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Oral history interview with Ginny Ruffner, 2006 September 13-14

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ginny Ruffner on September 13 and 14, 2006. The interview took place at the artist's home in Seattle, Washington, and was conducted by Mija Riedel 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.

Ginny Ruffner and Mija Riedel 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

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Ginny Ruffner in the artist's home in Seattle, Washington, on September 13, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number one.

And Ginny and I were just talking before we turned on the tape about her newest project, which is due to open -

GINNY RUFFNER: Hopefully, late spring of 2007.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's a steel sculpture, an outdoor piece called *The Urban Garden*.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. It's a moving fountain, a sculpture that will take an eight-foot-diameter footprint. It would be about 25 feet tall. It's made of catalytic enameled steel. The image is a flowerpot, with tall blue flowers and leaves coming out of it, and a watering can perched up on the leaves. The watering can, every hour on the hour, will tilt and water into a hole on top of the flowerpot, down into the pot, through the pot, into the saucer, which will function as a bench in the plaza.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, we are back. And we were talking about *The Urban Garden*.

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, this is a piece that is going to be at a location in downtown Seattle. Hopefully - keep your fingers crossed - it will go in next late spring, '07. And it has an eight-foot footprint. It will be in a 900-square-foot outdoor plaza downtown. It's about 25 feet high, and, visually, it's a flowerpot with several flowers and leaves extending upward out of it. On one of the leaves there is a watering can. And every hour on the hour, the watering can will tilt and water will pour from the can into the pot, into a concealed hole, so it goes through the pot, down into the saucer, filling it up. And you'll be able to stand around the saucer. It will function as a bench.

And during the time when the water is pouring, the flowers will open. The whole thing is made out of steel, coated with enamel, and the flowers are anywhere from approximately eight feet across, a daisy kind of shape, to a stalk of bluebells that extends 19 feet above the pots, and they each open.

It will be a wonderful invitation to the city square. It will function as a sort of clock, in that it operates hourly. There will be a two-foot-square window in the back of the flowerpot itself, so that you can see the interior workings, which is what I would want to see, is how it works. And it will be a fountain in the - only in the sense that water is involved.

Let's see; what else can I tell you about that? Privately funded. As for the flowers, some of the issues are what if somebody jumps up to touch the flowers? Well, they'd have to jump up 13 feet to even touch them, but most of them are about 18 feet above the plaza level and back over the pot, so you can't reach them that way either. The paint is graffiti resistant, so hopefully, it will be able to withstand that. The water is in a relatively covered area so that that there won't be an issue with bubbles or garbage in the fountain, and it will recirculate every hour.

It's, as I said, all steel, so it's - there is no glass.

MS. RIEDEL: Which is what we were talking about originally, was how it is an interesting piece to start with, because it's about as far from lampworking as one can imagine and it really demonstrates the spectrum of your work and your career. Not only is this steel and enormous public art, but as you said, you can see its inner workings.

MS. RUFFNER: Right. Yes. I'm intrigued with how things work, the origin of things and how they developed and evolved and - so that's the kind of thing I would want to see. That influences all my work. The one common thread of my work is that it, hopefully, provokes the viewer to think. I certainly don't want to tell them what to

think about; I just want the very, very human process of thinking to be inspired.

MS. RIEDEL: And one way you seem to have done that, no matter what the media, is to juxtapose compelling images or objects.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. The viewer has the power, whether they choose to make the connection mentally or not. The objects represent some possibilities and, hopefully, start the connections going.

MS. RIEDEL: I remember reading that you liked the image of connecting the dots, and I think about your work oftentimes as putting a number of dots out there that can be connected in a number of different ways.

MS. RUFFNER: Exactly. Exactly. And it puts the creative power back in the hands of - the mind of the viewer. I mean, I am providing the opportunity, but however you want to see it, I always say - people say to me, "Oh, is this blah blah blah? Are you showing me this and that?" I say, whatever you see is there. And it is. Whatever you see is there. If it's there for you, it's there for you.

MS. RIEDEL: And you draw from such an interesting, diverse group of subjects for inspiration, from math to science to the history of art, that, really, so many different correlations that can be made.

MS. RUFFNER: Right. Yes. The things that I find evocative are things that are a bit open-ended in terms of their possibilities. Now, the one that I can just hear them arguing with me about is math. [Riedel laughs.] Mathematicians are very proud of the fact that math is black and white, and they will argue, argue, argue with me. I do not think math was discovered. I think it was invented. That's a big, huge difference, and that implies, as I believe, that it is a human construct and therefore open to interpretation and subjectivity, which the mathematicians hate. They don't want to be - they want it black and white, right/wrong, true/false. Nothing's that way. I don't care what they say.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] That piece you did, *The Space Between Integers* [*What's Really In the Space Between Integers?*, 1993] -

MS. RUFFNER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: - it makes - I love that piece and the whole concept of what could be found between integers. Why not?

MS. RUFFNER: Exactly. I wanted to ask the question, why not? Well, another thing that is kind of where we differ is my feeling about gravity. Everybody takes that for granted, but I believe it is just a massively consensual, agreed-upon force, and it's hard wired in us as humans. We cannot not believe in it; therefore it works for us.

But on both small scale and large scale, I truly like the element of subjectivity. Like in particle physics, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, and in astrophysics, and in cosmology, the Anthropic Principle of the way the universe developed. I'll explain both. They're analogous, I think. The Anthropic Principle maintains that the universe developed the way it did because we are here to see it, or to witness it, or understand it, and that it's there, and it's the way it is because it's the way we can understand. It's not an "I am the center of the universe," beating on your chest thing - it's just a matter of developing in a certain way because that is the way our mind is wired - which is with logic. Logic is king in the human thinking. But that is just the way we're hardwired; it doesn't mean logic works for everything else.

And back to the particle level of quantum mechanics - the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle - the very, very simplistic definition of it is that when you're looking at a particle, part of an atom, you can either see mass or velocity. You cannot see both. And what you'll see is what you're looking for. If you're looking for mass, you'll see mass, and the particle will have no velocity. If you're looking for velocity, you'll see velocity but no mass. It's extremely counterintuitive, but quantum mechanics is. And to me, it's the same thing, both cosmologically and particle-wise. What you see is what you get. If you see it, it's there.

MS. RIEDEL: And sometimes it's there, but you just can't see it and someone else can, which is the openness of interpretation then.

MS. RUFFNER: Well, I really like being able to - I think - I'll get it for this one, too - I think everybody is creative, and it doesn't necessarily mean that everybody's an artist, not at all, but everybody is creative. Everybody has the potential for creativity.

MS. RIEDEL: In a variety of formats, absolutely. That is part of human spirit, human nature, I think. I agree.

MS. RUFFNER: It's very, very human. Like what we know about the past, about other cultures, back to prehistoric times or beyond - all we know is their art. That's all we know. Another thing that they have in common, all the religions of the world, past and present, have creation myths, like where do we come from, where'd the world

come from. They differ widely, but the one common thread is they're about creation, creativity. So that, to me, implies that - and this is a bit of a stretch, but that is the most human thing that we can do, is create, be creative.

I don't think you want to -

MS. RIEDEL: I think that was a fabulous way to begin. [They laugh.] We've covered a wide range of what we can go into in more detail over the next few hours, but I think we managed to cover particle physics, math, and, oh, we didn't get to the history of art, but we'll get to that.

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yes, there's that.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll get to that. All right, so we'll just start with some of -

MS. RUFFNER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll start at the beginning and move on from there. So, just to cover some basics, you were born in Atlanta [Georgia], 1952?

MS. RUFFNER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: And your father was an FBI agent. Is that right?

MS. RUFFNER: Right, a career FBI agent. My mother was a typing teacher. I'm the eldest of four. My next sister is an anesthesia nurse - a nurse anesthetist. She passes gas for a living. [They laugh.] My next sister is an optician. She has her own business making safety glasses for various industries in Florida.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RUFFNER: My little brother is a lawyer, and I'm from Mars. [Riedel laughs.] I have no idea how I got to be an artist. I was just encouraged - that is to say, just not discouraged.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, as I child, I don't have an understanding of you working in a lot of different art material - you'll correct me if I'm wrong - but being, really, an avid reader.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes, two stories. One is my favorite story over the years as an artist. I came home from kindergarten one day, and I had this drawing, it was a bunch of scribbles, and my mother said, "What is this?" "Oh," I said, "well, my teacher told us to draw something useful." And mom looked at it and said, "Hmm, what is it?" I said, "It's a toilet paper factory." So my visual storytelling started early.

Let's see. There was another story I was going to tell you. Oh, well.

MS. RIEDEL: It will come over time.

Any books in particular you remember as a child that -

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, reading, that was - yeah. When I was in grade school, my parents were worried about me because I was such a bookworm. I'd go to the library every few days, almost read a book a day. And what I really loved were books about imagination - imaginary stuff like - I remember *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* [Mary Norton. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1957] and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* [C. S. Lewis. London: G. Bles, 1950] and even *Mary Poppins* [P.L. Travers. London: G. Howe, 1934]. You know, when I found that in the library, I found them before any of the movies, any of the corny songs. And when they made them into movies, I was so mad, because it was my private book and there it was made into a movie for everybody to see.

MS. RIEDEL: In a particular vision that might not have been yours at all.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. So I - may I pause this?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely.

[Audio break.]

MS. RUFFNER: I was talking about reading.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. RUFFNER: My parents were a bit worried about me because I was such a bookworm, but I loved immersing in a book. Even today I can, like, go to the grocery store, and I'll go by the newspapers and just read - even the

title, and I'll turnaround and look, and I'll feel kind of disoriented, because reading immediately takes me into another world. So I cannot read and walk, that's for sure. [They laugh.]

When I was in high school, I had my own room, and I still remember because - two things. One, my parents let me paint my furniture. I was thrilled. And two, it had a built-in bookcase. I was just ecstatic about both of those things.

MS. RIEDEL: And what did you do to the furniture? Do you remember?

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, I painted a beautiful mahogany set lime green and antiqued it and painted hippie flowers all over it. [They laugh.] It was a great testament to my parents' patience that they let me do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. That's wonderful.

Well, I thought so much about your work in context of language, because of the titles and the double meanings, the love of puns, the layers of meanings, and I also really enjoyed the way you talked about the language of decoration. So it seems that that love of reading has really permeated your visual work.

MS. RUFFNER: It has. It's translated into, well, the idea that reading can transform me and is always inspiring. You mentioned titles of things - talking about titles a bit. Artists get asked, "What is that; what did you mean by that?" I find that titles are sort of a road sign of where you might go, or what I might have been thinking about when I was creating this, and what might have been an interesting route for the viewer to follow in terms of thinking about the piece.

Also, it's because I think a lot about language. I think about it and about art history in a different way, a more sentient way, I think. And I'm thinking about, like I mentioned - language, English language - 26 little squiggles that by virtue of their arrangement can mean everything, the most abstract, elusive truth. You can inspire someone. You can communicate with others amazing information, and you can inspire others. You make somebody weep, make them feel something, incite them to riot, all by 26 little squiggles. What an incredible power. And it is basically a visual thing because to read you see, or when [you] read, you feel. But it starts out as a sensory input, and then your mind has to translate that sensory data into something that is understandable. But it starts out visual.

And also, I love - this is kind of bizarre - I love to parse sentences. I love the thought that you can construct a sentence - that there are rules, not necessarily that I like rules, but there is a prescribed way to put this kind of word with that kind of word, and that it makes it a better way to communicate if you do it in a certain way. That, I think, is just amazing to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there any other memories of your childhood? You were in Trenton, Michigan, for a while, and then in South Carolina, and then you ended up back in - you were in college in South Carolina, as well. High school -

MS. RUFFNER: No, in Georgia. I was in college in Georgia.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. RUFFNER: I attended my freshmen and sophomore year in South Carolina, and then I graduated in Georgia -

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RUFFNER: - then lived in Atlanta for 10 years before I moved out here.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were very close with your grandmother. She was an influence, wasn't she?

MS. RUFFNER: I was just talking about her with my gardener, because my gardener was planting something in the front yard called vinca minor - no, sorry, vinca major - and I was laughing because my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, whom I think I got my love of plants and my green thumb from, she had in her front yard what she called vinca "mina." She was southern. So it wasn't until I went into college that I realized it was vinca minor, not vinca "mina." [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: What was her name?

MS. RUFFNER: Virginia.

MS. RIEDEL: Virginia.

MS. RUFFNER: So I was named for her, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RUFFNER: She was pretty young when she was my grandmother. She was only 38 when I was born. So -

MS. RIEDEL: So she was lively when you were young.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes, so she was really - actually, both my grandmothers were. My paternal grandmother loved to play ragtime piano and get all her grandkids - and she had a lot of them - to dance around the piano. We'd make the floor move when we were dancing. It would be fun. Both grandmothers were nice, and that's why I like old people.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RUFFNER: Grandparents, I think, are great in that they don't have any responsibility, so they can just love you.

Can we pause?

MS. RIEDEL: It's okay.

[Audio break.]

MS. RUFFNER: I don't remember what we were talking about.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about one of your grandmothers playing ragtime and children dancing, and you were named after one your grandmothers, Virginia.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. They were both the most wonderful - I had a truly *Ozzie and Harriet* kind of upbringing. My parents are still married. Nobody was an alcoholic. Nobody beat me. They just encouraged me and loved me. And I have three siblings that are - well, my little brother was still a little brother. Even though he's in his 40s now and a lawyer, he's still a pain in the butt. Did you hear that, Al? [They laugh.] But they are a lot of fun.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. What were your parents' names?

MS. RUFFNER: Carolyn and Al.

MS. RIEDEL: Carolyn and Al. Okay.

MS. RUFFNER: So I'm Ginny Carol. I got Virginia short version and Carolyn short version. So, yes. They still live in South Carolina in Fort Mill, in that little bitty town where I went to high school.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was high school - there were no art classes in high school, were there?

MS. RUFFNER: No. We were lucky to have English. My town at that time only had 4,000 people in it, and my graduating class had 75 people in it. So it was - there's not love lost with me and the South. It's a great place to be from, but it's no place for a smart-aleck female like me; they like their women quiet and obsequious. Regardless of what they try and tell you about the new South, ho-hum, horse manure. I don't believe it. Anyway, I love being here.

MS. RIEDEL: And you came here in the mid-'80s, but we won't go there yet. When you went to college then, what were you thinking about majoring in? What was your main interest?

MS. RUFFNER: I wanted to be an art major. When I went to school, I was an art major. I was painting and drawing a lot in high school, and, you know, in high school, especially a small one like that, it's kind of like in a big family. You know, there's one that's the smart one, one that's the musical one, whatever. Anyway, I was the artistic one in my high school. I could draw a tree that looked like a tree, that kind of thing. And I was painting, so I just said that I wanted to be an artist. I had no idea what one was, but I wanted to be one. [They laugh.]

Now, when I went to school, I went in as an art major. I went to Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, my freshmen year. I went to Winthrop College in Rock Hill, South Carolina, sophomore year and then transferred to the University of Georgia [Athens] for the last two years of my undergraduate, and then I stayed and did graduate in a year.

And when I got to Georgia, I had to declare what kind of art major I wanted to be - painting, sculpture, printmaking - and I chose painting because - a couple of reasons. The main thing, I was good at it, and also I felt like it was - of all the various art programs, it was the one that was most immediate. You had immediate success in painting. You didn't have to fire the pot; you didn't have to weld the sculpture; you didn't have to run it

through the press or develop the film or anything. It was just then and there, right? So I loved the immediacy. I still paint quite a bit.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And so you went through both undergraduate and graduate school focusing completely on painting and drawing.

MS. RUFFNER: And then when I got ready to graduate from graduate school, I had - I loved art history, obviously. I had taken a lot of it. And I was trying to get more light into my paintings, so I had investigated using neon and putting that in paintings. And I took 20th century art history. That was back in the 20th century. [They laugh.] I took that probably two or three times because I loved it, because I wanted to take it. But I remember being really overwhelmed by Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass*, *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* [1915-23]. And I realized, oh, I won't need to light my paintings; I can paint on glass. Light can come through my paintings. It was an incredibly evocative piece of art that involved mental processes. If you chose to think about it, you could. And the same thing - the same reason I started painting on glass in graduate school.

Of course, as it happened, it was - I think there might have been one glassblower in the whole state. Nobody knew anything. I had to teach myself about how to drill holes, how to cut glass. People didn't know anything. So I made these constructions that were layers of glass. I hung them on the wall. They had depth to them, but they were still pictorial in the sense that you viewed them from the front. As you walked by the layers, movement would change the whole thing. But it was essentially such a painting presentation that hung on the wall that you looked at it that way.

MS. RIEDEL: And so you really had to teach yourself by trial and error how to work with glass, because there was no one even to ask, let alone to show you anything.

MS. RUFFNER: But especially in the art school. There might have been if I had searched for somebody in Atlanta. I was in Athens, and in my world there wasn't, so I taught myself. It was fun, but looking back on it, it was definitely the hard way.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] You graduated in '76?

MS. RUFFNER: Seventy-five. I did it in one year. I realized - I made a promise to myself in graduate school. The figures are amazing, like 10 years after graduation, less than two percent of art school graduates are making a living with their art. And of that two percent, only like five percent are women. So I made a promise that I would - two things - always have a studio so it made me feel guilty if I wasn't making art and, two, always do a job that required my artistic abilities. So my first job was designing posters for a couple of cheesy guys - I think they were run out of business, some kind of graphic design but I don't remember the name - but I designed posters.

And then I - but I kept doing glass after graduate school, and the girl that I worked with designing posters, she and I decided that we wanted to learn to do stained glass because, you know, it was so hot back then - it was the mid-'70s. It was very cool to do stained glass, so we decided we'd do that. We took lessons and formed a company, just the two of us. We did a couple of hysterically bad commissions like McDonald's in Hilton Head [SC] maybe? - I don't remember. God-awful stained glass. But then I went into this shopping mall in Atlanta, and there was a lampworker who had this whole entire store full of stuff that was very well made, but I didn't agree with WHAT was being made. But I thought, oh, wow, just think of the possibilities.

So I approached them for a job and they said, we only hire people who have skill, but why don't you go to our competitor and see if you can learn how. So I did go over there and they said, well, can you engrave glass? And I thought, well, engraving can't be any more than drawing, and so I said, sure. [They laugh.] And they said, well, here is the engraver and let's see what you can do. And I said, will you just give me a minute alone with the equipment and I'll figure it out? So I thought, well, I can figure out anything. I do still have enough faith in my ability to figure things out. So I just sat there and figured out how to work it and did some really cheesy little things, but it was also the Bicentennial, so anything you made with a flag in it was going to be popular.

So anyway, they hired me as an engraver and as an apprentice glassblower. I worked with them for a year, then I went back to the original guy and I said, hey, I'm skilled now, and they gave me a job. And I worked for that guy - that company - for five years. It was kind of apprenticing, and it was hard work, but that's where I learned lampwork. I went through trial by fire, but it was good education. They're still all friends. So that's where I learned lampwork. I was working there until about a year before I moved here.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm struck by the leap of faith you had, being inspired by Duchamp's work on glass, to walk into a lampworking shop and see it as potential.

MS. RUFFNER: Well, that's because that's something I do, is to see potential. It has its downfalls, believe me. [Riedel laughs.] It's no good in a personal relationship. To see potential in, say, a mate, a boyfriend, is extremely pretentious and really not good, not polite at all to say, "Oh, but you could be this and that." I mean, it's one

thing to say that to an inert lump of glass, but another thing to say to a person. [They laugh.] Yes. I think with glass you should be able to think of something it could be.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And it's interesting that you created an apprenticeship for yourself in an older European tradition, in the middle of Atlanta with local lampworkers. It went on for a year or two, right?

MS. RUFFNER: Five years.

MS. RIEDEL: Five years.

MS. RUFFNER: But I was - it was an apprenticeship in one way, and in another way I was an employee. So -

MS. RIEDEL: Do you want to say any more about early influences and mentors? You mentioned Duchamp; was there anyone else that was really inspiring to you when you were younger and getting started?

MS. RUFFNER: Just books. And I think art history was. I remember when I was in school, and for at least 10 years afterwards I had this burning question: Am I an artist? You know, no one can answer that but you. But you can call yourself an artist all you want; you could make a living making art, but does that really mean you're an artist? Now it seems moot. Now I don't worry about it. You know, I have other things to worry about, but I worried about that for years.

MS. RIEDEL: And when did that finally resolve, or did it just - one day it was no longer there?

MS. RUFFNER: You know, I don't know. I -

MS. RIEDEL: You were so busy trying to be an artist -

MS. RUFFNER: I have no idea. I really don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: The mid-'80s, were a transformational time. Your grandmother passed away. You taught at Pilchuck [Glass School, Stanwood, WA] one summer, and then, within a couple of years you relocated to Seattle, and that was really a big change on many levels.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. It was - my grandma died; I quit working at the Frabel Studio, not quite a factory but it was - I came up here to teach at Pilchuck, and then I decided a year later to move out here.

MS. RIEDEL: That was - Pilchuck was just getting started. Would you describe that?

MS. RUFFNER: Well, no, it wasn't, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: No?

MS. RUFFNER: It was - oh, was it - I think it was founded in '75.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay. So close to 10 years then.

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah. And so it was new; it was nowhere near the establishment -

[Interruption, side conversation.]

MS. RIEDEL: We'll take a little break and we'll come back to this.

[Audio break.]

Okay, so we are back, and you were talking about your experience for the first time teaching at Pilchuck.

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yes. It was not brand new, but it was in its formative years, and it was a whole lot of fun. And I taught there, I think, five or six years in a row of the same -

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A.]

- teachers because we had such a great time, group support of each other. And it was a lot of fun for us and the students.

MS. RIEDEL: Who else was teaching there then?

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, Flora Mace, Joey Kirkpatrick, Fred Tschida, and Deborah Dohne.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RUFFNER: And then were various other people that came each time, but that core group was always there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RUFFNER: I was an artist in residence at Pilchuck, I think twice, and I taught there again in '95, I think. And I decided at that time that I probably - well, I still teach a lot, but usually on small-scale lecture type thing.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: We're back, and we're just looking at the pop-up books that - Ginny's just finished the *Creative Flowering Tornado* [*Creativiy: The Flowering Tornado: A Pop-Up Gallery.* Montgomery, AL: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, 2003], and she was showing me a prototype for the new one that's going to accompany a show in L.A.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. I'm doing a series. I hope, anyway. The intention is to do a series of three pop-up books, one about - the first one's about creativity. This one, to be published, is about imagination. And that final one is about wonder, which I have no idea when that one will get published or even be written. Writing is hard. The current one has a little bit different take, because I don't want to be repeating myself.

People tend to pigeonhole you. Right now many people think I only do glass; I do these cutesy little glass sculptures. That's not even one-tenth of what I do. I write, I make public art, I paint, I do bronzes, and I garden. I do all kinds of things, so I just want keep everybody guessing. I want to keep myself guessing most of all. I don't want to get bored.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] And I'm sure we can mention, too, that you've just come back from a trip. You're getting ready for a show that's opening on the East Coast -

MS. RUFFNER: Two shows.

MS. RIEDEL: - later this month, at the end of the week.

MS. RUFFNER: At the end of the week I go back east to D.C., opening at Maurine Littleton Gallery in Georgetown. Then three days after that, I'm opening at a new museum in Virginia, the Suffolk Cultural Center. And it'll be kind of cool because I did a big bronze piece for some collectors in Norfolk a few years ago, and the show is going to consist of that piece, which is, I think, 20 feet tall.

And it will be that piece in the center of the gallery, and then around that room will be all the documentation, because it was a full year of back and forth through e-mails, digital images, the occasional site visits - lots of communication about the commissioning process. So that process will be around the room, and the object in the center. I really like that. The show is about the thinking and the making and the development of it, so I'm looking forward to that.

MS. RIEDEL: And the show in '08 that this will accompany, will this be a traveling show, too?

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. Let's see, next year - it's helpful for me to go through the sequence, and I hope you don't mind.

MS. RIEDEL: No, not at all.

MS. RUFFNER: Oh-seven - well, I have this show in D.C. and Suffolk, and then the Art Fair in Chicago in November. Then January, I have an exhibition in Palm Springs at Imago Gallery. And then in May, locally, Woodside Braseth Gallery. And hopefully, at that time, *The Urban Garden* water park fountain will be installed and dedicated. Then in November of '07, I have an installation at the Kimball Art Center, which is the art center in Park City, Utah, and a month later, in December, I'll have a show at Ochi Fine Arts in Sun Valley, Ketchum, Idaho. So it will be a busy year next year, really busy.

I'm really extremely organized, which is a good thing, so I'm already working on both the metal pieces [bronzes] and the glass pieces for the show in Palm Springs. Because my work takes so long to make, I have to figure out how many pieces I need for this show or that show. How this particular series will develop I'm working on, as well - developing what's in my mind, in my drawings into the finished sculptures.

MS. RIEDEL: It's so interesting. Even very early on, when you had just graduated from college with your master's in painting and drawing, and you were interested in glass and there was an installation with neon and fabric.

MS. RUFFNER: That was my first installation. Oh, God - I remember how excited I was to do one and how I

planned so much and how I had to get friends to help me use so many different mediums.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was in Atlanta?

MS. RUFFNER: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: With Fay Gold?

MS. RUFFNER: Fay Gold Gallery in '84 was "The Seven Stations of Intimacy." I still love that piece. I think parts of it are still in my sister's basement. [They laugh.] The thing about art, it doesn't rot. So you can see bits of my last traveling show in my backyard.

MS. RIEDEL: That's right. We were just looking at that. Well, that takes us back beautifully to the time you were transitioning out of Atlanta and relocating to Seattle. I think we were talking about that before the last ringing of the doorbell. You were teaching at Pilchuck in '84, and then you moved to Seattle in '85. It must have been so stimulating to have this extraordinary community of artists.

MS. RUFFNER: It was great. It still is great. And I adore Seattle. Number one, I think it's the most beautiful place I've ever been, and I've been everywhere, or lots of places. But number two, part of the real beauty of it is the people. It's so supportive for artists, and the artists are supportive of one another. There's not - sometimes that's not true, but there's not - I haven't experienced, anyway, meanness of spirit. I've only experienced a wonderful support of each other.

MS. RIEDEL: Really, over 20, 30 years?

MS. RUFFNER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I really can say that there's not a single person I can - a single artist I can say I am an enemy of or I hate or they aggravate me. I really can't.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

Would you describe those early years when you were first relocating? You talked about the change in light.

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yes. Well, the light was probably the most different thing, because there is so much more moisture, not in the air, but falling through the air. It's kind of - it's gray a lot. I think it's an oyster light, looks like being inside an oyster shell. If you were an oyster, what your world might look like. [They laugh.]

But the other aspect of light that I really didn't take into account is how much it changes every day in terms of the length of it. I usually get up before daybreak, but that varies from, like, 4:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., and in the wintertime it gets dark around 4:00, which is really sad, but in the summertime it stays light until 10:00. It's amazing the difference in the days, length of the days. That affects me.

MS. RIEDEL: Is there a time of the day that you are more partial to working than others, or do you work 18 hours straight, regardless?

MS. RUFFNER: Well, when you're an artist, I don't think you go to a job. It's a 24/7 kind of thing. But I find that in the morning, first thing, I have the best ideas. I can think better. A little bit of coffee and it's really true. If I eat lunch, which I don't do a lot, I'll immediately have an IQ drop; so if I'm doing something where I have to make sense, I will not eat, because it's just not good for my brain or not when I want it to behave a certain way. But morning is the best time.

MS. RIEDEL: And are there certain times of the day you like to do - certain things, the drawing versus the painting versus -

MS. RUFFNER: I'm getting to be a Sunday painter. I like to paint. There's nobody here, so I have to do it on the weekends, because my employees are here - and I should say, I don't have a big staff. I have all part-time people. I have one that comes one day a week; one that comes two days a week; one that comes three days a week. That's it, except for having the occasional person that comes in to pay bills once a month. It's not like I have a lot of people working, but having them in my space makes me unable to - well, not to think, but there's something about painting that is so intensely personal, I don't want to do it in front of anybody.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting, too, because all of your glasswork starts clear, and then the acrylic is applied later, and none of it begins as colored work.

MS. RUFFNER: No, it's - well, that -

MS. RIEDEL: Well, in the early -

MS. RUFFNER: The lampwork, right; that's true. The bronze and glass has integral color.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RUFFNER: But the lampwork, yeah, it's there, it's painted. I don't want to spend that time waiting for it to fire or engraving it so I can move color around. I want to paint it now.

MS. RIEDEL: We should talk a little bit about the early work - the very first goblets and chalices, and then on to the dancing boxes - before you even came to Seattle.

MS. RUFFNER: The reasons that those things took the format that they did is they were totally and completely a reflection of my skill level. As my skills got better, my work changed, both in the painting - being able to paint. I can paint photorealistically, but I wasn't always able to. It's a skill that develops. So it was the skill of lampworking, so my earlier pieces were what I could do with what I had, which is a very sad thing, I'm finding out, because, you know, there's a, perhaps, an urban, a southern myth about people after the war eating dirt, and of course - I say the war. In the South they don't tell you which war it is, but, of course, they're afraid to. What they call it is the War of Northern Aggression.

But anyway, after the Civil War, the South was really poor, so they did eat dirt, and a lot of southern cuisine, like turnip greens and poke salad, is just weeds, just cooked weeds. While it's wonderful stuff, but it came from making do with what you had. It's just another form of creativity.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RUFFNER: You've got this; what are you going to do with it?

MS. RIEDEL: Your work really changed in the mid-'80s. It went from abstract to narrative. It was the combination of colorful painting and the lampworking skills into -

MS. RUFFNER: Yes, well, my whole life changed. I moved here. I wasn't working for anybody but me. My personal life changed, and for me to be out of the South - you know, I'm the first person to leave the South on either side of my family, for generations, so it was a real good escape celebration. [Laughs.]

I realized that I do tend to make work that's extremely personal. I think my doing that - it is, of course, extremely universal, my being personal, but making work that was narrative and celebratory only made sense in looking back on that now, because I was in a narrative point in my life. It was not abstract anymore. It was, "Okay, you're here; you're living. This is your life; what are you going to do, smart aleck?" And it was colorful because I was feeling colorful. I was feeling celebratory.

MS. RIEDEL: There's a wonderful quote, which I'm sure you've heard many times, but let me see if I can find it, because it describes this transition time I think so well, in '86: "That's when I knew my work needed an attitude adjustment. So I walked into the studio and slapped all their faces and began to make user-friendly sculptures that wear too much eye makeup but really know how to have a good time in a bar. They don't stand on pedestals anymore; they dance on tabletops. They keep me up at night carousing. Now that I've dressed them up, they think they can go anywhere, especially if Marcel drives." Would you talk about that time?

MS. RUFFNER: [Laughs] I forgot about that. Well, let's see. I tend to view sculpture as having a soul, as well as having - perhaps it's anthropomorphizing, I don't know. But I like it; it's the way I choose to live my life. It works for me. I was enjoying my life. I was doing things I have always wanted to do. Why not, I think. When are you going to do it?

MS. RIEDEL: That's right. I think that was *The History of Shoes Compared to Postmodern Architecture* [1986]. That was the first piece, wasn't it, that was in this new vein?

MS. RUFFNER: I think so, yes; I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: And then, all at the same time, there were public art projects and the Beauty series, and then the still lifes began, right, in the late '80s?

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. You know it better than I do. [They laugh.] It all runs together. I have to read the slide labels to remember what year.

MS. RIEDEL: The Beauty series strikes me as so significant, for multiple reasons.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. Well, I say this a lot, but I've studied and thought about beauty, its use and meaning and how it changes, like, over time, over cultures. And this was brought home to me when I went to Taiwan, maybe two years ago. They were showing me around the museum in Taipei, which is, as they will tell you, the reason

that mainland China has not crushed Taiwan, because they have this museum with all these fabulous treasures in it and China wants that, so they are keeping Taiwan as part of them and being very careful.

But anyways, so they have all these incredible treasures. There are amazing Paleolithic carvings that are so sophisticated. They're phenomenal, amazing. And then the most interesting thing there - I love this story - they showed me their prized possession. It was a jade carving - about a foot tall - of this concubine, I guess, that this one emperor had, and he almost lost his - he may have lost his whole empire over her. And she was considered the most beautiful woman of her time - incredibly beautiful, I mean, enough for him to lose the empire. And so they showed me this carving. She looks like a panda bear - [they laugh] - which just shows me again that beauty is extremely subjective - extremely.

Even, you know, well, I can go off on beauty. You know, you've probably seen that psychological composite of faces. People will ask which are the most beautiful eyes, nose, mouth, and then they put them all together based on the mold, and it's the most bland - I mean, it's the most bland, beautiful, Miss America-type; not interesting at all. And it made me realize another thing: what we find as beautiful is what we know. And that shows the power of incumbents. We know them so we want them. The power of name brands - we know them, so we want them.

I think it's that because our mind is our most human attribute. We like to feel our mind working, and when you know something, it is a quality of mind. Your mind possesses that thing. Your mind is familiar with that thing.

You probably heard that thing about if - it's an old psychology trope - that if something is totally alien, it cannot be beautiful, and that which we find beautiful is something that we don't find totally alien. This is mined to no end in horror films. It can be really scary, and the reason is that the knowing aspect is subverted. So I think, again, it's the mind; it's the human mind.

MS. RIEDEL: How does that correlate or tie into your continual experimentation into lesser-known areas?

MS. RUFFNER: Like what?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, for example, discussing beauty as it has to be something that's known; it's recognizable; it's familiar. But a lot of art - a lot of art-making, as we're discussing it, is you're constantly inventing or experimenting or taking your mind someplace unfamiliar. Do you think about that consciously?

MS. RUFFNER: I'm doing it in a way that takes me and the viewer down the experiential path step by step, using things like recognizable objects. Or you can start out and use juxtaposition, which makes you pay attention to the object. Then we say, "Oh, look at that with that. That's interesting."

The last time, I think, in art that there was really something new was Abstract Expressionism - and it was hated when it came out. It was 20 years after that got started when people began to see and know that they could love it. People hated it - especially hated it. When something is outside of our "known," with aware looking, we can possess it with our minds. Once we know it, then we will not be afraid of it. Only then we can label it beautiful.

But back to my Beauty series, I wanted to anthropomorphize, make beauty a figure. Wingless, headless, no - headless, armless, winged - kind of like the *Nike of Samothrace* with the toga. And she/he had adventures through art history, like surfing through a still life and all kinds of other adventures that beauty, as living being, would have, such as how we relate to architecture.

MS. RIEDEL: So she became a vehicle to explore periods in art history, concepts in art history, concepts in science, and from a different -

MS. RUFFNER: For me to say - for me to go on and on, you can tell I tend to be opinionated and have a lot to say. Whether or not it's valuable, I do have a lot to say. So the Beauty was, as you were saying, exactly the right way to explore all those.

MS. RIEDEL: She also had a lot to do with a feminist re-examination of art history and art in general. Would you like to talk about the feminist aspects of Beauty or the still life series? That's been a significant issue on many levels of your life.

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, it's - I don't think I really, truly realized how much of a feminist - how much I was interested in women's equality until I moved out here and I realized how bad I had had it and how much better it was here. But, yes, I find that if you go up and slap somebody and say, this is what's right, you're not going to be nearly as effective as if you wiggle your fingers, say, I want to show you something, tell them a joke, make them laugh and show via analogy or some other visual references - it's amazing. You'll get a lot farther in saying what you want to say, making a difference.

MS. RIEDEL: A little entertainment, a little bait and switch. [They laugh.] It's just putting the dots out there and eventually people can make the connections.

MS. RUFFNER: Exactly right. You give them a whole bunch of dots; they can make any connection. There's no wrong.

MS. RIEDEL: I was thinking about all the different adventures that Beauty had. She was embodied as the vices and the virtues. She showed up as Pandora and Athena. She was really a wonderful vehicle for you to explore, through narrative imagery, what was significant to you at the time.

MS. RUFFNER: You mentioned Pandora and Eve and Athena. That piece, I thought, was pretty clever on my part because she was a figure lying down. One Beauty is coming out of the head; one Beauty is coming out of the side; one Beauty is coming out of the feet. Athena was supposed to have sprung from the head of Zeus. Eve was supposed to come from a rib of Adam. And Pandora was supposed to come out somebody's foot, I can't remember who. But so all these mythological women coming out of man? Give me a break. They had it backwards. Man comes out of female. I don't want to get started on that one.

MS. RIEDEL: That actually makes me think about the importance of - you've talked about how important it is for artists to have mentors, and the disservice it is -

MS. RUFFNER: I had? [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, the disservice it is for young artists, especially young female artists, to study art history in books dominated by male artists.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes, when I was in school, I don't think there were any female teachers - maybe in the interior design department, but not in painting. And the men were kind of afraid of women because they didn't - you know, sexual harassment. They really didn't want to get close to female students because they were afraid of that. So there was a lack of mentorship, and there still is, I think. There are not that many female artists, and it's a shame. There are, I think, in undergraduate art school, 50 percent female - no, there's about 80 percent female. In graduate school it flips: 20 percent female. And I don't know the instructors. I don't know what the percentage is in the professors, painting professors or actual studio art professors, that are female. It's still an old boys' club, unfortunately.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've talked about a feminist sensibility that is different in art, a connection versus macho, solo - I'm trying to remember what quote that was -

MS. RUFFNER: Oh yeah, I'm trying to remember that, too. I believe there is misogyny implicit in people thinking that you work alone. The misogyny influence in that is that it was a, I think, romantic era trope, the sole, tortured genius, alone. And again, it was just horse manure. Maybe there were a few tortured alcoholics back then, but it just is totally misogynistic. It implies that one works alone. One does not exist alone, and depending on what kind of art you do, it's more or less collaborative. You need help. If you do more work, you get more help. And there's nothing wrong with that. I have real hard time with the rule that if there is more than one person working in your studio, it's not your art. Bull - horse manure.

I liken that to the architect. There's a building, a Frank Gehry building here. Well, everybody knows it's a Frank Gehry building, but I guarantee he didn't build, touch one thing while it was being built. And that doesn't mean that it's not his just because somebody else built it. The art is the *idea*, totally and completely, and I know I'll get it for that, too. But the art is the idea. The manifestation of it is valuable and one of the wonderful things you can do with your hands. But it's the idea that is the art.

MS. RIEDEL: You've done so many collaborations. And then you've done a lot of solo work. Of note, in traditional glassworking, especially in Italy, everyone worked in teams. It made more sense. So the whole idea of working solo, particularly in glass, doesn't have a lot of historical precedence. Would you talk about your working process in the studio?

MS. RUFFNER: Well, specifically, the studio, now I have, as I mentioned, my helpers. Because of the [car] accident I had 15 years ago, there are things that I cannot do. At one point I did everything. So what? I mean, does that make it any more valid? I mean, you can teach a monkey to sandblast. That doesn't make it any more valuable whether you sandblast it or not. The people I work with, they - I'll tell them what to do. Like, I want this image here, this color, this size, this media. I draw the outline. And then they'll come back and do it. It's like if I wanted a field of black and white checks, I don't think it's particularly required that I do that.

I have some wonderful, wonderful people I work with. I value them and honor their creativity.

MS. RIEDEL: But you worked in collaboration before the accident, too, because there is -

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yes. When you do public art, you have to work collaboratively. As a matter of fact, you're hired often to be on a design team to design the whole project. So you have to work collaboratively. As you said, glassblowing is a collaborative process when you're doing furnace work. When you're doing lampworking, it's not such a collaborative process. It can be. It just doesn't have to be. But I have worked collaboratively. I love to work collaboratively because you get to interact with somebody else's imagination. It's a wonderful thing to be able to talk to somebody, see how they view something, or their ideas about something. What a wonderful gift to be able to access that, to be able to hear that, understand it.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems that you really like to work in different formats and different styles and different collaborations, or solo, from very small work to very large work, from solo to very specific collaborations, from public art to objects. You're routinely -

MS. RUFFNER: I love challenges. I just love challenges. And I think doing something I've never done before is a challenge. So I really like doing new things. The whole, "Oh, what about this and what about that?" is just wonderful for me.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, we're going to just wind up today's talk with a little discussion about the whole language of decoration and the importance of beauty and decoration and work. And then we'll pick up tomorrow with everything else.

MS. RUFFNER: Okay. Yeah, I think my love of language over the years has caused me to think about it more like a visual sculpture of words. There are many, many different languages. I mean languages of shape and color. Say, for example, a red hexagon - a red hexagon on the side of the road, everybody knows it's a stop sign. It's a shape. The language of shape and color are talking to you.

And there are other languages, like body language, and verbal emphasis and intonation. You can yell something or you can, just by the way you say something, make it a question or an indictment. Those are all languages; they're all messages communicated.

Part of the language of beauty is that it conveys status. In other words, ornamentation, in a certain way, indicates that it is ecclesiastical or royalty or a season of the year, a holiday. Those are all languages.

There are so many unspoken languages, particularly of shape. For example, I have been doing these pieces that are easels with a frame - on the framed image on the easel. Now, of course the image tells you something, but the fact that it's framed tells you that it is art. The fact that it's on the easel echoes that, but also it can be a method of display and can tell you to pay attention to it. That is an unspoken language of shape, of function. The language of beauty can convey status, age, geography, all kinds of things.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've really championed that, even though beauty in decoration is often discussed pejoratively these days. You've championed that as an important part of creativity. And humor enters through that door.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes, that is another language to use, yeah, uh-huh. Humor is a part of it. As I mentioned earlier, you could teach something so much more validly with humor by just engaging that less stressful part of the mind, making somebody laugh. And play is - I can't even say how important that is.

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe we should start with that tomorrow - that serious/silly concept.

MS. RUFFNER: Because it's also getting pretty noisy.

MS. RIEDEL: The clanging of the pipes. Okay, we will end this for today.

MS. RUFFNER: No, that's not pipes. It's a glass thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? It sounds like steel.

MS. RUFFNER: No, he is taking glass parts from in there right outside the door, the last cabinet. Do you see all of the balls and parts?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RUFFNER: He's using parts out of there to put on, to tie onto the sculptures.

MS. RIEDEL: Glass. It's interesting that you talk - there is a fragility to it, but there is a strength, and it sounds like steel.

MS. RUFFNER: You know, in ideal conditions, it's stronger than steel. In ideal conditions, which never exist. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you so much. We'll pick this up tomorrow.

[Audio break.]

This is Mija Riedel interviewing Ginny Ruffner at the artist's home and studio in Seattle, Washington, on September 14, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number two.

When we stopped yesterday, we said we would begin today with the concept of serious/silly.

MS. RUFFNER: Okay. [Inaudible.] I have a couple of things. I detest the word "whimsy," when people say that, "Oh, it's so whimsical." Horse manure. It's very serious - just because it might be brightly colored. Whimsy to me implies that there is very little intention of forethought, and I really disagree. It is very intentional, very thought out. And there is - it's not a whim, in the sense that that's an important thing.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Ginny Ruffner at the artist's home studio in Seattle, Washington on September 14, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number three.

Okay, so -

MS. RUFFNER: So we're going to start with serious/silly.

Oh, yeah, I really detest the label of "whimsical" applied to my art, because, to me, the word "whimsy" implies lack of intention and somehow lack of forethought, lack of seriousness. A whim is something that's not serious and usually done rather capriciously. None of those words apply to my work. It may be - it's called that, I think, often because it has recognizable imagery and bright colors sometimes. Those things are very easy to characterize that way, but it's not - it is not whimsical.

It may be seriously - may be serious/silly. What I mean by that is that I think the concept of play is important in the work because of all of the things that play implies. If you truly think about it, in order to play, you have to be willing to risk. And to be silly, one of the things you have to risk is to be vulnerable. And for me, I think art-making requires that. If you make good art, you have to be vulnerable. And that takes a lot of courage, I think. And so I never want to downplay anybody's work by calling it whimsical. That, to me, is an insult.

It is not whimsical - but serious/silly, in other words, invites the viewer to perhaps let down their defenses for a minute and believe or feel or think whatever. Also, serious/silly is letting those defenses down and being vulnerable, being open to all kind of other transformative life experiences, I think.

I think there is nothing wrong with humor in art, either, because it's one of the best ways to teach. By making something funny, it makes it not as confrontive [sic], and one learns it better, quicker. Also, my main point, as I said, because it's not confrontive [sic], it doesn't put you on the defensive quite as quickly.

And being funny, I think, requires a bit of intelligence. Say, for example, in wordplay, a pun - to make a pun you have to know how the word is spelled. You have to know the meaning of it and the meaning of the pun. You have to understand the relationship of the two. And it's a highly sophisticated linguistic understanding to be able to make a good pun, or even a corny one. Humor is the same way. Things that we find humorous are often twists on things - things viewed a little bit differently. And to do that, you have to know how something is and then be able to twist it slightly.

Of course there's the kind of humor that is laughing at another's misfortune, but I don't like that kind of humor. And it's not news, the healing value of humor.

MS. RIEDEL: The healing?

MS. RUFFNER: Yes. On a physiological level, laughing is a desirable thing. I know that some artists make art that points out inequities or heavy, serious things like that, and that's fine - it's not what I want to do at all. I figure, why should I try and show people how awful life is? Life does it a heck of a lot better than I ever could.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. RUFFNER: And that is a kind of art that I really don't have much use for.

This was going somewhere.

MS. RIEDEL: We were going to then transition into the sacred quality that also comes with humor -

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: - and the whole concept of the trickster or jester.

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, I think - well, I should start out with what I think. I'm very idealistic when it comes to art. And I think art changes lives and can be really transformative if you let it. It can make life worth living. It does for me. It can be a really wonderful thing, but only if you let it. The question, what is art - anything can be art, depending on how you view it. Your eyes and your mind make art. It can be a lump of clay, but if your eyes input the data and your mind comes back with, oh, that is a wonderful piece of Ming dynasty porcelain, then bing, it's art.

And it's not anything that the piece did; it's your interpretation of it. So the power is the viewer's to make anything art just by the method of perception. Let's see; I'm losing track.

Oh, yeah, I believe that art can change lives. That's a huge responsibility. Oh, one other thing, if you're an artist, if you have the courage enough to call yourself an artist, you have to damn well be ready to take that responsibility, because art can cause wars. It has in the past. Art can define who is the king, who is the savior, or whatever. You know, art can really change history. It always has. You have to be willing, if you want to call yourself an artist. If you have the gift of being able to make art, you have that responsibility to do it, I think. I really do think it's a huge responsibility and a huge gift.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think of the piece you did at the Security Pacific Gallery [Seattle, WA], just the playful quality of attaching wings to the exterior of a building [*Bronze Wings*, 1990]. Do you know the piece I'm talking about?

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: There is something very playful about that, something ethereal and uplifting on many levels.

MS. RUFFNER: When I do public art, I try and think of what the meaning of the building, the site, what is the intention, use of, and perhaps the unintended uses, might be, what the site's history is, its past, present, and future. Because I view the world - everything - as being a more sentient being. I think the building may have the desire to be ornamented or celebrated or whatever. And that one in particular, that was a gallery, a corporate gallery, which is a bit of a contradiction in terms, but it was a wonderful gesture of a corporation to have a gallery and to be willing to put public art on it.

So I thought, well, there is something wonderful going on in here. I want to signify to everybody going by that this is a place where different kind of stuff happens - and that is the reason that I put wings on the outside of the building. And that dovetails quite nicely in the iconography, because for me wings, which I have used a lot, have always symbolized transcendence. A definition of wings is that wings lift somebody up or something up. They make you able to fly. What can be more transcendent than that?

So on my public art - because it is public art and it's not usually in a museum or a gallery or art collection, I try to be more understandable. And wings for transcendence is one easily understood symbol. In other public art projects, as well as my glass sculpture, I have used hands to signify the artist's input.

I wanted to say something about the art and craft argument - ask me again, but that's another topic.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. RUFFNER: I use hearts, which can be romantic or it can be more of a soul kind of thing. Pencils to signify the actual bit of art-making - colored pencils. Let's see, what else do I use?

MS. RIEDEL: The snakes.

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yes, snakes because - well, of course, in the biblical sense they have a huge role that is quite interesting. They are really cool to look at and move, and they are the most perfect graphic creature; they're just a line. It's a wonderful element to use. So it's both functional in terms of making sculptures stand up as well as being meaningful, containing meaning.

I can't remember -

MS. RIEDEL: Well, dice and fish and architecture.

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yeah, fish is Seattle. Dice is a chance to change your life. Who was it? - Mick Jagger - who

said, "The dice are always rolling." And what was the other one?

MS. RIEDEL: Architecture?

MS. RUFFNER: Architecture is because I have done a lot of public art, which has made me - forced me to be conversant with architectural terms and architects. One of the honors I'm proudest of is honorary member of the AIA [American Institute of Architects]. That was really cool. It was a license to a wear a bow tie. [They laugh.]

And that can lead right into architecture. There are some buildings that you can go in and you feel the space; you just *feel* it. If you're aware of it, it really affects you. Similar, I think, to the reason that sculpture is so intriguing. We are a 3-D entity in space. Sculpture is a 3-D entity in space. You know, many people can't walk by a mirror without looking in? I think the reason is the eternal question, who am I? When you run across another 3-D object in space, like sculpture, you sense some kind of simpatico. It's totally subconscious, unconscious. And I think also with architecture you really are aware of the fact that you are a 3-D object within this space. You are aware of it, but it's not on a conscious level.

This is a part of what I do in installations. Because they are larger than you, they can't be ignored. And typically, when you go into an installation, you become aware of your own being, kinesthetically; you're aware of your own movement in space because you are in an art space.

In that way, architecture inspires me. It inspires me to be aware of things on a different level.

But I also find that my friends inspire me, which is what kindness is.

I'm primarily inspired by reading, because when I read, I can think about and say, "Well, what if?" For example, I was reading *The Botany of Desire* [Michael Pollan. New York: Random House, 2001], and there was one line in there - I may have mentioned it yesterday - about - well, in the chapter on spinach that they - was it spinach?

MS. RIEDEL: Potatoes, maybe?

MS. RUFFNER: Potatoes, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I know the book.

MS. RUFFNER: - that they have put an enzyme in; it's called NewLeaf. They put the enzyme in the potatoes, and when a certain kind of bug ate it, their insides would turn to mush because the enzyme in the plant - it was genetic engineering. Well, they have since then taken it off the market. It was just a bit too, too - to have a pesticide in the plant itself. But when it was talking about that, it was also mentioning they were doing all kinds of research, including research in putting walrus DNA in tomatoes to make them frost-proof. It was just, oh, what? - 10 more lines in the whole book. And it blew me away because we are not talking cross-pollination; we are talking between species - between fauna - I mean, we're talking between kingdoms. And that was just phenomenal to me.

So I think this entire series, this Aesthetic Engineering series, really came out of just thinking about that one line. And what if you could cross an emotion with a flower? What if you could cross the sky with a flower? I've been making pieces like that because I love what-if questions. The things I read in the news inspire me also.

I have the oddest reaction when I go to a museum and see a painting exhibit. If it's a good exhibit, I can always tell, because I want to come home and paint - not paint anything like it, just have the activity of painting. It's a real feeling, desire in me that's provoked by that.

MS. RIEDEL: Any exhibits come to mind that you saw recently that provoked that?

MS. RUFFNER: God, I would have to think hard.

MS. RIEDEL: Or in the past?

MS. RUFFNER: I think - I went down to that LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] opening. I can't remember what the exhibit was that was in the big gallery. I think it was the [Gustav] Klimt exhibit ["Gustave Klimt: Five Paintings from the Collection of Ferdinand and Adele Blochbauer." April 4- June 30, 2006].

MS. RIEDEL: That actually ties in nicely, too, with the idea of mentioning [Paul] Klee and [Wassily] Kandinsky, and the use of color and line and rhythm.

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And how about I come back to inspiration, too, but Klee and Kandinsky - they can kind of be inspirations; they are inspiring, but only little parts of - I mean, they do inspire me to paint, but what is inspiring is all the reading. I have lots of books, art books. I look at them all the time. And I'll look at it

and think, God, what a beautiful line, what a beautiful wash of color. You know, it could be just the choice of the printing ink, but it works for me. [They laugh.] And it's elements in those pieces that I find really inspiring.

And also, besides what I read - I mentioned my friends who I talk to and what we talk about. There are two people that recently - not that recent - maybe in the past eight or 10 years - that I have enjoyed, extremely, talking to, just talking to them as friends, enormously thought provoking, which, of course, leads to art for me.

One is Tom Robbins, the writer, who is a friend, and when he was writing *Skinny Legs and All* [New York: Bantam Books, 1990], he would call me and read to me every day what he had written. And that was really inspirational, just talking with him. He's got a great point of view.

And also Alvy Ray Smith, who is kind of the father of computer graphics. Maybe five years ago, maybe more - six or seven - we had a long e-mail discussion. I was asking him to explain how color works with a computer. Do you know the paint bucket on your graphic program?

MS. RIEDEL: Vaguely.

MS. RUFFNER: He invented that. But anyway, he is really smart and he knows a lot of the stuff that I don't know. And he is really good about being able to talk to me and tell me. So we had a long, involved e-mail conversation.

MS. RIEDEL: Didn't you - about 20 years ago - do a collaborative painting show with Tom Robbins?

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that work?

MS. RUFFNER: I painted it - mostly - but he thought it up - mostly.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. RUFFNER: It was fine. It was - I still have some of those at his house. It was - collaborative painting is hard at best. I did a lot of it, and he came back and he did really good details. And we talked about how it's beautiful but hard to collaborate.

So, let's see -

MS. RIEDEL: Any thought about how your sources of inspiration have changed over the years? It seems like the reading has been consistent throughout.

MS. RUFFNER: Reading, yes, is consistent, and science is consistent. I read a lot in science; that's a lot of what I read. My interest in that has not waned; it's increased. I would say I used to do a lot of work about the affairs of the heart, like boyfriends and stuff - well, I won't say it's not of interest; it's just not where I am right now. It just seems like there are other things that I'd rather make work around.

Let's see, how else does it change? The Balance series that I made when I was learning to walk again, those pieces are a little bit small, because I could carry them around while I was in the wheelchair. Typically, they're a figure, either a martian, or a cat, or a fox - dressed in a black-and-white striped T-shirt. And the reason is those three species are totally nonhuman, and yet we consider them smart. I don't know why, but we do. And wearing a black-and-white striped T-shirt because that is a kind of classic Italian glassblowing uniform. And they were doing various adventures of balance. But they all were typically smaller, so that I could handle them better.

MS. RIEDEL: That series had to do originally just with the very physical concept of balancing, walking, learning to walk again, but then it grew into the metaphorical connotations of balance.

MS. RUFFNER: Right, like acrobats and balancing collaborations, stuff like that. It was a little bit more direct in terms of its meaning - less abstract. I can walk now, so I don't make those anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, though, because at the same time you were doing the Balance series, you were doing the Patterns of Thought series, which was very abstract.

MS. RUFFNER: Yes, yes and no. Balance is a physical, body thing; Pattern of Thought is mental. They were related in terms of learning.

Patterns of Thought was a series of vessellike shapes with balls that were patterned and brightly colored.

MS. RIEDEL: A vast array of colors and patterns and textures.

MS. RUFFNER: If you analyze it, what is pattern? This is really pertinent in terms of beauty: pattern is a repeated motif which implies learning, because in order to repeat something, you have to know it. So the mind learns something, is involved. We were talking yesterday about beauty in the composite of the Miss America face.

Symmetry is considered beautiful, and symmetry is a real buzzword in both particle physics and astrophysics. Symmetry is a repeated motif. And pattern is as well. It has to be symmetrical if it's repeated - which defines it as pattern rather than just a picture of something. It becomes a pattern if it's more than one.

MS. RIEDEL: Beauty is a through-theme in your work, really from the start, and it's just deviations of that vehicle for so many different things, from exploring art history and psychological ideas about beauty to physics now. It's interesting how it recurs over and over again.

MS. RUFFNER: It's so intriguing - what is beauty? Why do we want it? It just constantly intrigues me that if something is beautiful, that makes it desirable. But then what is beauty? It's so different. Beautiful in a banana is totally different from beautiful in a diamond or a person - it's different for a cat. Each one has a different kind of beauty, and yet, pretty much, it's common to know what is considered beautiful in, say, a person. And yet it changes so dramatically from culture to culture and age to age, to geography, gender - it's consensual and it's objective at the same time.

Let's see what we need to talk about - dealers?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, and also travel. The other thing too, is - do you feel happy with what we said about iconography? Frame is also a new element that has come up.

MS. RUFFNER: Frames are - let's see, a trope, a motif, to indicate "art" because when you put a frame around anything, you are saying it is separate from the rest of reality, and the implication is, "Look at me." And often it's art, but not necessarily. Say, for example, you can frame a diploma. And that basically says, look at me; I have status -

[END TAPE 2 SIDE A.]

- but if you take that same framed diploma and hang it in the middle of a gallery exhibition, it becomes art; it becomes a part of the exhibition just because of context.

That's the other thing that I wanted to mention, that beauty is context.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think of the room right here, which, to me, is a room constructed from frames. The windows are all different sizes, framing the garden. The opposite wall is all different, huge gilt mirrors, which reflect the garden. The room itself drops down to the level of the garden. It's walking into the whole metaphor about frames, actually.

MS. RUFFNER: Good thinking. I like that, yeah, and it's framing the garden, too.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's architecture.

MS. RUFFNER: It's all the garden. Yeah, yes - everything.

MS. RIEDEL: [They laugh] Yeah, it's like walking into one of your sculptures.

MS. RUFFNER: I have often been told that coming into my house is like walking into my head or my sculptures.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it is. [Laughs.] It's a wonderful place to hang out. There's lots of food for thought. And the juxtapositions of everything in the house -

MS. RUFFNER: Well, that makes it more interesting, I think. I like collections. If there is more than one object, if you put them together so that people can see there's more than one - that makes a collection. And if you juxtapose it with something, then it makes you pay attention.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, like the shelves in your library. On one shelf are the two sections of beauty, Greek goddesses, and above them is that incredible coiled rattlesnake. The juxtaposition of those two is extreme - both images that have occurred throughout your work - and then on the shelf below them are three statues of *The Thinker*.

MS. RUFFNER: Well, maybe thinking lets you know that beauty can be a snake.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, I have lots of stuff; that's for sure.

MS. RIEDEL: It's very vivid, very rich. The mind just begins to run immediately once one walks in the front door. [Laughs.]

MS. RUFFNER: Well, mine does, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Shall we talk about dealers or travel?

MS. RUFFNER: Sure. Sure. Let's see, travel. I've taught in Japan, Australia, France, Taiwan, Italy. I can't remember anywhere else.

MS. RIEDEL: Any of those places that were somehow extraordinary or pivotal for you?

MS. RUFFNER: You know, when I taught in Australia, I went on a tour - I figured, well, I'm down there; I might as well look around. I went to Bali, Bangkok, Hong Kong. And I realized in that trip - that was, I think, '88 or '89 - I realized that one of my favorite cities of all was Bangkok, and it was not only because it was beautiful and really tuned into decoration, but also it was the only place that I've been that I didn't run into somebody I knew.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] That says quite a bit.

MS. RUFFNER: It was fun. I love Venice, and that is not all because of the glass - it has nothing to do with - is because the - God, I can't think of the book that was written about that, but Marco Polo was from Venice, which is kind of appropriate, I think. And Umberto Eco. Garcia Marquez wrote a great book about Venice. And then having everybody be a pedestrian, having the roads be water, is just a wonderful twist on things.

I also love Bangkok because it has a lot of roads there of water, and it has these incredible jeweled temples that are one building, then the, I think, royal palace or temple compound that's covered with broken pottery shards. It's really amazing. And, of course, the - then everything there - people in saffron robes. The colors are quite exquisite.

Oh yeah, Ireland. I was an artist in residence at Waterford, and I really loved all the green and all the lushness, and the shape of the topography with the rolling hills - really beautiful.

I worked in Japan. Otaru. They call it the Venice of Japan. They have gondolas and canals that are pretty funny. They also have - it's a glass center, and they have glassblowing. I taught there. That was quite amusing, just in terms of cross-cultural aspect. But it was beautiful.

I have one - well, not one, but one image that comes to mind right now is near Hokkaido, in the northern part of the country, in Hokkaido, or Otaru - I can't remember which is a port, and it's actually kind of visually similar to Seattle and L.A. - the water. But I remember seeing one - what's it called? - area where they have lots of ships that was where they unloaded all the cars. And there was a whole huge parking lot, probably 700 cars, and they were all white, and I started thinking, oh, that's interesting. I looked around, and you go to a parking lot and there would be 95 percent white cars. And it's because why? It's for good luck. And you don't want bad luck with a car. It was quite interesting - another language - language in cars.

I went into a parking garage and they had at the door, at the gate - instead of taking a ticket out of this arm, they had a life-sized doll that would bow to you when you take the ticket and say - [speaks in Japanese]. This animated doll in a parking garage. It was great. And they had - when you cross the street, and you know when you - how people who can't see, they will go beep, beep, beep when the light's green. Well, this corner, when it was green to go west, they played rock and roll, and when it was green to go east, they played Japanese music. It was incredible. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's hysterical.

MS. RUFFNER: And in Taiwan it was wonderful. They had a three-story Hello Kitty store. [Riedel laughs.] It was just amazing. And the cool thing about that was the people who were shopping there, they were the coolest-looking hipsters you would ever want to see - not little kids. These were all 20-somethings, dressed to the nines. It was great.

So I have these wonderful images of different places, and many times I've mentioned the people in saffron robes. Well, you know, it's - I don't know which religion it is, but they're not supposed to touch women -

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RUFFNER: - which of course brings out the devil in me. So I would walk toward a whole group of them and they'd scatter like you wouldn't believe - [they laugh] - because they didn't want to touch me. I know it was devilish. That was an image from Bangkok.

Another cool thing, there was a thing in Paris, or - yeah, I was teaching in the northern part of France, but we flew into Paris and rode the train. And once you were in Paris, you came by the pest control exterminator shop. They had - no kidding - they had rats hanging by the tail in the window, probably at least 30 of them hanging by their tail in the window. It was - oh, I have a picture of it. And then the cool thing was - right next door there was a bakery, so when you stood there, you could see [the] *boulangerie* with loaves of bread on your right, and [on] the left you see rats hanging in the window. It was just too strange.

MS. RIEDEL: That is wild. They're taxidermied [sic] rats hanging there by their tails?

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, yeah, it was just wild.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a little like a Chinese restaurant with the ducks.

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, yeah. I show a slide of that and a slide of a restaurant in Chinatown with an identifying sign out front that says "F-O-O K-I-N-G." [Riedel laughs.] I took a picture of the sign - it's pretty cool.

Oh, dealers. Dealers. You know, a lot of people have bad things to say about dealers. I don't. I am a firm believer in the galleries tradition because - mainly because I think the gallery earns their 50 percent, by me not having to listen to, "Oh, that doesn't go with my couch." "Do you have that a little bit smaller?" It's art, for God's sake. I don't want to hear that. So they earn their 50 percent, dealing with that. And I have galleries that have been representing me since, like, '85 - a long, long time - I'm very loyal.

MS. RIEDEL: Fay Gold [Gallery, Atlanta, GA] and Heller Gallery [New York, NY], you've shown with them, and Maurine Littleton -

MS. RUFFNER: Definitely.

MS. RIEDEL: Some of them you've shown with for years and years. Your exhibition history is nonstop, and I see there are also new ones that come and go. Have you always found the relationships to be satisfactory?

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, there is only one that I can recall - and I don't even know where she is anymore - was somebody opened a gallery - I believe it was in Florida - who sold a couple pieces and never paid me. But I believe in karma, even if I'm not there, but she's going to get it. [Riedel laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Have you sensed how your - has the reception to your work changed over the years noticeably? Anything particular?

MS. RUFFNER: People have been more interested in it, I think. That's hard to say, you know, because I'm in a different position in terms of my work than, say, a dealer is. Somebody like Maurine Littleton might be good to ask that question, because I've had a long, critical relationship with her. But I really don't know. I mean, I see maybe a little bit more press, so I think it's been better received. And I know that my work keeps evolving. You can see it's all my work, but I definitely do not do the same thing over and over again, not even the same piece more than once.

When you get a degree in drawing and painting - you know, what could you possibly learn in college about drawing and painting? I mean, it's really indefensible in terms of major. And then to get a master's in it. [Laughs.] Anyway, one of the things I did learn, you learn how to stretch a canvas. You learn how to wash your brushes. And I do remember learning that copying somebody is bad; you don't want to do that. But what's worse is copying yourself. That is really sad. Fortunately, I'm extremely lucky that I have lots of ideas and all of that - way more than I can make.

I wish sometimes - sometimes I wish for a studio with unlimited resources and 50 employees, but then again, I have two or three employees and spend too much time managing them, and I think, who needs this? This isn't art-making. But it would be nice to be able to make what I want, but [I] don't have the time or resources to right now.

MS. RIEDEL: You studied a lot of art history in graduate and undergraduate school, and you have used it repeatedly throughout your work, appropriating certain images and then planting them in your work metaphorically - I'm thinking of [Sandro] Botticelli, who appears repeatedly in -

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, yeah. Well, it's my past; it's my formative years. It would be like a writer putting their family in their books. It's my visual art family history. It's food, it's solace, it's comfort, what I learned a lot about in school, what really helped me to become an artist, and also what helped me know what art is - or at least somewhat. I don't pretend to know what art is, all of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think of your work as being part of a particular tradition?

MS. RUFFNER: Not really.

MS. RIEDEL: Particularly American or international or - a continuation of anything in particular?

MS. RUFFNER: No, I don't really - I can't think of anything now, so I hope that it's not. It's part of me; that's enough for me. I would hope that whoever lives with my work, whether it's somebody who lives near a park where my work is, or somebody who owns the piece or visits the piece at a museum - my hope would be that they realize they've got a part of me.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's something that you've talked about from the start, making work that feels extremely personal, and extremely universal; it strikes a chord that many people can - relate to.

MS. RUFFNER: I hope so, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Almost archetypal.

MS. RUFFNER: I hope so.

MS. RIEDEL: Iconography that enables that to happen.

MS. RUFFNER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I hope so.

MS. RIEDEL: And by repeating those images over time, those stories are accessible to a larger audience.

MS. RUFFNER: Yeah, I hope so. That would be the best I could hope for.

MS. RIEDEL: I was just reading an article, I think it was Regina Hackett who described your recent show - in Tacoma, I think? - some of the pieces as "the visual equivalent of break dancing," which I thought was kind of wonderful.

[Audio break.]

Okay, we were going to talk briefly just about the accident in 1991.

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yeah. [Laughs.] In case you wondered why I thought it was funny, in December of '91, I was coming back from a meeting with Mark Leach at the Mint Museum to talk about a show - which hasn't happened yet.

I was in South Carolina for my little brother's wedding. The following day I'd gone up to Charlotte, North Carolina, for this meeting. I was driving back on the expressway, and a car ran me off the road into oncoming traffic, and I was hit head-on, then spun around and hit on the side. And fortunately, at that moment there was a fire truck crossing the expressway, and they saw the steam rising from my car, came over, and essentially saved me, because I wasn't breathing. They did a field tracheotomy, which is probably the reason, mainly, why I talk so funny. But I'm here.

So anyway, they call my little brother home from his honeymoon because they thought I would die. The doctors told my parents that I might not make it. When I lived, I went into a coma; the doctors told my family I would probably never wake up. When I did, the doctors told my family that I would never walk or talk again. So you can see why I had to learn how to talk, so I could tell those doctors to go jump in a lake. [They laugh.]

But it was a great possibility for creativity, because I had to relearn to do everything: walk, talk - I couldn't make a sound for months - breathe, eat. I used to be left-handed; now I'm right-handed - everything. I pretty much didn't know who I was, so friends brought me books about who I was before, and I learned again. But it was a great opportunity for creativity, because if I couldn't do something, I had to figure out another way to do it.

But that's yesterday's news now. I've been out of my wheelchair for 10 years. Then the recent - the main reason I decided I needed to walk again was I moved into this place. I was still in a wheelchair and I kept banging into the walls and messing up the paint. And it was my new house; I didn't want to ruin it. So I said, okay, I've got to get up and walk or I'll make a mess of this place. [Laughs.] So that's the reason I started to walk again.

MS. RIEDEL: Your aesthetic sense compelled you to stand up and walk.

MS. RUFFNER: Uh-huh - [laughs] - basically, yeah. But I pretty much have to do anything - I've learned to drive again, which - what I did was I did it kind of backwards. First I bought a car; then I learned to drive. But that was, God, seven, eight years ago, maybe, so I can get around just fine. I still walk slow and talk funny, but the only thing that I can't do, I'm no good at folding sheets or tying my hair in a ponytail, but I found other ways to get around that.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] That ties nicely into friends as inspiration.

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, exactly. Oh, I have a lot, I mean, a lot of good friends, and they really make my life worth living. It's just wonderful support. There are one or two that were old friends that just couldn't handle the way I was when I - afterwards. So they kind of dropped out of sight, but for the most part I have fabulous friends - really good friends. And they are a constant source of inspiration. Also George, my boyfriend, George C. Scott. He is inspirational in always making me laugh, which is a fabulous help, I think. I really enjoy talking to him.

So, yeah, friends are wonderful. They continue to be a big, big, big part of my life. And so a part of me - a part of the reason that I keep on making stuff is because of them, which segues nicely to, "What's next?" [Laughs.]

Well, I mentioned my show schedule, and I'm doing some installations. So in '08 I'm doing a show that's kind of an installation show, and it will be accompanied by a new pop-up book, which will be number two in the series. I wanted to do three - the first one I did about creativity. This one that's coming up is about imagination, and the third one will be about wonder, which - who knows when it will be done or where - but in the future. So that installation show, and the book is coming up also - maybe a movie; I don't know, but I've been approached.

I'm doing a big public art project next year - the fountain, the flowerpot fountain -

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. RUFFNER: - and who knows what - will come with that. I would like to do - I would love to do a whole bunch of the moving sculptures. It would be great.

And, you know, the wonderful thing about my life is that I've grown since my accident. Prior to my accident I used to be extremely good at three- to five-year plans. I would always have a very definite plan. But since my accident, I only know, kind of, where I have to go. I've had all these wonderful happenings that I had no idea they were going to happen.

I try to do things that are perennially my New Year's resolution list - well, four actually: one, to drink more water; two, to stand up straight; three, to think big; and four, to be aware of the fabulous opportunities that life provides and take advantage of them, no matter what they are.

So, who knows? Tomorrow we could all could go up in smoke - [inaudible] - or tomorrow we could win the lottery - no, we couldn't; I'd have to buy a ticket. [They laugh.] So, who knows?

I'm learning to be comfortable with the unknown. I won't say I really like it, but I'm learning to be comfortable and to expect the best, which I do. I'm an incurable optimist - obnoxiously so, sometimes. I'm always, always looking at the bright side because it's the best way to live, I think. Actually it's not just a belief, not just wishful thinking; I truly expect my life to be wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting because it makes me think, Ginny, of something you said about how your perception changed after the accident. Beforehand you felt so very visually inclined, and then afterwards when vision wasn't reliable your other senses kicked in. And so your sense of perception really changed, just opened up is the way you described it, and it parallels the way you're describing the change in your three-to five-year plan, the unknown opening up to a whole other way of just - and ties in with physics somehow, too, just moving into the unknown, but with all senses open.

MS. RUFFNER: I had to realize in the place that I was - and quite a few people get a kick out of this, I am a bit of control freak.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. RUFFNER: Or I have been trying to learn not to be. It's wonderful because if you're not a control freak, and you do expect good things to happen, it's amazing what comes into your life.

But you're right about perception changing. Another part of the accident, [it] affected all the things that really, really were part of me, and one is my speech. I couldn't even talk at all for a long time. And I'm very verbal, you can tell. And it affected my sight. I had really bad double vision for years. It's better now, but it ain't what it used to be. My drawing hand, I have to use the other hand. Everything was affected. Because I couldn't talk or see, I had to live in my mind more, which I think is a good thing. I like living there. I'm not afraid of it. I can hear a lot better than I can see - [they laugh] - which is bad and good.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

Any parting thoughts? Any other -

MS. RUFFNER: Parting words: think while you look.

MS. RIEDEL: Think while you look?

MS. RUFFNER: Oh, yeah. Most people don't. If they look, they just, you know, don't think about what they're seeing. Just be aware.

And also, I was going to say something about art versus craft, which I think is so absurd, distressing. I don't care what you call my work. You can call it art, you can call it craft, you can call it Fred; I don't care, as long as you pay attention to it. I think it's a silly classification - it's like calling somebody an acrylic painter, an oil painter - it's absurd. But let's see what I can say for final - art changes lives, art heals, art rocks - [laughs] - it's a reason for living.

The end. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you very much, Ginny.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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