Smithsonian
*Archives of American Art*

# Oral history interview with Richard Marquis, 2006 September 16

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

**Contact Information**
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Richard Marquis on September 15 and 16, 2006. The interview took place in Whidbey Island, 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.

Richard Marquis has reviewed the transcript. His corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

### Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Richard Marquis at the artist's home and studio on Whidbey Island in Washington for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, disc number one.

We're sitting outside in the garden. Let's start at the beginning. You were born in Arizona in 1945?

RICHARD MARQUIS: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Bumblebee?

MR. MARQUIS: No. In the early '60s when I first got invited to show an exhibition, and I got to just fill out like, you know, how old I was, where I was born and stuff, I was actually born in Phoenix, but it didn't sound as good as Bumblebee, Arizona. And at that time, I made a decision whether to be born in Wagon Wheel, Mississippi or Bumblebee, Arizona. And Bumblebee, Arizona, I decided I could support it a little bit because actually it's a place our family had been to. But Bumblebee, Arizona, actually it's just this funky little place outside on the road from Phoenix to Sedona. So, yeah, I was born in Phoenix, I think probably at the Phoenix General Hospital.

MS. RIEDEL: Should we tell people that you're planning to clarify all, or rectify all—

MR. MARQUIS: Did you just stop it?

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, it's on. Or would you just like that to come out of the interview?

MR. MARQUIS: I've decided my whole life has been lived as a lie. [Laughs.] And I've decided to come clean. So everything I'm going to do here in this interview is the most honest, truthful answer I can do.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a great way to start. You had a father and a mother and two brothers.

MR. MARQUIS: I had a father and a mother and I had an older brother and two younger sisters. My dad was born in 1910, my mom in 1912—

MS. RIEDEL: What were their names?

MR. MARQUIS: His name was Charles Kenneth [Marquis], Chuck. My dad was Chuck. My mom was Verna Iola [Hinck]. And not too long ago when I was collecting bowling balls, I came up with a bowling ball that said Iola. It's only the second time I've ever heard that name. It's a rare word that has three syllables with only four letters.

MS. RIEDEL: That's right.

MR. MARQUIS: So my mom and—so my dad was from, he was born in Burlington, Colorado. My mom was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, and they got married in Colorado. Sort of late in life, and later on some kids came along.

MS. RIEDEL: And as a child you moved frequently. Once a year or so, no?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, we moved a lot and I always thought that's just what people did. By the time I started junior high school, on my report card it said that I'd been to like fourteen different schools.

MS. RIEDEL: By the time you started, wow, junior high—

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, by the time I started sixth grade or seventh grade. And you know, I just always thought that it was just sort of what happened. Later on, in my adulthood, I found out that it was because my dad was an alcoholic and just kept getting fired from jobs. And my dad had three older brothers, and they all had grocery

stores, you know. One had a grocery store in Arizona, one had one in southern California, one in Colorado, so we just kept sort of moving in between those places, and my dad would work with one brother until the brother got pissed off and fired my dad, and he'd go and work someplace else. But I didn't know that. You know, it's like, okay we're leaving, we're leaving. And also it ends up that we were running out, we were leaving because we owe rent and back rent, bills and stuff. But I didn't figure that out for a long time.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you mind that as a kid, or you just took it in stride?

MR. MARQUIS: I don't know, I think I took advantage of it, in one sense. We'd go to a new school and it'd be already in session. My name is Richard, and everybody called me Dick, which you know, I didn't like that word, and so I'd go to a new school, and they'd say, okay, Richard, what do we call you? And I'd say, Rick, my name's Rick. And then, you know, the next school I'd go to I'd say, Ricky, and that didn't work. And then I'd say—my middle name is Charles, so it's Richard Charles—so I'd say, call me R.C. This one place, someplace, you know, we were in Arizona or Colorado or something, for a long time, a couple years I was R.C. [emphasizes R.]. It wasn't R.C. [emphasizes C.] It was R.C., R.C., R.C. [emphasizes C].

And then we moved again, and finally when I became a young adult, I realized that my name, the name Dick, was disappearing from the face of the earth, so I decided that I'd be Dick. Yeah. It's a name that's not going to be around for long.

MS. RIEDEL: You got to experiment with enough choices that you finally settled on—

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, yeah. Well, I wasn't Rick. I wasn't Ricky. I wasn't R.C. Dick just sort of landed on me.

MS. RIEDEL: So you started experimenting at the very start.

MR. MARQUIS: Because we moved so much, yeah. We moved around a lot.

MS. RIEDEL: And were there any art classes when you were in elementary school or junior high or high school that meant anything?

MR. MARQUIS: No. The art classes were awful. I remember we had an art teacher named Mrs. Quackenbush, and it was basically cutting up little tiny pieces of paper and gluing them back down into a paper mosaic. It was just tedious and boring. This might be the time to bring up Ellen Hershey. When I was in junior high school and high school, there was this woman, Ellen Hershey, well actually she was a girl, then, Ellen Hershey. And she could draw. I mean, she could look at you and draw your picture. And everybody thought, phew, that's so great. She thought that, I mean, everybody thought, that was so great, you know, she was a real artist. And I was impressed. I couldn't do that. I couldn't draw, you know, I couldn't look at you now and draw your picture and make it look like you. And yet, on the other hand, Ellen Hershey was not that bright. She was just not that smart, and so I thought, huh, so you can draw and be dumb. Hmm. [Riedel laughs.] So I thought, huh, maybe well—because I'm a smart guy, you know, I was smart. And I thought, well, then I'm probably not going to be an artist because I can't draw, and I'm smart.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there any particular art materials you worked with at all as a kid?

MR. MARQUIS: No, we always made model—well, when I was a little kid, basically I tried to blow things up—very creatively, too. I mean, there were like—we made all kinds of things to explode and blow up and shoot off. Spoke guns, I bet the whole—if this is the Smithsonian, they should know about spoke guns. A spoke gun is you get that spoke from the bicycle, you know a bicycle wheel, you get the spoke and you unscrew it, and you leave a little more room, and then you pop in, you push in a little gun powder from a cap, from an old cap, and then you put a single BB from a shotgun, a really small little thing, and you stuff that in there. And then the spoke—it's still attached to the spoke, so then you bend the spoke down and you stick one end into the ground and then you aim the spoke at your army men that you've set up, all right. And then you hold a match under it, and when the match heats up and finally the cap explodes and it just, blam, it just blows things away. I mean, basically that's what I did when I was a kid, I tried to blow things up. There's much more than that, yeah.

And so I made models and things. I had an older brother, he was five years older than me, and he introduced me to making—putting together old Revell car models. I remember, and the thing that you did, you just didn't put them together; you'd customize them as you put them together. I remember I had like a '56 Mercury model that I kept sanding and sanding and sanding and sanding, just to get it so perfect. I finally sanded through and there was nothing left. And also I remember putting together a model of a '32 Ford or '34 Ford, something, and I'd try to make the model—tried to make the engine massive, so like the bigger the engine the better. And I just, basically, I didn't know anything about motors or engines and I just kept, I just added things to it like washers and things. So I had this giant engine, which if anybody knew what was going on they'd look at it and say, what the hell is that? That's not anything. It was just like—it looks like a washing machine on top of a motor. I'm starting to digress here. What was your question?

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about art materials. [They laugh.] Art projects. So it's an art project.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, so I put models together as a kid.

MS. RIEDEL: And you collected. You started collecting as a kid, yeah?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, we started collecting—my brother was a big inspiration. Yeah, we collected things. I remember, going around, we collected bottle caps, and we'd go around—this was in Arizona, I think—we'd go around and at that time, there were all these—a Coke machine where, you know, there's a cooler and with a Coke, and you get the Coke or whatever, the soda pop, and then there was right on the side there was a thing where you'd pop off the bottle cap. And all the bottle caps would go inside this thing. And so my brother and I would go around and we'd get all those. We'd just dump 'em out, take them back home and we had just the world's most amazing bottle cap collection. And at that time, inside the bottle cap there was cork, so with a knife you'd carefully pull out the cork; it was actually cork. We'd pull out the cork, and then you would mount—we'd put the bottle cap in front of a sheet, and put the cork behind it and put it back in, so they were all set upon these white sheets, my mom gave us all these old white sheets.

And we had this great, amazing collection, and there were things that we were looking for, for a long, long time and we'd finally find one, you know. It was great. But then our family would move again, and all that stuff was abandoned. Yeah. And now it ends up, if I had them now it would be the most valuable thing I owned.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you make patterns with the bottle caps?

MR. MARQUIS: No, we just lined them up—lined them up. I like things lined up. We collected pennies—penny collections. We'd get a couple bucks together—at that time you'd go to the bank, and you could just from the bank, the teller would give you rolls of pennies. And we'd take them home, we'd go through them, if there were any good ones we'd save them, then we'd put them back together, take them back to the bank and get other ones. And then we realized that we had to start actually putting our names on them so we wouldn't get the same rolls back.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] And what were you looking for?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, well you know, 1909 SVDB is a very, very rare penny—1914 D, very rare. And every once in a while you'd find them. I mean, we couldn't collect dimes or nickels because we weren't that rich.

MS. RIEDEL: Pennies were accessible.

MR. MARQUIS: We couldn't afford to get, I mean, not even to think about quarters and half-dollars.

MS. RIEDEL: You spent high school all in one school.

MR. MARQUIS: I spent high school all in southern California. I went to Upland High School from the time I was, I don't know, from seventh grade through high school we lived in one place, and that was Upland, California. We had a house right on Route 66. And that's where we learned a lot about cars because we'd sit out on our front porch and identify every car that went by—you know, '53 Buick, '42 Chevy. They'd go by and just, it was a game like, oh, what was that? I don't know. So we'd have to research it.

So I went to high school at Upland High, Upland, California. And it was an interesting place, now that I have a little perspective, it was sort of like this upper-middle-class white place, but the high school also included this place called—what was it called? It also included this whole Mexican community. And so, where we lived right there on Route 66 was right next to the Mexican community. Anyway, I forget the name of it. Alvera, something. Anyway, so those were the guys I sort of hung out with when I was a kid. When I got to high school, most of the people I hung out with were put in one track and I was put in this higher track, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Honors classes—

MR. MARQUIS: Honors classes, yeah. And actually our high school had a, they had a Ford Foundation grant, I guess. So there were certain—kids were picked out and put in this honors class that we had the same teacher for two or three years, you know, the same home thing. So that was odd because I was in that, and you know, I did really well. And then I'd go home, and I'd hang out with the guys who were, like, in auto shop. It was really—it was a weird—I don't know if dichotomy is the right word. It was a strange difference between my home life and who I hung out with at school, who I hung out with outside the school, and then who I hung out with in school.

MS. RIEDEL: And was there something about each of those that was satisfying?

MR. MARQUIS: No, no, no. It was exactly the opposite. Neither were satisfying.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Interesting.

MR. MARQUIS: It was sort of the, you know, my friends I sort of hung out with thought I was abandoning them to go with these smart kids, you know, the rich kids. And the rich kids knew I wasn't rich, because it was pretty much the smart kids were the same as the rich kids. And so, you know I came up as a poor kid and smart, so it threw all the balance, threw everything off, the balance.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you get from there to Berkeley [CA]?

MR. MARQUIS: I have this friend, Bill Jones, in high school and he had an older sister, Sue Jones, and older brother Tom Jones, but anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: You're not making that up, are you?

MR. MARQUIS: No, no. That's true. My friend Bill Jones, who I went to college with, who changed his name to Llywelyn [ph] Jones, but then he found out later that Llywelyn Jones was already taken. So then I said, well, why don't you just keep your name, Bill Jones and spell it differently. So he spells his name Jones, J-O-N-3-E-S, and the 3 was silent—[they laugh]—so that was his name for a long time. It was like, Bill Jon(3)es, with a 3, parentheses.

MS. RIEDEL: He was a high school friend?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, yeah. We went to high school. And he has this older sister, Sue, who's like a total beatnik. And I was interested in being a beatnik. I was young, a kid, but I thought beatniks were cool.

MS. RIEDEL: What about it appealed, do you remember?

MR. MARQUIS: It was just the coolest thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Something that nobody else had.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah. We're talking real, this is like early '60s, real early '60s, and so it was time to—

MS. RIEDEL: The Beatles era, too.

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, before Beatles, before the Beatles. No, we're talking about the Kingston Trio and stuff like that. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: Or Theo Bickel.

So anyway, I did really well in high school. You know, got great grades, because I knew it was a way to get out. And I got a National Merit Scholarship, which pretty much said I could go anywhere. I could go anywhere. And at that time, by the time I finished, at the end of high school I wasn't living with my folks anymore. It wasn't working out, and I ended up moving with this other family who was a doctor, Dr. Kelly Anton and his wife Betty. You know, I wasn't living at home anymore, and I was finishing high school, and they were helping me get it together, you know? Apply to college and stuff. And they'd gone to—

MS. RIEDEL: They just took you in and said come live with us for a few years?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, no, it's much more complicated. Earlier they, geez, probably just before I got my driver's license my girlfriend at that time, living on this place called Red Hill, they knew this family who needed help. And that was this, so this family, Dr. Kelly and Betty, I went up and sort of worked for them and helped them do stuff. It was the first time I ever saw an artichoke, you know. I helped her just do things. It ends up that she's only like ten years older then me, but when you're 16 that's a giant, giant gap. And I helped her do things. And then she lost her—she had too many speeding tickets and lost her license, and so I, when I turned 16 I had a driver's license. And so she had permission from the judge or whoever took her license away, she could drive down to the high school parking lot, and then I'd get out of high school, I'd go out there and I could pick her up and we'd just do her errands. And she was this beautiful, blond woman. I mean, she was just like, she had kids and just this adult — but she was totally into pretending that we had something going, you know. So all my high school kids were so jealous—you know, whatever I was doing, I was doing it right because I'd go out after sixth period and I go out in the parking lot there would be this woman. She's have her sunglasses on, her scarf on, and we got in this '63 Bonneville convertible and we'd drive off.

It was just sort of silly. It was just sort of something that happened, but what was the question again?

MS. RIEDEL: A sixteen-year-old's dream.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, I had this dream, but—I left home like when I was fifteen and a half because it wasn't working out. It just wasn't working out, you know—big fights with my dad. Wasn't working out, so I ended up spending some of the time with this other family, Dr. Kelly Anton, and sometime I'd just stay at home, but I wouldn't deal with it. We had this old place on Route 66, it was like a giant old barn. My folks pretty much lived downstairs, and the rest of us lived upstairs. And there was, I could go to the back of the house, open these giant windows, step onto the porch and go down a pepper tree, and I could go in and out. No one ever knew where I was. And I'm just so fortunate that not only as a kid did I get to have BB guns and .22s, but when I got older I had total access to coming and going.

And my mom totally trusted me and backed me up, in case anything happened, and my dad was pretty oblivious. So I pretty much, I realize now—I mean, when I was a kid I just hated it. I didn't like my parents, you know. It was awful. But now, as a kid I realized just how lucky I was. Just I was so lucky I got to burn things and blow things up. My mom would write me a—I'd say, Mom, I didn't go to school yesterday; can you write me a note? She'd say, okay, Dick, but you should go to school. She just would write me the note. And I said, Mom, I have to pick up some potassium nitrate at the druggist; can you write a note saying it's okay? [Riedel laughs.] She'd say, okay Dick, yeah. So she'd write me a note so I could pick up potassium nitrate so I could blow things up. I was so lucky. It's never going to come again. It's not going to happen again.

[Audio break.]

MR. MARQUIS: So anyway, I lived with this family and they helped me get my applications together and so I applied to a bunch of places, and I got pretty much full scholarships to everywhere, you know, Notre Dame [University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN], University of Illinois, because that's where the Antons had gone. But because of my friend Bill, Bill Jones's older sister Sue, she said, you should go to Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley], man, that's where the hippies are. I mean, it was pre-hippie, that's where the beatniks were. So I went to Berkeley, decided to go to Berkeley. So I went to Berkeley when I was 17, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have any idea at the time what you might major in?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, no. When I was in high school I took these tests, I forget what the tests were called, but the tests were like what you should be. And my test said I should either be a forest ranger, an architect and two other things. And the only thing that made sense would be I'd like to be a forest ranger because I was a good Boy Scout. But it sounded like, sounds like I should do architecture. It sounded sort of romantic and something I could do, and that's what my test said I should do. But there was another test in high school, I forget the name of the test, but it's where you like, basically in your mind you have to fold up boxes and what shape they come up in. And I did this test, and the test came out that I cheated. So my high school counselor said, you cheated on this test. I said, how can you cheat on this test? It was just a thing that you did, you know. You folded these boxes up and you answered all these other questions. And so my results were that I had not been truthful.

MS. RIEDEL: Those were the results?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, that I had cheated on this aptitude test, which I didn't understand. I said, no, I did this. I tried to do it clean, you know. So anyway, the closest thing, my scores were out of the box, but the closest thing I came up to was being a postal carrier, and artist, actor, or something else. It was sort of, it was just kind of odd. And I'd done it totally truthfully, you know, so at that point I realized that I was a little bit off the scale, yeah, off the charts.

So anyway, then I went to Berkeley and enrolled in architecture which at that time was a five-year program, and what they did, the way the school of architecture worked was they gave you a bunch of classes you had to take, with very few credits, so you had to take a bunch of credits. Basically, they were trying to weed you out by making you just work your butt off. It took me a while to figure that out. And I did really good in all the creative things, and this and that. Also, the nice thing about the school of architecture is you didn't have to take foreign languages or other, so I thought that sounded good. So I enrolled in architecture and I did it for a couple of years. Even in high school I'd taken ceramics, I had an art teacher that did things, and so as soon as I went to Berkeley—when I was in high school, going back a little bit, the family I lived with, Betty, I was interested in doing ceramics. And so she had done ceramics in college so we actually, we set up a little pot shop, we got a little wheel and furnace and glazes and this and that and we started putzing around and made things.

So, when I went to Berkeley as an entering freshman in architecture, as an elective I wanted to take ceramics, so I went to the ceramics program which was in the decorative arts department. It was Pete Voulkos, I didn't know who Pete Voulkos was, and when I said—and I had pictures, I had a portfolio. He said I was the only entering freshman he'd ever seen with a portfolio. So I had these things I'd made and stuff, and he said, you know, it's going to be really hard to get you in because they only let in juniors and seniors. And he said, okay, come on in.

So when I was doing architecture, I was taking this ceramics class, and then after a couple of years pretty much dropped architecture. You know, once I had to take a class on concrete I decided I wasn't that interested in it. I knew what concrete was. So I ended up switching over to the decorative arts department, which is where ceramics was.

MS. RIEDEL: It was a pretty extraordinary department at the time with Voulkos, no? [Ron] Nagle hadn't started yet?

MR. MARQUIS: No, but, no one knew. As a student, we didn't know. We didn't know how famous those guys were. And it was in the basement of the housing services building on Bancroft. So it was in the basement of a building. And Pete, he was only there probably one third of the time. He'd teach a, it was in semesters back then, and he'd teach a semester and then there'd be a guest teacher. Then he'd teach a semester, and there'd be another guest teacher. It took me a while to figure out how famous he was, you know. And he was pretty much a regular guy. He was pretty good. And then while I was there, they shifted it into a new building. They moved—a whole new building called Wurster Hall was built, a big, giant, concrete ugly building. And they had a, they built this supposedly custom ceramic shop, which I assumed that Pete designed. Well, you know, I would think. So we shifted in. And at that time, I'd given up architecture and all and was pretty much in the dec art department doing ceramics. And we shifted into this new building and it was still so poorly designed. What a terrible building.

MS. RIEDEL: Brand new, and designed to specifications, but—

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, but a bad design.

MS. RIEDEL: What about it didn't work?

MR. MARQUIS: There wasn't, it didn't have any feeling of camaraderie. It didn't feel like it was someplace you'd want to hang out. It was like someplace you'd come and throw clay against the wall and leave. I mean, the old building, it was like a basement of an old building and it had little rooms and you'd hang out and there was a place you'd have coffee and this and that. The new building was just so stark, it had this specially constructed wall, this perfect pitch, this perfect angle so you could build a giant 20 foot by 40 foot ceramic wall, which no one ever did, except John Mason did. Okay, so it was used once. And this wall was in the middle of this room.

Anyway, so I was doing ceramics—

MS. RIEDEL: And Pete was teaching and Ron Nagle was teaching then?

MR. MARQUIS: Ron Nagle was actually the gopher. He was the—

MS. RIEDEL: Tech? Or teaching assistant?

MR. MARQUIS: No, you wouldn't even call him a tech. He was mixing the clay. He wore a funny hat that had clay all over it. And basically he was mixing up the clay and keeping glazes together. There was another guy named Richard Lindenau, who was sort of, Ron and he sort of took care of everything. And then, of course at the same time, Ron had his band together. Ron had his band the Mystery Trend, which was from a Bob Dylan lyric. And so this, there would be this guy that you hardly ever saw, just come in, mix clay, but then on Saturday you'd go down to the Pauley Pavilion and see his band. It was pretty good.

And Ron Nagle played keyboards. And I remember the band was up on top and I was down below and he had these black and white, beaded checkerboard moccasins on. The coolest shoes I'd ever seen. And now I realize they were actually real Indian moccasins that he must have gotten someplace, probably worth thousands of dollars and he should have never had them on to begin with.

So it was an amazing time, it was an amazing place.

MS. RIEDEL: Jim Melchert was in sculpture, was he teaching sculpture?

MR. MARQUIS: Jim Melchert was in the art department, for some reason. Ceramics and glass—we haven't even talked about glass yet—but glass was in the, at that time the decorative arts department, which later became the design department. And Melchert, you know, he was pretty much a ceramics guy, although he did all kinds of other things, but he had his office on the same floor—as you came down from the glass shop, which was on the second floor, you'd come down the elevator or the stairs and the first thing you'd see was his office. And he'd usually be in there just laughing. [Mimics Melchert laughing]. This amazing guy. And you know then I could do what I was doing. Yeah, I took classes from him. And he taught beginning sculpture or intermediate sculpture or something like this, and he pretty much let me do what I wanted to do.

MS. RIEDEL: And when did glass start, then?

MR. MARQUIS: You know, it must have been like ‘64 or so, ‘65. I was tooling along going upstairs and I heard that they were starting a glassblowing program, you know, whatever that is. And I knew something about glass from when I was in high school because I had actually helped this couple called the Osbornes, Judy and Jim [Paul] Osborne, and they were doing sort of stained glass panels, but it wasn’t with leading. They’d set up these glass things in this damp sand and pour concrete, and concrete would go around it. So I knew a little bit about glass. I said, oh, you’re doing glass, I’m interested. So I went in and I talked to professor [Marvin] Lipofsky and said, you know, I’m interested in this. But, he didn’t let me in the class.

MS. RIEDEL: And why was that?

MR. MARQUIS: I’m not sure, because—well, he’d only been blowing glass a year before he came out to teach this. He was a student of Harvey Littleton’s in Wisconsin. [Ed] Rossbach [chair of the Decorative Art Department –RM] at the time—I guess they were trying to bring some interest back in to the department—invited Harvey Littleton to come out and teach a class, but Harvey had just been made chairman of the department in Wisconsin so he didn’t want to leave. So he said, well, take my best grad student, which was Marvin. So Marvin came out to teach and set up the glass department, but he’d only been blowing glass about a year.

His first class was seven students, seven women, not that there’s anything wrong with women, some of my favorite people. And I think he was just trying to get his feet in, you know, he was trying to figure things out. And then—

MS. RIEDEL: And so the class was full?

MR. MARQUIS: He said it was full. Anyway, he didn’t let me in. He didn’t let anybody in, as far as I could tell. But then a year or so later, I got in the class and it was like, it was great. I mean, class wasn’t great, but blowing glass was just the greatest thing.

MS. RIEDEL: That was the first time that you’d blown glass.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah. And it was—I’d watched it, you know I’d watched him up in the class before. Actually, I was up there once watching for maybe twenty minutes or something and he was—at that time everybody sort of worked by themselves—so Marvin was working by himself. He was doing something, I can’t remember, and he was pushing on the glass. Obviously it was too cold and he pushed too hard, and just broke and he just got slashed, just got cut really badly. And I remember him holding his arm and wrist and as he left the room just looking at me—and I thought, oh, this looks good. This is dangerous. It’s hot. [They laugh.] You can blow things up. I thought, this is right down my alley. This is something I want to do. So I got involved in the glass thing, you know. I was in the class, then the next semester I became his TA [technical assistant], and because I was on this poverty kind of level of student I got work study. And the work study job, they shifted around. This wonderful woman in the office, I can’t remember her name now [Eve Gilmore –RM]; she shifted everything around so that I could get work study and be the TA So then I was the TA. So that would have been like in 1965.

The trouble with the whole system was that it didn’t leave you enough time to work, you know, you just didn’t have enough time to do it. And I was always kind of handy, you know. I could sort of put things together. So I just went out and built my own shop. I’d blown glass for like a year and decided I didn’t need to put up with all that bullshit, and I went out, and I got a little grant [Eisner Prize –RM] from the school somehow. I forget what it was or why I got it. It wasn’t that much money, you know, a thousand bucks or something. But it was like, I built a glass shop.

MS. RIEDEL: Where was it?

MR. MARQUIS: The first one was on *4th* Street in this old complex that the University owned that—way past Gilman [street], and they used to put the liberty ships there. [Henry] Kaiser made liberty ships for World War II. So these giant buildings, pretty much empty, and there was a guy who was the foundry tech, John Pearson, he had a shop there. And this other friend of mine, another sculptor named John Eubanks, so we sort of had this building. And I think it was something like $40 a month rent or something. And anyway we bootlegged the gas. There was two-inch gas main going through these buildings from the way old days when they were building these liberty ships. And we decided we’d tap into it.

And so what we did, fully dressed in rubber because we didn’t want any sparks or anything, so we got a big old pipe cutter and we had our pipe threaders all ready—if you ever want to tap into a big two-inch high pressure line, this is the way you do it. So you cut the pipe, and as soon as you pop it, break it apart and you stuff it with a potato up into the pipe to stop the gas. And then you go ahead, I think we stuck the potato in and then something else, a rag and just tried to keep the gas—I mean this gas was going [makes rumbling sound]. And then we went ahead and threaded the pipe, so we threaded the pipe, and then we screwed on a gate valve, put the gate valve on and then that was it. So we had a gate valve on it, closed it, and then we opened the gate valve and with a funny little kind of hook we made we went in and started pulling the potato out. So we got the

potato out.

So then we had a gate valve and then from there we could just go ahead and we ran a T so the pipe, so the gas would go wherever it was going, who knows where that gas went? And we put a T on with our own valve and we took the gas over to our shop and that's what I ran my glass shop out of.

MS. RIEDEL: Who knew how to do that?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, that's the way you bootleg gas. Shove the potato up the pipe.

MS. RIEDEL: With a potato. I'll remember that.

MR. MARQUIS: And no sparks at all. You have to do everything really slowly.

MS. RIEDEL: So you ran that studio for a year or two?

MR. MARQUIS: A year or two, yep. And then—

MS. RIEDEL: Built your furnace?

MR. MARQUIS: Actually, I had two little furnaces. It was before we knew about—[inaudible]—but it had two little—and I'd just go there and make things and stuff. And then I came back one day and everything was shut off. So it was just like, the furnace was cold and I went around and it was like we'd been busted. So, the next day, we just pulled out of there. We pulled everything out, just pulled everything and we left. Because we had stopped paying rent maybe six months ahead of time. I mean, we were just basically squatting on this thing, and bootlegging the gas. I don't even remember where the electricity came from. I think that was another bootlegged thing. Oh, that's right, John Pearson actually got hurt. His hands were, he was going through the big panel and did something wrong and, you know, vaporized metal burned his hands.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh dear.

MR. MARQUIS: But anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: Was he all right?

MR. MARQUIS: John Eubanks and I are still in contact. He calls me every once in a while. He's an auctioneer in southern California, in Ojai. Yeah, that's the way it was in the bad old days.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was undergraduate?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh yeah, it was still undergraduate. And then—

MS. RIEDEL: What sort of things were you making?

MR. MARQUIS: It would have been like '66, '67. I was making these things that were sort of based on early American glass, sort of mold designs and stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you'd done a lot of research.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, no, I looked in books. I looked in books. But yeah, I was making these things and now they'd be even hard for me now to make them. They'd be hard to make. I think I just started off really, really good, from day one, for no apparent reason that I can figure out, and I haven't gotten that much better. [Laughs.] Over the last 40 years my—

MS. RIEDEL: Now you said you were going to tell the truth this time around.

MR. MARQUIS: You know, it's true. I mean I look at some of the stuff I made in 1967 and it was like really well made, you know. The design was okay. It was really well made. I don't where that came from. I don't know how I got that good that quick.

And then I went to Italy—

MS. RIEDEL: You went on a Fulbright [grant]—

MR. MARQUIS: I got a Fulbright—

MS. RIEDEL: —in '69.

MR. MARQUIS: I got a Fulbright in ‘69. I hadn’t even gotten my undergraduate degree, and I got a Fulbright and, yeah, I went to Italy. And while I was there I was going to finish my undergraduate. They were giving me credit, you know, giving me credits while I was in Italy. And Marvin was my, somehow, I tried to stay away from Marvin, but somehow Marvin had, he became my advisor or something on this project, and he just gave me Fs. So he just gave me these Fs because he said I didn’t turn things in on time and this and that. And so he totally screwed up my undergraduate thing so I couldn’t graduate.

MS. RIEDEL: You were getting F’s while you were on a Fulbright?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: In Italy?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah. Yeah. Marvin. Weird guy. God bless him. They say in the south you can say anything bad about somebody as long as at the end you just—

MS. RIEDEL: God bless him.

MR. MARQUIS: —God bless him. Yeah, Marvin, no Marvin was fucked up—God bless him. [Laughs.]

Anyway, so it was, I didn’t care. I was on a program. I was doing, I’d gone to the motherland, and I knew exactly what to expect and everything. I’m not a very outgoing person, and I’m really bad at languages, so it was a pretty difficult time being in Italy. But I pretty much persevered. It was like—

MS. RIEDEL: Would you describe those early days in the factory—the Venini factory [Venini Fabbrica, Murano, Italy]? What that was like?

MR. MARQUIS: Well first of all, you know, I got a hair cut. There was kind of a suit I put on. And I studied, I practiced this speech. And I went and gave this speech—I was in Italy for a while, looking at all the factories, and mostly the—[inaudible]—was figuring out—mostly I was attracted to the colors that most of the shops had, you know — not so much the work they were doing, but just the access to colors. And the first thing I went to was Salviati, so I had my suit on and this practiced speech. I went in and talked to somebody and then somebody else, and somebody, I don’t know who it was, and I said, you know, I’m—oh, and beforehand the Fulbright people said, figure out who you want to, what you want to do, and then we’ll write—Italy is actually bunches of little tiny —you know, it’s a long, big country, but everybody who’s anybody knows everybody. So the Fulbright people in Rome knew all the directors and owners of all the factories. So the Fulbright people in Rome, I gave them a list of Salviati, Venini and this other thing called, I can’t remember the name of it.

Anyway, so they wrote, they already had, they wrote letters of introduction. So I made sure that they had those letters of introduction before I made the appointment. So they already knew who I was and that I was under the auspices of Fulbright, which was kind of a big deal. And so I went to Salviati and I explained this thing to somebody else, and I explained to somebody else, and I explained to somebody else, and I explained to somebody else. And it was all in Italian. It was just really, really difficult, really complicated. And they said, why do you really want to do this? And, you know, what are you going to—why? Why? Why? What are we going to get from this? Why? Why you? Why us? Why me, you know?

And then I got to Venini and I went in and I did my same memorized speech in Italian, you know, doo doo doo duh duh duh. And then this guy sort of looks at me and says, oh, your Italian is pretty good. He said it in perfect English. And my whole demeanor went—[sighs]—oh, thank God, now I can talk to somebody. And it ends up it was Ludovico de Santillana, and he had been educated at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA], you know. Spoke perfect English. Ends up later he spoke perfect French, and pretty good German, you know, and Italian. He’s just a cool guy. And so I explained to him, most of all it was like a spiel that like, not only what they could do for me, because like, who cares? But what I could do for them. And I said, you know, I can do time motion studies. And they said, what’s that? And I said, I can do time motion studies where I check out what everything is going on and how to improve it. Well, that sounds good.

MS. RIEDEL: So sort of efficiency—

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, yeah. Because I’d sort of, just the little bit I’d been around the shops I just noticed how, there were like maybe six or eight guys on a crew, and usually two of them had nothing to do. So, I’m oversimplifying things now, but anyway he looked at my slides and thought, okay this would be good. You know, come and do some stuff, you know. Come in and you can be sort of like this guest designer. And I said, no I don’t want to do that, I want to come and work on the floor. He says, why would you want to do that? I said, I want to just, I’m actually interested in the process. He says, oh God, they are going to eat you alive. [Riedel laughs.] I said, okay, let’s check it out. So I had, I was in this odd position in the factory that I was a guest designer, was my quote—and I had an office upstairs. They gave me this office just because they had an empty office, you

know, not that I deserved it, but I had this office. And then I could, well sometimes during the week I'd have a, they'd give me a young assistant to help me make whatever I wanted to make. And then once a week on Fridays, like at the end of the work week, I was given a crew to make things.

MS. RIEDEL: This must have been completely foreign, the idea of working with a crew? Had that happened in Berkeley?

MR. MARQUIS: No, no. You did everything solo. And Dale Chihuly had been there in the same factory a year ahead of me and that's one reason—he ended up in the same place as I did just because you could talk to this guy. But Dale didn't actually work on the floor. I mean, Dale was just sort of interested in organizing things.

MS. RIEDEL: So he would design, and then other people would execute—

MR. MARQUIS: Dale designed things—well, actually he just used it as a way of meeting people, you see. But I wanted to actually work with—I wanted to work on the floor. And they said, I don't know why you want to do that. And then the workers, it was the same thing. I said, you know how you—I was introduced to people. I was introduced to the higher up, and then introduced to the lower, lower, lower down. And then finally I had to deal with the lower, lower, lower down. And they said, what do you want to do this for? You could be up with the secretaries, the beautiful secretaries. I said, yeah, they are beautiful, but I want to do this. And I was probably as good as a ten-year-old. I mean, just the skill was—if I said, look, you know—I didn't say look, but the way it ended up working was that I would replace the lowest guy on the team, you know, the very lowest level guy. I'd replace him, take his job, he would take the next guy's job, then the next guy's job and the next guy's job, and so then it gets to like the fourth or fifth person, and they can go out and smoke a cigarette. And so then I was popular. They realized that here's like an extra guy that will allow us to go out and have a cigarette.

So then I got to be friends with the workers. And, you know, I worked hard. I worked hard and I was helpful and the whole thing about what I was doing and designing in the meantime didn't mean anything to them. It just didn't mean anything, but that I was just this extra guy, or like a free guy. And it allowed the team to have just the extra time to have a cigarette, a smoke.

MS. RIEDEL: And so there would be four and five people working as a team.

MR. MARQUIS: Sometimes more, usually three, four, five, sometimes six, seven.

MS. RIEDEL: And doing all sorts of techniques that you'd never seen before.

MR. MARQUIS: Well, yeah. But the whole time I was at Venini, I never saw anybody make a goblet. Never. I never saw anybody make a goblet until years later back here in Seattle. And I mean, I wasn't that interested in it. But it just, just the shop, the factory I was involved in didn't make that stuff. Although everybody there, I found out later knew how to make that stuff, but they just didn't do it. They'd learned it on their way up. By the time they got to Venini they were doing different things, which wasn't, didn't involve making goblets.

MS. RIEDEL: What were they making?

MR. MARQUIS: A lot of chandelier parts, a lot of multiples, a lot of beautiful vases and stuff. I was there when Tapio Wirkkala came down, a famous Finnish designer. They made some designs of his. It was hard.

One of the maestros I was interested in working with, one of the guys I sort of hung out with and would watch him, his name was Mario Carelli. He was just this nasty, awful guy that—pretty much a prima donna glass blower. But he got the most interesting jobs, so I watched him a lot. And he was just awful to me. Because sometimes I'd be there and he'd have me blow on the pipe, and I'd blow on the pipe and he would just always try to jab me, just always. Just always try to hurt me. And you know, the other workers, they all would raise their eyebrows like, yeah, yeah, be careful.

But everybody wanted to work with him because he was so skilled. And I found out years and years later that Lino, Lino Tagliapietra, that Anna Venini, the daughter of the, the daughter of Paolo [Venini] of the factory and the wife of the Luduvico, at one time they made a decision whether to stay with Mario Carelli or go with Lino, and they went with Mario Carelli because he could just, he could make the finest stuff. So, you know, my life could have changed a lot earlier. It could have just, you know, flip a coin and Lino would be the guy I would have been watching instead of Mario Carelli.

MS. RIEDEL: Which would have made a huge difference because his whole— but he went on to become an incredible mentor and friend.

MR. MARQUIS: He would have been much more open. I found out years and years later, through Lino, actually that I had a nickname when I was at Venini, and it was Speedy Gonzales. [Riedel laughs.] I guess because I was

always just rushing from one place to another. Because the whole thing, all the Italian workers are all given nicknames. You have your name and then you have your working name. And unbeknownst to me, mine was Speedy Gonzales.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] And so what were some of the early things you worked on there?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, the obvious thing, I mean they had, they'd melt I think it was 26 or 28 pots of glass everyday, with about 16 or 18 colors. So there was just this total access to color. And it was all compatible. And I watched how the old melter, his name was Carlo. So I had, at the factory I had, I was given this little design area, but it also had a little bed and a bathroom in it. And so I'd stay there a lot because the factory was kind of, it was closed. You couldn't, it was hard to just walk in and walk out. And so, if I was there after dark, it was just easier to stay there. And so I'd stay there and I'd hang out with this guy Carlo who was doing the melting, and I'd go around and I'd help him move wheelbarrows of stuff around. And he was always throwing, you know, throw all the batch in and then he'd go later and he'd turn things up and turn things down and he had little bags of stuff he'd put under the—it was just like alchemy.

He was just doing all this stuff, and then around four o'clock in the morning he'd go around and do these, blow these really thin bubbles with the base glass and the color glass to check the compatibility. And I just went around and just sort of watched him and helped him and stuff, and it was totally magic. At four o'clock in the morning, these glasses could be way, way uncompatible, I mean just not fitting. And he'd turn one down and he'd turn the other one up. He would get a brown paper bag of something, I don't know what it was, he'd put it in and stick it on the surface and flames would come out of it. It was just like, it was total magic. And then by seven o'clock when everybody came to work, the glasses would fit, or there'd be a little sign saying, don't use 'til noon. Don't use 'til lunch. And at that time, then the glass would be compatible. It was just totally amazing. It wasn't science. It was alchemy.

What was your question?

MS. RIEDEL: What were some of the first things you were blowing and making.

MR. MARQUIS: All right. So there was all these colors that were compatible, which was, from here, we didn't have those. I mean pretty much it was like, we had clear, we had coke bottle clear, we had bluish green, greenish blue, green and blue. [Riedel laughs] And then another color I called California clear, which was actually a bluish green. So that's all we knew how to melt. And so here I was, basically in a candy shop with all the colors, all the colors. And I could make anything I wanted to if I could do it, if I had help, or if I could just work it. You know, I had to find a bench to work on, and this and that.

And so right away I was interested in murrine. And I was interested in murrine beforehand, because just historically I thought it was an interesting thing, and I'd done it before, I'd done some murrine before I left. But here I was, here was a choice.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you just describe briefly what it is?

MR. MARQUIS: Murrine is a way of assembling glass that, if you can imagine stretching it out like taffy, that whatever the image you have on the inside remains true. So you stretch it out, like a taffy, and bust it up and whatever you had when it was big will be the same when it's small. [… –RM] Say you had a cinnamon roll and you kept rolling and rolling it out, and rolling it out, and rolling it out, and rolling it out until it was like a quarter inch across, when you cut it, it would still look like a cinnamon roll. So that's basically what murrine are.

So here I was with these things, and I thought, gee, I could do stars. I could do anything. So that was one of the first things I did was stars and stripes, because they had red and white, and blue and white. So I went and I said, okay, I want to do these stars and stripes stuff, and they thought, oh, how patriotic. And I said, I need a mold made to make a five-pointed star. And they said, wait a minute, we already got star molds. They were all six-pointed stars. No, I need five-pointed. They said, five or six, what's the difference? They said, it's a star. I said, no, no, no. It has to be a five-pointed star. They said, well, go ask whoever it was, you know, the guy who ran the welding shop. They said, go ask him. And so I went down and I said, I need a five-pointed star, and he says, what? We have star molds. I said, no, they're six-pointed. He said, six, five, what's the difference? I said, look, I'm going to build this thing no matter what. Are you going to help me or not? I said, I know how to weld; can I use your welder? And he goes, well, yeah, but here, and then so he ended up making it for me. And so I had this five-pointed mold, and I made stars and that's like one of the first things I made. I was there probably just a few weeks before I started making that stuff. Yeah. It ended up being a good idea.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was the beginning.

MR. MARQUIS: Pretty much. Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean I was always trying to prove to them that I was valuable, and it'd be a good thing to have me around. So I worked on the line. I designed things. I did do those time

motion studies and told them how to make things a little more efficient.

MS. RIEDEL: Did they appreciate that?

MR. MARQUIS: Hard to tell. I don't know. Because I could only talk, I pretty much always presented my findings and my thoughts to the padrone, to the top guy, Ludovico. And then I'm not sure how far it went down. But sometimes it would be like, I'd find out, because I'd deal with the top echelon, and so I'd talk to them, but then I actually had to deal with the workers at the very bottom. And sometimes I would find doors would be open, whatever you want. And other times I'd just find like, no, you can't do that. No, no. Can't do that. So I never figured out exactly what the communication was. I actually never knew what was going on. Couldn't figure it out.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it hard to work not speaking any Italian? And did they — it sounds like they [workers] didn't take to you all that quickly.

MR. MARQUIS: My Italian was never good, but I got along. No, it was really hard. I never knew what was going on. And sometimes I'd say, they'd say, oh, we're going out, you know, so-and-so is sick and we're going to go and visit him, come with us. So it would be that I'd be in sort of this big party and we'd have, really fun, and then the next thing would be like, you know, they didn't like me.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MR. MARQUIS: I never could figure out what was going on. And sometimes I'd say, okay, where's a—I was working with this guy Michele [ph]—and I'd say, Michele and I are supposed to be working together. And they'd say, nope, nope, he's not here anymore. I mean, he wasn't even in the factory. And I was like, I really did not know what was going on. I just—

MS. RIEDEL: But your technical knowledge grew exponentially?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, I saw it. I didn't get to practice that much, but I saw it.

MS. RIEDEL: And you took notes, no?

MR. MARQUIS: I took notes.

MS. RIEDEL: Kept a book.

MR. MARQUIS: And they let me take pictures, you know. I just, they were nuts. I mean, I could have just taken those pictures right to Taiwan. No, I would never do it. But I had free, I was just sort of this privileged character that the workers didn't know exactly what I was doing, the designers and the secretaries and all that didn't know exactly what, I was just sort of there. I was getting, I was this mascot or a pet. You know, I had a Fulbright grant. I was a special guy, and I pretty much, for the first six months I was always just worried that they're just going to ask me to leave. You know, because I could just see it. I could just see, you know, someone come in and say, sorry, Dick, this isn't working out. You're going to have to leave. So I was just so careful. Then, at the end, at the last few months, I realized, I'm just part of the place. They're not going to ask me to leave. And if they ask me to leave, so what? I'm going to leave anyway. So then I just started, I invited my friend Bob Naess to come over to help me, because I couldn't get a, the factory was really busy and it was really difficult for me to get somebody to help. So I asked de Santillana, you know, could I invite a friend over to help me? And he says, yeah, that's a good idea because we're really busy now. They had big commissions or I don't know.

So my friend Bob Naess came over and we just basically realized that no one knew what we were doing, so we could do anything. So we took advantage, so we just—yeah, we just worked.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you make?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, when Bob came over, we made the Mickey Mouse murrine. And we made a—because I'd made the stars and stripes, all that stuff, they thought I was really patriotic, so we went and made hammers and sickles, a swastika, and then they really didn't know what was going on. And then we made things, just sort of little small things. And everything pretty much belonged to the factory. I mean, that was part of the deal, like what I made stayed there, you know. It was theirs. After a while I realized, they don't really care, they're not doing anything with this stuff, you know. And so, you couldn't go in and out of the factory with a bag or anything. Everything was checked because workers would take stuff. But, I made all these little cups and things that just fit in my pocket. And I'd just would just say, see you—notte. And that's sort of like some of the things that end up existing are the things I just walked off with. And I left probably forty, thirty, forty, maybe fifty pieces there.

But then they had the big fire two or three years afterwards. And the fire was not where the furnaces were. It was all up in the offices and where my design room was. And all that stuff burned. So they lost not only my stuff, which is no big deal, they lost their giant collection. And this design office that I was given, where I'd stayed and

had a bed and a cot and the little bathroom and stuff, there was a thing up into the attic that I went in and I stashed all kinds of things. I just stashed stuff. I didn't know why. Just all the stuff that I was making, and little molds and things they weren't using anymore that I figured, sooner or later—at the very end, I knew I was going to ship stuff home. And you know, Fulbrights, they would just ship stuff home. So I was going to put that stuff in a trunk. In fact, later on I did ship, I shipped four trunks home of stuff, and I only got one trunk back.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, three disappeared crossing the ocean?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, yeah, probably disappeared right in Venice, the way things work.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was at the end of the Fulbright year?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah. Well, at the end of the Fulbright year, my grant was, I applied and they were, they gave me a second year. They gave me a grant for another year. But at the same time, I was offered a teaching job at the University of Washington in Seattle, through my friend Fred Bauer, ceramics guy who taught there. And it was like, oh, hmm, this, that, do what? So I decided, if I didn't go, I let the second year of the grant go, and I came to Seattle to teach at the University of Washington. It was like this incredible opportunity, and just so much money. I was being paid $13,000. I'd never seen money like that.

So I came here, came to Seattle. The idea was that I'd set up a glass program. By the time I got here, things had changed, where it wasn't exactly that, and my friend Fred Bauer, who had brought me over, he had actually had to leave the state because he and his wife Patti Warashina, were separating, and it was just a big mess. But anyway, so I came here, instead of doing another year in Italy, I came here to teach. I know my starting salary was $13,000, and that one year my student loans were like $12,000, and so I just paid off my student loans in that one year. And just like whatever salary I got, I paid off loans and I was clear. So after a year I was clear. And then I was trying to decide what to do after that. It was in the really early days, and I had a lot of opportunities. And I think I probably made some bad decisions, but they were all—

MS. RIEDEL: What are you thinking of? Anything you would have done differently?

MR. MARQUIS: I should have stayed in Italy. I would have gotten more accomplished. And the year teaching here in Seattle was good, it was kind of interesting, it was good, but I was still—

MS. RIEDEL: You set up the glass program here?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, yeah, not really because there was sort of a semi-existing one before I got here and I just sort of kept it semi going on. When I left it sort of just atrophied. But that's when Pilchuck [Pilchuck Glass School, Stanwood, WA, 1971] started. When I was teaching here in Seattle, is when Ruth [Tamura] and Dale started doing their thing up at the tree farm. But, no, now if I hadn't, in hindsight I should have stayed in Italy another year. I would have gotten a lot more done, but at the time, I was ready to come home.

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

[Pause.]

MS. RIEDEL: So we were going to have a couple final thoughts about the Fulbright year in Italy.

MR. MARQUIS: Well, I want to talk about the, making the fuck murrine. So when I was there, it became pretty, with those colors and stuff, I realized I could make letters. And so I decided that the first word I would make would be fuck, just because, you know, I was from Berkeley in the '60s, free speech and all that. And it was, and also, I only needed to make three letters because I could use the U and the C, you know. I could just move it over and it'd be the same letter. I just had to make three letters. And I pretty much, for some reason right away I was able to understand—to grok how to make these things. And so I made the F-U and the K, and put them together. And the workers in the shop, said, what does this mean?

And I said, you know, it means fuck. And they said, oh, you mean fuck off. I said, no, no, well kind of. Because they always thought it was one word, fuckoff. You can just imagine the tourists going through Venice and stuff and the Italians hassling them with these, fuck off. They always thought it was one word. They didn't realize it was part of, just a part of a two word thing, fuck off.

But they, they couldn't, they thought it was kind of interesting because, I mean, they had all that technology for years and years, hundreds of years, where all that stuff is made, but no one had actually made any letters for anytime, you know. All the people in the factory had never seen letters made.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, they'd never made letters.

MR. MARQUIS: But right away they could figure out how to do it. I mean this is true—they could've made letters.

MS. RIEDEL: But in hundreds of years, no one there had made letters.

MR. MARQUIS: Well, I'm not saying—maybe. It's hard to tell.

MS. RIEDEL: But it wasn't a regular part of what they were doing.

MR. MARQUIS: No, no. And the *Lord's Prayer* [1972] came from that. Right when I was in Italy I realized, wow, you can just keep going. You just keep going.

So what's next?

MS. RIEDEL: Did you want to say anything about Lino now, or did you want to save that for later?

MR. MARQUIS: Doesn't matter.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: I mean, the whole time I was in Italy, I worked with—the maestro I worked with was Checco Ongura. And Checco, he was like, sort of the youngest, he wasn't the best, he wasn't the best maestro, he couldn't do the really fine stuff, like Carelli or Mario Grasso could do, but he was so open. He was more open. And he's the guy I sort of worked with. And it ends up that his sister is married to Lino Tagliapietra. And through Benny Moore many years later, Checco was invited to come over to the States, Pilchuck. Came over and then was invited again and decided not to come over, he says, but you know my brother-in-law is pretty good. And that's how Lino came over.

And at that time, it was like, oh, this Italian maestro is coming over and I was thinking, oh God, another Italian maestro. I wasn't that interested. But I went up to Pilchuck when Lino was working and that's when I first found out I was actually famous in Venice. I had no idea. I was this punk kid, who was there for a little while, came and left. But, it ends up that I was kind of a famous guy. That's when I found out that my nickname was Speedy Gonzalez, and that I was actually, they knew who I was.

MS. RIEDEL: That you'd left a mark.

MR. MARQUIS: I'd left a mark, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were teaching at the University of Washington. Pilchuck was opening up, and then you were going to head on to Berkeley for a master's.

MR. MARQUIS: Okay. What happened was in Seattle, they weren't very nice to me. And I'd flown to Kansas City Art Institute to interview for a job there of setting up the glass program in Kansas City. And it looked great. It looked like I could sort of build a classic, star basketball team in glass in Kansas City.

So anyway, I had this job lined up. And while I was there interviewing for that job, they said they were looking for a foundation [instructor –RM]. Did I have a suggestion to teach foundation, which was like the first year, the first year general introduction to the materials. I said, yeah, my friend Bob Naess, who was the Bob Naess who worked with me in Italy, and we shared a studio together in Berkeley. I said, yeah, Bob Naess would be good for that. So anyway, came back, you know, so the job was set up. And I came back to Seattle, and I went to the chairman, I said, you know, you guys fucked me over. I don't appreciate that. I'm out of here. You promise me one thing, I came here and it was a different thing. I don't like it. I'm out of here. See ya. And then the job in Kansas City fell through. And I got this—Ken Ferguson, I sort of like the things Ken makes, but he was so wishy-washy or something, he just came back, oh, Dick, I'm just—it was a phone call—[imitating Ferguson's voice] oh, things have happened, this and that. Anyway, the job fell through. Bob's job, he got his job, for foundation, and so he ended up sort of doing the glass.

So anyway, I didn't have my, I just had my B.A., and I'd just barely gotten that, because I got it kind of when I was in Italy and stuff. Well, first of all I decided I wanted to go down to South America, so I was going to drive down through Central America, and then take the boat down to the mouth of the Amazon. That was my idea, so I drove down there with my two dogs—

MS. RIEDEL: You drove down through North and Central America?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, that was the plan. And I was going to abandon the car in Lima or someplace. Someplace. It was a plan. And I had these two puppies I was traveling with. I was just like, oh, it was awful. Oh, it was great, it was awful. Anyway, I—

MS. RIEDEL: How far did you get?

MR. MARQUIS: I got to south of Mexico City.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: I got in Toluca, that's north of Mexico City. Anyway, in Toluca, I was driving slowly through the town, and some kid ran out of the door and I hit him—boom. And immediately I was arrested. In Mexico, you're immediately, you're guilty, especially if you're American. So they hauled me off to jail. And I was, my dogs were in the car, these two English setter puppies, and it's really hot, and I had the windows rolled down, but I locked the car just in case. I didn't want somebody to steal the dogs. So I just was hauled off to jail—

MS. RIEDEL: Was the kid hurt?

MR. MARQUIS: The kid was hurt, maybe not even broken bones, I can't even remember now, you know. But the whole idea was like, oh, American, could be rich. And so I was there for like—and I had insurance, and I called up the insurance guy. And he said, okay, it was a bunch of Spanish, and then finally — I speak a little Spanish—actually I speak better Spanish than I do Italian. Anyway, I said, I'm here, I'm in trouble. And the guy says, I'll be there in 20 minutes. I said, wait I'm calling El Paso, how can you be here in 20 minutes. He says, someone will be there.

People were yelling and stuff, and I'm worried about my dogs getting too hot in the car. And this guy came in, totally waxed, I mean, just shiny, curly mustache, shiny shoes came in, shook hands with everybody, just sort of like this. And then he came over and he says, leave now. I said, what? He says, get out of here. Just go. So I walked out, you know. But I didn't know where I was. I was in the middle of this—see I didn't know where my car was. I didn't know how far away it was, because I'd been driven to the police station. I didn't know where I was, or how far I was, but I was smart enough not to go back in and ask for directions. [They laugh.] So I wandered around and finally found out where—found my car, and my dogs were—[makes panting noise]—hyperventilating in the car. And I just thought, you know, not that much fun. I think I'll go back home. So I turned around and came back through El Paso. Okay, that was off the subject.

MS. RIEDEL: That was the way of getting to Berkeley?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, yeah, well that was, I was teaching, well yeah. And then I went back to Berkeley to get my master's. And pretty much at that time the decorative art department was dead, the design department was kind of, they didn't know what they were doing. Pretty much I had to take, I took one course and they gave me my master's. I was sort of an embarrassment to them, I think. I was sort of this guy who's sort of really a talented guy, and they didn't know what to do with me. I mean, I'd already taught at a university, I had stuff—so they basically just handed me over a degree.

MS. RIEDEL: Was Marvin still teaching there then?

MR. MARQUIS: Marvin was gone. Marvin had—he was gone.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was in '72.

MR. MARQUIS: Actually, that's when I got my degree, but all this stuff happened in '70, so—

MS. RIEDEL: And that's when you did the *Lord's Prayer* murrine —

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, that was my master's project. I did the *Lord's Prayer*, and the American flag, and a couple other things. And I did them in—I had a shop then in Mount Diablo in this friend's place, Clayton—Clayton in Mount Diablo, and I built a little shop there. That's where I was going to do that stuff. But unfortunately I caught the hillside on fire—

MS. RIEDEL: Oops.

MR. MARQUIS: And so it was closed, so I needed a place to do it. And my friend Fred Lucero taught at Chico [California State University, Chico]. I said, Fred, I've got this project; I need to do this thing. And so Fred said, yeah, come on down.

So we did it in Chico in the summer. And it was so hot. It was amazing—it was like 107 outside. I don't know how hot it was in the shop. It was just really hot. But I think we did the whole, we did the alphabet, and the *Lord's Prayer*. We made all the letters, then all the words and stuff and a couple other things, all in five or six days. Yeah, that was the project.

So then I wrote it up as my thesis, you know, with nice photographs.

MS. RIEDEL: And the thesis also documented some of the techniques from Venini, from Murano—

MR. MARQUIS: From Italy, yeah, right. About just all the tricks I'd learned. At that time, it was sort of a mystery. It was sort of a mystery. This is the way it's done.

MS. RIEDEL: Definitely not familiar to anyone here.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, no, it's way ahead. Way ahead of the time. Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: So then, you went to Australia in '74, yeah?

MR. MARQUIS: Let's see. Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the first NEA [National Endowment for the Arts grant]?

MR. MARQUIS: No, that wasn't NEA. I've had a few NEAs. But no, I was, my girlfriend Raffi and I, at the time, we decided to go around the world. We had around the world tickets, and so it would have been '73 and '74, and saw, I guess we saw Paul Smith in New York. And he said that Australia was interested in glass, and would I be interested in doing something. I said, sure.

So anyway, then we're in Japan. We'd gone, we'd been to Europe and went ahead and then we were in Japan and we got a, can't remember, a letter or phone call or something—certainly wasn't e-mail—that, okay, this thing's on. This thing in Australia is on. And so, that's where we were going to go next. You know, we were going to go from Japan down to Panang and Bali and Indonesia and then on to Australia. So instead, I flew back and got all my stuff together, including this way of building a furnace that's really just quick, easy, sort of throw it together kind of furnace, thing. So I got all that stuff together and shipped that stuff to Australia. Then we went back to Japan, and continued the rest of our vacation, our travel, and ended up going to Australia.

MS. RIEDEL: Where in Australia?

MR. MARQUIS: It was like four months. It was crazy. I mean, it's unbelievable, like, no one could do it now. I couldn't do it now. But we started off, flew into to like Melbourne and did a couple of things in Melbourne, then up in Gippsland and Victoria. Went to Sydney and then to Perth and to Tasmania.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were teaching workshops and building furnaces?

MR. MARQUIS: Okay. It's hard to believe, but, I would go into this place, and everybody was supposed to have this list of supplies. There's supposed to be this list of palettes of stuff, mostly brick and things like that. Hardly anybody ever had that. Everybody says, well we didn't understand exactly. But basically, we'd go into someplace and in two days, we'd put a furnace together and turn it on. While it was melting glass, we'd build all the other stuff. In four days, five days, we'd have a shop running. And I'd blow glass, it's unbelievable, I mean we're not talking—there's no safety equipment. But people totally freaked out when I like coiled up a kanthal or a nichrome element, you know. Coiled it up. Wasn't sure exactly what it was and I just plugged the ends right into the sockets to see how hot it was. It was crazy. And, you know, it all worked, and so I'd blow glass for a few days and say, this is the way you do it. And everybody would go, wow, that's great. And I'd leave and no one would know what to do. It was like, who was that masked guy?

So one of the places I went to was this place in Gippsland in Victoria where Nick, who was like right here, right now. That's where I met him. And he's still, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Nick Mount?

MR. MARQUIS: Nick Mount, yeah. It definitely changed his life. But I did that a few months and then I came back, I forget what I did. I did something. Then from that tour in Australia I got offered a bunch of jobs. Most of the jobs were teaching jobs, come and teach. But one of the jobs was to come be an artist in residence and that we've got a bunch of money for you. You can come as artist in residence, build us a glass shop and just work. And that was in Tasmania, in Hobart. So that was the best offer I had. So back in, in '76 I went back and worked for a year in Hobart, in the Tasmanian School of Art. It was a great job. I was glad to be there. I was glad to leave.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the first program that you set up? And then you didn't teach, but you—

[Audio break, tape change.]

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, no, I set up—I built a little shop and I trained a couple people and made stuff, and a couple shows came from it. Had I set up other things beforehand? Probably.

MIJA RIEDEL: And now you were exhibiting in Australia and the U.S.?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah. I mean, back in those days you didn't have any gallery representation. But I was included in, at that time, important exhibitions.

MS. RIEDEL: "Objects USA" [Johnson Wax Foundation, Racine, WI, 1969]?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, that kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Sixty-eight, '69, yeah.

MR. MARQUIS: That kind of stuff.

MS. REIDEL: Okay, so in Tasmania, you were an artist-in-residence.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah. And so I built a shop and did a bunch of things. And it was great. And then we came back.

MS. RIEDEL: You just worked then full time and people would come watch?

MR. MARQUIS: No, it was just, I built this little shop and I had like carte blanche, I had like anything—I had all the money, anything I wanted. This really great guy named Les Blakebrough in Tasmania, he is the reason I went down there. In the earlier tour I did in '74, when I went to Tasmania, he is the only guy who had the pile of stuff that I'd ordered. There was actually a pile of stuff. Everything I'd ordered was there, and so later when I was offered this job of being an artist-in-residence at this place, he was the one who had it most together, so I thought that's where I would go. And he was just a—he's still a great guy, still a good friend. So yeah, I built a shop. Anything I needed, he helped me with. I had access to the whole school in terms of like if I needed a welder or bronze casting or anything. And so I built this little shop, showed Les and a couple other people how to run it, and then I left and then everything atrophied, because I guess that's just the way things work.

MS. RIEDEL: Nobody else knew enough to carry it on.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the name of the school?

MR. MARQUIS: It was called the TCAE—Tasmanian College of Advanced Education. And now it's just—and then later it became Tasmanian—it's just referred to as the Tasmanian School of Art, which is now connected to the university [University of Tasmania] or—kind of complicated, I guess.

Yeah, so then I came back in '77 and put my shop together again in Berkeley, and started putzing around working.

MS. RIEDEL: Was this the start of Marquis Deluxe?

MR. MARQUIS: You know, pretty close, yeah, you're right. I came back and I taught at Penland [Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC], and I was ready to put a shop together, and my two TAs at Penland who—I didn't choose them; they were just given to me—was Jack Wax and Jody Fine. And I thought, these guys are both good, so I said, why don't you guys come out to California? I'm going to set up this production studio to work. And that's how that happened. That was Marquis Deluxe Studios.

MS. RIEDEL: Lucky for them. What a great break. Go to Penland for a class and—

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, yeah. And it was really good. I mean, back then, you pretty much either taught—you had to have a teaching job—or you did production. And I was interested in sort of making stuff, art. But I realized that I had to support it, so it was either teaching or making production. So we set up this weird production scheme that included making mostly marbles and Christmas ornaments and vases and stuff like that. And it was set up just to exist for a couple years, and then it was going to be over. And in fact, that's what happened.

It worked for a couple years. We got all the equipment together and we got all the chops. It could have gone on longer, but then I was hired at UCLA, so I was sort of—I decided to do that. And we kept Marquis Deluxe going for a year or so after I went to LA, and then we just sort of stopped it and Jack Wax went to grad school, I sort of stayed with the job at UCLA, and Jody Fine sort of took over the production part of the studio.

MS. RIEDEL: Shall we talk about your early influences, and the work that you were looking at and really liking?

MR. MARQUIS: Okay. I saw a show in L.A., I forget the name of the show, but it was in L.A. County and it was like sculpture of the '60s or something like that. ["American Sculpture of the Sixties," Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967.] And there were these really impressive pieces by Grosvner—aluminum; just giant, aluminum things just amazingly put together, sort of like airplane wings almost. I remember how impressed I was. But then

looking at it, thinking, how would you—how could you do that? How could I do something like that? It would require teams of experts. It would require knowledge. It would require somebody who knew how to work with aluminum and a bunch of tools.

And then also, I know that Larry Bell had his boxes there, and then HC Westermann had this stuff in there. There was Westermann's table, which was a bunch of things all bolted together on the table. And it was like the first—I wouldn't say high brow—it was like the first art that was like—it was actually real art that I looked at that I could see me making it. I could do that. I know how to use a saw and stuff. And it was the first stuff I saw that was being acclaimed and accredited as real art that was pretty much just working with materials. And so, it sort of—seeing his stuff made me think that I can work with these craft, low-grade materials and I could still make something that could be someday accepted by the powers that be.

The other thing was—that was in the '60s. Now, later in the '70s when I was teaching at UCLA, Ken Price had his famous show of "Happy's Curios" in LA County [1978]. And that's the thing that totally blew me away. That gave me enough energy to keep doing what I was doing for a long time. I thought, if I'm going to get good enough to do like what Ken did, then I'm going to have to work; I'm going to have to practice; I'm going to have to make more stuff. So he kept me going for years—he has no idea he did this. But he gave me this energy, this drive to work hard and make stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: What in particular about that work appealed?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, the "Happy's Curios" thing was like about Mexican art, about Mexican ceramics. And he was able to reproduce what the Mexicans had done offhandedly, because they'd made hundreds of thousands of these simple little cups—he was able probably just to make 20, 30, 40, 50, maybe 100, and he got the same offhanded, casual aspect to it, which was the essence of that work. So he didn't have to be Mexican; he didn't have to make thousands and thousands, but I'm sure he had to make 30, 40, 50 before he had it down. So I thought, I'm going to have to do that same thing. I'm going to have to work.

MS. RIEDEL: Plus it was cups, which struck some sort of a chord.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, there were cups. And they were—it was like the antithesis of monumental. It was down home. It was cups, little pitchers, little plates, jugs, very pedestrian kind of works. But they were so exquisitely made, and yet they look like they were made offhandedly. And that's sort of what I wanted to do. And the only way you can do that is just make tons of stuff. You have to throw most of it away, of course, but you have to make a lot of stuff to be that good.

Yeah, most of my influence, I guess, are not from the glass world. It's pretty much mostly from the ceramics world and from, like, Joe Cornell, his boxes. That kind of putzy thing is what I've always been attracted to. And it's not always that popular. I mean, collectors, with quotation marks around them, basically don't know what they're looking at. They're looking at something that they think should be this certain way. It should have this certain craftsmanship or certain look or certain appeal.

And unfortunately, they control a lot of what happens because they are the ones who are paying for things. And I'm not sure what I'm saying, but no one got what Kenny Price was doing. And I think very few people, when Cornell was working, got what he was doing. I'm not saying I'm at their level or anything but I know that I shouldn't pay any attention to what collectors want. I shouldn't pay any attention to what the market demands. You could starve to death, but probably not. But it's an ugly fact that money is sort of driving what gets made.

MS. RIEDEL: And especially, as we were talking about earlier, if there is not a teaching salary or a production line going on at the same time—

MR. MARQUIS: Right. No, I mean, I don't have a teaching job; I don't have a production line. But I've got a few people who if I need anything, they'll cover me. I've got a few patrons out there that if I need something, if something happens, there's a few people I can go rely on. But basically, I'm trying not to rely on anybody. Our property is paid for. We don't have any expenses. The only thing that costs me money now is working. If I stopped working, it wouldn't cost me—we wouldn't have any problems. But I have to keep working. It's just something I—

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe you just need to bootleg the gas.

[They laugh.]

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, where's that potato? It's hard to do with propane. [They laugh.] Good one.

What else?

MS. RIEDEL: Anything more about early influences? Do you want to mention [Giorgio] Morandi or anything about Ron Nagle?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, Ron, Ron. Yeah, like I said earlier, Ron, he was like the technical assistant TA—he wasn't a TA; he was like a hired hand to mix the clay. And I guess what happened was that he had wanted to come to study under Pete Volkous at Berkeley, but he couldn't get in. He didn't have the grades. And so he just sort of came and worked there. And Pete showed—Pete had a cigar box full of slides, and he showed this slideshow. It involved Ken Price and Manuel Neri, Henry Takimoto, Jim Melchert, just the people around at the time.

And then he also had a few slides of Ron's. And Ron was like totally—everybody else was like this sort of macho hoo ha, no playing around, this, that—it was like the abstract expressionist ceramics thing. And Ron made these like delicate little things, and I was very attracted to that.

MS. RIEDEL: Brightly colored—

MR. MARQUIS: No, not brightly colored at all. Exactly opposite of brightly—it was like muted, four shades of pink, really very subtle things that were really hard to do. And he achieved it by doing multiple, multiple layers of over-glazing and under-glazing and stuff. But so he was never one of my teachers—maybe he was, because he came and taught later, but just being around him, just sort of seeing that there was an option—I mean, I talked to Pete years and years later, and Pete said that he never actually liked Ron's work. He didn't like Ron's work, but he admired that he persevered in this odd way. So he admired the way he persevered, but he actually didn't like his work. But he supported him, but he didn't like his work, which shows you how great Pete Volkous was that he was able to support somebody whose work he didn't like because he knew this person whose work he didn't like had some other vision. It's really smart. That's pretty rare, really rare that somebody would figure that out. And so like both Volkous and Ron and Jim Melchert were probably all equal influences on my work, much more than Lipofsky who had taught glass. But I didn't really pay much attention to it.

MS. RIEDEL: What was it about Melchert's work that spoke to you?

MR. MARQUIS: Melchert was the first guy—the first real artist, the talented artist that could write and talk in complete sentences.

[Riedel laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And how.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Yes. It all goes back to Ellen Hershey when I was in high school. [They laugh.] I mean, Jim Melchert, reminded Ellen Hershey—Ellen Hershey was a, you know, I said before, this person who could like draw anything. She has this great ability as an artist to draw things, but she was dumb. And so I always thought, like, I couldn't be an artist because I'm not that dumb, you know. I thought the two went hand-in-hand. I though it was like idiot savant thing. [Riedel laughs.] You know, yes, well, I can't draw, obviously, so I'm not going to be an artist because I'm too smart. I have to go into math and sciences.

And Melchert was this guy, real smart, who could speak eloquently, and could write succinctly, and who was still a really good artist. Pete Voulkos, you know, could barely talk. Ron Nagle, barely talk. But Jim Melchert was a good artist, made really nice objects, and he was smart. And so he was sort of—and he wasn't fucked up. You know, he had like a beautiful wife and a family, you know, he did regular things. And I thought, wow, there's hope. I don't have be Jackson Pollock, you know, I don't have to cut my ear off. You know, if I'm going to be an artist, I don't have to be nuts. I can be regular. I can be like Jim Melchert. You know, I can keep it all together and still make nice work.

That's pretty, you know—that was a pretty good observation, I think, you know. Yes, Jim's amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: He is amazing.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: He's gone on to do one extraordinary thing after another.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: At this time—

MR. MARQUIS: I bet he doesn't know he did that for me.

MS. RIEDEL: He might not.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Now he will.

MR. MARQUIS: I'll have to let him know that he's a—yes. I thought I could have a normal life and still be a good artist. [They laugh.] I mean, because otherwise everybody else was nuts. [Riedel laughs.] Yes, all the good ones were nuts.

MS. RIEDEL: At this time a lot of your forms were very much ceramic based—

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Cups and teapots.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes they were.

MS. RIEDEL: You were making murrine teapots, yes?

MR. MARQUIS: Probably right around then—

MS. RIEDEL: In the '70s —

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Some stackings, there were stacking boxes early on.

MR. MARQUIS: Hmm.

MS. RIEDEL: No stackings? No?

MR. MARQUIS: You know, actually, a lot of my glass—actually most of the stuff I make doesn't depend on the characteristics of glass. I'm not interested very much in the translucency or the transparency or the reflections or anything like that. I just sort of see it as pretty much this opaque thing. I mean, it is pretty much in my head, it's all a drawing. It's a drawing of a shape, an outline of a shape and I make it—I happen to make it in glass because that's what I work in. Because I can make it — because I'm good at it. You know, I can make quickly and I can go through a lot of ideas. You know, I can go through two or three or four ideas in one day, whereas in other materials it would take me a lot longer to go through those ideas. But—

MS. RIEDEL: Which is interesting because the glass is such a demanding, difficult technique.

MR. MARQUIS: Not once you have a few basics and if you, you know, if you limit yourself to a certain scale. It's quick. You don't have to wait around for it to dry, you don't have to glaze it—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: You don't have to—

MS. RIEDEL: The process can—

MR. MARQUIS: You don't have to blow it up on a kiln, you know, you can blow it up right then, immediately, while it's on the pipe. So that's one of the things that I'm attracted about—that's why I work in glass, I think, because I can do things very quickly. Back in the—so now we're talking the '70s. There was attention given—glass people started having shows, and it got to be a thing. It got to be where, well, you could actually make a living making things in glass and showing them not in a craft shop but in an art gallery. And so that was sort of from the late '70s, that was sort of like a, well, that looks what I should do. Forget this teaching job. I was teaching at UCLA for a number of years and it was—

MS. RIEDEL: Seventy-seven, I think, yeah, until '82.

MR. MARQUIS: Seventy-seven to '82, yeah, that's actually probably right around there. And it was like—

MS. RIEDEL: Commuting from San Francisco, right?

MR. MARQUIS: From Berkeley, yeah. I'd either fly down or drive down Monday morning, get there for my class, stay there Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, then drive back home. And actually it ended up—I mean, originally I started flying, and it ended up being that flying down took me like four hours from my door—I left my shop in my house in Berkeley—until I got to my place in Topanga. Driving, I could do it in six hours. There were only two hours more and I could take my dog. So I ended up—I bought this old Porsche that would cruise like 80 miles an

hour all day long, got good mileage, and I just would go back and forth.

And then, the thing that happened in L.A. was that they had a revolving chair. In a couple years, I would have had to be chairman, which I knew was never going to happen. So there was a guy who was teaching there named Vasa [Mihich] that did plastics and stuff, and it was his turn to be chair and he bailed. He just bailed, just quit, said I can't do it, I'm leaving. So everything went into turmoil and somebody had to do it. And I thought well, I can't do that. I'm going to have to quit really early.

The job at UCLA was really interesting. I wanted to build like this star basketball team in glass, and I thought L.A. would be a good place to do it because there was a bunch of money. They paid me just tons of money and I had a big budget and there was really talented students. But the problem was that it was so expensive to live down there. I mean, UCLA is like in Beverly Hills. So all the students had warehouses in Compton and Chinatown—the grads. And the grads who I was interested in, I would end up having to go see some grad show, and I would spend two hours on the freeway. So I decided it was time for me to get out.

So I decided to leave and I told them, I'm thinking of leaving. They said, what do you want, more money? I said, well, how much money do you have? [They laugh.] So, okay, so they gave me more money, more budget, and I stayed. And then finally, I said, you know, I'm leaving again. They said, you did this last time. I said, no this time, I'm serious. They said, okay, well, what do you want? I said, I want this and this and this and this, and they said no way. They called my bluff and I left, because it wasn't a bluff. I was playing poker with a perfect hand. So I got out of there, and unfortunately, the whole program sort of folded afterwards. It was the wrong place for me to do what I wanted to do.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think you might have stayed or continued teaching if you'd found a place that suited you better?

MR. MARQUIS: No, I always thought I'd go back into teaching, almost retire. I really like young people. I mean, I feel much more akin to people in their 20s and 30s than people my age. I find people my age kind of pretty boring. So I always thought I'd sort of get back into teaching. It hasn't worked out. There was an opportunity recently; the University of Washington is going to start this program. I thought about it and decided no, wait a minute, I already have a job. I already have a really good job which is just being me and being here.

MS. RIEDEL: And you teach regular workshops and you teach regularly at schools now?

MR. MARQUIS: It's not worth it. That whole thing is sort of stopping. I just taught in Scotland a few weeks ago. It was awful. It was just a totally awful experience. Nothing worked. None of the equipment worked. It was awful. And I thought, well, I don't need to do this anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you be interested in an annual residency at Pilchuck or something like that?

MR. MARQUIS: I would—I want to sort of line myself up to be artist-in-residence, where I go in and sort of just do what I want to do, and if it doesn't work out, people aren't depending on me. When you teach, if something doesn't work out, you've got all these students depending on you—or I feel they're depending on me—and so I want to try to do the best job I can. So I'm not going to do that anymore, not for a while—not after Northlands [Scotland]. That was really awful. So I think I'll just try to set up being a visiting artist — great job.

MS. RIEDEL: And would you try and keep it local or are you interested in traveling?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, no, I'm still interested in going to beautiful places. Yeah, I'm probably not going to do a workshop in Kansas ever again, or Scotland. I'm still interested in going to nice places. I mean, it took me a long, long time to figure out that I can go anywhere I want to without having to have somebody else pay for the plane ticket. I mean, it took me forever. I mean, somebody just said, gee, you want to go to Taiwan—we'll pay your ticket. I'd go, wow, Taiwan—wait a minute, I can go to Taiwan any time I wanted to and not have to put up with all the crap about teaching and all those limitations and expectations.

MS. RIEDEL: So even the workshops still come with loaded—

MR. MARQUIS: Oh yeah. I mean, mostly I want to do things because I want to work with certain people. I mean, I like being with young kids. I'll probably always teach at Haystack [Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME] because it's always a beautiful place and it's fun and I know the ropes there. And I like dealing with young kids, but boy—

MS. RIEDEL: Have you ever done workshops here?

MR. MARQUIS: Right here? No, no, why would I do that?

MS. RIEDEL: I just thought, you control everything, it all works, and you could invite who you wanted.

MR. MARQUIS: Oh yeah, no, no, my shop is pretty site-specific, just geared to do certain things. There wouldn't be any room for students. I guess I can do something here where people come and watch. No, the best thing about teaching is going someplace and learning something new—going to Japan, going to Australia, New Zealand. That's the best part about teaching, and I'm already here so I don't need to teach here.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have a particular philosophy? Were there certain things you tried to teach, certain techniques or certain ways of looking at things?

MR. MARQUIS: This is interesting because this thing I just mentioned I'm doing in Scotland, the woman who is the director, Jane Bruce, she said she was mostly interested in the idea of being an artist and the idea of making stuff, and she wasn't interested in teaching technique or anything. She wanted more about the ideas. So I said, right Jane, all I was going to do is focus on technique. I just pretty much just said, okay, whatever you said, I'm going to do the opposite. So when I teach, people want to know how to do things, and that's an easy thing for me to do. I hate looking at slides. So when I teach a workshop, I present this package of information of these techniques—traditional techniques and also techniques that I've developed myself—and I show everybody just like exactly how I make stuff. This is the way I do it. It took me 20 years to figure this out; I'm showing it to you in a week.

And what happens is, I probably learned more from them than they learn from me. They're probably learning a lot from me, because I'm presenting this packet of information. But I learn as much from them as they get from me. I mean, if I showed somebody tomorrow everything I know how to do—it would take me a couple days—in two days, I could show somebody exactly everything I know. But I would get something out of that; I would learn something new. That's the most interesting thing about teaching workshops. Because it's glass too—I bet a woodworker, that wouldn't be true. There is a total—if somebody has been working in glass, blowing glass for just a few weeks or few months could have figured out something interesting that I could learn from. And I don't think that's true in very many materials. It'd be really boring to teach woodworking, now that I think about it.

MS. RIEDEL: This might be a good time to talk about your oft-quoted phrase, "technique is not so cheap."

MR. MARQUIS: Oh no, that was—Harvey Littleton was the famous quote that "technique is cheap." I don't know when that was; it was early. And that was just Harvey's way of dealing with—he came from a glass background; his father was a famous glass chemist and did all this stuff. So Harvey was battling or fighting against all this tradition. So he came up with this thing, technique is cheap. And it became a catch word, and when I heard it, I thought, wait a minute; that's not true. Technique is not cheap. Technique is really hard to get. You have to work really hard. The perfect quote would be, technique is really difficult to get, but technique is important, but then you have to forget it. You should be so good at something that then the technique is not apparent. Like Pete Voulkos—amazing pottery—he can make anything. But when you look at his work, you didn't think about technique; you thought about what the work looked like. So that's what Harvey was missing in that quote.

My counter thing was that technique is not so cheap. I'm not saying—I wasn't trying to do the opposite of Harvey. I was just trying to make it just a little bit of qualitative judgment. Yeah, it's good to have a little technique before you revolt against it, before you disregard it.

MS. RIEDEL: So you left UCLA, and then you decided to leave Berkeley too.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, I did a world search. I figured I could live anywhere I wanted. And I remember the short list was seven places. And one was back in Tasmania; one was Adelaide, southern France, San Juan Islands, Boston area, Sedona, Arizona, a couple more. So anyway, I went to all those places and started doing—

MS. RIEDEL: How did you come up with that list?

MR. MARQUIS: Just where I wanted to live.

MS. RIEDEL: Places you'd been and liked.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, and I figured all I needed was like access to fuel—could be gas, propane or electricity—and UPS. [Riedel laughs.] It was very simple. I mean, basically I could live anywhere I wanted as long as I had access to FedEx/UPS and fuel. And so, anyway, the San Juans ended up being the best place. But then when I went up the actual San Juans, the fuel there, you have to have propane. And they don't let the propane trucks coming on the ferries, so you have to barge them over on a private barge. And we're talking 25 years ago, so then it was even more complicated. Now it's set up a little better. Back then it was like so the fuel would have cost like—not double but 50 percent more. But on Whidbey, which was not on my list, but close enough to the Juans, I came down because there's a bridge on the north part that the propane trucks can come down and the fuel is cheap. And property was a lot cheaper here because of the ugly air base on the north end. So that's why I ended up here. I was going to move to the San Juans and just for practical reasons, Whidbey Island made more sense.

And when I moved here, I thought, geez, it's never going to change.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's stop for one second. I'll change the disc.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Richard Marquis, at the artist's home and studio on Whidbey Island in Washington state, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, September 15, 2006 and this is disc number two. When the last disc was ending you were talking about relocating to Whidbey.

MR. MARQUIS: Right, so I decided I'd move up to this place, and as far as I could tell, this place was never going to change. There was like no way of making a living here, as far as I could tell. I mean, as far as I could tell everybody was just selling firewood to each other. I mean, I didn't understand how anybody made it. You know, this is before the Internet and before people moved, could work from home.

So anyway, I moved up here. I thought it would be pretty much always the same, and I didn't realize I was just like the beginning of a big trend. I was just a little bit ahead of the curve, and now everybody moved up here. There's like more glass shops on south Whidbey than there are in Australia right now.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that a fact?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, like 16, 18 shops. And not because of me, but just because this is a good area. With Pilchuck now, it's crazy. Within a mile of where we're sitting right now, there's one, two, three, four, five shops — one, two, three, four shops.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you mean workshops?

MR. MARQUIS: Glassblowing shops. Yeah, people are working, making a living—or trying to make a living, yeah. It's crazy, there's a bunch of stuff going on here.

MS .RIEDEL: That is pretty extraordinary, but this certainly is the magnet for glass in the country.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, and it's the perfect weather, perfect environment for it.

MS. RIEDEL: So you came up here and you found this particular piece of land?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, no, I came up on the island, started to move on the island, and decided to move up here with my old friend, Ro Purser, who lived in northern California. And we decided to come up here and set up some bread and butter operation, and we called it Noble Effort. One of the other names we were thinking of was New Departure, which is the name of a brake company that made brakes.

MS. RIEDEL: New Departure?

MR .MARQUIS: Yeah, New Departure. Anyway, we made it Noble Effort Design, and we made this sort of odd production line—quite odd now that I—

MS. RIEDEL: Little murrine earrings, didn't you?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, we had a range of this jewelry, this murrine jewelry, and sort of odd, funny objects. And it was all sort of based on toned-down versions of other things I've made. Yeah, that's what we did. That was the idea. It worked. It actually worked quite well. And then we decided to go our separate ways after a few years.

MS. RIEDEL: That ran for about five years or so?

MR. MARQUIS: More like three or four.

MS. RIEDEL: Early to mid-80s.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you doing anything with Pilchuck at all, this time?

MR. MARQUIS: Not really. I've always been an outsider at Pilchuck. I mean, I was just sort of not part of the old boy crew, sort of. Yeah, I mean, I sort of had been around and I'd been up there, but I was never part of it. Later on, quite a bit later on, I was on a board or two, the artists' APEC committee of artists sort of thing. And no one listened to me anyway. No one paid any attention to what I was thinking, so I thought I don't have to do this. I don't have to leave early, drive, get on a ferry, go to Seattle, go to the meeting where no one listens to me anyway, and come back. So I just pretty much eliminated it. Sort of my dealings with Pilchuck now are quite—I'm

involved with people who are involved with Pilchuck. My friend, Ruth King, really good friend, she's the artistic director or something like or other, and other people. So I keep track and everything, but I don't really have much to do with it.

MS. RIEDEL: And you still teach at Haystack, or Penland?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, I mean, I'd probably teach at Haystack any time they invited me; Penland, not so much. But I think, I'm in my 60s now. I don't have to do that. If I want to go to Penland, I can go and just go for a visit. I'm much more interested now in being a student than I am in being a teacher. I'd rather pay the money, write a check, and take a class in something—probably not glassblowing, but I think I finally graduated. I don't have to teach anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: No interest in it at all? You're done with that.

MR. MARQUIS: Well, I had such a bad experience in Scotland. Give me a few months and I might change. But right now it's like, boy, I don't have to put up with that crap. I really don't.

MS. RIEDEL: Shall we talk a little about glass as a means of expression and what you like so much about it, what it does well that nothing else does quite the same way?

MR. MARQUIS: Okay, I think I mentioned earlier, once you have your sort of gear together—once you have your equipment together—once you have a pot of molten glass in the furnace and the basic tools—hand tools and glory holes, things like that—you can go through a bunch of ideas really quickly, faster than anything else I can think of except maybe a pencil and paper. And that's something I've always been attracted to about glass. Oh, I wonder what this would look like. Twenty minutes later, you'll know. It was good or it's bad; it maybe has potential or no potential at all. And I still pretty much think of everything I make in two-dimensional image. I pretty much look at it like the sketch on the piece of paper. That's the way I look at it. And it just happens with glass, everything just ends up being kind of round, kind of full-bodied.

But the whole transparency thing and shiny and reflective—I find that's all kind of science-like. I mean, I find that sort of as a—it's interesting. It's an interesting thing, but I would just as soon be able to blow core-ten steel or brown earthenware. I mean, I like the idea—I like that I can go through a shape and form fairly quickly.

MS. RIEDEL: But it can take a long time to make the murrine ahead of time — to set up the patterns, and all of that, right?

MR. MARQUIS: Right, that's true. But that's after I figured out what I'm going to make. I'm impatient in one sense that I want to figure out ideas really quickly, but then I have this odd patience where I can—I mean, I can't talk on the phone, but I can spend hours setting up a pattern or something, figuring something out. I have an odd span of attention.

MS. RIEDEL: And do you draw out parts of that pattern as well, or do you just make the pattern as you're putting the murrine together?

MR. MARQUIS: Right. I mean, making the murrine itself, making the little things, I sort of figure out what they're going to be, and often if they're complicated I have to actually—

[Interruption.]

I'm a pretty impatient person for most things, but for some reason, I can sort of set my mind, arrange my mind and I can spend hours figuring out some tiny little process or some little pattern or something. For some reason, I can do that. And yet, I can't—I'm just so impatient with so many other things.

MS. RIEDEL: Does it have to do with the technical aspects?

MR. MARQUIS: I don't know. I don't understand it. It's a matter of focusing, and I have trouble focusing on things, but when I do focus, I can get totally involved, and everything else just sort of goes away.

MS. RIEDEL: Glass allows you to do that as well.

MR. MARQUIS: Something about it. Something about it—I don't know. I don't understand exactly what it is about the material. You know, I could probably get just as involved in some other material, but I don't know—the nice thing—okay, this is good. One of the best things about glass is there is a moment of truth. There is a moment in the actual glassblowing where the thing is going to work or not. It could be a critical time. And it's not when I'm setting up a plate. If I'm setting up a pattern, it's not there. There's no critical thing there. It's just sort of actually work. It's just sort of labor. But once I pick that pattern up and I'm making something out of it, there is usually this moment of truth. Sometimes it happens just a few seconds; sometimes it will last a few minutes. And that is

just a totally rewarding, fulfilling feeling like you either screwed it up or you did a good job.

And in a lot of processes, I can tell you exactly when that moment is, but some of the things I make, there is just sort of—when I'm making them, I don't even know what I'm doing. I'm just sort of experimenting. And so, that moment of truth, the thing I'm looking for—it could be, it's kind of abstract. It could be right at the very end or it could be in the middle. There's something about glassblowing that I don't think any other material really has. You have this moment of truth where it works or it doesn't work.

And like if you're weaving, there is never a moment of truth of this thing where oh, this is exactly what I wanted or, oh damn, because you can just sort of go back and fix it. Throwing is a little bit that way, but I can't think of any other. Photography also has that moment of truth. I think that's one reason I'm interested in photography. It has that same sort of moment, split second sort of decision. It's either good or it's bad. It can be fixed or not fixed. That's something about glass I think is—most materials don't have that.

They don't have that something you can spend hours setting up or even days—some of the things I make take days to prepare because it's in the steps—pull this out, put it back together, pull it out again—and then I line this pattern up and pick it up. I could have spent—there could be—30 to 40 hours just on this little thing that I'm picking up. And then what the hell am I supposed to do with it? And that's the way I try to approach it. I try not to be that calculated. It's like my idea is that I spend hours and hours and hours making these patterns and these canes and I try to pretend that they just came in from a shipment from Taiwan. That's the idea. That's why I look at it that this stuff is not that precious and I just use it up. Even though, in the back of my mind, I know it took me days and days and weeks to make it.

But I've just seen so many people on so many—there are some glass artists who spend all this time making these patterns and stuff, and it becomes so precious, they just end up making sort of like this simple little safe paperweight out of it as opposed to pushing it and pushing it, making something out of it, because it's too precious. So I try to remove the preciousness even though I know how many hours I spent on it. I try to remove that from my mind when I make it.

MS. RIEDEL: Is there a particular time or period in the process when that moment tends to happen?

MR. MARQUIS: No, it can be—usually it's near the end, before you put it away. But sometimes it's in the middle. Sometimes it's the pickup, just getting it all in the blowpipe in just the right way. The pickup is sometimes the big point. Sometimes it's at the end. It's usually more at the end.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you make any adjustments if you find it in the middle or even at the end? Or is it usually a yes or a no, it's going to—

MR. MARQUIS: No, there's always adjustments. The thing is, if I'm making something, and I'm trying to do one thing and it doesn't work—I screw up—I just keep working with it. It's just like, oh, this is now a new thing. This is like a newfound object. And so I'm just like, well, let's see what happens next. When you're learning, it's better for your learning curve if you're learning to do something and you're trying to do this one certain thing and you screw up, you throw that away and you start again. And you learn better that way. But after a point, there is a part of the process I'm interested in—is that I'm trying to do one thing; if that doesn't work out, then I—okay, that didn't work out. Let's see what this is. Okay, well, maybe it will be here. Usually, it ends up all being thrown away anyway, but sometimes that's the way interesting things happen.

MS. RIEDEL: So you're experimenting in the process and in the moment.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you describe what it is you're looking for?

MR. MARQUIS: Probably not. There is a thing about having an eye. I think I have this eye that I can pick out. You could line up 20 objects of anything. You just pick up 20 objects of anything you could name and I could pick out the best one pretty quickly. And I think there are other people who are like that too. And we seem to all know each other. I mean, we seem to like—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] I hope you don't shop together.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, no, right, right. Thankfully, they're not the same size I am. [Riedel laughs.] But there is this thing about—I think I have this really good eye. And I recognize good eyes in other people. So your question whether I'm looking for a certain thing—

MS. RIEDEL: Proportion or form or a certain nuance.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, there are nuances and they're hard to explain. The thing that I've come up with is that, like

if one thing is good, then the opposite is often just as good. So it's the whole thing of like turning an object upside-down. If it looks good right side up, it should look good upside-down. And the other thing I've come up with is whatever—well, I guess if one thing is true, the opposite is also true. And so no one told me that. If someone told me that much earlier in my career, it would have saved me a lot of time and misery. If somebody had just said, look, this is the way you do it, but it's also the opposite of what you should do. No one told me that. People told me this is the way you should do it. It took me awhile to figure out that if they said one thing, then you should do it the opposite way or at least the opposite way will work. I don't know if that makes sense.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Any limitations that glass has?

MR. MARQUIS: Scale. Yeah, scale. Money.

MS. RIEDEL: [Riedel laughs.] Larger if you could? You can't go too much smaller.

MR. MARQUIS: No, no, I can't go too much smaller. I think there is—for a while, everybody was getting bigger and bigger scale, and I was going bigger and bigger scale too because there were all these young, handsome young men who could really heft a lot of glass in their—glassblowing is one of the few things where you get people to make stuff for you. I mean, there's crews that you can hire and make things for you. And that's not really true in very many other fields. So for a while I was sort of interested in making bigger things. I made some bigger things where I had help—big guys making big stuff. And I could point. I'd be in the shop; I could point. Make it bigger. But it wasn't as fulfilling as making stuff that I made myself. Some of it was pretty interesting because I got to move it and manipulate it and things like that.

But the limitations of glass, yeah, it's scale, and also—okay, what I found out was like, wait a minute, I don't have any room in my house for any of this stuff. What's it going to be outside of—I don't do public commissions. I'm not interested in public art at all, because I just see how much trouble it is and how unrewarding it is. So I'm not interested in making that big stuff. So okay, the limitations I have, I've got a little shop. My shop is designed to make small stuff, a few small things per day. If I want to make anything big, I have to go use somebody else's shop. Or if I want to make a bunch of something, I have to go use somebody else's shop, which is pretty easy to do because there's all these shops around.

MS. RIEDEL: And you got around the scale issue, to some degree, by doing installations.

MR. MARQUIS: I did installations, yeah, with my friend Therman—Therman Statom. It originally happened—I met him in New York at some party. And he was coming out to L.A., we were going to be in this show together—Dale, Therman, me, and Dick Weiss. ["Four Leaders in Glass: Dale Chihuly, Richard Marquis, Therman Statom, Dick Weiss," Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA, 1980.] I said, well, come on out and you can use the shop at UCLA to make your stuff. So he came out and I said, okay, here's three grad students. They'll do what you want. And the grad students say, oh, great. And it was like the best thing ever for them. So Therman made these things, and I'd already had a bunch of—I had some certain expertise in glues, assembling things. And he was trying to put these things together, so I helped him. And we ended up getting on famously, great. It was really fun. And so we worked together for like five years, we did something like—

MS. RIEDEL: Mid-'80s, yeah?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, a bunch of installations, yeah—mostly museums, doing installations where we'd come into town and put all this stuff together. And I did, actually, a lot of the painting, because Therman, the way we worked together was, he and I'd start off cutting all the glass together, and then he was actually quicker at assembling it, and I did most of the painting and stuff. But I could paint just like him. I mean, it wasn't that hard to do.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Richard Marquis at the artist's home and studio on Whidbey Island in Washington state on September 16, 2006 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number three.

And we are going to start off with how lucky you are.

MR. MARQUIS: I am so lucky. I'm lucky because it just happened I was in the right place at the right time. I was smart enough to take advantage of the situations. Opportunities came and I can't say I knew exactly what the opportunities were, but I was smart enough to like—even though I don't understand I'm going to just check it out.

So I was lucky because it was the right place at the right time and I was smart enough to figure out that this thing was sort of interesting. I mean, growing up and putting models together and all this stuff, that's what I

really liked to do, but I grew up in the ‘50s and there was the whole Sputnik scare, which no one really knows what that is, but I was just pushed into science and math because I was smart. I kept being pushed into science and math, science and math. You’re going to be a famous scientist. You’re going to do this and that. And all I really, really wanted to do was blow things up. So once I got that part of science I liked, but outside of that, I’d rather work on cars.

My family moved around a lot and at one point, we were driving from probably Arizona to L.A. in a ‘52 Pontiac, and the car stopped. And it was hot; it was really hot. And so it was like me, my brother, my two sisters, my mom, my dad in the ‘52 Pontiac in the middle of the desert; it was hot and the car is stopped. So my dad flagged down somebody, a truck driver, and he got a ride into town. I mean, my dad left. We were there for another hour, two hours or something. Finally, he came back in a tow truck, and the guy in the tow truck opened the hood and said, try it now. Okay, try it now—and it started. And at that moment, I realized, I’m going to have to know a lot about cars. I’m going to have to know how to fix cars, because look, it’s so stupid not to know how to do that.

So growing up I realized that okay, they’re pushing me into being a scientist or a mathematician or a physicist or something. I could do that—I could be a mathematician; I could do the scientist—but I have to know how to fix the car. And that’s pretty much what high school was for me. I was like in the advanced programs, pre-college course, but at the same time, I took auto shop. And auto shop was nothing but the Mexicans who are my friends, because that’s where I lived. But at that moment, at that time, I realized that I have to know everything about everything. To exist in the world, I can’t be like my dad, and I can’t be like the teachers. Because I knew my teachers couldn’t fix a car, so I had to know how to fix a car and I had to know everything the teachers knew.

Boy, that’s a good tangent.

MS. RIEDEL: How have you done?

MR. MARQUIS: Pretty good, yeah. I’m never going to be stranded on the highway. Yeah, I’m never going to be stranded on the highway. I know how to check the spark and the gas.

MS. RIEDEL: So it worked out pretty lucky.

MR. MARQUIS: Well, that’s right. Okay, no, I was lucky because I was at the right place at the right time. And that all involves being in Berkeley in the ‘60s and they were such amazing people, because Ron Nagel and Jim Melchert and all that. I was lucky to be there. And I got into the courses—really quickly. Yeah, I’m sorry. So I got in the right classes really early. I can’t remember, because I lied or something I was able to get in this course. And, I mean, you don’t get into Pete Voulkos’s ceramics course or the other courses until you’re upper division. And I was like lower division for so long—lower division meaning freshman and sophomore—and I was just there for a long time. I was a freshman and sophomore for a long time, years and years, because I kept trying to figure out what I wanted to do. And so, I finally got into these courses.

I realized what I was looking at. Pete Voulkos would come in very rarely. He was hardly ever there. He’d come in and he’d be sitting at a kick wheel, just a kick wheel, and he’s going kick, kick, kick, kick, and be talking. And he’d either be talking about nothing that really made sense, just kick, kick, kick, kick. I think one thing he talked about was that you have to be smarter than the clay, and the clay was an inanimate thing, not even an object, just an inanimate thing. And you had to be smarter than it, and he’d go kick, kick, kick, kick. And the clay would just sort of—it wouldn’t even be centered. It’d just be on the thing and he’d say, you had to be smarter than this clay. And then he’d just go boom, center, boom, throw up a wall, boom, that was it. And it was like most people in the class are just saying, what do you mean? How do you do that? And I just realized that Pete was able to do mind over matter. His mind was definitely smarter than this lump of clay.

So he was always my hero. I thought that, gee, if I ever have that job, what I would want to be would be like Pete Voulkos. And like he had this university job, but he didn’t seem to pay much attention to it. And he seemed to be able to get away with murder just by not being there and by whatever he was doing. And then, he had this greatest shop, this shop down on the train tracks. It was just amazing. He got to drive a forklift. He got to smoke cigars all the time. He had a beautiful girlfriend, Annie Stockton. I thought, that’s what I want to be. I want to be like him. I want to be like Pete Voulkos. I want to be able to smoke cigars, drive a forklift around, deal with heavy metal and stuff, have this beautiful girlfriend, and have this job at the university, which I assumed just sort of like paid the bills and he got to do this other stuff. And that was pretty much what I wanted to do.

That was the first real role model that made sense, that I could accomplish, because I was smart. I had certain eye-hand coordination. I could put things together. And I thought, this is what I’m going to do. And it ends up that later on, I could do that, but it didn’t work out.

MS. RIEDEL: You tried that at UCLA and decided that wasn’t, after all, what you wanted.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, it didn't work out. I wasn't Pete Voulkos. [They laugh.] And I wasn't going to be. Yeah, no, I couldn't do it.

MS. RIEDEL: How long did you study with him?

MR. MARQUIS: You have to be careful about what you're saying whether you study with him because basically he was just this ephemeral guy, would walk through the shop every once in a while. I mean, I took courses from him. The semester was like a 16-week semester and maybe I saw him twice. But he just came through. Pete, he can walk through the shop; he could walk through the pot shop not breaking a stride, not saying anything to anybody. He'd get to the other end, then he'd come back and he'd start to talk to you about what you were doing wrong or what you should do. He was just this weird polymath guy that had a visual sensibility that I've never seen. I've never seen it again. He could walk through the shop, not say anything, go back someplace else, do something else. And then, maybe a few weeks later, I'd go and talk to him, and he says, oh yeah, you know what you were doing wrong was this and that. And then, boom, boom, boom, he would just nail it.

MS. RIEDEL: He'd remember it from three weeks earlier.

MR. MARQUIS: And I just imagine what other stuff was going on in his life. Yeah, he was — I think he must have been really smart, talented, brave, all that. But he was also—he must have been so much smarter than people gave him credit for. People don't give artists that much credit for being smart. This guy was really smart.

MS .RIEDEL: Who were some of the other students? Was John Mason there then?

MR. MARQUIS: John Mason came as a guest instructor, because Pete pretty much took off every other semester. And Mason was there, and one of my first classes I actually took was from John Mason. And he was great; he was fine. I mean, I was still a teenager, so I didn't know that I was in the presence of a god. You can't tell when you're that young. Who else was there?

The instructors weren't that important because the instructors weren't around. Pete, he was hardly ever around. But Pete had this program, which was called the auditors, where you could audit the class. And the auditors were all these amazing people. There was Mike Frimkess, Joan Dickson, Richard Lindenau—in retrospect, very famous artists. And he just let them work there. The other ones who were sort of my contemporaries were Patrick Siler who was a painter that came into ceramics; Jun Kaneko, of course, came—just like one day we were working and Pete came through with this little Japanese guy. He was not very big. He said, this is Jun. He's going to be working here for a while, just like be nice to him. We said, okay, yeah. We'll be nice to him. And Jun Kaneko just came in and started wedging like 100 pounds on the floor. I mean, the guy didn't weigh more than 100 pounds. He started wedging this up and sort of making things. And it was like, okay, this is the way it is. This is why I was there. This is why I wanted to be in Berkeley, because this stuff doesn't happen any other place. Another guy was Chanson, this guy named Chanson. And he just did amazing stuff, and then he just opted out. He just went and did something else. Yeah, I wonder what happened to Chanson.

MS. RIEDEL: Inspiration?

MR .MARQUIS: Inspiration was in all the books, you know. You looked at books; you looked at magazines and stuff, and there it was. You know, my instructors were an inspiration, but in terms of ceramics, it was pretty wide open. It was like looking at *Artforum*, *ARTnews*—pretty much *Artforum*—and all the stuff going on in New York. And that was all pretty interesting. I thought, I could do this; I could do that. I'm going to have to move to New York. I always thought that I'd have to move to New York to go to some other level. That ended up not happening, but I always thought that was like an obvious step. You do this. You do your graduate work. You do this and that, and then you go to New York. And you have to live in a shitty place. And you have to do probably some shitty job. But, you'd have to be in New York. Ten, 20 years later, I realized no, I don't have to go to New York. I can live in the woods. I have a different perspective of it, a different idea of what I could do.

Going back to the people working in ceramics, Joan Dickson, Patrick Siler; there was Chanson, Susan Steinberg [Dangberg] [, Sally Lorch –RM]. Yeah, it was just an amazing time and it just happened for a little while. And then, that's when I got—they started the glass program up on the second floor, and I got sort of sucked up into the second floor, and I saw people blowing glass. And I thought, oh, it looked good, that's something I should do; something I could do. And that's how I got involved in that.

MS. RIEDEL: Where were you getting your ideas at the time? Where was your inspiration coming from?

MR. MARQUIS: It somewhat had to do—well, when I first got involved in glassblowing, I was interested in counterfeiting. I thought that—some of the most valuable things in glass at that time were these things called whittle bottles, which were basically middle 1860s whatever bottles that were blown into a carved wooden mold. And I was blowing for a few weeks, and I realized I could counterfeit these things. I could make some money. I could counterfeit these antiques. And that's what I thought was interesting. One thing I got interested in glass

early is because I thought, oh, I could counterfeit early mold-blown glass things. And so that's sort of what I got involved in. That's the reason I was interested in it.

But then after being involved in it a little while, it ended up, wait a minute, there's this whole other market. You could actually make things with your own name and sell them and it wouldn't be a crime. It was legal. It was legal to make stuff and sell it for outrageous prices.

So let's go on.

MS. RIEDEL: Which leads nicely into how and where to steal ideas — a talk you gave a couple of years ago—ten years ago, yeah?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, I gave a slide talk a while ago, ten years ago, about how and where to steal ideas. And the mistake that most people do is they see an object or an idea and they just stupidly take the whole thing, just the whole—I'll just reproduce that. And you're going to get in trouble. It's not a good idea. There's bad karma involved. But what you have to realize is that you can steal an idea and you can steal the gist of an idea. You steal the essence of an idea and the idea could be letting things go all wonky. Make something perfectly on-center, really thin walls—we're talking about blowing glass now—perfectly on-center, thin walls, and then right at the end, you can let it all go wonky by spinning it or letting gravity take over or something like that. And that's the gist of an idea.

It's not the same thing as stealing what the object looks like, but just like what—it's stealing an idea properly, which is—[Riedel laughs]—there are certain—we're talking about karma. There are certain standards. If you're going to steal an idea, there are certain standards. And karmically, you have to be able to steal an idea where the person you stole the idea from doesn't even recognize that you stole the idea.

And the thing I did—the best stealing I did was Dale Chihuly. He was doing the basket forms and early sea forms, and it was these big, sort of, bowls spun out, and then draped. And so they had all this kind of organic look to them. And so I looked at them, said, hmm, hmm, hmm, now I know what I can do. And I made these rocket jars, which were based on that idea of Dale's of letting gravity take over and things drape, but no one ever realized that I stole that idea from Dale, and I made these rocket jars. Because they're totally opposite, totally different, plus no one cared because there was no money involved. [Riedel laughs.]

I mean, so I put up this lecture—I did this lecture. It was a serious, you know, hour lecture about how you steal ideas. You know, the proper way going about it and I used historical reference with Tiffany and the Romans and the Egyptians and Renaissance and—yes, it was this—it was sort of tongue and cheek lecture about how to steal ideas. But actually, it was a lot of good information that I'm sure there's a lot of little shops, you know, out here in the country—no, not here on the island, but there's—I bet there's little shops—people are still making a living using my ideas of how to properly steal an idea—[Riedel laughs]—and not the bad way to do it.

MS. RIEDEL: The spirit of play. There's a humor that permeates your work.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, when I was a kid, I was funny. I guess when I was really young I was really an extrovert. I guess I was like willing to get up and tell jokes and do all this stuff but somewhere through high school, through education, I got down trodden or I got embarrassed or, you know, who knows. But I was still really funny. I was quick, smart. I was funny but outside of being a comedian there was no way of parlaying that ability into a lifestyle. So ended up being an artist and, you know, I could have been a physicist; I could have been a scientist; I could have been a chemist; I could have, you know, I probably could have been successful at anything that I decided to do.

But I ended up deciding to be an artist because it looked like the best job available. So I was an artist. I decided to be an artist and—what was the question?

MS. RIEDEL: The humor that permeates your work.

MR. MARQUIS: Right. And there's—historically in art, you know, you're going back in art history, there's a lot of humor in art. But the artists who are able to do the humor were already credentialed. They already had—they were already famous before they could do the humor. You don't—outside of Saul Steinberg, you know, outside of him, he's the only guy, this cartoonist who was sort of always kind of funny.

But traditionally, you couldn't be funny unless you were already established and then the work was just sort of thought of as, oh and here's Picasso being funny. Here's so and so as being funny. But you couldn't be funny. You couldn't create a body of work or a career on just being funny. Not in art.

MS. RIEDEL: Be written off as whimsical.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Right. And so, I mean, I was always written off as whimsical. [Riedel laughs.] But I made all this stuff that had humor involved and funny, you know, sort of anthropomorphic twists of things. It was always kind of funny and, you know, I could have been a flash in the pan. I could have just come—I could have done a body of work in the ‘60s, ‘70s and gone off and then, you know, go off to some other career and I would have been, just now, parenthetical to the glass movement. But because I’m still around, and I’m still working, I’m still making things—I’ve been around for 40 years, they’re starting to take me seriously and a lot of it I think is longevity.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, also the humor often was based on more formal concerns. Humor appeared in the work but you’d also be looking at balance and color and composition.

MR. MARQUIS: Right. But you might be giving me more credit than I deserve. [They laugh.] No. I kept track, you know, I kept track of things. I knew what was going on.

MS. RIEDEL: The goal wasn’t just to be funny.

MR. MARQUIS: The goal was not just to be funny. You know, I tried to keep the humor out of it. I tried to deal with more formal aspects of, you know, form, color, balance. You know, I tried to deal with that but it’s still really hard just to—you know, I could just move a little salt shaker over into the thing and it made it look better. Yes, I mean, I tried to not do the humor and, you know, I’d often give up and it would have to be there.

And probably in my career there’s so many times that I torpedoed my own career. Just I’ve—people started taking me seriously, then I’d do something really stupid—what one would — what an outsider would think of as being stupid. And I did and I did it intentionally, you know, and I couldn’t help it and it would just happen.

And it’s only by being around so long that those things—those pieces are being accepted and that’s sort of what being lucky is, you know. I could have died and I would not be here talking to you, plus, my career wouldn’t have been exemplified as much as it is now and that’s just luck. That’s just sort of being around, staying alive, doing work and not—I was going to say selling out but that’s not what I mean.

I think I’ve always had an idea of what I was doing and why I should do it and I tried to—you know, it sounds corny, but I’ve tried to stay true to this original feeling of making stuff. And then, you know, fuck everybody, you know. If they don’t like it, fine. That was pretty philosophical.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we were talking earlier about your sources of inspiration and about how they’re cyclical, they’re a series, there are ideas you come back to. And it makes me think of your early work at Berkeley, that whole funk aesthetic — I wonder when you decided to do those series—I’m thinking of the heads or other series that pushed the envelope—as examples of the cyclical nature of your work, going back to that funk aesthetic and pushing that envelope again?

MR. MARQUIS: Okay. That’s a couple different questions.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: The first one, back in Berkeley, you know, no one was saying, oh look we’re involved in this funk movement. You know, it’s all going to be funky and here at Berkeley, everything’s going to be funky so—no. No one. The word was never mentioned, you know, it was mentioned in terms of jazz. So all that happened—that was curators—Peter Selz trying to come up with a label for a show.

So that, as a student, I didn’t enroll in a class to learn to be funky.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. So I just want to make that clear that—you know, it wasn’t an option—that’s just later. That all happened later. All those labels came later.

MS. RIEDEL: But there was a—

MR. MARQUIS: And also, this is important, that just because later I became sort of known, then I was lumped together with like Don Potts and Bob Hudson and all these people in the funk show. Those guys were my mentors, you know. It’s only, you know—it’s like when you’re in the 12th grade and you have a friend’s younger sister in the fourth grade. You never talk to them, you know, they’re just—you’re worlds apart. But then later when you’re 68 and 60, you’re exactly the same age, and that’s a mistake that has happened in trying to identify—trying to pigeonhole artists.

So I’m sort of pigeonholed with these people who are like my totally heroes. You know, I was just this punk kid—punk kid, and there’s no way that what I was doing was anywhere near what they were doing. But 40 years later

—30 years later, I'm labeled as a funk artist, in particularly, in the '60s and that's not true. I was just a kid. I was just a student just trying to barely stay alive, you know, just—so that's—

MS. RIEDEL: But was that an inspiration for you?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, yes. Yes it was inspiration for me and I liked some of it. I liked a lot of it. But I'm pleased to be lumped together with that sort of thing but I wasn't there. No, I was just a student.

MS. RIEDEL: I was thinking of your sources of inspiration—

MR. MARQUIS: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: —over time.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes and that as inspiration.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes I saw this show in—there was a show called, "Abstract Expressionist Ceramics," ["Abstract Expressionist Ceramics," University of California, Irvine, 1966] which actually, when you think about it, it doesn't make any sense. But the show—I can't remember who put it together but it—I think it was—anyway, I once saw it. I went with—my brother and I—in southern California I went and saw it. It was at Irvine. It was at Irvine —"Abstract Expressionist Ceramics." It must have been '65, '67, something like that and it had Pete Voulkos and Melchert, and then they had this guy, Ken Price. You know, Pete had showed a couple slides of his work. And I looked at this thing—the thing I was really impressed with was he had these like funky low-fire porcelain plates that—and the thing that was important about them was that the way they dealt with what they were sitting on. This is something I read. I said, what? I thought, what a bunch of bullshit, you know, you can't talk about shadows and stuff like that.

It's like—it's a ceramic object and it should be good or it should be bad and I looked at them and they were great, just so, so great. And then—so Ken Price from that day on was my hero. He's still my hero. I'm actually—I have had a chance to meet him a few times but I've just been too scared to do it. [Riedel laughs.] It's true. No, it's true. The guy is a—he's a monumental giant. And he's being—you know, he's being recognized by the big—you know, the big guys, the big blue chip galleries but he's still—he's a guy who's a really great artist working in a craft tradition. And I think it's going to probably take another 50—100 years before people realize how great he is. He's totally, totally great. Yes. I can't even stand in his shadow.

Okay. So what else?

MS. RIEDEL: Any other influences? Any you want to mention while we're on the subject?

MR. MARQUIS: HC Westermann. HC Westermann. Just the guy—a radical guy—unhappy guy who—as far as I could tell he was always sort of pissed off at somebody, at something or somebody but he created this body of work. It's fully art-like—it's fully art-like, seemingly art, but it's based on craft about woodworking and being able to use a file properly in shaping things, you know. I bet he used—

MS. RIEDEL: Found objects. Yes.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes, he—but he also—I bet he was able to use scrapers. He knew how to use a scraper. No one knows. And he made this body of work, totally exemplary, beautiful. Beautiful in a—beautiful yet ugly. And this thing—you know, was smart and I don't think he was that smart.

MS. RIEDEL: What makes you think so?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, I sort of read about him and stuff, about how he felt about things. I mean, well, obviously he's really smart but I don't think he was that smart. I think he was just—he was given these creative genes. No, no, he was smart. I have to take it back. Yeah, he was totally smart. He must have known what he was doing. Although, when you look at the stuff—if you look at it sort of chronologically, year by year you could see how he became aware, you know, from the early work to his late work he became more and more aware. And so you can't become—you can't do those kind of steps without being smart.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: So I guess he was smart. But I guess I was thinking he wasn't that smart because he joined the marines in World War II and then he joined again in the Korean War. I mean, that doesn't sound smart to me. You know, that—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MARQUIS: —to intentionally go—you know, to go to war, to be a soldier. So I think HC Westermann—

MS. RIEDEL: What about his work spoke to you about—

MR. MARQUIS: It had a humor; it had a craftsmanship; it had this political—a large political bent, which I never tried to do in my work. I've avoided it because I don't want to be political. I want to stay—you know, I—I guess I'm kind of chickenshit, but I don't want to take a stand. Basically in my work I want to make things that sort of look good, you know.

And Westermann—he was much more willing to take a stand that I am. I'm not going to do it. You know, it just doesn't work out for me because I don't have—I can't back it up. You know, if I make something that sort of looks politically one way or the other, somebody's going to say, well what do you mean by this and I can't back it up. So I just—I've decided not to back it up. I've tried to remove politics in my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we were talking earlier about a political thread or a thread of social commentary — that runs through that and runs through your work relates back to being a student in Berkeley in the '60s.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Well, yes that's the same as, you know, once I decided to be an artist—you know, I was automatically politically correct. The thread you're talking about—you know, it might not be there. It might not be there.

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe it's more of a sensibility?

MR. MARQUIS: It might be a thread. It might not be a thread, it could be a dotted line.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Yes.

MR. MARQUIS: That some of the stuff I make one would possible think that there's a political statement being made or not, and I'm not sure, you know. I've really—I haven't slapped any political bumper stickers on anything —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: —recently.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Well, it's certainly not intentional.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes and I'm just—I guess I'm not comfortable with it. You know, I'm not comfortable with that so—I mean, just dealing with humor is a big enough problem that I don't have to deal with—if I put humor and politics in then I'm juggling probably one or two many things to be—to make what I want to make. And the thing I want to make—the things I want to make are pretty simple, pretty classical. It's pretty much—I try to make things that look good and I try to do it without any rhyme or reason.

You know, there are certain forms that look good together and there are certain masses that, you know, you could pile this on top of that or that on top of this and one looks better than the other, and that's pretty much what I try to do. I'm not trying to remove all the politics. The humor comes in, okay, but I pretty much try just, without a lot of preconceptions, I try to put things together so they look good. That's all I'm—you know, that's all I'm trying to do. And it's a little tiny world and my world is very, very small. There happens to be—you know, not even hundreds—there's probably 20, 30 people who like what I'm doing and they, fortunately, support me. And I'm able to make this, you know—not a hard scrabble living but, you know, I'm able to make a living and do pretty much what I want to do. I'm so lucky—so lucky to get to be able to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking earlier about all the different ways that you've worked — by yourself, with a team, and collaboratively, in particular, with Therman Statom. You wanted to talk about those installations.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Can I take a break now?

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

[Audio break.]

MR. MARQUIS: So it—I think there was a glass conference at the Corning Museum in New York, whenever that was, and at that time Therman Statom, this guy who I'd seen pictures of his work before when his name was Tree Statom. It was pretty interesting work. Anyway, so it ended up at—there was an exhibition in L.A. that I was in and Therman, and Dale Chihuly, and Dick Weiss.

MS. RIEDEL: The late ‘70s.

MR. MARQUIS: Mid-’70s probably. You know, but—yes, maybe late ‘70s. It was called “Four Leaders in Glass” at the—it used to be the Egg and the Eye but it must have been—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MR. MARQUIS: It must have been—it had a more official sounding name. [The Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA.] And—so I said, hey, you know, come on out and— I was teaching at UCLA then. Come on out make your work there. So he came out and I told my grad students—I had like four grad students. I said, okay next month, you guys are working for this dude and they said, no, no I’m busy, I’m busy, I got things to do. I’m working on this and that. I said, no. You guys are working for this guy, Therman Statom. He’s coming out and he’s going to put a show together. And they go, oh okay. And later they told me it was the best thing that ever happened to them. Just to meet and work with such an extraordinary, talented, energetic guy.

So anyway, so that show went on—that show happened and Therman was interested in fabricating things and gluing them together and I’d been working with glues for a couple of years so I sort of became his technical glue guru and it was fun. You know, it was like—I had more fun helping him do his work than I was having—I was having more fun helping him than I was having fun making my own work.

So over the next five years, we just sort of joined forces and did these installations. And—

MS. RIEDEL: Was this the first time you’d collaborated and the first you’d done installations?

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. I guess. I mean—yes. I mean, in a broad sense of collaboration, I’ve had people helping me make my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: You know, I’ve had assistants and people helping make my work. You know, bring me a punty, bring me a handle, that kind of stuff. So that kind of thing—collaboration, in a sense of working with somebody, I’ve done that, but this was a guy who I thought was like, already established. You know, well, he was. So we made these — I think we did 13 installations and it was like, you know, using big sheets of glass. You know, giant scary sheets of glass and cutting them up and making things out of them and assembling them together and then painting them, this and that.

Therman and I worked exactly the same way. We could have been the same guy, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: How’s so?

MR. MARQUIS: Because we worked exactly the same way. I worked on different things than he did but if he was making what I was making, and I was making what he was making, it would have been exactly the same. We didn’t measure anything, you know. It was all eye; it was all proportions and looking at things, and even our color sense was pretty close, pretty similar. Yes, we were sort of the same guy and so we worked for a number of years, only I had—you know, I had another life and he had another life.

We’d get together and do these installations at, you know, this museum or, you know, somewhere or other. And it was—we called it hard fun, really hard fun. It was like so difficult to do. You know, some of it was dangerous but we were able to pull it off. You know, roll into town, put this thing together in three or four days and get out of town, which we did at Indianapolis Museum of Art. We had this, I don’t know, 20,000 square foot space. We could just go ahead and do things and they had scissor lifts and we had help and we did all this stuff, put all these things together, it was great.

And then like the show is over and we were like on the street, you know, with a couple suitcases. And the director of the museum says, well you should go—you know, you should go up to the top of the hill and see the Duchamp exhibit. And we said, okay, so we went up there and it was like six bucks to get in. We didn’t have six, you know. It was like, are we going to have lunch or are we going to see this show.

So we were like, these famous, you know, sort of famous guys having this amazing show, putting all together, and we were like destitute on the street. And it all, to me, it all—it meant that hmm, you know, you have to have a backup plan. You have to have a backup plan.

MS. RIEDEL: And why did the collaborations finally come to an end?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, with that, yes the collaboration came to an end because we were—Betsy Rosenfield in Chicago, who would book—where we both showed—was doing the Navy Pier show, like the precursor to the SOFA [Sculpture Objects and Functional Art] shows, and she had two big booths—I guess they were kind of

expensive—to do an installation. So I said, okay, great and so I got there, Therman never showed. Therman—there was a message from Therman, who was in Amsterdam, and the message got relayed back to me, that I'm in Amsterdam, I'm okay. Sorry. Anyway, so I put this show—you know I sort of pretty much did all the stuff. You know, I was Therman and I was me. [Riedel laughs.] I had to be both us, yeah, and it looked different. It looked different from one — if Therman was there, it would have looked totally different, but then there was a review in the paper. The show and it said, once again, Therman Statom has done just an incredible job, you know, and I wasn't mentioned.

I said, you know, I don't have to do this anymore. You know, this is—obviously this is not my job—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: —you know, my job is making something else, so that was the last time we worked together for a long time, for maybe 10 or 15 years. I mean, now we work together. Recently we've done some work together and we've always remained great friends—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: —but it didn't make any sense there for a while to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Did the installations build on each other? Were there certain concepts that you were developing from one to the next, or was each one a completely new idea?

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. No. It was pretty much just—imagine yourself dropped from like a 20 foot height into a living room and there's a bunch of things in the living room that you're not familiar with, but there's like big balls and there's TVs and stuff, and then you're supposed to make something. That's pretty much the way I interpreted it. You know, we just pretty much had to deal with things. Sometimes—you know, we said we would leave a list of what we wanted, you know, how many sheets of glass and paints and props and this and that; and sometimes it was there and sometimes it wasn't. It was really fun. It was really fun and totally dangerous. I'm just so surprised none of us really got hurt badly.

MS. RIEDEL: I've seen photos of jagged edges and many points.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Well, later Therman was working in Europe and people were killed. Yeah, he was—I think he was doing an installation in Germany and the truck full of the glass was delivering to the museum, and he had volunteer helpers unloading the glass. You know, there wasn't a chock—you know the wheel chock wasn't set properly and one of the large dollies of glass sort of slid off the back of the truck and killed somebody. Yes, so it's—we always knew it was dangerous and we were careful, and outside of a few, you know, bloody fingers no one was ever hurt but it is—it's dangerous when artists get to use industrial technologies.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MARQUIS: I think it's true. I think, you know, it's dangerous. I mean, I don't know—we're careful so we weren't hurt but it was always—we were careful. We had to be careful. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think about yourself and your work as part of an international tradition or an American tradition? For you that's an especially interesting question.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes, and I'd say the answer is both. I'm international because I studied in Italy and I kept—I have an appreciation for English, Czech, Russian, Italian, Swedish glass-blowing. So—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: So I did have that appreciation, but I'm pretty much American. I was invited to a show in Japan a long, long time ago. I thought, I'm going to have me a show in Japan. I should, you know, try and make something kind of Japanese. You know, so I sort of made these—I knew about, you know, a lot of traditional raku tea bowls that the—so I sort of made these tea bowls and that was the dumbest thing to do. You know, you can't—one should never try to second-guess the culture. So you shouldn't try to make something Japanese for Japanese; you should not try to make something Italian for Italians and stuff. You should just do what you know how to do and what you're best at doing. And the thing I was best at doing is just, I don't know, putzing around in my shop and making stuff that I like.

And the Japanese will either like it or not; the Finns will like it or not, the Swedes will like it or not; the Italians will like it or not. And it seems to be that the more true you are to your own ideas, more true to your own thoughts, it will be more accepted by everybody else.

Nick, you know, my friend Nick who was here—Lino Tagliapietra was having dinner at his home, so they like

made this handmade pasta and — what's it called? The small little critters.

MS. RIEDEL: Gnocchi?

MR. MARQUIS: No. No. The little birds?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, duck?

MR. MARQUIS: Quail or something. Yeah. It was like breast of quail sauce in this handmade pasta. I mean, it was—they just worked their butt off because this Italian maestro was coming to dinner. And it ends up that he just—without saying anything he just put all the pasta off to the side, he didn't eat it. And that right there—that just little story, that just shows you, just try not to—don't ever try to please any culture or any person that you think you should try to please. What you should do is just be true to your own ideas and your own image. You know, it's like the stuff I make that I would consider so American, you know, with references to—[inaudible]—or something like that, that is appreciated more in Europe than when I, if I'd try to make something for them.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: So, yes. So back to the question of whether—am I international or am I American, I think it's pretty much both. I've got all my—you know, I've got—my skills are based on—you know, everything I could—everything. But I think my most successful work is sort of, not only American but kind of actually local kind of, Californian kind of. Just that little era that I grew up in the '50s and the early '60s, you know. I think Gene Autry is more important to me than Ingrid Bergman.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think about how and when to steal an idea. You went to Italy and learned all those techniques, brought them back here and used them very much in your own way. So you didn't try and make Italian glass, anything you learned there but you put those techniques to use.

MR. MARQUIS: Well—

MS. RIEDEL: In terms of your own work, yes or no?

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: No?

MR. MARQUIS: No. Yes and no. The thing is I never saw—the whole time I was in Italy, you know, the first year or so I lived in Italy, I never saw anybody make that goblet.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. You mentioned that.

MR. MARQUIS: They were made in other factories, other shops, and so I never saw that made. So I never saw that technology and also, when I first went to Italy, the stuff in the showrooms, it was pretty much so '50s. It was so clunky, '50s, ugly. I wasn't interested in it. I was more interested in the stuff from the 1850s than the 1950s. Okay, I'm losing my train of thought but people think, you know, I went to Italy, and all this stuff was just handed to me on a silver card. You know, young people think I was—like I went to Italy and I was a—I must have already been important and they said, okay here, this is how to do everything. This is how we do it, you know, and it's nothing like that. It's so far from the truth. I went as this punk, long-haired guy that nobody liked, you know, in Italy. I mean, I—you know, they didn't understand why I was there or why I wanted be there. And I had absolutely, you know as far as they could tell, I had absolutely no skills, so who was I trying to fool?

So all this stuff I learned and all this stuff I made was pretty hard fought. It was pretty hard fought. I had to—I got my tooth chipped; I got my hair burned; they were not nice to me. I mean, it was—you know, it wasn't that much fun, but I had a sense of delayed gratification, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: I had a sense of—you know, it's probably worth it for me to stay there and work hard and get as much as I could, but I could barely stand it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: I could barely stand it. I had a girlfriend back in the States, you know, and I knew, you know, there was a nice warm bed, you know, and I thought, why am I here in Italy just having so much misery? And the answer was because—well, delayed gratification. You know, this will probably all work out sooner or later and if I had more stature, you know, actually physical stature—if I was like older and if I had—if I was able to have this sort of chutzpah of being able to talk to somebody, like being able to talk to an older adult in an adult-like

manner, I would have gotten along so much better, but I was just—you know, I was a punk kid who stuttered, couldn't speak Italian, and couldn't express my ideas and my thoughts, you know. It was a painful, awful experience.

MS. RIEDEL: It was hard.

MR. MARQUIS: And it was—but now, 40 years later, it looks so great. You know, I was so lucky, and I was lucky but it wasn't—

MS. RIEDEL: It wasn't easy.

MR. MARQUIS: —it wasn't—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: —you know, it wasn't that pretty at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Which is an interesting way to lead into what we were talking about yesterday in the car — that you would rather be starting out in glass today because there's so much more information available now.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —the whole world has changed.

MR. MARQUIS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —in the field.

MR. MARQUIS: Right. That's true.

MS. RIEDEL: Which changes strike you as remarkable or—[inaudible]?

MR. MARQUIS: It looks like the university program has broken down. It looks like there aren't kids now wanting to go study at the university to learn about art or glassblowing, or crafts, or anything else—it just seems like that is all been taken over by summer schools and craft schools, things like that. When I was young it was pretty much the obvious thing to do. It was like—to—you know, go through the university or art school and then get a job teaching art, you know. I mean, that was pretty much—that was the ideal. I wanted to be like Pete Voulkos, you know, in the sense I had a really good job and I didn't have to be there very long.

But now, my good friend Dante Marioni, who like didn't ever go to college and didn't put himself through that kind of turmoil. He is as smart and more well-informed than anybody else of his age and that's just happenstance. Just because—I think he like—he reads the paper. He reads magazines and he can't stop—wherever he is, no matter where he is—like in a—I've had dinner with him at restaurants and this and that. He picks everything up and looks at it. I mean, he actually—he picks things up. Like he would pick up this vase and turn it around and look at all the different sides of it. And so, he has taught himself this three-dimensional world—education.

He provided himself with his own education and—

MS. RIEDEL: His dad is an artist too, though. Don't you imagine, growing up as a kid, a lot of—

MR. MARQUIS: Yes, but you can also grow up—growing up and just wanting the exact opposite. His dad's an artist and they didn't know where the money was coming from, they didn't know this and that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: You know, I could see Dante wanting to be an accountant.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: You know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: And it just ends up that he ended up sort of being like his dad in being another artist. But I think he's the first one—I think Dante is a unique window into the future of like—you don't have to use the university, you don't have to do the art school thing, you just have to like work and work and work, and practice, practice, work and work, and practice, practice. Dante's also an excellent example that he realized pretty early on that he

didn't have to have that many original ideas, you know. You know, I'm speaking for him and I've never talked to him about this, but I think he realized that if he just got good, if he just got the skills, the ideas would come later.

And unbeknownst to me and a few other people of my generation, he ends up being right. I think so. I think he—I think it's only in our little glass world, it's true that you can just—if you just study, study; practice, practice, practice; and get all your skills together, and then later on, you know, you could have one or two or three or four ideas, and that's it, because you only get a few ideas.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: And in my generation, it was more like the ideas came first and then you had to figure out how to make it. You know, you had to figure out how to do that. And now, there's a couple generations now that are getting their skills together before they get their ideas together. And in a perfect world—in my own perfect world, that would—you would think, no he shouldn't do that, shouldn't work. But in the new semi-perfect world, that works. You don't need that. You don't need the university education. You don't need to have to take foreign languages or physics and all that stuff. You don't need to take in all those classes. All you need to do is to work hard and, you know, with a certain eye-hand coordination, you're going to be successful with this particular world I'm involved in. And I'm not saying that's good or bad; it's interesting.

So to get back to the question whether I'd rather do it then or now, I'd rather do it now because so much information—I mean, I have a certain eye-hand coordination, you know, I'm okay. And I know what's going on, I could figure things out, I can extrapolate. And so I would be so much better—okay, like I'm 60; if I start now in my 20s, in 40 years I'd be so much better than I am now—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: —starting out, you know, back then to the point I am now, because whenever and whatever I was doing, I would be successful just because that's what I'm going to do. That's what I'm going to do, that's me. So I'd rather do it now because there's so much more information. I could have learned so much more, so much faster, all this access internationally.

MS. RIEDEL: You don't have to go Italy for a year to—

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You could just take a Richard Marquis weekend seminar and—[laughs.]

MR. MARQUIS: Well, no not exactly. But no, I'd much rather be involved now, you know, and all—you know, I sort of, like copyrighted things, early, you know, like figured out the, you know, the teapot and murrine and stuff like that. You know, it's sort of like—it's hard for somebody else to do that—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: —because I did it. But there's so much more. There is just so much more to do. I mean, that is nothing. That's a drop in the bucket. That is—I would really love to be 20 years old right now with all my faculties—

MS. RIEDEL: What would you do?

MR. MARQUIS: With all my faculties, 20 years—I just would practice and practice and practice. And I would learn one thing over and over and over and over and then I'd do something else and do it over and over and over and over, do something over and over and over. Yes. I'd—

MS. RIEDEL: So developing new skills. Are you talking about new series of work?

MR. MARQUIS: No, developing old skills.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes, I'm still fascinated with the whole aspect of glassblowing. You know, the actual thing. Yes, I'd probably be Josiah McElheny, you know. I think actually Josiah McElheny and I are the same guy. As far as I can tell, we're exactly the same person, we're just like 30 or so years apart because he has a certain skills and he's really paid attention. I mean, he actually paid attention and so he's like—he's the first guy—the first glassblower to sort of go into the blue chips. You know, he's got, you know, his galleries, New York, London gallery, the Whitney [Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY], you know, and I can never do that. I can't do it because I got this big craft tradition. You know, I made teapots, I did this and that, and so I can never move into that realm, which, you know, I think it's too bad, but the people who are in charge of that realm, they're not that

smart.

You know, they'd never let me in, so it's like I'm not even going to worry about. You know, just like that's just the way it is—the way things happen. I certainly can't complain, I had a really nice—I made a really nice living, you know, nice life. But if I was going into glass blowing now, I could do that.

MS. RIEDEL: What's changed?

MR. MARQUIS: What's changed is 40 years of blowing glass and my—along with those 40 years, my perception has changed. If I had been smarter—If I had known then what I know now, and if I was smarter then—if I was smart then as I am now, I could have figured that out. But it wasn't—you know, it didn't happen. I wasn't that smart.

MS. RIEDEL: You could have done something differently?

MR. MARQUIS: I could have done something differently. I could have been—I could have moved in different realms, different spheres. But I didn't know it and—you know, I didn't give up my subscription to *Artforum* so—[laughs]—it could have been different, yes. It could have—yes, I could be in a different place, not that I'm unhappy with the place I am in. It's pretty great where I am.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think you could have changed the response to your work by doing something differently, or do you think the world has changed? Is there anybody in your generation who has done what you would have done?

MR. MARQUIS: No. In my generation, it didn't happen because of all—it was all in the craft realm.

MS. RIEDEL: I just don't know how feasible that would have been 40 years ago.

MR. MARQUIS: Well, it's only because we didn't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And you don't think anyone tried?

MR. MARQUIS: Howard Ben Tre tried. Yes, Howard tried. And then Dale, Dale Chihuly, he just sort of created his own little world.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: And that was totally out of left field. He—from really early, he always realized that the image is more important than the object, and this and that. I think Dale has just sort of gone and, you know, phenomenally successful glass artist. If I had more knowledge or if I had been more careful, I think I could have—you know, I couldn't have been Dale, but I could have been—I could have broken into—you know, real art.

MS. RIEDEL: More fine art, more blue chip.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —you think that—

MR. MARQUIS: I could have done it.

MS. RIEDEL: —you could have opened those doors?

MR. MARQUIS: I could have done it but I can't do it now. It's way too late. Yes, now I'm just—I'm tagged.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. The way that I've normally heard that argued is that multiple people did try and there was no positive response from the galleries.

MR. MARQUIS: Right. But how —you mean people, you know, people are gimping. They were just—they were complaining. It sounds like they're complaining. I'm not complaining. I just—

MS. RIEDEL: No, no. I'm not thinking about complaining, I was just talking with an artist who said that 20, 30 years ago, he would take his work in — it was all concept-inspired work but done in glass — and he was told point-blank by the dealer, sorry, my clients don't take it seriously.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Just was written off completely because of the material.

MR. MARQUIS: Right. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So it wasn't for lack of trying and he wasn't complaining; he was just describing what the response had been 20 or 30 years ago.

MR. MARQUIS: I've never actually gone out and tried to get people interested in my work.

MS. RIEDEL: That's not a bad thing to be able to say.

MR. MARQUIS: Well, I mean, in one way I'm really ambitious. I'm very ambitious in getting things done. But I'm very lackadaisical in dealing with galleries and collectors and stuff. Actually, I don't like most collectors or most galleries. I would've liked to have just given a stipend, you know, like a WPA project, I'd like to have gotten like $1,000 a month and do whatever I wanted to do. And I would have probably made pretty much the same stuff I've made, because the things I make, they're pretty much because I want to make them.

Sometimes I look at sales, you know, like, oh this could, I could sell this, you know, that's a good idea. But generally I'm just on these little funny tangents of making stuff, and often the tangents are like—not making things old, but like fixing up the '34 Desoto Airflow. And those tangents, which I used to be more involved in than I am now—I've actually gotten a little better trying to keep focused on things that I think are more important, over what other people think is more important.

If I was just given a monthly stipend, I'd be happy. If I just didn't have to worry about paying my health insurance and the rent and that kind of thing, I would probably, I'd be able to make anything I wanted to make. It would be so nice to be able to make anything I wanted to make.

MS. RIEDEL: Which you're pretty much doing, but you wouldn't have the anxiety of the bills.

MR. MARQUIS: I'm pretty much doing it, but I have to finance it. I have to sort of plan a little bit ahead, and I have to figure out whether I can pay for the gas and the materials and this and that. And I can't do giant projects. I can't do monumental things, but it ends up that I'm not that interested in that kind of thing anyway. So, it's all actually kind of worked out. It's all worked out.

MS. RIEDEL: How has your work been received, and how has that changed? You worked with Kate Elliott for years and years, and Franklin Parrasch for a long time, too.

MR. MARQUIS: The thing about dealers, it's all a catch-22. The galleries that I want to be in aren't interested in me. And the galleries that are interested in me, I'm not interested in. And so there's this sort of smudged line of who I actually end up working with or dealing with. And there's no reason that I couldn't be with a New York gallery, a Chicago gallery that shows regular work—when I say regular work, I mean they're showing painters and sculptors and whatever.

So I have this relationship with Franklin Parrasch in New York, and he was pretty much kind of a regular gallery. He dealt with some of my favorite artists, HC Westermann, Ken Price, Ron Nagle, and he liked my work, but he couldn't sell any of the work. I'd have a show, and it ends up that he hated the glass collectors. And pretty much the people who collect my work are glass collectors. There's some other, I have a few collectors who, like, I'm the only glass artist that collect, and that's fine. But he, he couldn't, he hated the glass collectors. And I said, so do I. I totally understand, Franklin, it's not working. He says he'd like to keep showing me, and I say, well, I think it's not working, we're not selling anything; I think I'm going move one to another gallery. He said, good luck, fine.

And then, of course, nothing happened because I never pursued anything. No one called me up and said, I'd like to show you in New York City. And so it's been years now, five, 10 years that I haven't had any New York representation. And that's just sort of the way it is.

MS. RIEDEL: What was so frustrating to him and to you about the collectors?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, glass collectors are pretty much, they're not educated. They're not smart. They don't know anything about art history. They're not—oh man, this is on tape, huh?

MS. RIEDEL: We can take it out if you want.

MR. MARQUIS: That's all right. No, I don't mind pissing people off. They seem to get involved in glass because it's a sort of shiny thing, and they seem to have a bunch of money. But they don't, you know, they've probably

never read anything about art history. They don't know who so-and-so and so-and-so is. They just sort of, they like this material the way it looks. And they get sort of pushed to me, you know. People say, if you like glass, you should like this guy, you should like this Richard Marquis guy. And they look at my stuff and it's not glassy, it's not shiny. So they have to actually be talked into it. They have to be educated into getting my stuff.

And that's what Kate Elliott was always good at. She could actually talk them in to doing it. She could talk the talk and she knew a lot about history and all that. So Kate Elliott could sell my stuff. Franklin couldn't do it. He didn't have the patience. And I don't blame him. I don't blame him at all.

MS. RIEDEL: So a huge educational component.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah. My stuff, it's not shiny, it's not pretty, and it is expensive. As far as most people can tell, it's expensive for no apparent reason.

MS. RIEDEL: How has the reception to your work changed over the past three decades?

MR. MARQUIS: I don't know. It used to be that in—there were shows, you know, national shows, international shows, and I was always the youngest guy. Then Dan Daley was like a little younger than me, I thought, huh, now I'm in these sort of same international, national shows and I'm the oldest guy. And I was thinking, I thought it was interesting but I think the reason that I was the youngest guy way back when and now I'm the oldest guy now is because my work has always changed. So I'm always making new stuff. Some people call it schizophrenic. I can put a group show together by myself. And it's really interesting, right now I'm picking out slides for a slide show down in L.A. next week, and it's 40 years of glass, trying to get it down to 30 slides. And it could be a dozen people could have made this stuff. Yeah, pretty much.

And so over the years I'd say I'm still in the hunt. I'm still there. I'm not discounted I think because I'm making new stuff all the time. And the new stuff I make, or the new things I make, I think that one reason they're appreciated is because they have no commercial potential. I'm still making things with no commercial potential, which is my goal.

MS. RIEDEL: That sell.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, right, that will sell sooner or later.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking earlier about the cyclical nature of your work, how you do so many different things at the same time, and the four good ideas.

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, the four good ideas. Well, I think—anyone with half a sense—anybody smart who were, say—okay, let's say you are a living, maneuverable adult person, and you're thrown into a world, a different culture, foreign culture. And if you looked around and paid attention, you could exist. You could see what was going on, figure out what to do, and this and that, and in a little while you would be successful—if you were smart, willing to work hard, and you had any sense at all, any sense at all.

When I got involved in glass and stuff, you know, I just read a few books. I looked in books in the library and looked at glass stuff and then I realized, wow, I can make this. Look, no one's done this before. Couldn't be that hard. And so I was able to make these things, and then when I went to Italy, I saw sort of technology there and I thought, wow, look, these guys could make that if that had any—you know, they could make this, or I could make that. I might as well do it. And so stars and stripes, you know. How hard, it's not that hard to do, you know. It's like, gee, they have blue glass, white glass, red glass. I can make stars and stripes. And so I did it, and then 40 years later it's so close to what I'm doing now. It's so close. I mean, my skill levels have gotten better, but the basic, original thing of making murrine back in Italy in 1969 and 1970, I'm still doing the same thing. When I talk about everybody gets four good ideas, that was one of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Variations on the theme.

MR. MARQUIS: Variations on the theme and you have to stay kind of close to home. You can't go just wacky way out in the stratosphere. You can't take the idea out there because people won't understand what the idea is. But if you stay close and do general improvements, subtle improvements, then the work is pretty good.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you want to talk about the four good ideas?

MR. MARQUIS: I've never actually—the four good ideas is just something I came up with, but I haven't numbered my ideas yet. I know one. I had one, I've only had one good idea.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's discuss what motivated the significant changes in the work. We've talked about how your ideas circle around. Every once in a while you do something completely different based on something familiar.

MR. MARQUIS: Right. I think there's a general mistake made in artist's work where they try to figure things out chronologically, and my mind doesn't work—it's not that linear. I don't go from A to B to C to D. I go from A to D to E to F to G. If I had more—if there were more of me, you know, if I was ten guys or four, I would be working on all this different stuff all the time. I look in my old sketchbooks and I'm sort of amazed how many ideas I had that I've never even dealt with. But then I have ideas that I—things that I made in the '60s or '70s that I haven't quite finished that I could do it better now, or that reminds of something else I could do — it would be more interesting if I did it now or if I could just go back. And I think there's a problem that artists or I guess most human beings think that their life has to make sense. It has to have a beginning, an education, and then the productive period, and decline; and that doesn't seem to be happening.

I look at stuff I made like in 1967. You know, what a good idea; I could go back—you know, I want to go back and I want to fix it, you know, I want to make it better. And then things I made last week—

MS. RIEDEL: Can you give me an example of a piece, or a series?

MR. MARQUIS: Yes, there's this way of making bottles called double-post where you gather the glass and you sort of make the top part of this thing and then you gather, just on the bottom part of it, and then that becomes the body of the work. It was a way—in the 1800s they made utilitarian work called double-post, and I was intrigued with it back in 1966 and 1967 and just recently I thought, I should go back. You know, I could back there and delve into that whole chunk of knowledge because I can do it now; I know how to do all different patterns and textures and stuff. And no one is even — no one is there. No one—

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Nobody's developed that yet.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Yes. So that's one little thing. You can't do it all, but I try.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's good.

Do you see any specific—we could have talked about this when we were talking about Dante Marioni, but there are so many different threads we can follow from each of these topics—specific1 differences between artists trained at university and one who learns outside?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, no—I think we dealt with it a little bit—can't tell. I think it's an individual — you know, somebody could go through the university system and be inured and come out great or come out tainted. And there could be a kid who doesn't go to the school or university at all and learns how to be a great glassblower just through apprenticeship.

So, no, I think it's the individual person. It could happen either way.

MS. RIEDEL: What place do you see for universities in contemporary glass?

MR. MARQUIS: Boy, I don't know. I think there's—you know, there's fewer and fewer programs in the university system and more and more, like, public access glass shops. You know — I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything the universities could do that the glass shops can't, or are the glass shops springing up because the universities aren't doing what they should be doing?

MR. MARQUIS: You know, it's not my place to tell the universities what they should be doing. I mean, I'd be glad to tell them what I think they should be doing but I don't think this is the right place.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: UW, the University of Washington, is talking about setting up a graduate program in glass. It's probably the only place in the country where they can successfully do that without having any facilities.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. MARQUIS: Right, because—I mean, there's so many places and shops that they could have an instructor and grad students and there would be some—I'm sure that there'd be some pretty dynamic conversations, but there's not going to be facilities. Seattle is the only place in the country that would work. I mean, I haven't talked to—I haven't talk to them in a couple of years but I think it's still in the works. I think that's going to happen. They're going to have—they're going to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: That would be interesting.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: A new glass program without facilities.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Yes, because there's so many facilities in the area.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah. At first I was a little interested, you know, and then I thought, oh, I'd have to go on the ferry and I'd have to Seattle, I'd have to go meetings — wait a minute, I've already got a job, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: That you like.

MR. MARQUIS: I've already got a great job and so I don't have to worry about that job.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

Let's talk a little bit about how you're working process has changed over time. You've got a studio here at home that allows you to do certain things, and you travel to do other kinds of work.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. I've always—from like, you know, 1966 when I was, you know—got interested in blowing glass at Berkeley, and I only had very little access to the shop, so in '67 I built my own shop. I got a little tiny grant and bootlegged the gas, like I was saying, and built this little shop.

So I've always had my own shop. And I can't imagine not having my own shop. I mean, you know, in Berkeley, like I had to drive from my house to the shop. And here I just walk out, you know, 50 yards from my house to the shop.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: And I can't imagine not having my own shop. You know, it's not that expensive to maintain. My shop is simple. You know, we figure my shop has the fewest moving parts of any shop in the world. So I've always had my own shop that I go out to and work out ideas, you know, make things and work out ideas. But realistically, I've made the shop fairly small-scaled just because of expenses, you know, in terms of gas and that kind of thing.

So most of the things I want to make, I can make in my shop. If I want to make something bigger, I use somebody else's shop, or if I want to make a ton of something—you know, if need to make 50 or 60 or 100 of these things, then I use somebody else's shop. And there are so many shops around now that that's pretty easy. And I basically have a cosmic trade with people who help me and the people I help, and money very rarely exchanges hands. It's just they use my shop; I use their shop; I help them; they help me. And it's kind of like a village. It's a village of glass workers who help each other out, and it goes across different continents, but it's actually a small village and we help each other out.

MS. RIEDEL: Yesterday you were talking about how you made a very conscious decision when you came back from Italy to share all that information. There is competition within the field, but that as a group, you really do try to be a supportive community.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. You know, the more you know, the more you teach, the more you get back. Yes, I've always just—the very early days of glassblowing, you know, in the shop, somebody would figure out some little trick; you know, somebody figured out how to do a spiral thread, spiral wrap, which is just a very simple tool that you set up a pipe on wheels that are at an angle, and when you roll the pipe, the wheel setup and the angle bring the pipe slowly back so you get this really perfect spiral.

And I was working in California and I was working in this shop and the guy had this thing, this piece of equipment, and he always kept it covered. It was a secret. It was a secret, and I thought, that's the stupidest thing in the world. It's like, anybody can figure that—you know, why are you doing that? I pretty much always just—you know, it's taken me years sometimes to develop a technique or process like a slab construction for instance. It's taken me a long time to figure it out. And I can just go and demonstrate how to do it: You know, this technique—four years to figure out, and here's how you do it. And I'd show it to people and all I'd do is I get more back.

First of all, no one's interested in doing that because it's difficult and tricky and all that. And I got such a head start—I got such a head start that they're not ever going to come close. I mean, if they do come close, I'd be impressed and I could appreciate it, but I can outdistance them.

My friend—I started to do daguerreotypes a few years ago and my friend Jerry Spagnoli, you know, it's the same thing—he's saying, okay, this is how you do it. I said, Jerry, you know, it's taken you years to figure this out. I said, how come you're just giving us all—you know, why are you giving us all this information? He says, you'll

never catch up. [Riedel laughs.] And then he looked at me and says, wait a minute, you might be able to catch up. I said, that's right. That's right. I'm right behind you, buddy. [Laughs.] I'm going to catch up. But if you're going to teach, you have to do that.

There are some people who—a lot of glass artists don't teach, and that's why, because they can't afford it or they think they can't afford it to give all the information out.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MARQUIS: In fact, they could, but they don't think they can. You know, I could name names but I'm not going to.

The more you give, the more you get. The more—the idea is to work. It's sort of like my philosophy in garage-saleing is like buy low, keep for ten years, and then give it away. And I think that's the same thing about my teaching philosophy. It's like, learn how to do it, work really hard and figure things out, and then as soon as you figure it out, show everybody how to do it. And no one's going to do it anyway because it's already taken, or if they do—the good ones will come up with something interesting, something new. I've always tried to work with—try to get apprentices and assistants who were going to move on.

MS. RIEDEL: So they can steal in an appropriate way, move forward and use it.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MARQUIS: And then move on and it won't look like my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

I'm going to pause this.

MR. MARQUIS: Okay.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Richard Marquis at the artist's home and studio on Whidbey Island in Washington on September 16, 2006 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number four.

[Motor in background.]

MR. MARQUIS: The sound of freedom. That's a helicopter, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: I realized as I was driving here that you live in Freeland. Did that have anything to do with your choice?

[Cross talk.]

MR. MARQUIS: But it was like—in the teens it was a utopian community. They named it—they did name Freeland for this utopian thing where you came in and you got so many acres, like an acre or four acres or something, and you worked all together and everything went to the — it was called the cash store, but I don't think that's what they meant.

Yes—no, it was an old—it's a failed utopian society. [Riedel laughs.] Another failed utopian society—Freeland, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: We were going to talk about the work.

MR. MARQUIS: Right. Are you going to go through the list or what?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, let's talk about significant breaks. What inspired the end in one series and the start of another? For example, the neon heads and the bottles and plates are significantly different from other series.

MR. MARQUIS: I came into glass with a ceramics background, but the ceramics background was only like a couple years, you know, before I started doing glass. And I just sort of—Ken Price and Ron Nagle's cups, so I got into glass and I decided to make cups. This was one of the first things I made, and then I was influenced by them. And also, at the same time, looking in the library and looking at the historical glass precedence, I was interested in early American glassblowing and that kind of stuff, so I was dealing with like—the very beginning,

like in ‘66,’67, I was dealing with making glass cups and glass bottles that were based on this double-post technique of early American glass.

And then I went to Italy, I got a grant—I got a Fulbright grant to go to Italy. And before I went there, I pretty much—I went to the library. I was probably one of the few students that actually spent a lot of time in the library learning how—looking at images and learning how things were done. There’s just so much information in the library. And that’s probably why I got the grant because I was able to write a coherent statement of like why somebody should spend a bunch of money to send me to Italy.

So I went to Italy and then I learned in practical terms how to make things that I only knew in theory before. Most of the stuff—most of the information about complicated techniques were written by Englishmen in England, having been to Italy, you know, for a little while, and I can just see them with their gouty foot upon that leather cushion pretending they knew how the stuff was made. And those were the books that came down from the 17th, 18th century, and that’s what we—as a young, interested student in the library, those were the books that I came across about how this stuff was made. It was totally wrong. There’s Occam’s razor — you know, Occam’s razor?

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds familiar but—

MR. MARQUIS: It’s a sort of basic theory in science like—the most simplest solution to a problem is usually the right one, and that was not apparent reading these books. So when I went to Italy, it all became clear that, oh, it’s so much easier than one had imagined. There’s so much—the way you make these techniques and patterns and stuff, it’s just so clear, so easy once you see it.

So Italy introduced me to that whole thing of don’t make it complicated; go for the easiest, most direct route. And so a lot of my work and a lot of my patterns and all that stuff comes from the idea of like, it’s not that hard. Do it, do it, do it. Do the simple thing.

And then I’d been back from Italy a couple years—I was teaching at San Francisco State—and one of my students—her name was Cathy [Baum]—she wants to make a—how do you make a teapot in glass? Okay, I knew how to do it; I knew how to do it from—just from my basic knowledge of glass blowing. And so, as a demo for her in the class, I made, you know, a teapot—just out of clear, made this teapot, put it all together, you know, had a spout and a handle and a lid and everything.

MS. RIEDEL: You’d never made one before?

MR. MARQUIS: Never made one before, yes. Well—

MS. RIEDEL: In clay but not in glass.

MR. MARQUIS: Not even in—hardly in clay even because it was like—with Voulkos stuff; you couldn’t make one. You’d be thrown out. You couldn’t do it. It was not allowed. And this was like, I think the first—I mean, I got out of Cal—I mean, I was finished with school like in ‘70 or so, ‘72 and the first teapot I made was ‘74 and it was pretty much because a request from a student saying, how would you put a teapot together? How can you make a teapot? So I just sort of figured it out. I did this demo. And then after that I realized, well, that’s pretty good, because the teapots had—I feel like I’ve answered this question hundreds of times.

MS. RIEDEL: But we haven’t talked about it so this is good.

MR. MARQUIS: No, we haven’t talked about it, so this is good that we’re putting it on tape.

The thing about the teapot that’s interesting is it has all these elements. It has a spout and a handle and a lid and a bottom, and so it had all these things that you could play around with and move around and mess around with and it still is recognizable, you know, as a teapot.

Even in ceramics—I mean, I was taught and bred to make nothing functional. You know, if it was functional then you were out of there. So when I was in ceramics making cups and this and that, everything was nonfunctional. You know, you couldn’t deal with function, and why would you want to deal with function anyway because you could go down to Value Village and get something that functions for 39 cents.

So anyway, I got interested in making teapots, and a couple of years earlier, I’d learned how to do all the murrine stuff in Italy and so—you know, nowadays it looks like it was an obvious thing to do because if I can do murrine and I could make teapots I should just make murrine teapots, but it actually came together much more slowly. And some of the first ones I made were at the Haystack school in Maine. And from there then I went on to —I was on—my girlfriend Raffi and I were going around the world and Paul Smith says that there’s some interest in Australia—they’re interested in glass. And I said, well, okay, I could do that.

And so, while we were in Japan on our tour, the letter or whatever came and says, okay, yes, it's on, you're going to Japan—I mean, you're going to Australia to do this stuff for three months and you're getting paid a certain amount of money. And so I flew back home, went back to Berkeley and got things together because, you know, I had molds made for furnaces and this and that. And then I went back to Japan and we went on and continued this tour, and that's when I went to Australia in '74.

And then, you know, there's a whole bunch of information that came from that.

MS. RIEDEL: And we're talking about the work, though.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes, right. The different stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Did Australia influence what you were making?

MR. MARQUIS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No. So you were making teapots and you were making murrine teapots—

MR. MARQUIS: And I just started making murrine teapots before I got to Australia and—

MS. RIEDEL: How did you get to the *Big Greys* [1980], for example?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh. The *Big Greys*—it all goes back to high school physics. In high school—

MS. RIEDEL: Doesn't it always? [Laughs.]

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. It all goes back there. I think it was chemistry or physics, but I'm pretty sure it was—it couldn't have been Mr. Vick, my chemistry teacher, or Mr. Bescoby, my physics teacher, who talked with a lisp, and I got in so much trouble because I couldn't help but—when he had called me, I'd say, yeth, Mr. Bethcoby, and I'd just get thrown out of class.

Anyway, but there was a thing of like boiling water in a paper cup.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: Have you seen that one?

MS. RIEDEL: No, I have not.

MR. MARQUIS: No, there's a thing like—you get a paper Dixie cup and you put the cup of water over a Bunsen burner and you could boil the water in a paper cup. It's the whole thing of heat transfer.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: And so I thought I could make these big things if I was able to ladle or gather a bunch of glass and then pick it up on the bottom of another bubble, then I'd be able to blow it—right at the end, I'd be able to blow it really big.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: So I thought of, well, one way to do it would be like from the water boiling in the paper cup, which is—so I got these really thin stainless steel salad bowls and then I put them in a tub of water and then we just dumped all this, you know, molten glass from the furnace into and it would just sit there and sort of simmer and it hardly cooled. And by leaving it there a little while—I mean, the steam was sort of insulating it and so it would sort of just stay there hot and I was able to make the other part—the top parts and everything, get it all ready, and then I'd go in and pick this thing up and then just with a little bit of shaping and marvering I'd blow it into this giant big thing.

And at that time, it was really big. Nowadays it's like tiny but at that time it was just this big thing, you know, and it was kind of cool. And it—

MS. RIEDEL: And you just completely invented that process?

MR. MARQUIS: Well, from—

MS. RIEDEL: Based on high school—

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. High school physics and—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MARQUIS: —and knowing that you could boil water in a paper cup, so I knew I could put molten glass in a very thin stainless bowl, sitting in water, and all the heat would be dissipated and it would all work.

MS. RIEDEL: There was water actually in the bowl as well?

MR. MARQUIS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So the bowl was sitting in water.

MR. MARQUIS: The bowl was sitting in water and there was—it was all about heat transfer.

Okay, the fabricated word series was at this time where I was—I always collected things. I always had stuff. You know, I've collected salt and pepper—when I was a little kid we collected stuff. Anyway, I was always collecting things, and so in my shop, in the shelves, there were all these things that I collected and then there all these things I made. And I started looking at all and it all started to merge together, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MARQUIS: —and so I decided, well I might as well merge the work together. So I started incorporating found objects—salt and pepper shakers, odd things—into my work. And at the same time—so a couple years before this I had set up this production shop called Marlux, Marquis Deluxe, and the idea was to get the skills together and the equipment together, and part of that was getting all this grinding and polishing equipment together.

And so then I finally had this grinding and polishing equipment, which I've never been interested in but it's a necessary evil. And so I could—I was able to, like, you know, just pick up two things, any two things in the shop, any two things in the shop. I'd go and just pick up two things and I could grind and polish them so they fit, and it was kind of an amazing discovery that you could put these things together and put them together and they would fit. So the fabricated ward series all came from that and, you know, that stuff I did it, you know, a long time ago. And I look at it now and it's like—I'm impressed with what I made, you know. I mean, I've tried to—I start trying to collect that stuff, I try to get it back. They were all unique and pretty rare and fortunately, some of them have just fallen apart so I have been able to get them back. [They laugh.] I have been able to get them back and reassemble them. And it was just—I think it was like a very brave thing for one to make.

Yeah, I mean, it's some of the best work I've ever done, which is sort of sad because it's 30 years ago. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it allowed you to really juxtapose things that would never otherwise have gone together—

MR. MARQUIS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —and make them literally and metaphorically fit perfectly.

MR. MARQUIS: Right. And it was—no one got it. No one understood, which is I think, generally, that's a good sign. I think it really is. I think, you know, if you make something and people buy it, then there's something wrong. You know, you can make a living that way but you're not going to—the work isn't that good.

MS. RIEDEL: It goes back to what we were talking about yesterday, in terms of the Italian perspective — when they were blowing something new that people wouldn't like immediately, or would not like at all. It takes a while for something really new to even be able to be seen.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: What about the bottles and plates?

MR. MARQUIS: Oh, that was just—that was pretty much standard art history. I knew—you know, I knew at the time what I was doing. Okay. Let me go back. [Robert] Rauschenberg got this drawing from [Willem] de Kooning, a very famous thing now. When he did it, it wasn't very famous, but he got a drawing from de Kooning, de Kooning gave him this drawing. Well, he erased it. [*Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953.] Actually, it took him a few days to, you know, it was hard to erase. And that whole idea of negating something appealed to me and so I was working on — I knew how to do these really complicated Italian patterns, these zanfirico and, you know, reticello patterns. And at the same time I was going through this endless, endless process of testing these ceramic glazes—underglazes and overglazes. And now I realize that I was just more interested in the testing than what I was going to do with it.

But anyway, so I had all this stuff. I had these patterns I knew how to make and these complicated, tedious tests. And I decided just to put them together. So I made these ceramic—these low-fire plates and these ceramic

plates with these complicated, patterned bottles, and I just coated them with thick latex paint, just hiding it, just negating it. And, you know, it had to do with Rauschenberg, but it also had a lot to do with Giorgio Morandi, who Ron Nagle had turned me on to a lot earlier, you know, just this great painter and stuff.

And one thing I did when I went to Italy in ‘69, I had the Fulbright people give me a letter of introduction to—Morandi was dead just a couple years or something, but they gave me a letter of introduction. I went to his house, and there was a studio in the background, and gave this letter because I didn’t speak Italian very well, and gave it to these little old ladies, two of them, who were his sisters. And they read the letter and they said, yes, you can come back. I went back and they showed his studio, which was like this funky little dark place, and all his stuff that I’d seen in paintings, those objects that I’d seen in paintings, they were painted. The pieces themselves were covered with paint.

MS. RIEDEL: How interesting.

MR. MARQUIS: There was like an eighth, quarter, half-inch of paint on these things. So he did paintings of these objects but he painted the objects. He painted shadows on these objects. It was just such a revelation that he was an unknown object maker because he made—you know, a lot of them were, you know, sort of jars and this and that, but he totally changed them. He just totally painted them. They were covered with paint.

MS. RIEDEL: Commercial objects that he had taken and painted and then painted again.

MR. MARQUIS: Well, you couldn’t even recognize them. He made them up—I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MARQUIS: There were some things in there—I mean, those little old ladies were like watching me like a hawk so I didn’t steal anything, you know, but—it was not a very big room and it was filled with incredibly, incredibly interesting things.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah?

MR. MARQUIS: Yes. Yes. It was really an odd revelation.

MS. RIEDEL: That must have been—

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —after looking at those paintings for years.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: To actually look at those objects and have them be completely different than—

MR. MARQUIS: Yes, and I always thought he was just like—he just picked up things from, you know, garage sales or something and put them up there and painted them. But no, he made those things. Yes, he was an object maker, you know, not just a painter.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: He made those things up.

MS. RIEDEL: He made the objects before anything.

MR. MARQUIS: And so that’s—getting back, that’s why those painted things were all about that negation of, you know, Rauschenberg and also about Morandi painting things, you know, painting things and then covering them up and then using those for other paintings or—I never got that far. That’s where that came from, kind of complicated.

MS. RIEDEL: But really interesting.

MR. MARQUIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: The—

MR. MARQUIS: Interesting to you and me.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet it will be interesting to a few other people.

Let’s discuss the Neon Heads [1984-86]?

MR. MARQUIS: Ah, the Neon Heads. You know, I said it earlier that, sometimes I feel like what I’m doing is repeating slide shows, and the heads are sort of like part of my slide show. I don’t know exactly where that came from. I realized I could make these things—and they’re dumb. You know, I did a drawing. And you do a drawing—you can draw something like 3, 4, 5, 6 inches tall and, you know, sort up line it and something, and you look at and say, oh that’s a good idea. But then when you make it 24—you know, when you actually make it giant, it’s totally different.

So this was a—I did them at Pilchuck as a—I was teaching a class in—I can’t remember what the focus of the class was or anything, but while I was there I decided I was going to do something as stupid as I could, and this is pretty much, making the happy face. So I made these big heads. And the gaffer at that time was Ritchie Royal—Richard Royal, and sort of made these, you know, big bubbles a certain shape, and at the same time, at the class, my friend Bill Concannon—Bill Concannon was a—he was there because of me and he was teaching neon, so I wanted to use his expertise and Ritchie’s expertise and so I made these sort of big bubbles that I then sandblasted primitive faces in and put them on sort of bases that had a transformer inside and then, you know, energize them and then Bill Concannon made the neon for it to go around the outside. And they were just so stupid. They were just so amazingly stupid.

I mean, so primitive, I mean—and it didn’t destroy my career, but it certainly didn’t help. But I thought it was good to keep people on their toes, you know. And I think it was in ‘84, so it was a long time—20 years ago. And now people say, oh, those are my favorite pieces; I love those. None of those people had any money back in the ‘80s, obviously, but I think I probably made like eight of them and I sold one.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you sold the rest now?

MR. MARQUIS: No, no, they’re just sitting around, you know, still waiting. I sold the one, but then it came back.

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe that’s a good sign; they were ahead of the curve.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. [Riedel laughs.]

No, it’s good to keep things mixed up. It’s good to keep things confusing. You don’t want them to know—you don’t want them to know—you do not want them, being the general unwashed collectors, you don’t want them to know what you’re doing. Yeah, you got to keep them on their toes. I think I said yesterday, it’d be nice if I just had money, then I—everything would be a lot easier.

MS. RIEDEL: What about the boxes, the assemblages of all of the found objects?

MR. MARQUIS: There’s something—yeah, there’s something about collections, about things lined up that has always appealed to me. When I was a kid I collected things. And there’s a point where you—anything, you could line up—you could point around the table here and you could line up the teapot or the cup or the chocolates or the raspberries, and if you line them up in a pleasing order with a certain spacing, they become, to me, a pleasing object. And so, I’ll—

MS. RIEDEL: The whole becomes an object in itself.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, it doesn’t matter what it is, but it’s just the way—and if you do it carefully and line it up, then it becomes more than the sum of its parts.

MS. RIEDEL: Definitely.

MR. MARQUIS: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: And so some of this is from dealing with Therman and doing installations and knowing how, you know, learning how to work with sheet glass and putting things, you know, being able to put things together. And then the other part is from the old collections I had, because I’ve had collections. And the collections started coming into the work.

And pretty much, when I really thought about it and really observed what I was doing—because a lot of things I do I don’t pay attention to, but then when I step back and observe what I’m actually doing, I notice that if you had three of something, it had as much import or much—it has as much information as if you had 20 or 30, or 40 of them, depending on the scale, of course, I mean, three locomotives, that’s a lot of information—three pieces of raspberries, not that much information. But I thought that three was the scale, so I started putting boxes together that had three of things—three this, three of that, three of something else, and then I realized that

once you've got those threes together, then if you compare three of this thing to three of something else, then it started getting interesting.

So that's where a lot of those boxes, those object-comparison boxes—it was pretty much about trying to train someone's eye, you know, my own eye. I mean, I found it interesting just to me and I didn't care if anybody liked them or not. And they're difficult things to make in terms of scale because when I was comparing some of the, you know, threes to other threes to other threes, it ended up being these really long, you know, four-foot long little boxes that are only four inches wide and four inches high. And you can't photograph it. If you can't photograph it, it means no one's going to want to buy them. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Good to note.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: One thing we haven't even mentioned are the few installations that you've done for clients. Do you want to talk about those and whether there was anything in particular that was different or interesting.

MR. MARQUIS: No, no no. Yeah, I've never done any public commissions; I don't think I ever will because I've been on committees. That stuff—I don't need to do that. But I've done a few private installations and basically, a couple of them were private collectors who happened to like my work and bought some of my work and then didn't know what to do with it, and asked me, like, can you help us? Can you do something with this? I said, well, yeah, I can—like, this part of your living room, I could put it right here in this corner, but you'll need two more of these, three more of those, four more—no, I'm being facetious. But basically, it was like installing my own work in somebody's house.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you add other objects to that?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, usually they needed some things. And then I've done a couple other commissions, kind of cosmic trade, in offices.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: Where somebody needed a wall. You know, I have done that. But —

MS. RIEDEL: In general, you just don't find commissions worth the trouble.

MR. MARQUIS: Not at all. I think it's—once you try to start to please somebody, you're getting off track. I mean, people have to make a living.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: I understand that.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you like to talk about the cars or the new work or what you would like to do next?

MR. MARQUIS: I was on a hike with Nick here, and Dante Marioni, and we went on a camping trip. We went to Lake Ozette [Olympic National Park, WA] and took the canoe way up to the end of the lake and then hiked over this old trail that hadn't been used in years, it really was a rough hike. And I was talking about dealing with glass, like ceramics because I have this ceramic background where you could make this slab construction where you sort of figure something out and then you cut it out of clay and then you assemble it. Like you build something, bring up the walls, do the top and this and that. And I realized that I could do that in glass if I was careful, you know.

Right around the same time, old Mr. Kevlar invented his Kevlar gloves [which were actually invented by a woman –RM]. Last year was the 25th anniversary of the invention of Kevlar gloves. Anyway, Mr. Kevlar—that is not his real name—there were these gloves that you could—everybody said with glass, geez, glass is so great. It's too bad you can't touch it. And I grew up learning that. You know, it's too bad you can't touch it; you know, you get burned. But then I realized, wait a minute, there are these gloves; maybe you can touch it.

And so I developed this process of working with glass, sort of like clay where I fused these panels together and then I could actually construct them. I actually put gloves on and picked up the glass like it was clay and assembled it with—you know, it was like a pinch pot almost. I was able to put things together with these gloves and the gloves were burning and I had to change gloves, and I had to do a bunch of stuff, and there was a lot of —there was a lot of coordinated teamwork. You know, there was yelling and smoke, and stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Sort of like the good old days.

MR. MARQUIS: So I sort of developed this technique of assembling glass slab kind of work, just like clay, which, like, if you were in your kitchen table, you could sort of make this thing, you could sort of cut it out and assemble it, and that is what I was trying to do. And that is where the cars came from. First of all it was just—first of all it was just like trying to make anything, and then sort of the first objects I made, the simplest things to make were these sort of canoe-shaped boats. And I was pretty happy with them; they looked pretty—they looked pretty good. They didn't look like my work. They were just interesting, but they didn't look like something I would make.

MS. RIEDEL: Brightly striped.

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, it was—and then I realized, oh, wait a minute; I could put them on the wheels. And then just the fact I put them on the wheels, then it looked like my work. And so that is where the cars came from, and then later on the cars changed into boats and dustpans, dustpans from HC Westermann. HC Westermann used dustpans—such a low, lowbrow object that I thought it needed a little bit of, not exultation, but it needed to be restudied. The things he made—H.C. Westermann was just not appreciated like he should be. And I thought, well, you know, if you are going to steal an idea, you might as well steal from the best—[laughs]—so I went right to Westermann.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MARQUIS: And to the dustpan.

MS. RIEDEL: What is next?

MR. MARQUIS: Daguerreotypes. I mean, I'm already interested now in doing photography and daguerreotypes. I think the next couple of years that is probably where my emphasis will be. And the thing about the daguerreotypes I have just recently figured out is that I'm not so interested in the process as an end result. So I know how to do it, I have studied how to do it, I have—I have built this whole shop so I can make daguerreotypes. But I think what I am going to do is bring in the best. You know, my friend Jerry Spagnoli, I think I am just going to somehow, either by throwing money at him or something else, I'm going to have him help me —photographs of objects that I make. And the daguerreotype, like, they are like — they are on silver plate.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MARQUIS: And I am going to, besides some other—besides some images outside I want to work with, I'm going to make some things made out of mirrored glass. I'm going to make this object out of mirrored glass, and then photograph them, and then I'm going to make a light—a light box out of mirror. And so there are going to be these photographs—silver photographs of silver things in the silver room.

MS. RIEDEL: And will they be like the boxes that you have done, installations with the object in the photo?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, no, they will be just like full plate—full plate images six and a half by eight and a half, or something like that, and then I'll figure out what to do with them. That is just the first stage. I think I am probably—in the next few years I will move out of glass —it's losing its appeal.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MARQUIS: I think I'll still be interested in it, but I have got — I have always had other interests and other ideas and stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. MARQUIS: And the photography thing is something that I think it's going to maintain my interest for a while. Glass is physically hard to do. I'm getting old, so, you know, maybe it's time to do something else I'm thinking.

MS. RIEDEL: That is really interesting.

Well, I think we have done a great job of covering all of these questions even though, as we were saying earlier, there is no way to truly cover it all, so it is always, to some degree, frustrating.

MR. MARQUIS: I think you and I should get together every couple of years.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I think it is true. There are so many different ways that these questions can be addressed. But you have a few minutes of tape if you would like to say anything else?

MR. MARQUIS: I still feel I'm just a kid. I feel I'm not this old guy that the Smithsonian should be interested or anything. I just feel like I'm still a kid. But when I look in the mirror, it's like I see my father, but I don't—I think

it’s interesting that I have been picked out to do this. I find it kind of interesting and I’m puzzled, although I’m totally opinionated so I have a lot of things to say, but it’s true that—shouldn’t you be dealing with older people?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I usually do. [Laughs.] Any words for the next generation?

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, right. Keep your day job. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, thank you very much for taking the time to do this.

MR. MARQUIS: It was actually—it’s kind of pleasant. You know, it made me think about things. It’s interesting, sometimes I just find myself going into, like, an old slide lecture. And often those slide lectures weren’t honest; they were just like—it was like an entertaining presentation. And here I have tried to be as honest as I can be, which probably isn’t totally honest because who knows who one really is.

MS. RIEDEL: We set out from the beginning, to do that as much as possible. At least we have cleared up the Bumblebee issue. [They laugh.]

MR. MARQUIS: Yeah, I was actually born in New York City.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] We will start all over again with that as we leave.

MR. MARQUIS: [Laughs.] All right.

MS. RIEDEL: All right. Thank you much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]