got this-you heard about this position-

MS. KARNES: We heard about Black Mountain [College, Asheville, NC].

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: We heard about it, because they-I guess it said in the announcements at different schools that they needed somebody.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I guess you had already gone to take a class with [Josef] Albers one summer, right?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Earlier, it was years before.

MR. SHAPIRO: And was that while you were at Brooklyn College?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: -Serge Chermayoff's suggestion or-

MS. KARNES: Maybe. It could have been. Could have been.

MR. SHAPIRO: And had that experience been good?

MS. KARNES: But it was really that-the kind of course that he gave was like a course in the Bauhaus, moving materials around.

MR. SHAPIRO: So kind of a design oriented-

MS. KARNES: Like there was, say, a problem of using white materials so that you didn't know what they were.

MR. SHAPIRO: So everything was white?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Just all kinds of abstract things like that.

MR. SHAPIRO: And was he encouraging to you, Albers, or was he-

MS. KARNES: No, I don't think he knew I was there.

MR. SHAPIRO: Many people in the class?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, because it was a summer course.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: Lots of people, but it was fun being there and nothing to do needing his approval.

MR. SHAPIRO: And were any of the characters he later met at Black Mountain College there? Was [John] Cage around or-

MS. KARNES: No.

MR. SHAPIRO: [Robert] Rauschenberg or any of those folks?

MS. KARNES: No, no. I think it was before that.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see. So then you go down there, and it's been described that they partly needed somebody to coordinate this workshop of [Soetsu] Yanagi and [Bernard] Leach and [Shoji] Hamada.

MS. KARNES: Was that right after that summer-no, no, because I had-

MR. SHAPIRO: No, when you went back.

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: Wasn't that one of the reasons they needed a potter, after [Robert] Turner had left, is that right?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was because they-

MS. KARNES: Because they were going to have a workshop.

MR. SHAPIRO: Now, who had organized that workshop?

MS. KARNES: Well, I don't think it was Turner. I think it was probably the man who was in charge of the school there.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, that's all right. We can find that out, but I was interested, because it seemed like that place was always so lacking in funds, was such a terrible issue for Black Mountain. And it was never clear to me how that all happened-who paid for Leach and Hamada and all to come to Black Mountain?

MS. KARNES: I have no idea.

MR. SHAPIRO: Interesting. When you were offered the position, did you know that the conference was scheduled, that it would be one of your responsibilities in the coming year?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Oh, what a thrill.

MS. KARNES: But they only gave, I think, \$25 a month salary.

MR. SHAPIRO: To you. Yeah.

MS. KARNES: To anybody.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: And food and a place to stay. It was perfect-for the studio.

MR. SHAPIRO: And wasn't the studio somewhat removed from-

MS. KARNES: Yes, it was in the field. It just came to me that when Lucy [Phenix] called, she needs-that's what I was doing this morning-she needs photographs of different periods of my life, and I realized I have this book, *The Arts of Black Mountain College* [Mary Emma Harris. *The Arts at Black Mountain College*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987]. I have a copy.

MR. SHAPIRO: It's got a very nice picture of you.

MS. KARNES: Not just me, but much of my work is in that, too.

MR. SHAPIRO: While you were there, how did you live? So you were getting \$25, and you're living with David.

MS. KARNES: Well, we sold a few pots. We were-well, we got food. We had a place to stay and food. That's all we needed.

MR. SHAPIRO: And wasn't the Southern Highlands Guild [Southern Highland Crafts Guild, Asheville, NC]-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, the Highlands Crafts Guild was there, and I belonged to that and sold a few things, and the other teachers got nothing. They just lived there and got their food.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: But there was a fair and I was at the fair. I mean, I had things in the shop.

MR. SHAPIRO: It always struck me that Anni Albers being a weaver, and the Bauhaus background of the visual arts program there, that there was this integration of making things that you could use with fine arts. Did you feel that-when I talked to David about that, he said, "Oh, we were the peasants," I think he said. Is that how you felt?

MS. KARNES: I think we were down in the field. Just because weaving was upper-class. That was clean.

MR. SHAPIRO: Clean.

MS. KARNES: And Albers was interested in that. We just made pots and we were fine.

MR. SHAPIRO: And was [Charles] Olsen supportive of the pottery?

MS. KARNES: Olsen loved it. The teachers all loved us, because there was so much windiness in the art-the art stuff that was going on. When they came down to the studio, they saw pots and they saw us working-it was wonderful.

I'll just make an aside. I was reading this Marguerite Wildenhain book yesterday, and she speaks so well about what happens in the art world nowadays and the craftsmen, what they're-so what they're interested in-

MR. SHAPIRO: Wasn't she along with Yanagi and Leach and-

MS. KARNES: She was-yeah, and she just sat in the back. She didn't do anything, but she was one of them, because she had known people at Black Mountain.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see.

MS. KARNES: But this is very nice-lots of good times.

MR. SHAPIRO: And she has a Bauhaus background, doesn't she?

MS. KARNES: Yes. Yeah, but she was in California.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you always speak so glowingly about seeing Hamada's work. Can you remember that feeling at all?

MS. KARNES: Well, he just sat there-right-and worked, and didn't say anything. I mean, Leach was talking, philosophizing and everything, and Hamada just worked. He was wonderful.

MR. SHAPIRO: It was beautiful to move the clay and-

MS. KARNES: Right, right. And just be there. I think the important thing for me over the years was to not be afraid of being in front of an audience, because Hamada came to my mind. I could just sit there and do what I wanted to, and they probably would like it. It was an opportunity to see him, and he looked at my work and said nice things-you know, made a connection.

MR. SHAPIRO: And did Yanagi speak also or not?

MS. KARNES: Well, Yanagi gave lectures. I didn't make human connection with that, but Hamada was very human. When I saw him at a show of his, years later, he remembered who I was.

MR. SHAPIRO: I remember-yes. He said something like "Oh, Ms. Weinrib."

MS. KARNES: I mean, that was very nice.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: I never went to his-I meant to go to Japan and see him at his place, but I never did. That's part of it. I didn't go to Peru when the Crafts Council went. I never thought I could do anything, because I didn't have the money. And when they said, you're just a potter, and everything you make goes into your life and your child and everything-

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, it's so interesting, because one of the things that your life embodies so exemplarily for me is, as a person who never really had an institutional back support, and yet somebody who really made no aesthetic compromises, and really pursued a vision.

MS. KARNES: I don't know where my aesthetics came from. Well, I guess it just came from generally looking at things and art courses. That's one of the things you do when you go to Brooklyn College is the art history courses with slides and all that, so that you sort of begin absorbing the culture of the world subconsciously.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you used to go to museums even as a girl, right, before that? Now, that's something that-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, [Museum of] Natural History [New York, NY] museum, Metropolitan [Museum of Art, New York, NY], all that. But when we lived in New York City, that's a very natural thing to do.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. So Hamada was there. And I was interested in thinking about the next move that you made to Stony Point with Paul Williams, and was Vera there as well?

MS. KARNES: Yep.

MR. SHAPIRO: With Vera [Baker] Williams and MC [Mary Caroline Richards] and John Cage.

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: And David. Were you kind of a group at Black Mountain before this move happened?

MS. KARNES: I think our only "groupness" was to do with MC. Yeah. Maybe Paul [Williams], but not with John Cage.

MR. SHAPIRO: And in reading about your teacher, Serge Chermayoff, I noticed that he was very involved with Buckminster Fuller, and I know that Paul Williams, the architect, was also similarly inspired.

MS. KARNES: Because he really worked at Black Mountain-I mean, did things at Black Mountain-

MR. SHAPIRO: And worked-was Buckminster Fuller around when you were there?

MS. KARNES: Well, he wasn't there when I was there, but he built things, gave a general spiritual point to everybody.

MR. SHAPIRO: So how did you know it was time to leave Black Mountain College?

MS. KARNES: Well, we were offered something better. When they began planning this place outside of New York City, we knew that the college wouldn't be there more than another year or two, because of no students. They had no money. It was really winding down, and a chance of going up there was just like a miracle. I think I've had a feeling in my life whenever I knew when a miracle happened and I got to the next stage. Not with planning it; it just happened.

MR. SHAPIRO: And were you involved-did Paul [Williams] select the land himself?

MS. KARNES: No.

MR. SHAPIRO: Or was everybody involved in that?

MS. KARNES: I wasn't there, because I was at Black Mountain teaching that summer, but Paul was there and John. Just a few people that was-

MR. SHAPIRO: Was MC involved in selecting the land?

MS. KARNES: Probably, probably.

MR. SHAPIRO: And your place was the first place to be built?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Well, it was-the Pot Shop was the first place, because there was a farmhouse where we all lived.

MR. SHAPIRO: I remember seeing that. Yes.

MS. KARNES: And the Pot Shop was the first place.

MR. SHAPIRO: So we've been talking earlier, off tape, about being within that group in the very earliest years when you were all in the farmhouse. So who was in the farmhouse?

MS. KARNES: John Cage and David Tudor and MC, and David [Weinrib] and I.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you used to go to the movies.

MS. KARNES: We went to the movies, and we played poker, and we had community meals-to eat, \$25 a week, each person.

MR. SHAPIRO: And Vera and Paul Williams weren't there?

MS. KARNES: No, because they had a family, so they rented a place-

MR. SHAPIRO: I see.

MS. KARNES: And the next house that was built was their house, and then they moved to the land.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see.

MS. KARNES: A year later.

MR. SHAPIRO: And that was the house-

MS. KARNES: Up on the hill.

MR. SHAPIRO: -the highest one up there?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you think of those times as, sort of, a more carefree moment in your life, those couple of years-

MS. KARNES: I think so.

MR. SHAPIRO: -this five or six of you living in that house and-

MS. KARNES: Yes, it was wonderful. I guess by the time I came up to the studio, it was already after the summer.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you were already working?

MS. KARNES: Oh, we started when I came back from Black Mountain.

MR. SHAPIRO: You could go right to work?

MS. KARNES: Pretty much.

MR. SHAPIRO: But no kiln.

MS. KARNES: Oh, we built the kiln first thing. Paul loaned us money. The big thing about the land is that there was money available.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah, I know.

MS. KARNES: I think we got \$3,000 to make the kiln and the showroom and everything. It was a 40-cubic-foot kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you feel that Paul was an unusual person who just brought generosity without expectation-

MS. KARNES: Yes. Yes. He was an extraordinary person.

MR. SHAPIRO: It seems very unusual for it-

MS. KARNES: He was unusual. Well, he had no desires for himself. The only luxury is that he did get himself a little MG car, although, I think, it didn't mean anything, and he just wore the same old crummy shoes and jeans and whatever. Yeah, the money was there from his father, and he was happy to share that and use it for his friends to make this community-he wanted to make this community.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I remember when we went to the reunion, was it the 50th reunion at Stony Point? You described how members were brought in. Would you speak about that?

MS. KARNES: Well, we had meetings, and in our meetings we had to have consensus for anything to be decided. That was the basic principle, consensus, not votes, and up and down. And the way we decided to have a new member come in was that we didn't want to have to vet them, and talk about them, judge them. A person recommended somebody, which was enough. And we didn't have-I mean, I don't know what we would have done if five people wanted people, but usually, it was one at a time, because we were respectful of each other, and we trusted the person who was recommending somebody would recommend the right person, who would fit in. It was a good principle.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah, unusual.

MS. KARNES: John Cage was very philosophically connected to everything.

MR. SHAPIRO: So this was sort of his inclination?

MS. KARNES: Well, his and everybody else's, but his largely, yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: So there you were, with the city about an hour away?

MS. KARNES: About an hour away. We didn't have a car, so we all drove in in Vera's VW Beetle, five or six big people squished in, but Paul bought the car and we all used it. And for us, we just thought that's the way it's supposed to be and we didn't even appreciate it.

MR. SHAPIRO: And when you started having open houses or students early, in the very beginning, or when did that-when did your shop-

MS. KARNES: Oh, the studio shop was to make money for me.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: I just taught there one night a week.

MR. SHAPIRO: From the very beginning?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, pretty much, so I had probably six or seven students who came there and worked.

MR. SHAPIRO: And was Mikhail an early student, Mikhail Zakin, or was that later on?

MS. KARNES: That was a little bit later, but pretty much at the beginning, yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And how did your relation-the first gallery relationship was with Bonniers [New York, NY]. And how did that come to be?

MS. KARNES: Well, when we wanted to sell pieces, we took them in bags or boxes or suitcase, to the city. We were so primitive. God. I guess we went into Bonniers, and he liked them. I mean, it wasn't hard to make an appointment to see somebody then. Maybe it's not hard now. I don't know. I haven't done it for so many years, but we'd go in and unpack the pots, kneeling on the floor. Humiliating.

MR. SHAPIRO: And that was mostly tableware that you were making at that time?

MS. KARNES: Yes.

MR. SHAPIRO: And this was-

MS. KARNES: As in jars and-

MR. SHAPIRO: Was this before the flameproof?

MS. KARNES: Flameproof came pretty quickly afterwards.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you mentioned that you were helped by a chemist with that. I don't know that story.

MS. KARNES: No, not me. That was MC. I don't know a chemist.

MR. SHAPIRO: But she had somehow gotten this formula?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And MC was making pots at that time, too?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you and David and MC were all working in that studio together?

MS. KARNES: We each had separate rooms.

MR. SHAPIRO: And firing altogether?

MS. KARNES: Yes, sometimes, but there was enough work.

MR. SHAPIRO: And was MC making tableware?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: But David was making slab sculptures at that time?

MS. KARNES: Yes, sculpture, right.

MR. SHAPIRO: So he was sort of moving in a different professional direction?

MS. KARNES: Right from the beginning, he was, yes.

MR. SHAPIRO: So then Bonniers basically would take whatever you would make, pretty much, huh?

MS. KARNES: Well, he gave me orders.

MR. SHAPIRO: Orders?

MS. KARNES: Was happy to take them; they sold well.

MR. SHAPIRO: And would you actually have exhibitions there?

MS. KARNES: We had exhibitions, when I made a body of work, and an exhibition meant display in a window.

MR. SHAPIRO: Good spot?

MS. KARNES: Good spot.

MR. SHAPIRO: Fifty-seventh Street.

MS. KARNES: And Madison.

MR. SHAPIRO: And they paid you in a timely manner?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yes.

MR. SHAPIRO: Now, this was about-

MS. KARNES: I'm just trying to think, because somebody here in Vermont was the grandson of Mr. [Goren] Holmquist at Bonniers. I think he's the head of the Vermont Art Council.

MR. SHAPIRO: There you go.

MS. KARNES: I mean, he told it to me twice, and I can hardly believe it. Yeah, I think it was that man.

[Audio break.]

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah, here we go. So this is 1950-

MS. KARNES: Three.

MR. SHAPIRO: Three, four, five?

MS. KARNES: Four.

MR. SHAPIRO: And when is Abel born?

MS. KARNES: About six [1956].

MR. SHAPIRO: Nineteen fifty-six? And you described-well, I guess that may be a little later, but let's see.

So what made you think you could make a living as a potter at that time-was it just something that you were confident you could do? Was it something that you saw other people doing?

MS. KARNES: No, I didn't see other people doing it, but I knew I could.

MR. SHAPIRO: Because you'd already had some success in-

MS. KARNES: It's what I wanted to do, so I was just going to do it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Were there other individual craftsmen selling at Bonniers?

MS. KARNES: They had mostly European people.

MR. SHAPIRO: But wasn't it mostly, kind of, factory produced or semi-[factory produced]?

MS. KARNES: No. They had factory things, too, but they had-I mean, Hamada was selling there, and Lucie Rie,

and a few other British people. There weren't very many Americans.

MR. SHAPIRO: I didn't realize they had that work there.

MS. KARNES: You see that third piece over?

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

MS. KARNES: That's a piece from France, a person called [Elisabeth?] Joulia, J-O-U-L-I-A, the first piece I ever bought at Bonniers.

MR. SHAPIRO: They were mixing handmade and industrially produced things?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah. The handmade were in the showroom part, and then they had books and other things. Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: So one thing that struck me was I was thinking of the Pot Shop at Black Mountain being, kind of, off in the field, and I was thinking that you had really wanted the Pot Shop at Gate Hill in Stony Point to also be kind of separate from the living pods, and-

MS. KARNES: We had a big fight then when that happened.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, tell me about that.

MS. KARNES: Well, Paul had this idea that everybody should be up the hill with their houses and everything.

MR. SHAPIRO: Their studios should be attached?

MS. KARNES: Studios should be attached. And I mean, I couldn't have made this happen, except David was a very strong person, so he usually made it happen. We wanted to be just down below, and we wanted to be near the studio and firing kilns. And we also didn't feel like necessarily being right next to everybody up there. We were snobs.

MR. SHAPIRO: It's always that kiln excuse. It's a good one.

MS. KARNES: Well, it really was true, too. I'd be running up and down, so we pushed it through.

MR. SHAPIRO: And did you feel in any way separate from the community?

MS. KARNES: Not really, it was fine. I mean I had a few really good friends.

MR. SHAPIRO: Which were your closest friends?

MS. KARNES: Johanna Vanderbeek, who was a filmmaker. And Vera [Baker Williams].

MR. SHAPIRO: And I remember you describing that there was this kind of-as children came along for everybody, there was this kind of gang of mostly boys up the hill, and that Abel was somewhat quieter and-

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: -a little bit separate?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, Abel was not one of the gang. He would have been happier if he'd been one of the gang, but it wasn't his nature, so he's really not had any connection from that since he left it.

MR. SHAPIRO: And he also-wasn't there a question of school? The rest of the kids were homeschooled or something?

MS. KARNES: Well, they made their own school, which was like homeschool, but it was a school.

MR. SHAPIRO: What were your feelings about that choice?

MS. KARNES: That wasn't what I wanted, though it was a really good school. I mean, if they didn't learn to read, it didn't matter, or they learned-and they did. You know, they're fine now.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah. I met him. Yeah, great kid.

MS. KARNES: All those children have grown up and done well at all kinds of things.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: So one should have more faith in one's children, I think.

MR. SHAPIRO: So were you driving Abel to school?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: In the VW?

MS. KARNES: No. By that time, we had our own car.

MR. SHAPIRO: And so about that time David moved. We're talking now about 19, what, '58 or '60?

MS. KARNES: Something like that.

MR. SHAPIRO: David moves to New York?

MS. KARNES: Yes.

MR. SHAPIRO: And when does Ann come into your life?

MS. KARNES: In '70.

MR. SHAPIRO: So much, much later?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you're living alone, raising Abel, and you're responsible for providing for your child.

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I think at that time, that was probably not a thing that a lot of artists did. It's-or maybe they did, but it's a kind of an invisible achievement, and it's certainly not easy to do as a woman in that time. Did you have a-

MS. KARNES: But I made works that sold, you know. I was making casseroles and bowls. All my functional things were very saleable, and people came to the studio to buy it, or I sold at Bonniers, a few other stores.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was MC still living on the land at that point?

MS. KARNES: She had just about left.

MR. SHAPIRO: Moved-gone to Pennsylvania to her farm or-

MS. KARNES: Well, first to New York, and then Pennsylvania.

MR. SHAPIRO: So your-that was probably a major shift in the studio for you, because then you were the only person-

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: -working in the studio. Did that feel fine?

MS. KARNES: Just fine.

MR. SHAPIRO: It was fine. And did you stay close with MC or-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, we were always friends, but we didn't see each other that much. She was in the city.

MR. SHAPIRO: What was she doing in the city then?

MS. KARNES: What was she doing? She was writing and, you know.

MR. SHAPIRO: Writing. Getting ready to make her next move to Pennsylvania? When did you teach at Penland [School of Arts and Crafts, Penland, NC]? Is that much later?

MS. KARNES: This is in the early '60s.

MR. SHAPIRO: So that's when-

MS. KARNES: Because I worked with the salt kiln at Penland. Came back and made the kiln. I guess it was about '67.

MR. SHAPIRO: So pretty much later than when we're talking about now. So the whole first half of the '60s you were selling at Bonniers, till they closed, and then you had this connection with the America House [New York, NY].

MS. KARNES: Yeah. And some other galleries.

MR. SHAPIRO: In New York?

MS. KARNES: No, around the East Coast. They'd come up, pick out pieces; I would give them lunch, and they-

MR. SHAPIRO: Does-I know you refer-you say that you do not like to ship.

MS. KARNES: I didn't ship. I told them I wouldn't ship. They'd come up and get them. I didn't really ship until I had my art pieces, and that's further away.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. And Paul Smith was interested in your work also at the Craft Museum [New York, NY]?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you have shows at the Craft Museum at that time or-

MS. KARNES: Don't think so. No.

MR. SHAPIRO: But they had a connection with America House or-

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I know that you mentioned [Isamu] Noguchi as a big influence. When did-

MS. KARNES: Well, Noguchi. Jack Lenor Larsen was a friend.

MR. SHAPIRO: Of Noguchi?

MS. KARNES: Friend of mine.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: And he made a house out in East Hampton.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. That's right.

MS. KARNES: In one of those places. And he wanted work from me, so I made garden seats.

MR. SHAPIRO: What year is that, do you think?

MS. KARNES: It was before Ann came, so it must have been in the '60s, late '60s. And Noguchi saw-he was at Jack's house and he saw the seats, and then he wanted one. So then I made some, and he came to Stony Point, which must have been just the late '60s.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: And took two of them.

MR. SHAPIRO: And had you been aware of his work before?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yes.

MR. SHAPIRO: And that had always been-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, good artist. I'd seen his work in the museum.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, that must have been very validating or-I don't know what you'd say.

MS. KARNES: It was nice.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: I seem to have accepted all these things as being very normal.

MR. SHAPIRO: That's good. So you made those fireplaces for Jack Larsen?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, started making for him and for other people. And it was at that same time, when he needed a fireplace for his house, and I had one in my house. I had made one for me first, and then he saw that, and then he wanted one.

MR. SHAPIRO: And remember when we were looking at that old *Craft Horizons* that [D.] Hayne [Bayless] had found, and there was this, kind of, a-planters, the slab planters? I had never really seen those before.

MS. KARNES: They weren't slab. They were pressed planters.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: Do I have that magazine? Did he give it to me?

MR. SHAPIRO: I have that magazine.

MS. KARNES: Oh. You have it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah, but that was in-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, that was-I was building those before Abel was born, so I was building those in the late '50s, and sold them at a decorator's place in New York. Carl Mann. Yeah, those would be it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah, they look great. Two different clays close to each other.

MS. KARNES: I saved two or three molds. I'd drag them around. They were here, and then they were destroyed by the fire [1998], because I always thought, well, someday I'll press a few of them in there, because they were such good pieces.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah. Do you know if any of those pieces are around anywhere?

MS. KARNES: I think Mikhail [Zakin] has-

MR. SHAPIRO: Does Zeb [Schactel] have one?

MS. KARNES: No, Zeb doesn't, but Mikhail Zakin has some, but you don't keep things like that.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: You sell them, get the money.

MR. SHAPIRO: Get the money.

MS. KARNES: Get the money.

MR. SHAPIRO: So Mikhail walked through the door one day into your class?

MS. KARNES: Well, I think she came by when we were building the kiln, and then she walked into the class, because she hadn't worked with clay, but she was always an artist. She was a jeweler. And both she and her husband, Gabriel, began studying with me.

MR. SHAPIRO: Is that where the connection with Demarest [N] came, or was she already involved with Demarest?

MS. KARNES: No, Demarest came later, but I got connected to Demarest through her.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right, right. And so she wasn't teaching at Sarah Lawrence [College, Bronxville, NY] at that point either?

MS. KARNES: No. No, she didn't do that until Gabriel had his breakdown in 1970.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see.

MS. KARNES: At first she taught at Greenwich House [a community center, New York, NY], and then she taught someplace else. And then she taught at Sarah Lawrence in the late '70s.

MR. SHAPIRO: And when did Zeb-what's Zeb's full name?

MS. KARNES: Zeb Schactel.

MR. SHAPIRO: When did she come into your life?

MS. KARNES: Well, she began coming up to the studio probably in the '60s also, because she-you know, she was a psychotherapist, and she'd go if she had some work in the area, and she'd come by and buy pots. She loved them.

MR. SHAPIRO: And so was that the first collector that you had?

MS. KARNES: Probably.

MR. SHAPIRO: First person you knew would support you in that way?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, I think so.

MR. SHAPIRO: And did that have any meaning for you in a way, or did that-was there-I mean, obviously it has a meaning in terms of a certain economic security.

MS. KARNES: The thing is that since I was in Rockland County, there were a lot of people that came and bought from me, and they were all collectors, even though I didn't call them that.

MR. SHAPIRO: Like New York people?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, and local people, Rockland County people. The pieces were sold through the showroom. That's really how I made my living.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I read somewhere you had a price structure where you would-

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Tell us about that.

MS. KARNES: Well, if you came to the studio, you didn't pay retail prices like in the big world. I guess it was about a third less, something like that.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was that ever an issue with your galleries?

MS. KARNES: Didn't ask them. I mean, it might have been an issue, but they had no choice. If they wanted my work, that was it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: So I thought that was a good system.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: Made more money for me and it encouraged people to come.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you were, at that time, selling mostly teapots and cups and-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, casseroles and-

MR. SHAPIRO: Casseroles.

MS. KARNES: Bowls, candlesticks.

MR. SHAPIRO: Sets?

MS. KARNES: Sets, everything, dinnerware if people wanted it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Would you make dinnerware for 12 or 24 or-

MS. KARNES: Never 24, thank goodness. Ten or 12.

MR. SHAPIRO: Ten or 12.

MS. KARNES: I mean, if people came and ordered it, then I made it. I made anything that you wanted.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: If I wanted to make it.

MR. SHAPIRO: And when you would make a simple pot, like a bowl, would you-how many would you make of a similar form at that time in your career?

MS. KARNES: Well, like 10. So the normal throwing cycle-because I never was a very fast thrower, so I wouldn't make hundreds.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: I mean, 10 felt like a lot.

MR. SHAPIRO: So Bonniers had this sense of exhibition when you'd have a large body of work.

MS. KARNES: Well, I made bird feeders and things like that that were more special.

MR. SHAPIRO: For Bonniers, for the shows?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, and then sold them.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. And I guess I'm interested in when you started to have this more of an exhibition line and the casserole-

MS. KARNES: Well, I think the real change was the salt kiln. And the salt kiln-I went to Penland and came home. That must have been around '67. And that second piece on the shelf-

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: -is my first salt piece.

MR. SHAPIRO: Oh, wow.

MS. KARNES: Not up on the top.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: In the middle shelf.

MR. SHAPIRO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Was that made at Penland?

MS. KARNES: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Just threw it in and then poured the slips over it and put it in the kiln, and it came out and I said, okay, I'll make myself a salt kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was Paulus [Berensohn] at Penland at that time?

MS. KARNES: No, I don't think so.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was Cynthia [Bringle]?

MS. KARNES: Cynthia was, not Paulus. Paulus was at his farm. And that's what Paulus bought, that last one.

MR. SHAPIRO: So did you enjoy the teaching at Penland when you were there?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah. I love teaching. I taught at Haystack, too.

MR. SHAPIRO: When did the Continuum start? Was that later?

MS. KARNES: No, Ann was there, so that's later.

MR. SHAPIRO: Later.

MS. KARNES: But let me say something about the salt kiln, because the salt kiln was the real place where I began enlarging the kind of work that I did, because Mikhail and I made the salt kiln together.

MR. SHAPIRO: Mikhail and who?

MS. KARNES: Mikhail Zakin and I built it together.

MR. SHAPIRO: Uh-huh [affirmative], just the two of you?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. And then she came up and worked in my studio and fired with me. And I think the whole idea of this new way of doing things-it freed me. I didn't have to make something that's really a functional thing. It was a functional thing, but something that somebody wanted.

MR. SHAPIRO: What was it about the process that felt so different?

MS. KARNES: I think suddenly the surface of the salt was so gorgeous that it just inspired me to work more. And also, at that point, the point that I sort of just freed myself from the necessity to be connected to immediate function, the bowl; the covered jar had to be of a certain kind.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: Didn't have to be a certain kind anymore. It could be any kind. Didn't have to worry about putting my hand in or a spoon in or whatever. And then size, I began making bigger pieces there.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did that have anything to do with any other things that you had seen at Penland or any-

MS. KARNES: No, I don't think so.

MR. SHAPIRO: It was really just the kiln?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. I think just the kiln, that I could work larger and it was all right. I didn't have to worry about, what do you need that big pot for? Like, this is a salt piece-

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: -of that period.

MR. SHAPIRO: Put a lot of salt in the kiln.

MS. KARNES: Yes. A lot of salt, a lot of heat, so it was a real change in my work. I still kept going with the casseroles and things in the other kiln, but all the-and the creative energy went into the salt kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you find that-at that point-that it felt different to make the casseroles? Did you take less pleasure in it, or was it more of a job at that point?

MS. KARNES: I would say it was more of a job. I mean, I needed to make them. I liked making them, but that's not where my basic interests were. The interests were in the salt kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I know you've spoken about the annual rhythm that this-the fall being very busy, and then having these several months in the winter to do experimental work. Would you do the salt work-

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: -at that time?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, I would never do any casseroles then. I would do big jars, vases.

MR. SHAPIRO: Would you carry that work-the big jars-through the year also, or not?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. And when I was deeper in the salt work, then I did less of the other.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: So I carried it straight through.

MR. SHAPIRO: And were you able to show both works side by side in your normal gallery situations?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Or did that evolve into-

MS. KARNES: In my showroom, you mean, or just in-

MR. SHAPIRO: No, I mean, in New York.

MS. KARNES: Well, some of the shops that I sold to gave me specific orders. They wanted casseroles or wanted jars, but they were happy to include some salt pieces, too, but not this kind. I mean, that was really show work.

MR. SHAPIRO: So what was the first place you were able to show this large-scale salt glaze work? Would that be [William] Hadler- [Nicolas] Rodriguez [Galleries, New York, NY, and Houston, TX], or was that before that?

MS. KARNES: Maybe that would be-yeah, maybe I didn't show it. Maybe I just kept making them. I mean, there is no place-my normal sales places were not interested in this expensive work, larger work.

MR. SHAPIRO: But maybe collectors were buying it at your studio or-

MS. KARNES: A little bit, but not much. No, I think they were just kicking around. This piece was actually shipped to Ann. And I guess that was already in the '70s-every time I had a kiln, I would ship her two or three pieces, so that went to England, and then it came back when we moved back.

MR. SHAPIRO: So when did the relationship with Hadler and Rodriguez start?

MS. KARNES: They used to come up to the studio to buy casseroles and things, just-

MR. SHAPIRO: For themselves?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Not to resell?

MS. KARNES: No, for themselves.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did they have a gallery at that time?

MS. KARNES: No, because they only made the gallery in about '70, '69, '70.

MR. SHAPIRO: Okay.

MS. KARNES: It was late.

MR. SHAPIRO: And were you part of the gallery from the very beginning?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Yeah. Before they moved uptown, they had a big loft on maybe 20th Street, where they lived and where they showed work; we were friends, so we'd go in there. I'd just be there. And then they said they were going to make a gallery, and I said, "Gallery? You're children; you can't make a gallery." I mean, Warren Hadler, especially, was a dancer, and he looked about 16. Nicolas was more sophisticated and older, but they didn't look as if they were people who had a gallery, but they did. And I guess their first show was not in the gallery, but on 20th Street, wherever it was. It was my salt work.

MR. SHAPIRO: That was the first show?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And they sold it?

MS. KARNES: They sold a lot. Didn't cost very much and they sold. And then from there, they decided to open up the gallery on 57th Street, so I was part of that gallery immediately.

MR. SHAPIRO: And were they-they were showing fine art as well, right? They were not just showing craft.

MS. KARNES: I don't think they were showing paintings.

MR. SHAPIRO: No?

MS. KARNES: I think it was just craft, just ceramics. Well, they might have had some textiles and things, too.

MR. SHAPIRO: Who-what other potters were they showing, or do you remember? But you would have a show

there every-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, year or two.

MR. SHAPIRO: -year and a half?

MS. KARNES: Year. But I think they died about-would have been about two years, and then they died.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you had maybe three shows?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. And then they also went down to Texas. Houston, I guess, and opened another branch of the gallery there. And I had a show there once, and I drove down-

MR. SHAPIRO: You drove?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Wow.

MS. KARNES: Because I didn't want to ship.

MR. SHAPIRO: How did that one go?

MS. KARNES: I think it was okay. Don't remember.

MR. SHAPIRO: So about this time Demarest must have been starting-'70. When did Demarest start?

MS. KARNES: Little later. Maybe '72, '73.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did the pottery show come after the art school [The Art School at Old Church, Demarest, NJ] was founded, or was it simultaneous?

MS. KARNES: No, the art school was founded, and maybe a year or two later they made the pottery show.

MR. SHAPIRO: And Mikhail asked you to-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, well, we talked about it. It was something that I hoped would be a good thing to do. And I set it up exactly the way it should be set up.

MR. SHAPIRO: What were some of your concerns, because I know you had some.

MS. KARNES: Well, my concerns were, first of all, the potters have to be paid immediately. We even-the first year, the first year or two, we drove up into the Northampton [MA] area and picked the pieces up, because I felt the pieces should be taken and given back. And we should just treat them-treat them properly, which Mikhail was all for. I mean, we went to get them, feed them, house them. I mean, we'd just do everything.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you send them into Manhattan in those early years?

MS. KARNES: No. The potters?

MR. SHAPIRO: Encouraged them to go and look at shows and-

MS. KARNES: Oh, yes, but, I mean, they didn't need encouragement. But the first few years we-I only asked people in the area. I didn't go way out to Minnesota and places like that.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: You have to sort of feel that you have the market-

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: -when you bring them from so far away. But you see that Green Meadow [Waldorf School, Spring Valley, NY] had a show around then, so we kind of fashioned it after that, but that failed soon after that.

MR. SHAPIRO: I remember that, yeah.

MS. KARNES: Did you ever go to it?

MR. SHAPIRO: I did.

MS. KARNES: As a potter?

MR. SHAPIRO: I had a couple of good years.

MS. KARNES: Well, he died. The man who organized the show died and that sort of killed the show.

MR. SHAPIRO: So Mikhail was head of the pottery-

MS. KARNES: Head of the school.

MR. SHAPIRO: Head of the whole school at that time.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, and teaching pottery. Well, that was fun, those early years. It's still fun.

MR. SHAPIRO: It is fun.

MS. KARNES: It's nice to make a show that really-everybody is so happy to be at.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you were always having that dinner at Mikhail's house.

MS. KARNES: That I cooked.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was Malcolm [Davis] there from the beginning?

MS. KARNES: Not from the very beginning, no.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, who were some of the earliest? Do you remember?

MS. KARNES: Well, they must have been more local people.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: Like, Angela [Fina] probably and-

MR. SHAPIRO: Were the Cohens [Michael and Harriet] around at that time?

MS. KARNES: Cohens. Yeah.

[Audio break, tape change.]

MR. SHAPIRO: This is disc two with Karen Karnes, interview with Mark Shapiro on August 9, 2005.

So there was this idea that you would be in for a year and then out for-in for three years and then out for one-you said that was sort of a way to make it more flexible.

MS. KARNES: So should I say that?

MR. SHAPIRO: I think so, yeah, because that's interesting. We were just saying that that show has become such a model for shows like Northern Clay [American Pottery Festival,, Minneapolis, MN] and for the St. Croix River Tour, for 16 Hands [16 Hands Studio Tour, Floyd, VA], for Worcester [Worcester Center for Crafts, Worcester, MA], Vermont Clay Center [Vermont Clay Studio, Waterbury, VT], we tried to do that and-

MS. KARNES: It didn't work. That's because they closed.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. I mean, at one point, did you see this as a thing that could kind of expand outward?

MS. KARNES: Well, as it began expanding, I thought it must be. It was expanding. I'm always wary about it-you can't just expand it. It has to be the right conditions. New Jersey was so different, because we were right near New York City. I think the main thing is, that I always have emphasized to the people who would want to make such shows, is that we started so modestly. If we made \$1,000, we thought that was a lot. I mean, now everybody thinks, "Oh, look. They made \$100,000. We should make \$100,000, too."

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: And they don't give it the time to mature up to that point, but in Minnesota they do, because the conditions are right. They already have such a powerful buying public there. It's maybe the only place like that in the country. I mean, New Jersey isn't like that. We've had to work hard to get where we are, but that's the whole thing.

MR. SHAPIRO: Plus, though, I think at Demarest there's such an incredible support from the volunteers who use the facility.

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: Really. People like Joyce [Halpert, Demarest board member], who buy a lot of work, who also take classes, who volunteer in such a powerful-

MS. KARNES: Don't the other shows have that?

MR. SHAPIRO: Not on that level.

MS. KARNES: Because the Minnesota show is a pretty powerful place. But they're mostly around-

MR. SHAPIRO: Warren [MacKenzie].

MS. KARNES: I mean, when I see the thing that Warren-if you want to buy one of his pots, you draw a note and then-

MR. SHAPIRO: But then it's only 30 bucks-

MS. KARNES: The pieces are inexpensive?

MR. SHAPIRO: I was there this spring, and there were cups for \$6.50.

MS. KARNES: From Warren?

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah. So-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, it makes a big difference in the level of money you can sell things for. But were all the things in Minnesota that cheap?

MR. SHAPIRO: No.

MR. SHAPIRO: Just Warren's. But things are a little bit less than they would be-than they are on the East Coast. So I was asking whether you felt comfortable in that role.

MS. KARNES: Yes. I have no problems with that role, because Mikhail gave me the full authority. Right from the beginning I said, "I'm the one who chooses. Don't anybody else do anything else." So they had to come to me, and then I could refuse, instead of coming to Mikhail and nudging her or anybody else.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: So it's really made it easier for me to have that total authority. I'm not sure all the shows are like that. But it's the consistent quality of the work that makes it happen. People come to the show, and if they don't see good work, then they sort of say, well, that's not so good.

MR. SHAPIRO: And did you always feel that there should be spaces for people starting out?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yes, but it has to be good.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: But the people starting out are wonderful. I only find the work in the magazine or something, because I don't go to the shows. In the early years I went to the craft shows to find people. I don't do that anymore.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you go with Mikhail?

MS. KARNES: No, I went myself. So now I ask my friends-my potter friends-to break them in, the people, and I trust them. And then people show me slides and things like that. But still, they have to be good people. You can't fool the public.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: We have a very sophisticated public in New Jersey, too. They've been coming for so many years-

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: -that they really understand about clay. And that's the nice thing for the potters, because they have an audience that really looks and cares about them.

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

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: So how did Ann come into the picture?

MS. KARNES: MC went to England to teach, I guess. Then she went to a workshop, in which Ann was firing kilns, and she really enjoyed that so much that she wrote to Paulus at the farm and invited Ann-and she had a friend Helen who knew how to build kilns-with her to come and work there. And I was one of the teachers in that course, so we met.

MR. SHAPIRO: And was she building wood-was that where the Bourry box kiln came from?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Yeah, it was. And that's-I guess it was in '69 when she came to the farm. She built sawdust kilns and wood-fired kilns and everything. And she definitely had a mad time. And the people who came to build, work with her, potters, were friends who we'd invited, so that was a wonderful experience for everybody. And then the next year-I guess in '70-she invited me to go to England and teach a course that she had arranged there.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: In England. And then-

MR. SHAPIRO: That must be 19-

MS. KARNES: Seventy. Either '69 or '70-'69, because '70 she came to work with me, so that's how it happened.

MR. SHAPIRO: And is this about the time your Continuum thing was established?

MS. KARNES: Continuum happened about a year or two later, after they invited me to teach. And then I just worked out this new way of teaching.

MR. SHAPIRO: So tell me about that, the way that it happened.

MS. KARNES: Well, it was just a group of potters, maybe 20.

MR. SHAPIRO: And this was not through any institution, right? This was just-

MS. KARNES: No, it was in a center, but it had nothing to do with them. We just used the facilities.

Well, the kind of teaching that I was prepared to do then was really working with form. And the pattern of the day was that I gave a problem and they all worked on my problem, and then we stopped and looked at the work and talked about it, so it had that kind of continuous feedback.

And then we worked on another problem, you know, so it was all people really listening to me and trying to do the kinds of forms of work that I was pressing them into, so they did all kinds of really interesting things.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I think you described the space-the studio space that you created.

MS. KARNES: Yes, we set the wheels up in a circle so that everybody could look at everybody working, and the whole idea, too, is that I gave them permission to look at everybody's work and get inspiration from it, so that you weren't just all by yourself in a studio thinking, what am I going to make now? You were doing-could look at your neighbor and say, well, that's a good idea. I'll do that. So we kept on developing it like that.

So then at the end when we-when they'd made all their work and they wanted to fire it, I said, that's okay. We'll fire it, we'll make-we'll all make one glaze. Everybody had to use one glaze.

MR. SHAPIRO: All the same glaze?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Wesleyan white, we called it. We made up one of the whites for the glaze, and you couldn't do anything artistic on it, decorative. You dumped it in, dumped it out, and put it on the shelf, and that was such a revelation for everybody, because it was very exciting. You know, everybody had these white pots instead of all the other things. That was the conclusion of the firing and seeing the pieces, the white pieces. And then at the end of that workshop, people wanted to work together again, so they formed themselves into this thing called the Continuum. And I guess I must have worked with them the second year.

And then we needed to have another teacher another year, so we talked it over and invited Mick Cassin.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was that because you felt that-

MS. KARNES: I didn't want to keep-they needed another person. Not me.

MR. SHAPIRO: You felt that you had given what you could-

MS. KARNES: Yeah. So the person that was chosen was Mick Cassin from England. So I said, the only way you can get him is to give him a big salary, because every potter needs money. He won't come to America if you just offer him a small salary. And that's what they did, and they brought him here. And then they set up that workshop at somebody's barn. I think they found other places, venues with studios.

[Audio break.]

And then the other theory that I have is that everybody should teach twice, so that a student can-first of all, the teacher gets to know the student, and the students can really get to know the teacher, so I think there's a much more profound learning when you work with the same teacher twice instead of just once. So we did that. And then maybe I did that again, I don't remember.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did any of those people become your friends?

MS. KARNES: They were friends then, and they were acquaintances. They didn't stay friends, because I guess we moved to Vermont-it's hard to keep up friendships with people. So much of the past now, I don't even remember it.

MR. SHAPIRO: So were you going to-was it at that time, were you thinking about-were you spending any time in Wales, or did that come later?

MS. KARNES: Oh, what was that time? Oh, God. Well, Ann had this house and a studio that she'd made in Wales-North Wales. We had an idea that we would live there and live in the States, part-time.

MR. SHAPIRO: This was still at Stony Point?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, I guess it was Stony Point. And then we realized that that's not practical. Just too hard to keep up the place in Wales and take care of it, and fix the roof when it breaks and all of that, so we had to really sell it. We did ultimately sell it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you make work in Wales?

MS. KARNES: Never. I mean, the studio was there. We bought the bricks for the kiln [but had them shipped back here in the end] and never-we never brought [built] the kiln, and had a wood kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: When you moved to Ron and Sandy Bauer's did you begin right off to work with wood firing?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Yeah, it would be his wood kiln to start with.

MR. SHAPIRO: And that was a very rugged situation. It had no electricity or-

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: I don't remember if you said that walking in or-

MS. KARNES: Walking in with the snow in the winter, and cars were parked away about a mile away from the house.

MR. SHAPIRO: And was that the way it was always going to be, or that was-

MS. KARNES: Well, who knows? Maybe not always, but it was quite a ways then. And we had a tiny little apartment and a tiny studio.

MR. SHAPIRO: On the site?

MS. KARNES: Well, as an extension of his studio, bigger area.

[Audio break.]

MS. KARNES: We [had] made friends with Ron Bauer and his wife, Sandy. We began visiting them in [West

Danville] Vermont. I mean, a big piece was this work in a wood kiln, which I couldn't do in Stony Point.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: And then-and Ann was not happy at Stony Point with the closed-in terrain and everything. It just seemed like a good time. If I was ever going to move, I had to move fast, because if you wait too long, you're too old.

MR. SHAPIRO: And so that lasted about two years, three years?

MS. KARNES: Three years.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you built the kiln with a group of people?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, we came up there and we had this-as soon as we came there to plan the building of the kiln, so we got a group of potters. I mean, the Continuum was basic to that, but a few other people came up and to have a workshop and build a kiln.

And what happened then was as soon as they came up there, Ron [Bauer] and his wife, Sylvia, [Bauer] saw each other and fell in love, and Ron was married and had a child, so it was a very sticky situation. So after the workshop, she almost immediately stayed on and the wife moved out-Sandy-and we were very judgmental, which maybe I wouldn't be now. Maybe I would be, but we couldn't leave there, because we had no place else to go to. It was just-this was our home, so we stayed on with a lot of tension.

MR. SHAPIRO: And the conditions were also very-

MS. KARNES: Primitive.

MR. SHAPIRO: -primitive.

MS. KARNES: That would have been all right if the other parts hadn't gone wrong, so I guess we stayed there about two years. I really enjoyed it. I mean, we did all these primitive things, like carrying the groceries in and doing all that.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you-that was when you started making this larger work that you were showing.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, well, we had the great big kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was that when your relationship with Hadler-Rodriguez started?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, just then. They came in. It's a wonderful story. They came in in the winter pulling a sled to pack the pieces and take them up, because they had to leave their car beyond, and they were just overwhelmed. The two city ladies had moved to such a primitive place.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you own the kiln, or was it a cooperative venture?

MS. KARNES: No, cooperative kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: You had paid for the bricks together?

MS. KARNES: No, I think it was Ron's kiln. We got a lot of secondhand bricks, and we got secondhand shelves and all kinds of things like that. I mean, when the time came for us to leave, they were going to leave, too. And then they said we should take the bricks because they were not interested in my kiln. If they'd wanted it, it would have been theirs, really.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you took all those bricks and put them on pallets.

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Well, we got potter friends to come and take it down and put them on a pallet.

MR. SHAPIRO: How did you decide on Morgan, on this place?

MS. KARNES: Well, we'd been looking all over, but it's hard to find a place, because we wanted enough acreage, and we wanted to not be on a dirt road so we didn't have the same situation as with Ron. And then we just were lucky. Through a friend we found this place that had the old farmhouse, and it seemed to be just fine. So then we moved all our stuff and bricks and everything.

MR. SHAPIRO: When did-I know you had this relationship with your kiln-the fireman. What was his name? Ann, what's the name of the man who helps Karen fire?

ANN STANNARD: Ken [Whitehill].

MR. SHAPIRO: Ken. So when did Ken come into the picture? How did that come to be?

MS. KARNES: Well, Ken was the one-Ken was a dowser and he got connected. And Ken is the one who actually found the property. I mean, he was just a friend right from the beginning.

MR. SHAPIRO: But is he from here?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah, he's a local. The farm next door was his parents' farm, and he'd grown up there.

Then that next summer, planned to build the kiln back again. And our friend Jeffrey, from England, came. See, the kiln that this great big group put up, he and I put it up again.

MR. SHAPIRO: A lot of work.

MS. KARNES: Whoa. I was younger and stronger then-a lot of work.

MR. SHAPIRO: That's a fairly complicated kiln with the throat arches and-

MS. KARNES: The throat arch-yeah. We were duplicating exactly what we'd done there. And the door-yeah, we had a beautiful door and a metal frame and everything. We just moved everything and duplicated everything.

MR. SHAPIRO: So the metalwork existed-

MS. KARNES: The metalwork was there already, the interior door and everything.

MR. SHAPIRO: Who had done the metalwork originally for the kiln?

MS. KARNES: One of the people locally. Yeah. So we put the kiln up quickly.

MR. SHAPIRO: And did Ken always-did Ken help you fire in Danville?

MS. KARNES: No. He fired here, because there we had-no, we didn't have to have help. Ron was part of the firing. But we carried our separation for a number of years, Ron and I, because we were going back to England-to Wales-in the summer or at some point. And then a number of years later we were at a craft fair together, and we just looked at each other and it was okay.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, that's good.

MS. KARNES: We didn't go over it. No, because most human things are really delicate aren't they?

MR. SHAPIRO: And things happen.

MS. KARNES: They certainly do.

MR. SHAPIRO: Certainly happened at Stony Point. Plenty of others from that period.

MS. KARNES: Everybody was separating then. Yeah. And Abel was grown. So he wasn't with me anymore. He was going to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA]. But we started working, started working in our studio there.

MR. SHAPIRO: And did you have a salt kiln also, a gas burner?

MS. KARNES: Not right away. Just the wood kiln. And then in-when I went to Penland, '70-or it was before Ann, so it was like '68, went down there and decided that was fine that I didn't have a kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: But did you have a salt kiln also up here ever?

MS. KARNES: That was the salt kiln that we built. After being in-

MR. SHAPIRO: Penland?

MS. KARNES: In Penland. And I built it with-

MR. SHAPIRO: But when you moved to Morgan, you only had the wood kiln or-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, yeah. It didn't matter, salt or-

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah, salt kiln.

MS. KARNES: Didn't need a salt kiln. The wood kiln was gorgeous.

MR. SHAPIRO: And no reduction kiln, just-

MS. KARNES: No, we fired everything with a wood kiln, but I think that's why Ron lost a lot of his work, because he should have flame-proofed a kiln like that.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see. So did the landscape affect your work?

MS. KARNES: Well, it must, because I'm looking at the mountain. It took 10 years to affect it.

MR. SHAPIRO: But I'm noticing this-I think at that point the scale of the work really jumped.

MS. KARNES: Well, it jumped because I had a big kiln. Guess you should make your work to fit your kiln, or you should make some kilns to fit your work.

MR. SHAPIRO: You were saying you got how many casseroles in your kiln?

MS. KARNES: Oh, I don't know. Ann's got about 40, probably more up in the big kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: Forty casseroles and then some exhibition pieces and-

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: And how often would you fire that kiln?

MS. KARNES: About every two months, two and a half months.

MR. SHAPIRO: Wow.

MS. KARNES: And Ann was doing some work, too, platters and planters and things.

MR. SHAPIRO: So four firings a year or something like that?

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And who-how would you-who would get the wood ready? Would Ken be responsible for that or-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, Ken was the wood expert. That's what his work was; he was a woodsman. So he would sell us the wood and cut it and stack it.

MR. SHAPIRO: And get it just right?

MS. KARNES: Get all the wood-

MR. SHAPIRO: So that's about '83 or '84?

MS. KARNES: Well, yeah, that's when we moved here, in '83. I mean, I would have stayed in the wood kiln for the rest of my life, and I wouldn't have needed salt or anything, because the wood had so much variety and it was so wonderful.

MR. SHAPIRO: And at that time did you begin spraying color on?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Had you done that before?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, sprayed glaze on.

MR. SHAPIRO: You have had-at Stony Point you had a sprayer?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. It was just the wood-

MR. SHAPIRO: And was that because of the scale of the work?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, I needed-and it was not an Anagama kiln, so it didn't give you any very rich woods; ash, a little bit. It was much bigger. I mean, when you look at the pieces, you know that that kind of made a difference.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. And did you do a lot of testing at that time or-

MS. KARNES: Not very much. No, I'm lazy. Angela Fina gave me the glaze.

MR. SHAPIRO: So the things that are sprayed on are very thin glazes?

MS. KARNES: Medium things. Yeah. Like the purples and green, blue green.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you always mixed your own clay?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. But it's the same clay. Been doing it for years.

MR. SHAPIRO: And-

MS. KARNES: It really was the fire that put the end to that period.

MR. SHAPIRO: You feel you would have continued?

MS. KARNES: I think so.

MR. SHAPIRO: So within that period there-

MS. KARNES: Many different forms.

MR. SHAPIRO: Four different, maybe, distinct bodies of work?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. The way I think about my forms is I sort of get an idea, and I begin making them. And then I make them, and make them with all these variations-bigger and wider and narrower-until I'm tired of that form. Then I stop it-but by the time I'm tired, I've already had ideas for the next series of forms, so I would just start doing the next. And I never go back to a form that I'd made before.

MR. SHAPIRO: So maybe the longest form that you made, or the two longest forms, may be the casserole-

MS. KARNES: Oh, yes. Casserole-

MR. SHAPIRO: -and the lidded-jar form?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. The lidded jars and casseroles and bowls, I mean, they're just production. Things-I didn't think of them in the same way.

MR. SHAPIRO: But you made those very large-scale lidded forms?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. And those were really functional pieces.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: They were just big pieces. But-and that's a real feeling I have about form, is when I'm finished with the phase by taking a year or two years, I just go on to the next one.

MR. SHAPIRO: So how did the slitted pieces start, do you remember?

MS. KARNES: Oh, they were way back in my salt kiln. The lids would be cut wider.

MR. SHAPIRO: No, no. The slitted-

MS. KARNES: Oh, slit.

MR. SHAPIRO: The slitted ones and the-

MS. KARNES: Slit. I don't know.

MR. SHAPIRO: Or the wings.

MS. KARNES: Wings. I don't really have a brain that tells me change to this or change to that. Life does it, so I just do it. I don't have any thoughts about why I change it.

MR. SHAPIRO: I notice there are a lot of images of rocks and landscape.

MS. KARNES: On my wall.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah, I love those. I think all potters love those-I think there's a good story that I tell in the film about when we went-and all those pieces I started making with the openings. And then I went to Hawaii and went up on top of the crater and looked down into the volcano, and they were just like that. And in the interior of the volcano they had these beautiful mounds with openings that were like that. I just said to Ann, "It's lucky I hadn't seen it before, because I couldn't have done the piece." I mean, it's very clear to me not to ever imitate anything or copy anything; if there is too strong an influence, then it stops that kind of form.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you moved from the lidded-very large, lidded forms, cut-lidded forms, to the slit forms.

MS. KARNES: I think I did, yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And then to the winged forms.

MS. KARNES: Maybe.

MR. SHAPIRO: Or maybe at the same time. And also, you're making these tulip vases.

MS. KARNES: But not at the same time. Each moved-I mean, when I started making winged pieces, I was no longer doing something else.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see.

MS. KARNES: Yeah. And then the tulip things were just really instigated by Garth [Clark], because he wanted those things, so I did quite a few different variations of those. And then the openings, I get a lot of pieces there. I don't have so many out, not just enormous ones, but the small ones with holes going on. Of course, I really like things that are mysterious and have holes going in or slits going through.

MR. SHAPIRO: People always said that you've always made closed forms, whether covered or-

MS. KARNES: Earlier I have, but not when I started working in the wood kiln. I stopped making covers, because I don't-

MR. SHAPIRO: But I mean, enclosed.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, but not necessarily.

MR. SHAPIRO: There were bowls, too, weren't there?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah. I made lots of bowls.

MR. SHAPIRO: I mean, exhibition piece bowls, that sort of-

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Yeah. It's interesting. When I see all the pieces together, I don't remember how I went from one form to another form, but, I mean, I have a lot of black and white in slides and I've got of a way of looking at things, because I had-for Lucy [Phenix, filmmaker], I had to make a collection of slides of forms; slides for her for the film. I did that before you came, and I don't have the batch.

MR. SHAPIRO: You mean, of work that-

MS. KARNES: Earlier work.

MR. SHAPIRO: That we don't see here?

MS. KARNES: No, because I don't have them anymore.

MR. SHAPIRO: Like whole bodies of work?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Especially since every time I made a batch, I only worked for a year; I worked slowly. I might have only made 20 or something.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: There aren't that many around. But you can't-you can't have a body if you don't have work, so you can't just use photographs.

MR. SHAPIRO: So then after the fire happened in-

MS. KARNES: Ninety-eight.

MR. SHAPIRO: And I know it's a hard thing to talk about. Can you talk about the fire a little bit?

MS. KARNES: Well, the thing about the fire is it took, like, over a year to rebuild. Like a year and a quarter or something. So that made a big difference, because I wasn't working-well, I built the salt kiln, but I wasn't really working in clay. I was doing things, but it was different.

MR. SHAPIRO: So you didn't work for a year and a half?

MS. KARNES: More than a year, yeah. And then the decision to take down the kiln, I think, was the right one, because it was too big and it pressed me to a certain kind of work. But now I'd like to have it, but I wouldn't build a big kiln like that again. Joy Brown invited me to put things in her kiln, too.

MR. SHAPIRO: Joy Brown.

MS. KARNES: So it's not that I put that many, but at least I have another place, but it was a hard time for me, probably still.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you go to New York during that period?

MS. KARNES: No. No, I stayed here.

MR. SHAPIRO: And where did you stay?

MS. KARNES: In the guest house.

MR. SHAPIRO: Oh.

MS. KARNES: A little treehouse. On the porch I had a little oven and a hot plate, and we'd do our meals there, even in the winter. We bought a refrigerator that we put to use finally and put it into that porch. It was a good time. I really enjoyed being squished into that little house.

MR. SHAPIRO: And there was a tremendous feeling also of the potters' community coming together to support you.

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah. They're wonderful. Well, they spent a lot of-we had a sale. I won't remember the place-Pennsylvania-that potters donated work.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was it at the Clay-at the Works Gallery or the Clay Studio [The Clay Place, Shadysville, PA]? Chester Springs. No?

MS. KARNES: Just a person. Both of them had this gallery. It was an interesting time.

MR. SHAPIRO: Is that the longest you've ever gone without working?

MS. KARNES: Ever-ever. And when I came back to working, it was very hard.

MR. SHAPIRO: I'll bet.

MS. KARNES: Very hard.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you started with-

MS. KARNES: I made those little pieces.

MR. SHAPIRO: -with tall skinny pieces?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, and I'd never really made skinny things before. And then I made a very nice body that Garth showed-black pieces with color on a section of it. And when I sprayed the glaze on, I got color on it, but the white is on the black. And I don't have any of those.

MR. SHAPIRO: And did your association with Garth-was it different than having been with Hadler-Rodriguez in the sense of-

MS. KARNES: Well, when Warren-when Hadler and Rodriguez died and Garth invited me to his gallery, and he wouldn't even try before, because, like I said, Nicolas and Warren would-I mean, it wasn't the same really loving relationship that I had with them, but it was very nice. He was always very nice to me and gave me periodic

shows. I feel very fortunate to be in his gallery in New York.

MR. SHAPIRO: Through that period were there other significant collectors who supported you besides them, supported your work?

MS. KARNES: Well, I have other galleries, Hand and the Spirit [Scottsdale, AZ] and a few others. Yeah, there were some good galleries. And then they closed. Okun/Thomas Galleries [St. Louis, MO]; another one had just entered my head-it's not there now.

MR. SHAPIRO: What about in terms of individual collectors?

MS. KARNES: No, I haven't had individual collectors. I've had good relationships with galleries and they've always been very nice to me-gave me enough shows. I had enough shows for my work-I couldn't make that much work.

MR. SHAPIRO: So when you worked, you usually had music going, I think you said; you listen to radio or-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, I listen to the radio. Public radio.

MR. SHAPIRO: And do you listen to classical music-

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: -or news or mixed?

MS. KARNES: It was classical or news. Not all the time. I've always had a habit of that, because it cuts out all the other sounds. I'm just trying to remember what happened in the year that I had to stop working. I guess this disease that I have was starting then, because I was working straight along.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right through Demarest?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. But then when I stopped working, it was very hard to get started.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah, I think it's hard for us all, when we take time off, to get back into it.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, but I feel ready now. Well, I think that Joy is helping me by encouraging me to make some pieces for her, and then Leslie [Ferrin] gave me the exhibition now. And looking at all the work together, I mean, I think I'm going to start.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, that's great.

MS. KARNES: And I think when I wasn't doing it, I wasn't very well. Of course, my doctor says, you're older.

[Audio break, tape change.]

Like Beatrice Wood. She was, I guess, 100 or something. It's just more work. I guess you have to be physically well to have that ability.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, or to work more slowly.

MS. KARNES: Yeah. And fewer hours. Yeah, I've got to work.

MR. SHAPIRO: So how do you feel about the surfaces that are coming out of Joy Brown's kiln?

MS. KARNES: I'm very pleased with it.

MR. SHAPIRO: What is it about them that really feels right?

MS. KARNES: Well, the richness of the surface and the places where she leaves-where there's no ash-very beautiful. I'm going to make some landscapes.

MR. SHAPIRO: Have you ever made really horizontal work before?

MS. KARNES: Not really. And you said something about slicing it in half. I may do that. We'll see. And there was a very interesting thought that I said on the film-she [Lucy Phenix] was asking me these same questions. And then I said maybe I would have come to this in passing anyway, even if I didn't have a fire. Maybe I was at some point, to really make a change in my life. When something happens and then you blame it on the happening, who knows if that was really the reason or not, so we'll see. That's what I say. We'll see.

MR. SHAPIRO: But clearly, as you said, that kiln would have been a bear to fill, just too much.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, but that's okay, because I couldn't put casseroles in there. It demanded large pieces, and I was happy to fill that demand earlier; of course, now I can't even carry those big pieces, so I couldn't make the same ones. Have to make thinner ones. I really appreciated that kiln when I was firing-Joy's kiln. Your kiln isn't that hot, is it?

MR. SHAPIRO: It's a lot of work to fire it. Not as much as Joy's, because it's 20 hours, but-

MS. KARNES: But you had people working with you.

MR. SHAPIRO: Five people.

MS. KARNES: But the main thing that I realized that-I hadn't known it, but I'd forgotten, is that the Bourry box kiln is a down draft, so when you open up the door to put wood in, the heat doesn't jump out at you. It pulls down.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: The box for the wood is here and the ash pit is down there, so it's a really hot fire, and then the flame goes through and on up into the kiln, whereas Joy's kiln, like all the others, you open it up and you're right at the firebox with heat coming out. It's terrible. I didn't even put wood in [until] the last moment, till the last day.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: The best. Very innovative. I think I would have gotten an asbestos suit or something, but you didn't need them for my kiln.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: It's not hot. It's warm, but you could-you didn't have to rush to put the wood in. That Bourry box is a good kiln. It doesn't give the ash like the other one.

MR. SHAPIRO: Linda Christianson has a kiln like that. She fires it entirely herself.

MS. KARNES: An Anagama kiln?

MR. SHAPIRO: No, a Bourry box.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, I could have done it myself, but she takes on challenges that are excessive.

MR. SHAPIRO: Karen, I know we talked earlier about this sort of polarity that maybe all artists face about privacy in community, and it seems like your life really-those themes are very present.

MS. KARNES: Well, privacy is really, really important. You see, when I-when I first had the studio, it was MC and David and me. But we had separate rooms, and then we had a sink that was part of it, and then there was a room where we made up our glazes, a public room. I felt very-maybe that's when I began playing my radio very low to just make my own space quietly. But we didn't intrude on the other's space. We were really very private. And then we came to fire together; if it was appropriate, we did it together or we didn't. We got along very well in a separate way. And then when I was alone, that was fine, too. When David left, and MC left. And then when Ann came, she had a room.

MR. SHAPIRO: So how did you feel when there were students-when you had your students in your studio?

MS. KARNES: Oh, I didn't work myself. My students were just on, like, Monday evenings or something, so I was just a teacher.

MR. SHAPIRO: Would you have to move the space around?

MS. KARNES: I had to clean it up. Yeah, I did, but I figured that's what the work was about. They would give me money, and you had to do it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: I had to straighten up and move things, but in the actual teaching it was all right. It was just them coming into the studio and working once a week. They were not working with me. I've never really had to-well, when I had Robbie [Lobell] here for a month, she was working with me, but she was working in a different place.

I've had periods when I've had somebody working for a bit, somebody that I cared about, but-

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you ever work with Mikhail, in a shared studio with Mikhail anywhere?

MS. KARNES: We did. Yeah, she worked in my studio.

MR. SHAPIRO: Here or in Stony Point?

MS. KARNES: No, no, Stony Point.

MR. SHAPIRO: Side by side or-

MS. KARNES: No, no. Just a room here, like the studio had all these rooms, so she could have her own room. I never had people working side by side or even-their psyches didn't come to my head. Of course, the community which you have after you're working that would-I mean, and I could see when I was with Joy and we were firing-but firing is a different activity, too.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: I mean, when Joy works herself, I don't think she has anybody in the studio. It's kind of a concentration you get by yourself, but lots of people probably liked working-I mean, people worked in workshops together, and they worked in places like Penland in the same room. But that's just temporary. It's different, you go someplace for a week or two.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right. We were talking about fun when I first arrived, and seems like maybe fun is something that you associate with a kind of communal experience.

MS. KARNES: Yes, more people, because you don't have fun all by yourself in your studio. Fun is kind of a group thing. But when you suggest teaching two weeks at Haystack, that seems like fun.

MR. SHAPIRO: Sounds like fun, doesn't it?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. I mean, I don't dance because I'm past my dancing years, but-

MR. SHAPIRO: What kind of dancing would you do then? Was it ballroom?

MS. KARNES: It was ballroom and folk dancing and everything.

MR. SHAPIRO: And you'd do it at dance halls or bars?

MS. KARNES: Well, we used to do it in barns. Barn dances.

The barn dance and also did folk dances. It touched me. We were around Stony Point a little bit, but then we separated. Too bad. Wasn't strong enough to keep us together.

MR. SHAPIRO: Did you feel that other people in the communities that you've been associated with, like Stony Point or Black Mountain, had a different idea about privacy and personal work?

MS. KARNES: Well, not really, because I have always been able to set up a really big zone of privacy. I mean, I was at Stony Point for many years, 25 years. And I had-some of the people were good friends, but nobody ever came and asked me for coffee or visited; they knew that was my time. I made it very clear; that's my time, just like if I went to the factory, like my mother went to the factory. I never had problems with that. That's why when somebody came to work here, I'd have to be very clear about it. I can do it. I've done it all my life. I can do it again.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: You have problems with privacy?

MR. SHAPIRO: I have a semi-separate space.

MS. KARNES: Yeah. That's how you have to set it up, so that it isn't public space-

MR. SHAPIRO: Though I did work with Michael Kline for years in the same space.

MS. KARNES: If you're really sympathetic, you can do it.

MR. SHAPIRO: It's not without its struggles, but in the end it's a time I remember with great pleasure, but there

were moments where it wasn't easy.

I'm wondering whether artists are particularly seeking these communities because they need to be so private to do their work.

MS. KARNES: Maybe.

MR. SHAPIRO: I mean, most people, they go to the office and they have a sociable experience, right?

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: We go to work all alone.

MS. KARNES: But you don't really live in a community. It's your family and the rest of the people.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right, but there's always the impulse and the-you see these at Stony Point or Black Mountain College or even some of those 19th-century American communities-Brook Farm [West Roxbury, MA]-and so it's kind of an impulse to do creative work, but live-

MS. KARNES: I think that's why you-a good analysis is that the working time is very private, but then you like to have the other.

Yes, I was very happy to be in Stony Point. I wouldn't-my life would have been very different if I'd just been in a little farmhouse studio by myself, especially when David left. It'd be awful. I couldn't really leave, couldn't go around. Yeah. And raising a child in that community was wonderful, because, like, I had my sister-in-law; David's sister lived there.

MR. SHAPIRO: Oh, she did?

MS. KARNES: Had family. So I could go away on a Friday, and the children would-my son would sleep with her children, and another night they came to me. It was a lot of exchange like that, which was my connection to the work.

MR. SHAPIRO: I wonder if this idea could be connected to any of this sort of European socialist idealism, your kibbutz movement.

MS. KARNES: Might be.

MR. SHAPIRO: Somehow the idea that there's something fundamentally good about being together in some way.

MS. KARNES: But helping each other, because so many times someone needs help. It's good to have help rather than being all by yourself.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: I mean, here Ann and I are a community of the two of us, but we have friends and there are people who-I mean, if I needed help, I could get it.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was it hard to integrate into this community? It's such a different-

MS. KARNES: Well, it just happened slowly, because we bought the land from Kenneth's family. That was the first thing. And then, by the way, we had to get somebody building for us, so we had a wonderful-because it's an old farmhouse that needed a lot of work, so I don't know how we got into it; I guess Ken was to come and look. And at the same time, somebody else got somebody else to come look about the farm, see the kind of building we needed to have done. And this other person, he looked around and he said, "Burn it down," so we knew he was not for us. Wesley [Farrow] said, "Sure," so he was for us, and he was wonderful. He was for us for many years after this. He was always helpful, always ready to come.

One time my eyeglasses dropped down the toilet. We called Wes and he came and fixed it. And now that he's no longer alive, Brenda, the woman who lived with him for years, she's our person. Anything that goes wrong in the house, "Brenda!" and she comes and helps.

Gradually we have made a real community. Not that it's different. It's not our social community. We don't have dinners together. Well, sometimes with Wes we did, because we really cared about him. But, I mean, it's not this kind of community that you-they're not friends like friends are. There are deeper ways; they're better than friends. But you must have a support group of people like that around you?

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, right now it's all about kids, so it revolves around that, but-

MS. KARNES: That's true. The years that you have children last-that's what your life is, and you become friends with other people with children.

MR. SHAPIRO: But some of those friendships are quite good.

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah, but it'll all change. It'll change when the children go away to school, when you're alone.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right.

MS. KARNES: And then you do other things. But it's true. The children-when you have the children-I mean, I wouldn't have not had a child for anything.

MR. SHAPIRO: Are there any regrets, anything that you would have thought of doing differently? It's kind of a ridiculous question in some ways but-

MS. KARNES: It has felt to me always that my life has followed this path. I went here, and then I needed to move back there, and I-it was just was very organic and always one thing led to another, so I don't think I have regrets in a large sense.

MR. SHAPIRO: And one other-

MS. KARNES: I mean, I'm glad I came up here. I wouldn't want to be in Stony Point now, in Rockland County.

MR. SHAPIRO: In the hollow.

MS. KARNES: Just driving around there-we were back there last year, or two years ago.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah.

MS. KARNES: And New York City. I've never had regrets if I would have stayed there. I never stayed there. I was just there growing up. I never lived there as an adult, even though Mikhail Zakin has friends that live there and Zeb, so I'm there sometimes. I couldn't live there.

MR. SHAPIRO: Can't do your work there.

So the other thing that I had been thinking about you is that I feel like in some way you're kind of this insider/outsider, in the sense that you never had the academic credentials or that sort of track, and you made your own way, which was very independent, and you can be absolutely outspoken in a way that really holds to what you believe, regardless of where the cards fall and the chips fall. And yet you've been so celebrated in the community, whether it's the American Craft Council or being artist laureate of Vermont. I mean, a couple of different things.

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: You've been really-you know, your NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grant. You've been nationally very celebrated. Do you ever feel like an outsider in any way? Are you thinking partly being a Jew culturally, being a woman, being outside the academy, do you ever feel in any way like you were not part of some center of the clay world that was-

MS. KARNES: I would say that I never have, because I've always been very modest and I have no expectations. When I started working, I thought, well, I'm a potter. I want to make pots. I'm making pots. And then when I moved from doing that to more sculptured things, it wasn't a planned thing. It just happened in a natural way.

And I never thought I would be famous, which I am now. I had no thoughts about that. It wasn't what I was about. And maybe because I have such modest expectations, I was just living in the moment what I'm doing. And as a woman, I've never had any feeling that I've-that anything was not going as well for me because I'm a woman. I'm lucky-I haven't had any of that.

MR. SHAPIRO: And do you think that that's also part of the historical moment in which your life unfolded?

MS. KARNES: Yes, I think a lot of it is that. Yeah, that I was interested in becoming a potter just as pottery was starting. And I often say this to students when I am teaching, my life is so-I can't even imagine being a potter nowadays with the competition. We didn't have competition. There was so few of us, there was no competition. We just had people that you admired, like Robert Turner or Toshiko [Takaazu]. They were people that were more iconic than I.

MR. SHAPIRO: Were they more established?

MS. KARNES: A little bit more, but not really. But I think they were both teachers and potters, and it was a simple thing, but I had all the fame that I needed. I mean, *Craft Horizons*, and my work was always accepted, praised, so it was fine. But I suppose the main thing is I have no expectations really.

MR. SHAPIRO: But somehow you had an expectation you could make a living?

MS. KARNES: Assuredness of that. But I think those are the days when you could do it. Well, maybe you can do it. Look at all the young people who are doing it nowadays. That's not true if they are doing it now.

MR. SHAPIRO: But maybe they're doing it in-partly through these other networks that evolved, other expectations. One of the ways you can do it is by being well connected, by doing a little teaching, but doing a little-I mean, the younger people I meet, they're doing a little teaching, they're doing a little-traveling to certain shows. It's more using the whole network.

MS. KARNES: Right. And I feel so lucky that I didn't need to do that. Didn't really have a network, just-but I guess the biggest miracle was going to Black Mountain, meeting MC. We probably would have got along without it, too, but that really made all the steps very reasonable, good. And selling in New York.

MR. SHAPIRO: Was MC the connecting force there with the [Paul and Vera B.] Williamses and-

MS. KARNES: Yes, because MC was a beginning potter. She wasn't really a potter, so when she was building the community, she needed us to help her make a kiln and all the rest, which was fine. We were teaching at Black Mountain, and she was very much a student.

MR. SHAPIRO: But wasn't she a professor also?

MS. KARNES: Oh, yeah, but not a potter.

MR. SHAPIRO: I see. And did she have a particular dynamism and charisma and-

MS. KARNES: Well, she was very strong-a very special person. But you never knew her.

MR. SHAPIRO: I never knew her, no. No.

One person who we haven't spoken about at all is Paulus, and you said you didn't meet him at Penland, that you must have met him through MC?

MS. KARNES: Through MC. Yeah. He came to the studio. And he had the farm, you see. She was living in a farm with him, and they had the workshop for Ann, so it was just when I met Ann.

MR. SHAPIRO: On Ann's initial trip?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: You know, when I saw Paulus at Penland a couple of years ago, we were talking about Garth's catalogue, and he had said, "Garth made one error. I am not Karen Karnes's guru."

MS. KARNES: Did he say that?

MR. SHAPIRO: He said that.

MS. KARNES: Oh, that's true. He was not my guru.

MR. SHAPIRO: He said, "I want to make it absolutely clear."

MS. KARNES: No. But he writes-I mean, we write to each other. I think as we get older, we get more sentimental.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, he had that very nice thing that Haystack published [Paulus Berensohn. *Whatever We Touch Is Touching Us: Craft Art and a Deeper Sense of Ecology*]. That was-

MS. KARNES: Lovely.

MR. SHAPIRO: Reprinted in *Studio Potter*-

MS. KARNES: Yes. I bought a few of them and sent them out to people. I haven't really seen him for a long time. So I went-the ACC was giving me honors and he was there, but-

MR. SHAPIRO: I saw him in the spring when he gave us this panel on MC.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, we were connected then because of the show we made for MC just before she died ["Imagine Inventing Yellow: The Life and Work of MC Richards." Worcester Craft Center, 1999.]

MR. SHAPIRO: At Worcester [Worcester Craft Center, Worcester, MA]?

MS. KARNES: At Worcester, yeah. Yeah, you would have enjoyed that.

MR. SHAPIRO: Yeah. Sorry I missed it.

MS. KARNES: It ran for two weeks.

MR. SHAPIRO: That was probably in the midst of having our babies then.

MS. KARNES: But she didn't-when we had the thing at Worcester, she was no longer alive. She had just died, but that was very moving, very beautiful, because so many friends spoke for her, and she had meant so much to so many people. But she was a teacher as well as a poet and everything else.

MR. SHAPIRO: Right, a very powerful voice for a lot of people, I had the impression. So did she ever really become a potter, or not really?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. She thought of herself as that, sculptor, a potter. She loved making functional things. She worked in clay. But she did a lot of other things, too.

MR. SHAPIRO: So when you look at all that work, we just looked at-

MS. KARNES: More than 100 pieces.

MR. SHAPIRO: More than 100 pieces for over 35 years, 40 years.

MS. KARNES: Well, I've done a lot of other pieces that I don't have anymore-I mean, my best pieces, really, aren't here.

[Audio break, tape change.]

Because I always sold the better ones, and took them to shows.

MR. SHAPIRO: This is disc three of the interview with Karen Karnes and Mark Shapiro on August 10, in Morgan, Vermont.

MS. KARNES: I think the thing, when we see the work together or having the showroom, going in and out and seeing it, what I find really interesting is that I've really made so many different periods of work over the years. The casserole was-that same casserole for 40 years. But all the other things that I've made, I just-and it was a self-limiting thing that I had. I worked and I was finished with it, strangely, when I went on to something else.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, it's interesting, because it seems like, especially in craft, when you do the same work, it's called production, but when you do the same work in fine art, it's called mature work.

MS. KARNES: Mature work. That's good.

MR. SHAPIRO: There's this idea that, sort of, the person finally moves to finding their voice.

MS. KARNES: Their own voice.

MR. SHAPIRO: And once they're there-

MS. KARNES: Then they stay there.

MR. SHAPIRO: -they sort of play in that space.

MS. KARNES: Right.

MR. SHAPIRO: But I think that-you know what, it maybe connects somewhat to the Bauhaus idea that in some ways you're working as a designer, and you sort of run through the possibilities of a design, and then you have another design that you play in.

MS. KARNES: Maybe.

MR. SHAPIRO: Maybe it goes back to Serge Chermayoff. I don't know.

MS. KARNES: On the other hand, I very much admire-I was reading this Marguerite Wildenhain, who just stayed right there and kept on going and going and going with the same kind of work. And I admire the Japanese people who produce and produce and produce. I wouldn't mind being one of those, except I would have to go to Japan and have a different life. I don't put that down, that kind of work. I love it. I guess in our contemporary terms, it's funny.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, maybe you had a little bit of both worlds, because you did have the casseroles.

MS. KARNES: Yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: Which have that kind of consistency.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SHAPIRO: And then you also had this other-

MS. KARNES: And bowls and jars. All my production pieces were just-I felt I made a good thing. I didn't have to change, because it was good as it was. But I suppose, I mean, when I look through the magazines and see the work that people are doing in clay, I think "Oy." So much of it is "Oy." I'd rather they were just doing lovely things.

MR. SHAPIRO: Because they're trying too hard or because-

MS. KARNES: Yeah, trying too hard. Yeah, so hard.

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, I always like to think that it's hard-it's easy to forget how many bad pots I had to make. Maybe they just took pictures too soon.

MS. KARNES: Well, the magazines are giving the most important work people are doing right now. The other thing is that one realizes it really doesn't matter. There's a lot of mediocre junk in the world, why not in the clay field? It's everywhere else. I think next time they have one of those conferences of functional ware down someplace, I think I might go to that.

MR. SHAPIRO: That would be nice. At Arrowmont [School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN]?

MS. KARNES: Yeah, Arrowmont. The one conference I went to, I was driven by an urge to come, was that wood fire one in Iowa.

MR. SHAPIRO: Ninety-one.

MS. KARNES: Yeah, I liked that. It was fun.

MR. SHAPIRO: It was.

MS. KARNES: I should do things-did you go, too?

MR. SHAPIRO: I was there in '91, I think, and also there was a second one.

MS. KARNES: I didn't go to the second one. I think I went to-

MR. SHAPIRO: Well, it's difficult at NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts] because it's-

MS. KARNES: Oh, NCECA-I missed it. I mean, I should have gone 30 years ago.

[Ann Stannard calls from another room.]

Oh, do you have lunch ready?

MS. STANNARD: It's getting there. When you're ready. Are you ready to stop?

MS. KARNES: Yeah. And then I'll come and make the tuna fish.

MR. SHAPIRO: All right.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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