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Oral history interview with Chunghi Choo,
2007 July 30-2008 July 26

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally-recorded interview with Chunghee Choo on July 30 and 31, 2007 and July 26, 2008. The interview took place at the artist's studio in Iowa City, Iowa, and was conducted by Jane Milosch 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.

Chunghee Choo and Jane Milosch have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The transcript has been heavily edited. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

Note: In June 2008, the state of Iowa and Iowa City experienced its worst flooding levels in 500 years. The arts campus metalsmithing studio at the University of Iowa was severely damaged, and many things belonging to Professor Choo were lost. See addendum/second interview with Professor Choo on July 26, 2008, following this transcript.

JANE MILOSCH: It is July 30, 2007, Monday. This is Jane Milosch interviewing Chunghee Choo [b. 1938, Incheon, South Korea].

We were just at the amazing University of Iowa metalsmithing and jewelry studio [Iowa City], which Chunghee uses as a studio for her students, as well as her own studio. She's given all of her tools and donated them to the university studio, which is quite amazing. But now we're back at her home in Iowa City.

Chunghee, since we just came back from the studio, let's talk about this a little bit more.

CHUNGHEE CHOO: About the studio?

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, tell me about the tour that you just gave me of the studio and your program, how long you've been there. You said you've been there the last 39 years?

MS. CHOO: Right. Well, our metalsmithing and jewelry program offers B.A., B.F.A., M.A., and M.F.A. degrees. The program emphasizes the development of individual expression and teaches the conceptual and technical skills necessary for professional achievement. Students are encouraged to create freely, without boundaries of any media, producing jewelry, hollowware, flatware, mixed-media objects, sculptures, installation pieces, furniture, light fixtures, and artful consumer products for mass production.

MS. MILOSCH: That is an impressive list. How many graduate students do you have?

MS. CHOO: We have 10 graduate students. We only have space for 10, and I am proud to say that the program provides all 10 graduate students with full or partial tuition and material scholarships from our metal program's scholarship fund. The School of Art and Art History also offers scholarships for outstanding incoming graduate students, merit scholarships for current students, and scholarships for minority students. Three teaching assistantships are offered each year, and our students come from different parts of the world.

MS. MILOSCH: Interesting. How are your students doing?

MS. CHOO: I am very proud of the fact that every year, many of our students' work has been accepted into major national and international competitive exhibitions, and many students have received awards. Student work has also been published in various publications, and our graduates are working as educators, working in industry, or producing in their own entrepreneurial businesses.

MS. MILOSCH: That's amazing. Tell me, what is the most important thing in your studio facilities?

MS. CHOO: Among many things, ventilation is very important. We have the best ventilation system anywhere. I was determined to make the studio a safe working place for all our students. The ventilation system has been running since 1973 for our copperplating tank, and the whole studio is 100-percent ventilated. In addition, seven working areas have their own powerful ventilation system and many dust collectors.

MS. MILOSCH: I'm so glad I got to see that. Astonishing. What kind of tools and equipment do you have in your studio?

MS. CHOO: We have a wide range of tools and equipment that allows us to practice traditional, contemporary,

and cutting-edge techniques. We have the nationally known 250-gallon copper electroforming tank, a 90-gallon aluminum anodizing tank, and a 50-ton hydraulic press, et cetera, and since the fall of 2000. With the hire of second faculty, Professor Kee Ho Yuen, we have installed a 3-D computer modeling system, 3-D printer, and a four-axis desktop milling machine and enameling and powder-coating setup. All of these tools help students to create unlimited expression in their work while helping the metalsmithing and jewelry program to stay competitive nationally.

MS. MILOSCH: I see your studio is very well equipped.

MS. CHOO: One thing we are not fully equipped with is sound control. Though we do have acoustic walls with blankets and ceiling with barrels to absorb sound, it is still loud when students hammer. Because our studio is built with concrete, I had to come up with new techniques to minimize high-pitched pounding noises.

[END MD 01 TR 01.]

MS. MILOSCH: Chunggi, it is exciting seeing your studio. Have you had any involvement with other arts-and-crafts schools like Haystack Mountain School of Crafts [Deer Isle, ME] or any other educational institutions devoted to craft?

MS. CHOO: A long time ago I taught contemporary jewelry at the New School of Social Research in New York City, in the fall semester of 1975 and a summer session in 1976; I also taught metalworking at the Arrowmount School of Art and Crafts in Tennessee [Gatlinburg], for the summer session in 1978. And yes, in recent years I taught silent metal forming at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts during two summers, in 2000 and 2006.

MS. MILOSCH: I've never been there. What kind of a place is Haystack in terms of defining its scope?

MS. CHOO: Haystack summer school is an internationally known arts and crafts school. Students of all ages, all skill levels, from beginners to advanced professionals, come from all over the world. They come here to develop their skills, nurture their creative spirit, and produce work in their chosen medium. They learn from widely recognized faculty and visiting artists. Students are very focused, eager to learn, and are highly productive every day. Studios are open 24 hours a day, not to mention they also serve the most delicious and healthful meals and snacks every day. The Haystack School is built on a very beautiful spot on Deer Isle, Maine, overlooking the ocean.

MS. MILOSCH: They offer a lot. What else do they provide during that session?

MS. CHOO: They offer evening slide lectures by faculty and technical assistants, and presentations and performances by visiting artists.

MS. MILOSCH: Who is the current director?

MS. CHOO: The school is very well run by the wonderful director, Mr. Stuart Kestenbaum, and the board of trustees. I learned that their successful fundraising supports students' scholarships, faculty and staff members, and the school as a whole. Many visitors come from all over the world.

MS. MILOSCH: Whom have you met there?

MS. CHOO: Among many people, I met Professor John Paul Miller, the world-renowned goldsmith and jeweler known for his most beautiful designs and superior granulation. I met him there for the first time in person, and I found out many years ago that he was a juror for the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grant program in 1981 when I received the NEA fellowship in metalwork. So I thanked him for that so many years later.

MS. MILOSCH: Now, have you traveled back to Korea to give lectures?

MS. CHOO: Yes. In 2005, I went to Korea as one of the international jurors for the final judging of prize winners for the Fourth Cheongju International Craft Biennial Competition. I was told this competition offers the highest amount of award money in the world.

I require my students to enter national and international competitions. This gives them a great opportunity for national and international exposure of their work. In 2005, I am very thrilled to say, my former student, Alison Brunson entered her teapot into this international competition in Korea. It was a teapot shaped like a pencil, with a fish for a handle. Her creativity and craftsmanship stood out among all of the thousands of pieces in the competition, and she was awarded the silver prize.

MS. MILOSCH: That's fantastic. What are the awards at the international competitions like? Are they monetary?

MS. CHOO: Oh, lots of monetary awards are involved in this competition. At the Fourth Cheongju International

Competition, the first place award, grand prize, was \$20,000.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow.

MS. CHOO: This year's grand prize had grown to \$30,000

MS. MILOSCH: That's great.

MS. CHOO: Yes. And this year, the total prize money for all the winners totaled over \$100,000 US. I must mention that two of our graduates this spring received awards. Jon Ryan received the silver prize and Yoko Noguchi the bronze prize for works they produced while they were students here.

MS. MILOSCH: What was the competition like?

MS. CHOO: It was a breathtaking experience seeing thousands of outstanding works in all mediums of craft from all over the world, placed together in one huge room in Korea. You could see what's going on internationally. Many pieces were highly innovative, conceptually and technically.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, how did pieces differ from around the world?

MS. CHOO: One thing I noticed was that I couldn't tell which piece came from which country unless the piece contained traditional motifs or folk art images of the particular country.

MS. MILOSCH: So have you given workshops in Korea?

MS. CHOO: Yes, I have given workshops and presentations several times in Korea. Some of them were the Seoul 1999 International Metal Artists Seminar and Workshop at the prestigious Hong Ik University and, in 1995, the International Metal Art Workshop and Seminar at the Won Kwang University in Ik San, where I met metal artists from different countries, including Michael Rowe, one of my favorite artists, from Royal Art College in London.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, that's fantastic. So these workshops, they connect you with other artists.

MS. CHOO: Yes. Workshops, seminars, and conferences are great places to connect with artists. The world is getting smaller and smaller through artists traveling, Internet, TV, and touring exhibitions, and publication of books and professional journals in metals and other mediums in craft, spread images around the world. Artists in all mediums are sharing and learning about each other's innovative techniques and concepts. Artists are aware of each other's work. Charon Kransen of New York City provides excellent collections of art books, especially in metals, from all over the world, and sells them to university art libraries; this also contributes to accessibility for viewing artists' work internationally.

MS. MILOSCH: Now, have you taken your students abroad with you?

MS. CHOO: Yes. In 2004, I took five students to Korea to attend the International Metal Artists Invitational Exhibition by the Seoul National University of Technology, where I also gave a presentation of our university metalwork. I would like to mention that Seoul National University of Technology has one of the strongest metalsmithing and jewelry departments in Korea. It is completely equipped to practice all traditional, contemporary, and digital technologies.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow. What did you learn from visiting that school?

MS. CHOO: What I learned from this university is that the hardworking and visionary dean of the art school there, Professor Oh Won Tack, opened the doors for his students to the jewelry and metalwork industry and opened the doors to technicians, workers, and CEOs in industry to take the university's metalsmithing and jewelry course free of charge.

MS. MILOSCH: And how has this improved the program?

MS. CHOO: In return, industry supports this university with all kinds of new equipment and very generous funds for student scholarships. One of our former graduate students, Alison Brunson, is teaching at this university as the first American metalsmith teaching at any Korean university.

MS. MILOSCH: That's pretty impressive. Well, how do you feel about Korean crafts in general?

MS. CHOO: I am very happy to see that the Korean craft field is blooming, especially the metalsmithing and jewelry field being internationally recognized for their superb sculptural contemporary metalwork, with fantastic craftsmanship. Many metals programs have grown so much. While I was a student there in 1961, there was not even one class offered in metalsmithing or jewelry at universities.

MS. MILOSCH: Does Korea have a long history in supporting art?

MS. CHOO: Yes, absolutely. Historically, art in all mediums, music, science and technology, et cetera, have been supported nationally and individually in Korea. With the economic boom in recent years, art is even more supported.

MS. MILOSCH: I wish that was happening in this country.

MS. CHOO: I do, too. I know Korea has a rooted tradition in producing beautiful ceramics and metalwork. As we know, the Japanese took many talented Korean craftsmen away to Japan. They used Korean craftsmen to produce their artwork and then claimed it as their own.

[END MD 01 TR 02.]

MS. MILOSCH: This is Jane Milosch. We're back here again. Chunggi, we were just talking about your trips to Korea and doing workshops. I also know that you love to travel, and so I'd like to talk about that a little bit. I know when I was arranging this trip, it was difficult because you do travel, and you've just returned from a trip to southern Italy and Sicily. Tell me about your trip, and how has traveling in general influenced your work?

MS. CHOO: I have traveled since the mid-'60s to many parts of the world, and especially when my husband became interested in taking photographs of the scenery in many parts of the world. I have seen so much. It will take a long time to explain, but every country I visit inspires me with their art, architecture, history, culture, religion, government, people, landscape, and food. They have enriched my life and increased my knowledge of the world. And I am certain travel has influenced my art-making. This includes this trip to southern Italy. I learned a lot about the country's history and art.

MS. MILOSCH: You really have a great understanding of the many things that make up our lives. Well, of the places you've traveled, what are some of your favorite places?

MS. CHOO: Many, many places. I would love to live someday in Rome and Paris. The history and art is so visible there. You are surrounded by it. Some places I have gone to twice, but still, twice is not enough to see everything. Perhaps on my next sabbatical, I will go there again and live for several months.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, those are my two favorite cities. Every time I'm in Rome or Paris, I think which one comes out on top. I have to tell you, it's Rome, even though I absolutely love Paris.

MS. CHOO: I agree.

MS. MILOSCH: Its many layers of civilization and different cultures make it phenomenal.

MS. CHOO: It's all there

MS. MILOSCH: What do you feel after you travel?

MS. CHOO: Oh, there are many things I feel after a trip. I have seen many times the works of many historical master painters and sculptors at many different places, including at the Louvre and in Italy, such as Michelangelo [Buonarrotti], [Leonardo] da Vinci, and Raphael [Sanzio]. Their paintings look like three-dimensional reliefs. I admire their skill. For example, the paintings in the Sistine Chapel are of such enormous scale and power. And during this trip, I found the National Archaeological Museum in Naples to be the most enjoyable.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, one of my other favorite museums in the world.

MS. CHOO: The eloquent and masterful fine mosaics there show the daily life. As a human being, I felt very connected to this kind of artwork. I am not a religious person, and I don't go to church or live by the Bible. I was more moved by these scenes of daily life than scenes from the Bible.

MS. MILOSCH: Those mosaics inspired that show I did, "Art in Roman Life: Villa to Grave" [September 19, 2003 - August 25, 2005, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA].

MS. CHOO: Yes.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah. How do you use masterworks in your teaching?

MS. CHOO: I strongly believe that art students these days also must have the capability of drawing and painting. I want students to have accurate eyes to absorb the reality of the human body and all other parts of nature. They have to have the basics before they can move into the conceptual side of expression. Sometimes artists are all talk and no skill. Maybe I am too traditional, but you have to have accurate eyes and be capable to draw.

Even the most highly conceptual art and junk art, you know, terrible art, those artists have to have the basic skill to draw, and, of course, produce the work with good craftsmanship.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, craftsmanship. Craftsmanship and drawing. Is there anything else that you'd like to mention about your travels, any other insights?

MS. CHOO: Another feeling I have is that there is nothing humans can't do. Humans have brains, physical energy, and the will and the drive to do everything and anything. How they carried and moved gigantic stones without any mechanical gadgets moves me and inspires me. Ancient ruins in Greece and Egypt and the construction of monuments are a mystery even today. By knowing that thousands of slaves were the ones who moved the huge amount of weight to build monuments, we know that there is nothing humans can't do. We are lucky these days to have machinery and technology.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you think this country has something unique to offer?

MS. CHOO: Of course. This country has enormously beautiful landscapes. I hope the Republican government considers - any government, actually - funding for arts for the future generations. This would help attract people from all over the world to come to see the United States' treasures in art.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, I hope so, too. What do you hope that travelers will gain from visiting the U.S., you know, because you are not from here but you now are from here?

MS. CHOO: Yes, of course. But what I feel every time after traveling, I worry a little about this country. Travelers are going around the world seeing the remains of art at museums and at many other places, architecture, and so on, beside the scenery. For many countries tourism is a large source of income. Some of my concerns for the future of the United States are the questions of what will remain of our cultural artifacts - maybe new technologies? I have to say, though, that we do have many great museums, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art [New York, NY], the Smithsonian Institution, [Washington, DC], and many others. We have contemporary architecture in many cities, including New York City and Chicago. And, of course, San Francisco is beautiful, et cetera, and we have many enormously beautiful landscapes.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you think we're lucky to be living in this 21st century?

MS. CHOO: Of course. In Scotland and other countries, I went to many castles and palaces. I felt how lucky we are now to live in contemporary facilities. We are so lucky to have lighting, heating, air conditioning, and toilets. [They laugh.] Our food is so much better now, as well.

MS. MILOSCH: Those are a lot of conveniences. Tell me again, your drive, your impulse: why do you travel?

MS. CHOO: I do travel to see museums, of course, historical sites, landscapes, to experience different cultures, their food, and their people, with my husband. Traveling is pleasurable, and we want to see the world and learn. The trip to South Africa gave me the chance to see the enormous nature in the southern hemisphere with so many animals. I collected masks, antique artifacts, and Kuba cloths. Kuba cloths are strikingly contemporary in design.

MS. MILOSCH: I'm admiring three of them right now over there.

MS. CHOO: Yes. I brought [inaudible].

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, they're fantastic. Where else have you traveled?

MS. CHOO: Finland, to see the country where the Saarinen family came from. I learned that Helsinki is the only European capital with no medieval past. I enjoyed seeing the National Museum of Finland.

MS. MILOSCH: What is your favorite Scandinavian city?

MS. CHOO: Copenhagen, in Denmark, is one of my favorite cities. I went to see the Georg Jensen store and the Danish design center. It has Danish design and examples from all over the world, including architecture, fashion, and graphic art. In 1996, one of my silver vases was given as a gift to Denmark's Det Danske Kunstindustrimuseet in Copenhagen by then-American Ambassador to Denmark, Mr. Edward Elson. I also went to the National Art Museum there. They have Danish and European paintings from the 14th century through today.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you admire Scandinavian metalwork? This work is often featured at SOFA [Sculpture Objects and Functional Art Exposition] Chicago. Sometimes the Danish section is the only one to feature hollowware at the expo, or where the majority of hollowware can be found.

MS. CHOO: Yeah. I admire Scandinavian hollowware for its simplicity and the functional aspect of many pieces.

MS. MILOSCH: Have you been to Norway?

MS. CHOO: Yes. Norway was very beautiful, as well. It had the most beautiful mountainous scenery I saw in Scandinavia. I learned that it is also the most prosperous of the four Scandinavian countries. I must mention that I loved Stockholm [Sweden], and I was impressed by the royal armory in the Royal Palace.

MS. MILOSCH: When you're traveling, are there specific sites or purpose or ideas you have in mind?

MS. CHOO: I take trips in homage to composers. I go see their homes and their tombs. Music has always been the food for my soul. In Vienna, I spent all day sitting in the Central Cemetery where artists, composers, writers, and architects are buried. I sat in front of the graves of [Johann] Strauss, and I also sat in front of [Ludwig van] Beethoven, [Johannes] Brahms, and [Franz] Schubert's tomb. And I went to the monument of [Wolfgang Amadeus] Mozart. I also went to Salzburg to the house where Mozart was born and the places where he gave concerts in Prague. I was moved by seeing the original score of Beethoven's fourth and fifth symphonies at the Lobkowitz Palace in Prague also. And I went many other places in homage to composers.

MS. MILOSCH: How did you like Vienna?

MS. CHOO: Vienna is one of my favorite cities because it is a city for intellectuals, artists, musicians, and delicious desserts. I enjoyed being in Vienna so much because it offers so much culture, music, and Art Nouveau architecture. And in honor of my love of music, I went to the house where Schubert died and the [Joseph] Haydn Museum in Vienna.

MS. MILOSCH: I can see that you have such a gesamtkunstwerk ["total art work"] approach to life, similar to the Viennese who live art in daily life through beauty and music. Are there any other composers you've paid homage to in your travels?

MS. CHOO: On my first trip to Italy, I went to visit Giuseppe Verdi's home in Buseto and Giacomo Puccini's home in Lucca. They are my favorite composers of opera. I felt very close to them spiritually and emotionally.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, I love those composers, too. You are very lucky to have experienced so many different cultures.

MS. CHOO: The more I travel, the more I appreciate each country's culture, artwork, architecture, antiquities, history, and people, et cetera.

MS. MILOSCH: Where have you traveled, besides Europe and Korea, of course?

MS. CHOO: Oh, yes, many places in Far Eastern countries. But Thailand is one of my very favorite countries. We went twice. The place is so beautiful, and the people there are gentle and not greedy. This country has never been colonized, and about 95 percent of the population is Theravada Buddhist.

MS. MILOSCH: That's interesting.

MS. CHOO: Buddhism is credited for the harmonious environment there. It also plays a big role in the sanctity of family, friends, and social harmony. I cannot compare Thailand with any other country. For anybody who goes to Thailand, it is a breathtaking experience to see the many Buddhist temples, wats [monasteries], wats [assembly building in wat], and I was greatly moved by the enormous beauty of the Wat Phra Kaeo and grand palace in Bangkok, which is truly one of the great wonders of the world.

MS. MILOSCH: That is somewhere where I still hope to go. Tell me what it was like.

MS. CHOO: Temples are filled with sacred sculptures and covered with jewels and golden spears. The walls are covered with murals, giving insight to daily Thai life dating from the early 19th century. This type of gold work and the jewel-like buildings are spread around the country. The next time I go to Thailand, I am going to bring back a spirit house for my own home. Each spirit house is individually crafted, with an offering to the spirit. This spirit protects the house. I enjoy this kind of superstition.

MS. MILOSCH: That's why you probably liked Sicily, too. Have you visited other Asian countries?

MS. CHOO: I've always wanted to go to China, not only because I am a descendant of China. My husband gave lectures to Chinese medical associations throughout China one month. I accompanied him on this trip. We went there in 1981, before China enjoyed making money and spending it. China has an immense history, as you know.

I learned that Chinese people were the inventors of so many things. And I saw great art and architecture in this country, including the Temple of Heaven and Ming Tombs. When I studied Chinese painting, I always thought the paintings I saw were an imagination, but I found out the rock formations of mountains and beautiful scenery are not abstractions. Human beings in many Chinese landscape paintings usually refer to Taoism, which shows harmonious existence with the environment.

MS. MILOSCH: Your list of travels really never ends. But, of course, I love to travel, too, so tell me a little bit more, if you like.

MS. CHOO: Okay. Of course, I traveled to New Zealand with my husband. We went twice and traveled both the south and north islands. The country is so beautiful that the day we left on the last trip, I bought a lottery ticket, and I told my husband we would not leave if I won. [Milosch laughs.] But obviously, I didn't win. New Zealand is a young country. It is very clean and breathtakingly beautiful. And people are kind and contented, and I enjoyed seeing Maori weaving using flax, and in Australia, we went to the beautiful Sydney Opera House and enjoyed a memorable performance of Carmen.

MS. MILOSCH: Wonderful.

MS. CHOO: And we go to Canada almost every year. I find people there are liberal, relaxed, kind, and friendly. Canada is also a beautiful country, with water and mountains in many parts. Quebec City is a jewel, with French charm. The architecture is beautiful, and many old buildings have roofs made of copper, with a beautiful natural patina. I also like the modern city of Toronto with its many contemporary buildings. And Morocco is another country filled with craftwork of metals, weaving, ceramics, and mosaics. And we traveled to Greece and the Greek Isles and Istanbul in Turkey and many other places in the world.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you take any tokens of your travel home with you?

MS. CHOO: I brought home a few little things that are aesthetically pleasing to me and are old, and some are new, from different countries.

I have many good memories of the different cultures and tasting their foods. I do look at international cook books to see an ingredient, but I never follow recipes to cook. I would lose my interest immediately if I would follow the instructions. I challenge myself to create the tastes I experienced eating different cuisines around the world. So my food is, and always has been, creative. A lot of times, I use a fusion of different cultures. I use fresh ingredients, and I am always challenged in creating and sharing new dishes with friends. My husband takes me to many of the best restaurants and knows that I will then recreate it even tastier when we return home. My husband says that a lot of times, my version is more creative and delicious.

MS. MILOSCH: I believe that. And just all the times I've eaten food here, I've also seen all the beautiful things that you serve food in. Not only the ingredients are fresh, but the ceramic vessels, the porcelain, the silver, all these things, including the gorgeous silver punch bowl that I'm looking at, which is extremely dramatic. You obviously understand the entire ritual and experience of serving food.

[END MD 01 TR 03.]

This is Jane Milosch interviewing Chunghi Choo, at the artist's home, today, in Iowa City on July 31, 2007, for Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Thank you for having me here, Chunghi. Your house is as beautiful as everything around you. You surround yourself with great beauty.

MS. CHOO: Thank you, Jane, for flying here to interview me. I am very humbled and honored by this interview. I received an invitation for this interview in January 2001, and I told Ms. Liza Kirwin, although I am so honored, I feel I am not old enough yet to be interviewed and to wait until I get a little bit older. I am a bit older now.

MS. MILOSCH: You don't look older.

MS. CHOO: Oh, I am. But the truth is, I never liked to talk about myself. I have never been self-interested. I'm not an ambitious person for myself, though I promote the work of everybody else. I am honored to be interviewed by your brilliant mind, Jane.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh yours - to me, it's a great honor. It's a great honor, Chunghi, for me, watching your work develop over the last 17 years - well not quite 17 years. Well, no, that's not true. I started out in Detroit in 1990, so it's been 17 years.

MS. CHOO: Well, time passes very fast, doesn't it?

MS. MILOSCH: Yes.

MS. CHOO: And first, I want to mention that I am so appreciative and admire the research you have done on American craft, decorative arts and contemporary art. I really enjoyed the most recent exhibition that you organized and curated, "From the Ground Up: Renwick Craft Invitational 2007" [March 9-July 22, 2007] at the Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum [Washington, DC]. One of my former students, Jocelyn Chateauvert, was featured in this exhibition. Thank you.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, it was beautiful, and to me, it was a great honor and a huge surprise that you came to see the show and surprised Jocelyn. It's great. I'm just thrilled to be here in such a beautiful setting today. Tell me a little bit about your home.

MS. CHOO: Thank you very much. Throughout my life, I have taken pleasure in surrounding myself with art objects, like in this house, and I use many of them in daily life. I also love to cook and do so creatively and freely, people say. My own designs are the same way.

MS. MILOSCH: Now, this is true, and thank you again for that lovely meal right now. It was great.

Well, let's start by - could you tell me a little bit about your house? I'd like to know more.

MS. CHOO: Well, I designed this house in 1980. I feel this home is airy and light, with a good cosmic flow. It sits facing south and east, with a hill to the west, and it has a wonderful panoramic view of the river valley below. The view of the trees changing color, and mist from the river, is an additional lyrical piece of art within this white, tranquil and joyful home. The east and south are completely open through the large windows. I can see the sunrise and moon rise every day. The west-side wall is completely covered with mirrors to reflect the trees into the house and to create the illusion of double the space. I designed this house with my sensibility and feeling for color and design, mixed with common sense.

MS. MILOSCH: Thank you for hosting me overnight. I have to tell you, waking up this morning, I saw the sun rising this morning in my window, the mist, and the beautiful trees, so I can see that all the thought you've put into the home is - and actually, because you work in metal, and that's a reflective surface, I see your surroundings truly reflect the complexity and simplicity of your work. Well, I'm looking at the shelves here, and all around, you have quite a collection of art objects.

MS. CHOO: Yes, I have been collecting for many years, mostly the work of emerging artists. And I decided to donate the outstanding work of quite a few artists to major museums and other public places when I receive requests from curators and acquisition committee members. Some of the artists are my outstanding, star, former graduate students and Korean metalsmiths. I have done this for more than 15 years. So now, while I am still alive, I have the joy of giving.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's great. And I want to record in this interview that it was an honor for me to acquire your work for the Renwick's permanent collection, and that several of your former students' work is in the [collection] thanks to your encouragement. Well, tell me again which museums you have been donating pieces to.

MS. CHOO: Up to 2007, the museums include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Arts and Design [New York, NY], and the National Ornamental Metal Museum [Memphis, TN], the Longhouse Reserve [East Hampton, NY], and the University of Iowa Museum of Art [Iowa City], and the Mint Museum of Craft and Design [Charlotte, NC]. I have donated approximately 33 pieces by 26 artists to these places so far.

MS. MILOSCH: I know. You've been really generous.

Now, I know you have another contemporary house across the street, so tell me, which one do you live in?

MS. CHOO: I live with my husband in the house across the street, and we use both houses. Usually we use this house to cook and entertain in, and we use this house as a guest house.

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, thank you. I'm one of those lucky guests. Now, tell me - I would like to know who lives here, then, if you're living across the street.

MS. CHOO: My sister, Chung Won Choo - she is a pianist and teaches piano in this house, especially to people who cannot afford to pay. She is also a volunteer worker for a free lunch program and for the senior center in Iowa City.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's lovely. Tell me a little bit about your husband. I'd like to make sure we have that for the Archives, too.

MS. CHOO: Well, his name is Dr. Charles H. Read. Read spells R-E-A-D. He is a professor emeritus at the

University of Iowa Medical School, and he is a pediatric endocrinologist who pioneered using antibodies to measure protein hormones. He was also the originator of the current diet for patients with diabetes.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow. Is he active in the community, too?

MS. CHOO: Yes. In 1971, he was the only physician and the advisor, with one medical student and two street men, to start the Free Medical Clinic in Iowa City, which became the longest and continuous running free medical clinic in the country. He is also a strong supporter of my work and volunteer worker and promoter for the arts.

MS. MILOSCH: Now, when did you get married?

MS. CHOO: I did finally marry him after 22 years of a very special friendship with him.

MS. MILOSCH: Lovely.

MS. CHOO: We married in 1998, when I was 60 years old and he was 80 years old. We made it a surprise marriage and surprised friends who came to celebrate his 80th birthday in New Brunswick, Canada.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, lovely.

MS. CHOO: As you may know, he's an intellectual, a warm, sweet, and handsome man. He loves me, and he is very supportive of my teaching and my work. I respect and love him very much.

MS. MILOSCH: That's so beautiful, and it's been a pleasure getting to know Charles over the years, too. I understand he's retired, but he seems to be always busy, so tell me, what is he up to now?

MS. CHOO: After he retired from doctoring, seeing patients and teaching medical students, he became an avid photographer. He has a natural born aesthetic sensibility. He never went to art school. He has had five successful solo shows in photography. And the University of Iowa Museum of Art has acquired two of his works. His inspiration comes from traveling to many parts of the world to photograph aesthetically pleasing sceneries. And he has been doing research, and his research paper was published in 2004 in the endocrinology journal, and another paper will be published soon. So he's always busy.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, you are - the two of you are quite a powerful couple. Now, tell me - I've got to remember now - how many years have you been living in Iowa City?

MS. CHOO: Many years. I have been living in Iowa City since 1968, and have been teaching at the University of Iowa all that time. I feel that Iowa City is my home. This is the longest I have lived in one place.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow.

MS. CHOO: Because my best friends are here, I feel very fortunate, comfortable, and happy at home here. I have great support from this university, and I will continue to live here and enjoy the intellectual, cultural, medical, and artistic environment that Iowa City offers. You may have heard that Iowa City has the most educated people per capita in the USA. And I love the simplicity of living here, and it is the best place for me to produce.

MS. MILOSCH: You know, I believe that. I feel really lucky to be back visiting from Washington, D.C., here in Iowa City, and I would agree with you. When we moved here from Italy in 1994, I was like, hmm, what would it be like? It was nice to meet more of your friends yesterday - many special people. So you mentioned your best friends and supporters are around you, and tell me a little bit about them.

MS. CHOO: Well, of course, my husband, Charles Read, and Renata Sack and Hualing Nieh Engle are my very best friends, as was the late Paul Engle.

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, Paul was a renowned poet.

MS. CHOO: Yes, we are everything to each other. I can talk to them about everything. They are my "Dear Abby."

MS. MILOSCH: Aww.

MS. CHOO: Yes, the poet, you know of him, the late Paul Engle was the one who made the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop famous, and his wife, Hualing Nieh Engle, is an internationally renowned Chinese novelist. Paul and Hualing, together, established the famed International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. They both were nominated for the Nobel Prize.

MS. MILOSCH: That's beautiful. Well, tell me about Renata Sack, because I've met her before, when I lived here.

I know you're very good friends with her, so tell me a little about Renata.

MS. CHOO: Renata is a German. She's a writer, artist, and collector. She has been the director of the Cedar Arts Forum for the Waterloo and Cedar Falls area for a long time, and she was the one who raised the funds to bring artists, musicians, dancers, and storytellers to give their performances to senior citizens, factory workers, school children, and to all of the public in Iowa. She is a promoter, supporter, and advocate of all forms of art and culture. All of my best friends are living very active lives, highly cultured intellectuals, and they are totally generous.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's nice.

MS. CHOO: Yeah, and I'm truly blessed with many other close friends and a very supportive university. Almost all of my friends are volunteers, and I have a great assistant, Anne Hansen, to look after all my mess.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, I don't know about - you don't create a mess.

MS. CHOO: I do.

MS. MILOSCH: You're just busy.

MS. CHOO: I am very messy, and I also have a great family doctor, Dr. Gwen Beck, who is recognized as one of the best internists in the U.S., my best dentist, Dr. Bryan Clemons, and my best mechanic, Ed Harney, and many other good friends, who I have long relationships with. I am a person who lives where my friends are, and not for the climate.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, it's beautiful. You admire them for the different skills and gifts they have.

MS. CHOO: May I mention a little more about my supporters?

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, please do, especially about the university.

MS. CHOO: Oh, yes. I have to mention the past and present directors of the School of Art and Art History, the current and former deans of the liberal arts college, and the university's presidents, who have all advocated and encouraged innovation and creativity. And they not only provide us with updated equipment and tools, but also a lab tech and another professor for our program. This has allowed our metals program and my own work to develop in a uniquely positive way and has allowed our work to flourish. As you may know, our metals program is considered one of the forerunners in metalsmithing and jewelry programs in this country.

MS. MILOSCH: I know. Remember, I did that exhibition. That was the first major exhibition I did in Iowa, called "Forging Ahead: Contemporary Metalwork in Iowa" [Davenport Museum of Art, 1996], and that's because I had admired your work for a long time, before even coming here.

Well, I want to talk a little bit about your childhood and family, so I hope you don't mind if I start with some basic questions.

MS. CHOO: Okay.

MS. MILOSCH: All right. Now, tell me how you first started out, when and where you were born - the beginning of your life back in Korea.

MS. CHOO: I was born on the morning of May 23, 1938. I am a Gemini.

MS. MILOSCH: [Laughs] I wouldn't have guessed that.

MS. CHOO: Yes, I am. According to two astrologers who cast my chart, the shape of my chart is a bowl shape, and the bowl is a movement that allows great creativity and great service to people, they say.

MS. MILOSCH: Beautiful.

MS. CHOO: The shape of the bowl in my chart is tilting, and they say that, as the unfolding of the bowl, the tilting shape means that I will easily give a great deal to the world. The Neptune is in the house of service, and it means that a great deal of my life will be working and serving. This is what astrologers are saying. Also, may I mention that I became an American citizen in 1972 in order to vote? So I consider myself a Korean-born American.

MS. MILSOCH: That's lovely. Where were you born in Korea?

MS. CHOO: I was born in Incheon, Korea. Incheon is a beautiful seaport city about 65 miles west of Seoul. And would you like to know about my ancestry?

MS. MILOSCH: I would very much like to know about your ancestry.

MS. CHOO: The Choo family is descendent of Zhu Zai, who was the third son of Zhu Zi, the great Chinese philosopher. At the end of the Song Dynasty in China, Zhu Zai immigrated to Koryo.

MS. MILOSCH: Where is Koryo?

MS. CHOO: Koryo is the former name of Korea.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, I get it - Koryo, Korea. Okay, tell me little bit about your family, and what did your father do?

MS. CHOO: My father, his name is Kwang Hyun Choo - we say it Choo, Kwang Hyun. He managed an inheritance from my grandfather all his life, sometimes well, and sometimes people took advantage of him.

MS. MILOSCH: Another generous soul.

MS. CHOO: Yes, and he was a lover of arts and classical music, and he played the violin, and he enjoyed the beautiful things and good food, and he was a good tennis player.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's a good thing.

MS. CHOO: Just like you.

MS. MILOSCH: I love tennis. [Laughs.]

MS. CHOO: And I think he was one of the people who provided funds for the Texaco Oil Company in Korea.

MS. MILOSCH: Now, what did your grandfather do? That lineage sounds so interesting.

MS. CHOO: Well, my grandfather's name and his achievements appear in the website of the history of Incheon, Korea. My grandfather's name is Choo, Myung Kee. He was born and educated in Seoul. He moved to Incheon when he was young, and he first had success in the textile business, and then he became one of the most successful producers of polished rice, through advanced modern industrial methods and facilities at that time. He was one of the major exporters of polished brown and white rice to Japan, until 1945, when he retired.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, wow.

MS. CHOO: He served as the president of Incheon, Korea's, Commerce and Industry and was recognized for his exceptional contribution to the economic development of Incheon and Korea. He was a philanthropist. I learned later, from my aunt, that throughout his life he quietly gave generous financial support to many underprivileged Koreans.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, beautiful.

MS. CHOO: Yes, and my aunt also told me that he received an Honorary Doctor of Human Letters degree from Kyung Hak Won, which is the former name of the Sung Kyun Kwan University in Seoul. And I remember he was so proud of me, telling me how well I draw. He was handsome and had a brilliant mind, and he loved art and fine things.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow, so this is amazing. I'm beginning to see all these amazing traits and talents coming from your father and grandfather. But tell me a little bit about your mother.

MS. CHOO: Well, sadly my mother Han, Young Bong died early, at age 32.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, my.

MS. CHOO: She was a frail and small-framed, a beautiful and brilliant woman, whose major study at Ewha Womans University was English literature. She died when I was 10 years old. My mother and my father produced three children: me, my sister, who is a pianist, and my brother, who is an economist and works as senior director of Korean business development and vice president of international finance at the Comerica Bank in Detroit.

MS. MILOSCH: I didn't know that. Ah, he's in Detroit and at Comerica.

MS. CHOO: Yeah, but they live in Troy, Michigan. They built a beautiful house.

MS. MILOSCH: Troy is beautiful.

MS. CHOO: My brother and his family - his wife and daughter - they're all collecting classical music CDs, and they love artwork.

And I must tell you that I remember looking at my mother's collection of the most beautiful and precious jewelry. As a child, in my little mind, I wished to produce beautiful things like that myself someday.

MS. MILOSCH: You were ambitious even as a child - precocious.

MS. CHOO: You think so?

MS. MILOSCH: I think so. You were born with a kind of vision insight.

Well, tell me a little bit about your mother's side of the family. How did she - you know, if she had that kind of appreciation. Interesting.

MS. CHOO: Well, my mother's father studied law at the very beginning of law school at the Seoul National University now, but he decided not to practice law under the Japanese occupation. He became successful in the textile business. My mother's side of the family was also well educated, and they were also lovers of art, music, and good food, and my mother's-side aunt told me my mother's father played the flute.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's lovely. Did your father remarry?

MS. CHOO: Yes, my father remarried a young, healthy woman, and they produced five children. My family lived in Incheon until I was a teenager, and then we moved back to Seoul, where the Choo family originated.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you keep in contact with your family?

MS. CHOO: We all keep in contact and visit each other in Korea and this country. My grand aunt, Professor Chang, Bo Won, visited us for the month of June, last month, and my stepbrother, Sung Yoon Choo, also visited us most recently. All my grandparents' generation have passed away except my grandfather's cousin, Professor Chang, Bo Won, who is now 94 years old this year, 2007, and is a renowned pianist. She was the dean of the School of Music at the Yonsei University in Seoul, Korea. She is retired from her teaching at the age of 90, and now lives north of Malibu in California. I will be visiting her soon. And I will also visit my stepbrother Sung Yoon Choo and his family, in Scarsdale, New York, I hope in this year. Sung Yoon Choo is a medical doctor and currently an associate professor at the Mount Sinai Medical School in New York City.

MS. MILOSCH: So tell me a little bit about the environment that you grew up in. What was it like?

MS. CHOO: Our house in Incheon had two separate houses on a large property. One was traditional, and the other one was Western style. The home in Seoul was situated on the high spot on Nam San Mountain. The house was beautiful. It had gardens outside and one heated, glass botanical garden in the center of the house. The house was filled with beautiful art and antique objects, paintings and screens, et cetera. The gardens and house were so beautiful that a movie was shot there.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, wow. You don't know the name of the movie, though, do you?

MS. CHOO: Oh, I forgot.

MS. MILOSCH: All right. I'll have to investigate that sometime.

MS. CHOO: Yeah, and it was a long time ago. And my grand aunt, I just mentioned Professor Chang, Bo Won, lived a few houses away from our house, and I remember going to her house, listening to the piano when she was giving lessons, and sometimes a soprano came and sang there. I enjoyed listening to the beautiful music all the time, there and at my home. I was nurtured with the music of sonatas, operas, chamber music, and concertos of the Baroque and Romantic periods.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, it sounds like you grew up surrounded by beautiful music and objects, and, of course, great food, which, coming to your home, I've never not had fantastic food when I've been with you.

MS. CHOO: Thank you.

MS. MILOSCH: So did you take music lessons, with all this talent in the music field?

MS. CHOO: Yes, although I am not playing now, I was trained to play the piano when I was young. I didn't like practicing a piece over and over, day after day, but I was always told that I had perfect pitch. I guess I was a

little Gemini with not much patience for practice. You know, I wonder these days, if I would have been as patient and cultivated a Gemini as I am now, then maybe I could have become a pianist or a vocalist. I always feel that music is in my blood.

MS. MILOSCH: I believe that. So when did you realize that you wanted to become an artist?

MS. CHOO: Maybe I had some desire to become an artist when I was young. Growing up surrounded by beautiful things inspired me as a little girl. I remember staring at the simple forms of old Korean ceramics and admired it so much for its beauty. Now I know why I liked the piece, and can interpret it. When the form is simple, beauty appears. I think I had a little more aesthetic sensibility than many others of my childhood friends. And I think I was a curious little girl and wanted to learn about art. I also remember that I loved listening to Beethoven's piano sonatas, and the music was so beautiful and moved me to cry, like I still do.

MS. MILOSCH: Now we've talked about your childhood a little bit. Tell me, how did your childhood influence your art?

MS. CHOO: I remember so vividly in kindergarten making fruits and other objects out of modeling clay. The teacher always displayed my work, and I remember mine was always perfect and prettier than others. [They laugh.] My family and other people told me I was talented, so I guess I thought so, too.

MS. MILOSCH: [They laugh] You were perceptive.

MS. CHOO: And I have to say that although I loved music so much, I felt art-making more suited to my temperament. I liked creating pieces, the spontaneous way of expression. I knew I could always listen to music while making pretty things.

MS. MILOSCH: Right. You didn't have to practice the same piece over and over again.

MS. CHOO: That's right.

MS. MILOSCH: So tell me a little bit more about your childhood.

MS. CHOO: Well, I have to say I am so grateful to my father, being so generous, giving me a big allowance. I was able to buy additional antique pieces and records. Living surrounded by beautiful things and hearing and playing good music helped develop my appreciation of beauty, stimulated my mind and creativity, and also enhanced my abstract reasoning skills, I think.

MS. MILOSCH: I would definitely say so. I think that's part of the magic - I mean, the music and these things.

[END MD 02 TR 01.]

Okay, tell me again, now, Chunghi, were you in Korea during the Korean War?

MS. CHOO: Yes, three years during my teenage years. Visiting museums was discontinued for a period of time, and we didn't have such a beautiful surrounding.

MS. MILOSCH: Tell me about the Korean War.

MS. CHOO: The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, and lasted until the ceasefire in 1953.

MS. MILOSCH: How old were you then?

MS. CHOO: I was 12 years old when the war started, and when the war ended, I was 15. It was a civil war between North Korea and South Korea due to the different ideologies that were created post-World War II. The 38th Parallel still exists today. I remember our family was safely moved to Pusan, the seaport on the very south end of Korea, until the war was over. I remember I drew a lot. I drew everything I was attracted to, and I read any book that was available during that time.

MS. MILOSCH: You were resourceful.

MS. CHOO: And then we had the April 19 Revolution in 1960.

MS. MILOSCH: And what was that about? What was that event?

MS. CHOO: This protest was the basis of a national movement against Syng Man Rhee, the first president of South Korea, and his corrupt government. On April 19, 1960, Korean university student groups led a march against the government, and civilians joined the protest. This movement brought down President Syng Man

Rhee.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you remember that day?

MS. CHOO: Yes, I was 22 years old then - I did not want my family worried about me, so I stayed home that day, although I wanted to join the march. We had another revolution on May 16, 1961, the year I graduated from Ewha Womans University with my B.F.A. and the year I received an acceptance letter from Cranbrook Academy of Art to study metalsmithing.

MS. MILOSCH: What was the cause of that revolution?

MS. CHOO: This revolution was after the April 19th movement. Syng Man Rhee was replaced by Yoon Po-son, and the government was not functioning well. The country was in a state of chaos, politically and economically. On May 16, 1961, Major General Park, Chung-Hee led a bloodless military coup to stabilize the country. In 1963, Park was elected president. I was then studying at Cranbrook. Park was assassinated by the director [Kim lae-kyu] of KCIA [Korean Central Intelligence Agency].

Park's long-term legacy was that of dictator and a severe political repression. However, despite his dictatorship, President Park's leadership created important industrial development and economic growth for the country. Today he's known as a president who was not corrupt.

MS. MILOSCH: So, this is why studio art was not at the forefront in Korea during this time?

MS. CHOO: Yes, because of all these difficult times, studio art in Korea was not quite established then in the academic setting, especially metalsmithing and jewelry. This was the reason I decided to study at Cranbrook.

[END MD 02 TR 02.]

MS. MILOSCH: Okay, this is Jane Milosch, still at Chunghi's home. Chunghi, you told me some very beautiful things about your past. But I'd still like to know a little bit more about your time in Korea. So would you mind telling me a little bit more about your early education and career choices? We know you were attracted to music and beauty and so forth, but what motivated you - your interests specifically in metals?

MS. CHOO: Well, during my Ewha High School years, my art teacher, after seeing many of my drawings, told me that I was talented and told me to pursue art as a major.

MS. MILOSCH: Now, where did you go after high school?

MS. CHOO: I then went to Ewha Womans University, where my mother and my aunts from both my mother's and my father's side had gone. It was kind of a family tradition to go there. I learned all of the basic things art school offered. I decided to study Oriental painting with Professor Park, No Soo. He was an abstract expressionist painter who was a painter of beautiful landscapes and figurative work. And I respected him very much, and I loved his painting. He was the most respected contemporary Oriental painter in Korea at that time. So I decided to learn to paint from him.

MS. MILOSCH: So then after that, how did that progress?

MS. CHOO: Later, I had private lessons from another renowned Oriental painter, Professor Lee, Sang Bong. I studied in history and theory of Western and Oriental art and painting, teaching methods of art, aesthetics, calligraphy, and other areas in art.

While I was a senior at college, I started to have a great curiosity and desire to move into making three-dimensional art objects. Although I found that painting gave me great joy, I had the driving spirit that led me to create 3-D objects, including metalwork and jewelry, I think, because I was strongly drawn to the beautiful antique ceramics and precious and nonprecious metal objects I saw and admired while growing up. My transition naturally grew from my past experiences and my need to be challenged. And I am most grateful to my father and family for giving me great freedom to develop however I wished to develop as an artist. They wanted me to fulfill my desire and encouraged me to go to the Cranbrook Academy of Art in America to learn what I wished to learn. That was making 3-D art objects, especially metalwork and jewelry.

MS. MILOSCH: Let me just ask you one more thing, if this is not too awkward for you, before we talk about Cranbrook. You mentioned music and art and that you were attracted to metals. I'm just curious. And you don't have to answer this now; you can think about it, and we'll come back to this question later. But I'm just struck by your knowledge of both Western music and art, and also the Eastern traditions.

MS. CHOO: I will talk about it.

MS. MILOSCH: Good, so you'll talk about that a little bit later. Okay, great.

Well, then, let's talk about Cranbrook. I worked in Detroit, and I've always admired the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. And when I saw your work, even in Detroit, when I was at the museum there, the Detroit Institute of the Arts, I was astonished, because it seemed like a beautiful synthesis of this Western and Eastern style. So now that I know there wasn't a metalsmithing department and you came, tell me how is it that you first came to the United States to study?

MS. CHOO: I must have been a brave girl. It was 1961 when I came to the United States as a student. First, I studied at the Penland School of Craft [Penland, NC], during their fall semester while I was awaiting the spring semester at Cranbrook. I learned techniques in ceramics, enameling, and stone cutting. I then had a tutor, Mrs. Ethel Dow, in Highland Park, Michigan, who taught me English, before I enrolled at Cranbrook.

MS. MILOSCH: She did a good job.

MS. CHOO: My English is not perfect. Anyway, I started in the spring of 1962 at Cranbrook.

MS. MILOSCH: Right, so let's get - for the record here, tell me a little bit about Cranbrook.

MS. CHOO: Bloomfield Hills in Michigan is where Cranbrook is. The Cranbrook Academy of Art campus is designed by the renowned Finnish architect and designer Eliel Saarinen. And there are sculptures by Carl Milles placed in the ponds in this beautiful campus. Cranbrook is one of the most prestigious art institutes ever since the academy was established in 1925. It was one of the few institutions that offered instruction in design during the 1920s and '30s. And Cranbrook produced designers like Charles Ames, Eero Saarinen, Florence Knoll, and Jack Lenor Larsen, and many, many more distinguished craftsmen and artists. And the influence Cranbrook has had on architecture, interior design, art, and craft after the Second World War was extensive, so talented students and artists come from all over the world to produce creative work in this beautifully removed setting, separate from other places.

MS. MILOSCH: It is a very beautiful place. Now, tell me again, who did you study with?

MS. CHOO: At Cranbrook, I studied metalsmithing as my major with Mr. Richard Thomas. I studied ceramics as my minor with world-renowned great master of ceramics, Ms. Maija Grotell, and weaving with the outstanding weaver and teacher Mr. Glenn Kaufman. I studied weaving because I was impressed by Loja Saarinen's work also.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's great. I just have to say that, you know, we still don't have Maija Grotell's work in the Renwick collection, but I can see her influence. Tell me a little bit about Richard Thomas. He also was a very important educator and artist/teacher at Cranbrook for years.

MS. CHOO: That's right. Mr. Richard Thomas was a small-framed, gentle and sweet person. And he was the head of the department of metalsmithing for many years and is also the author of *Metalsmithing for the Artist-Craftsman* [Philadelphia: Chilton Co. Book Division, 1960]. I was one of his students from the spring of 1962 to May of 1965. The Cranbrook metalsmithing department was one of the first in the U.S. I think Mr. Thomas had an M.F.A. degree in both painting and metalsmithing from Cranbrook from around the mid-1940s. And although Mr. Thomas did not give formal classes regularly, he gave close attention to my development.

MS. MILOSCH: Did you have any metalsmithing knowledge then, before you went to Cranbrook?

MS. CHOO: No, I didn't. I was brave enough to ask Mr. Thomas what made him decide to accept me into his program without any background in metalsmithing, when he visited the University of Iowa and me in the mid-'70s. I said it must have been a very risky thing to accept me. He took a great chance. And he said he accepted me because I had good grades and graduated with my B.F.A. Later on, I got a transcript from Ewha Womans University, and I noticed that the last semester I graduated with a four-point [grade average], and I had quite many A-pluses, in history of Western art, aesthetics, teaching method of arts, even English, and history of Korean arts; and I also had many As in studio art, music appreciation and theory of Oriental painting.

I want to mention that without Mr. Thomas, I would not be able to teach at the university level in metalsmithing. I owe to him my career life. I am totally grateful to him.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, you owe him your career life, but you got all those A-pluses and graduated with a 4-point. That was really amazing. Well, tell me a little bit more about your experience, your friendship with Mr. Thomas.

MS. CHOO: Because I did not have any previous training in metalsmithing, he had to show me how to use tools and equipment, and he taught me most of the basic techniques. At the very beginning, I was very uncomfortable using hammers and tools. I was not used to them. I was a painting student. Discipline and hard work comes

naturally to me. I learned also by watching other people produce their work.

MS. MILOSCH: Right, it's not quite like playing the chords there on an instrument. You were still playing different ones. So basically, it was Mr. Thomas's teaching there. Were there any artists in particular that you were influenced by?

MS. CHOO: Well, I remember one of the special students at that time was Yuho Fujio. He was a virtuoso metalsmith from Japan. I was always watching him create forms with such fluidity. I learned a lot from him, too, especially the raising technique, creating bowl shapes from flat pieces of metal.

MS. MILOSCH: I believe it. I'm looking at a beautiful one right now as I'm sitting here. Well, tell me a little bit more about your experience as a student at Cranbrook.

MS. CHOO: Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, is one of the wealthiest towns in this country. Many automobile executives and industrialists were living in that area. There was a major collector named Mr. Allen Harlan. He used to come to the metal shop and purchased many students' work to support the students. I think Mr. and Mrs. Harlan and Mr. Richard Thomas were very good friends.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's nice. Let's see - did they buy any of your pieces at that time?

MS. CHOO: Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Harlan bought a couple of my tea serving sets. My chalice also sold while I was a student. Mr. Thomas told me this piece was sold to a Lutheran church in Detroit. He was promoting students' work, as well as preparing and taking pictures for our portfolios and helping us to get jobs. Mr. Thomas was happy that one of the pieces I produced during my student years with him was awarded second place at the National Sterling Silver Design competition. I think it was sponsored by the National Sterling Silversmith Guild of America in 1965.

MS. MILOSCH: Okay, great. Well, I just have to take a second here, because this means, when I go back to Detroit, I need to find out where those early tea serving sets are; I'd love to see some of your student work. And now that I know Thomas promoted your work as a student, I understand, now, this beautiful tradition you've followed. Now, tell me, what was on your M.F.A. thesis? Or what was your M.A. thesis on, I should say?

MS. CHOO: At Cranbrook, I did my M.F.A. thesis on "The Use of Zinc Etching and Centrifugal Casting Processes in Preparation of Cells for Niello or Enamel." The zinc-etching process was developed in 1960 by Mr. Richard Thomas. The process is a unique method of transferring a two-dimensional design to a three-dimensional cast entity.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, interesting. Now, what kind of designs did you use at that time or for this kind of work?

MS. CHOO: I used many different designs. Some of them are precise designs of liturgical symbols and letters drawn with black ink on white paper, and other times I used a brush soaked with black ink, energetically splashed on white paper on a fast running turntable to capture energetic, accidental patterns. The black designs are then photo-etched on a zinc plate. The etched zinc plate is then used to make an impression into sheet wax by pressing it under a vertical kick press. Then, the wax mold is cast.

MS. MILOSCH: Would you explain the process of this method a little bit more? I'd like to get this down in the archives. It's very interesting.

MS. CHOO: Yes, then cast cellular division is used in conjunction with niello or enameling. You melt different amounts of silver, copper, lead, and sulfur together to make niello and fuse it into the groove. Back in the 1960s, we were not environmentally aware of dangerous toxic fumes that niello produced. I even contracted a severe skin reaction and respiratory problems.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, my goodness. People often don't know how dangerous art-making can be. So do you still use a similar technique or materials, or how did you modify or come to teach this technique?

MS. CHOO: I have continued to teach the zinc-etching process. But instead of using niello to fuse into the impression, we now use enamel or finely powdered, dark colored wood, mixed with a strong, two-part epoxy, to fill the groove, or oxidize with liver of sulfur, or we leave it as a groove. Back then there was no OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Association] or safety precautions that we insist on today. Now we also use a hydraulic press to press the design onto wax, not a vertical kick press using your feet to press. This kind of adaptation is what keeps me challenged and improving.

MS. MILOSCH: So tell me a little bit about how Mr. Thomas influenced your work.

MS. CHOO: He was always watching my development closely. One day, when I was designing the handle of a teapot, he simply drew one very elegant, simple curve and he left. That line is still ingrained in my work. And I'm

always very grateful to Mr. Thomas, who taught me and all of his students that work must be well designed and that the craftsmanship must be impeccable. Before Mr. Richard Thomas retired from Cranbrook, he and Mr. Roy Slade, the president of Cranbrook Academy of Art, asked me to return to Cranbrook to teach metalsmithing. This was in 1984. But I was already rooted in Iowa and didn't go.

MS. MILOSCH: That's amazing, but Roy Slade was not president when you were there?

MS. CHOO: No. He came to Cranbrook later. The painter Mr. Zoltan Sepeshy was the president when I was a student there.

MS. MILOSCH: And tell me more about Mr. Thomas

MS. CHOO: Yeah, I want to say, Mr. Thomas's legacy still continues to influence United States and other countries' metalsmithing. He produced many successful students who became metalsmithing professors at many universities in this country and abroad.

MS. MILOSCH: So tell me who some of those students are. Who were his students?

MS. CHOO: While I was studying there, Curtis LaFollette, Michael Lacktman, Alvin Ching, and Mary Lee Hu were some of my classmates. All of them have been teaching at universities. And Stanley Lechtzin and Fred Fenster had already graduated before I came, and they were already teaching at universities at that time.

MS. MILOSCH: That's an impressive lineup.

MS. CHOO: May I mention one student while I was there who was great? Mr. Hu Hung-Shu, who received an M.F.A. in design from Cranbrook. He taught at the University of Northern Iowa [Cedar Falls] and the University of Iowa, both where I taught and have been teaching. Professor Hu taught basic design, form and function, form and structure, interior design, perspective drawing, and 3-D design, among other subjects. His courses were of the most important basic trainings, all of which a student must learn before taking any studio courses. Students benefited a lot from taking his courses.

MS. MILOSCH: What does he do now?

MS. CHOO: Now he is retired. So I am teaching to my students what he used to teach. Mr. Hu is a well-rounded artist. He is a designer, an architect, sculptor, painter, and master teacher. He produced many successful students who are teaching design at many universities in this country. And his legacy continues. He is now producing his paintings, sculpture, and designing furniture. He is also the author of *Basic Design: The Cultivation of Wisdom, Reason, and Sensibility* [Beijing: Higher Education Press] published in both English and Chinese. These books will be available in the U.S. in early 2008. I must say, when students learn and are able to see the quality of good design, their work will become better, and helpful for highly conceptual or even for junk work.

MS. MILOSCH: That's fantastic. Having met Professor Hu, I'm going to go out and get that book. That's fantastic. And looking at your home, you have many beautiful things designed -

MS. CHOO: - by him, too.

MS. MILOSCH: By him, fantastic. Chunghi, that's so nice.

Now, one of the things that I really remember, when you came to the Renwick to give a talk, you said that you lived with Mrs. Eliel Saarinen while you were at Cranbrook. How did that happen that you came to live with her?

MS. CHOO: Well, one day, Mr. Richard Thomas singled me out and told me that Mrs. Loja Saarinen is looking for a student to stay at her house during the nighttime. Mr. Thomas recommended me to her, and I met her, and we liked each other immediately; perhaps she liked me because I knew something about music, and I didn't smoke.

MS. MILOSCH: In the '60s, that was rare.

MS. CHOO: Mrs. Loja Saarinen lived in a long, flat house designed by her son, Eero, for her large, long, woven carpet. The house was absolutely beautiful and displayed her woven work, Eliel's silver urn, Eero's furniture, Maija Grotell's ceramics, and her beautiful collections of other art objects. Her house was very simple, and her collections were placed perfectly.

MS. MILOSCH: Can I ask you one other question? That's not the historic house, Cranbrook House, the son designed - Eero designed.

MS. CHOO: Yeah, her son designed it. The house is at 1045 Vaughan Road, across the street from the back gate of the Cranbrook campus.

MS. MILOSCH: And do you know if it's still standing?

MS. CHOO: I hope so.

MS. MILOSCH: Okay, I'll have to look into that, too. Tell me a little bit more about Loja, Mrs. Saarinen.

MS. CHOO: Yes, Mrs. Loja Saarinen was the wife of Finnish architect and designer Mr. Eliel Saarinen, the architect of Cranbrook, and according to one of the Cranbrook publications, he was also the president of Cranbrook from 1932 to 1946. Mrs. Loja Saarinen married Eliel Saarinen in 1904, and she was in charge of the Cranbrook department of weaving, until she retired in 1942. She was born in 1879 in Finland, and she was a photographer, sculptress, designer, and a weaver. She was the mother of renowned architect and designer Eero Saarinen, and the mother of Pipsan Saarinen Swanson, an interior designer and textile and fashion designer. The whole family created the Cranbrook setting and design.

MS. MILOSCH: Please tell me how you feel about Loja.

MS. CHOO: I always felt that Mrs. Loja Saarinen herself was a piece of art. She was exquisitely beautiful, smaller-framed lady, and always wore one-of-a-kind clothing that, very likely, she or Pipsan, her daughter, had designed. Almost every night, she used to sit in Eero's chair and listen to music with me before she went to bed. I was privileged to live with her in this beautiful environment. Every time, after I finished my work, I took the piece to show her, and she told me that I was learning very fast and that she liked my work very much. She was always very supportive of me.

MS. MILOSCH: Wait, was that the Womb chair, Eero's Womb chair [1948]?

MS. CHOO: Yes.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's wonderful. Did you enjoy your time together?

MS. CHOO: Yes, very much so. We shared many happy times together. We always went to concerts, operas, and openings of exhibitions together. With my fund, I bought flowers and records for her. We talked about music and composers and performers almost every night. I used to carry her mail to the Cranbrook mailbox. I noticed her letters to Mrs. Jean Sibelius and other well-known people. And I told Mrs. Saarinen many times that I was so honored to live with her, so I didn't want her to pay me anything. But she insisted that she wanted to express her thanks to me by paying for meals every day at the Cranbrook dining room. And I humbly accepted her generous gift, which I shouldn't have done.

MS. MILOSCH: Hey, you let her do that, while I'm not allowed to buy you dinner! [Laughs.]

MS. CHOO: Oh, she was absolutely insisting. So at the same time, while I lived with Mrs. Saarinen, Cranbrook also awarded me tuition scholarships. And Mrs. Saarinen wanted me to stay longer with her, because we liked each other and we cared deeply for each other. So I stayed with her a total of three years. That's why I graduated from Cranbrook in three and a half years; I was very fortunate.

MS. MILOSCH: That is so beautiful that you had that friendship. Now, how old was she when you were living with her?

MS. CHOO: She was in her mid-80s. I started living with her one year after her son, Eero, passed away and about 12 years after her husband Eliel's death.

MS. MILOSCH: When did she pass away?

MS. CHOO: Mrs. Saarinen passed away in 1968. Three years after I left her, she died at the age of 89. I treasure many wonderful memories with her. I visited her a few times, and we talked on the phone from time to time. I saved a couple of her handwritten letters she sent to me after I left.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, lovely. I'd love to have those for the Archives of American Art someday. So you also studied with another giant in the field of 20th-century American ceramics at Cranbrook: Maija Grotell. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like being a student of Maija Grotell?

MS. CHOO: Yes, I took ceramics with this world-renowned Ms. Maija Grotell. According to the Cranbrook record, she was a Finnish artist who came to this country in 1927, and she was the head of the ceramics department, teaching ceramics from 1938, the year I was born, to 1966.

I wanted to learn about ceramics from this master. At the time that I was her student, she was in failing health, but she always watched us to make sure we were throwing technically correct on the kick wheel. She helped me a lot, especially because I was short and awkward with the standard-sized kick wheel. She helped me to adjust

to the size of the wheel made for taller people. I think I learned quickly. Most of my ceramic pieces were wheel thrown.

I was so grateful, getting to use her beautiful color glazes that she developed and let her students use for their work. These bright colors were not commonly used at that time. The colors were turquoise, salmon pink, many shades of beautiful blue, black, and yellow, et cetera. I enjoyed using these brilliant colors as if they were paint pigment. Most of my pieces show painting-like patterns and colors.

One year after I graduated, Ms. Maija Grotell retired. How lucky I was. She was a very gentle, warm, and brilliant ceramist. She used to call me "Choo."

MS. MILOSCH: That's so lovely. It's like she started there when you were born. What an amazing thing.

Tell me a little bit more about your weaving.

MS. CHOO: My weaving courses were taught by the tall and elegant Mr. Glen Kaufman. He was an outstanding weaver and teacher. At the end of my studies, Ms. Meda Johnston, of the weaving department, briefly taught me fabric design. Together, Ms. Meda Johnston and Mr. Glen Kaufman wrote a book titled *Design on Fabric* [New York: Reinhold, 1967]. I had to learn fabric design because I got a job before I left Cranbrook teaching at the University of Northern Iowa. I started preparing my material to teach textile design and weaving.

MS. MILOSCH: What did you do after you graduated from Cranbrook?

MS. CHOO: In the fall of 1965, I started teaching the course "General Crafts," at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa, which included weaving, textile design, woodworking, and other craft medium, making 2-D and 3-D objects. Another course I taught there was metalsmithing and jewelry. The two studios were across the hall from each other, and many students took both of my courses. I gave students freedom to create without boundaries of medium, which stimulated them to make mixed-media art objects. So in 1965, I practically started teaching mixed media. Now, these days, most studio artists are producing mixed-media objects. This means I taught a mixed-media approach more than four decades before it became mainstream.

MS. MILOSCH: I have to interrupt you here, too, because I think that is really amazing and worth noting, because I think it's part of your repertoire. You absorbed some of that great Cranbrook tradition, and you carried it further. And that is astonishing, because that's only happening now. So the fluidity by which you move from medium to medium in your own work also translates into your teaching. So is UNI [the University of Northern Iowa] the only place you taught before you came to teach at the University of Iowa?

MS. CHOO: Yes, although sometime in the late '60s, the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee asked me to come and teach weaving and textile design, but I didn't go. Instead, I recommended Ruth Kao - it's K-A-O - one of my very gifted students I taught at the University of Northern Iowa.

MS. MILOSCH: Did she take the job there?

MS. CHOO: Yes, she did. Ruth Kao became recognized as an outstanding teacher there, as well as being known as the first weaver whose abstract expressionistic designs were woven by weavers in China in silk. She passed away at the early age of 53. She was one of the most beautiful human beings inside and outside. Her presence, her talent, and her spirit will remain in my heart always.

MS. MILOSCH: That's very beautiful. And I saw that beautiful piece upstairs. I've got to take a picture of that; it's so moving.

Now, when did you come to the University of Iowa?

MS. CHOO: In the fall of 1968. I had been invited by Dr. Frank Seiberling, then the director of the School of Art and Art History, to teach metalsmithing and jewelry at the University of Iowa. It was challenging for me to teach at the University of Iowa, because I had to build up the program from only very few rusty hammers and an anvil that was left by the previous professor. I started virtually with nothing, as far as a metals studio goes. Students who came to class thought I was one of them, because I looked so young then.

MS. MILOSCH: [They laugh] Well, how did you promote your work while you were teaching?

MS. CHOO: Well, I never "promoted" my work to anyone, though Mr. Jack Lenor Larsen has been supporting and promoting my textile work since 1969 and, subsequently, my silver work. I was very lucky to be discovered by Mr. Larsen, first through my textile work, while he was jurying the "1969 Young Americans" at the Museum of Contemporary Craft in New York City.

MS. MILOSCH: So that later became the American Craft Museum.

MS. CHOO: Yes, and I also continue to send my work to many invitational exhibitions and publications. This activity also brought exposure of my work to the public. My drive to produce work is mostly a professional requirement by the university and also is a way to help students learn what professional activities are like, as well as my pleasure while creating pieces. But I never promote my own work.

MS. MILOSCH: I still have a lot of questions I want to ask you in the interview. But I have to say, I'm amazed at the major figures in the field of American craft who you've spent time with, and that you've trained more students, who then go on to teach and do amazing one-of-a-kind things.

[END MD 02 TR 03.]

This is Jane Milosch, back for another session with Chunghi Choo at her beautiful home here in Iowa City.

Chunghi, tell me about your time and teaching at the University of Iowa. This is a big topic, very, very important.

MS. CHOO: As you know, the metalsmithing and jewelry field is technically the most complicated and difficult area to teach and learn, more so than any other studio art class. The courses we offer teach over 50 different techniques, using countless tools, equipment, chemicals, and materials. It also requires time-consuming hard work and skills to produce pieces.

MS. MILOSCH: Right, and I already know that you said you inherited a few rusty hammers and an anvil. So tell me, how did you build up your program here at the University of Iowa?

MS. CHOO: It has been very challenging work. I had to develop and improve various metalworking and other media techniques for students, in the liberal arts college, to produce work faster and easier. What started out as a bare concrete room with a severe acoustic problem has now evolved into a less noisy and comprehensive, well-ventilated facility with all major equipment and tools for students to practice traditional, contemporary, experimental, and digital technologies.

MS. MILOSCH: I know you had experience with mixed media. Tell me a little bit more about that.

MS. CHOO: Yes, in the mid-'60s, I had a vision that art in all craft media, including metalsmithing and jewelry, which are traditionally kept separate, would become more and more mixed and married to other media in the future.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, I think that doesn't surprise me, because when you come from a culture - you grew up in all that beauty - you had beautiful painting, music, and metalsmithing objects. So tell me, when did you start producing mixed media?

MS. CHOO: I started producing mixed-media objects in the mid-'60's, and I taught, inspired, and encouraged students to freely use and explore the use of a material singularly, or in combination with different mediums, as well. This allowed us to enrich our personal expression and broaden our creativity. Many new and unconventional materials were used for creative work for the first time by my students and myself, and this has been leading us to develop techniques for the use of new materials. I believe innovation is what makes art thrive.

MS. MILOSCH: You are right. And we just had an exhibition at the Renwick Gallery which included the work of Joceyln Chateauvert, one of your former students and she combines handmade paper with sterling, a credit to your teaching. Tell me, do you still teach this mixed-media course today?

MS. CHOO: Yes, Ever since the mid '60's, I continue to teach and inspire students to create mixed-media objects within the metalsmithing coursework. And in 1997, I had to add a separate course within the metals program titled "All Media/Experimental Workshop," and currently the course title is listed as "Mixed-Media Workshop." This course is also taught by professor Kee-Ho Yuen and painter and lab tech Mr. Benjamin Paul Anzenc.

I would like to say our mixed-media course objective is searching and experimenting with diverse media techniques and concepts, using unconventional and conventional materials, found objects, and innovative materials. Students have been creating mixed-media, conceptual, and/or functional objects, including jewelry, sculpture, costumes, furniture, lamps, and other functional and nonfunctional objects for interior and/or exterior, installation pieces, and site-specific work. This work reflects individual vision and personal statement, social commentary, narrative, or purely aesthetic expression.

MS. MILOSCH: It's great.

I want to ask you another question, but before I do, I want to just say that what you just said is all true. Many of your graduate and undergraduate students' work, which exemplifies your teaching methods, was included alongside your own work in the exhibition "Forging Ahead: Contemporary Metalwork in Iowa," in Iowa a number

of years ago [1996].

So tell me, do you feel the mixed-media course has influenced the field of metalsmithing in general?

MS. CHOO: I think today's art in craft media, including metal arts, is to be one of the liveliest of all the studio arts, conceptually and without the restrictions imposed by any single medium. Art historians and critics are predicting the current craft movement will be seen as part of the fine art movement of the late 20th century. Do you agree?

MS. MILOSCH: I do, I do. And you have been making history for some time.

MS. CHOO: I did not do it intentionally, so I must not receive credit.

It just naturally happened that way. The University of Iowa metals program has been teaching students mixed-media trends of today for almost four decades.

MS. MILOSCH: Tell me more about electroforming, because the piece at the Renwick Gallery is a piece that you created through electroforming process.

MS. CHOO: Yes, I always seek new ways to express myself in my work. The fluid organic forms I wish to create were difficult to achieve by using traditional metalsmithing techniques. Since I teach and am employed by the university, I have had much less time to produce my own work than a pure studio artist has. All this has contributed to my quest of developing easier and faster methods. This led me to learn and use the electroforming method to create my work.

MS. MILOSCH: How did you learn about electroforming?

MS. CHOO: In 1971, I learned electrochemistry and electroforming method from Professor Stanley Lechtzin, at his summer class at the Tyler School of Art [Temple University, Elkins Park, PA]. Professor Lechtzin was the first metalsmith to apply this industrial technology to making art, in his case, mostly for his innovative sculptural jewelry.

MS. MILOSCH: When did you get an electroforming facility installed at the University of Iowa, because I know that involved quite a bit of equipment and setup?

MS. CHOO: In 1973, I received a grant from the University of Iowa allowing me to install a copper-plating tank in our metals studio. Exceeding 250 gallons in capacity, it is known as the largest copperplating tank in any art school in the United States. And since then, I have helped in further developing and refining the potential of electroforming, so that my students and I can produce larger-scale hollowware, sculpture, and jewelry, as well as producing multiples through electroforming.

MS. MILOSCH: That's great. And I want to just note that it's curious that, here we are in 2007 in America, and there is very, very little hollowware. So how has this technique influenced the field?

MS. CHOO: Well, electroforming allows for unlimited expression in forming metals with relative ease and less time-consuming work. This method lifted some of the technical limitations that existed in the past.

MS. MILOSCH: Tell me a little bit more about the actual process of electroforming.

MS. CHOO: Electroforming and electroplating have a history of industrial development and application dating back to the mid-19th century. Usually, I make a mold of plastilina form, and then cast it in wax, or I make the form directly in wax, and then electroform over the wax piece by applying silver lacquer on the surface of the wax form as a conductive coating. When the layer of metal reaches the desired thickness, the wax form is melted out, leaving a hollow or other copper form that the artist created. Then, when the metal form is cleaned and refined, the piece is heavily plated in fine silver or gold.

Both plastilina and wax permit an immediate and spontaneous relationship with forms. Most of my finished objects in silver have a fluid appearance that can only be obtained through the use of softer materials. But, of course, one could make hard-edged, geometrical forms, as well. Electroforming has allowed me and my students to produce fresh-looking silver pieces which have drawn the attention by curators and collectors since the mid-1970s.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, I have to say that that is at the key, that these forms look that they're sort of soft and dissolving. And you're right. When you have to work heavy metal, it's usually of edges and hammering, and it's all free of that. And so explain a little bit more about the technical process.

MS. CHOO: The essential process is electrodeposition of a metal. Simply put, the plating metal and the object to

be formed, or plated, are placed in an acid bath, which contains copper sulfate and sulfuric acid, with other additives, when copper is plated. The object is conductive to a negatively charged source of electricity, a cathode, while the metal is given a positively charged anode. Since the negative and positive charges attract, metal ions flow toward the object and are deposited onto its surface.

When wax and other nonmetallic pieces are plated, silver lacquer is applied to the surface of the nonmetallic form as a conductive coating. The anode serves as a continuing source of metal ions for deposition, and these ions are carried through the solution to the cathode, where the piece is being plated. The longer the matrix is in the bath, the thicker the electroform, or plating, will be. Reverse plating is done when the piece is plated too thick. By connecting the thick piece to the anode bar, when the other piece is plating, which is connected to the cathode bar, it will decrease the thickness of metal.

MS. MILOSCH: So what do you consider to be some of the great advantages of electroforming?

MS. CHOO: There are many. One of them is production possibility, the making of multiples. First you make a silicon rubber mold of the finished metal piece. Then you cast a wax mold from this mold, and multiple editions of electroformed metalwork can be produced from this one mold.

One of my decanters, purchased by MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY], and a vase, which is in the collection of the Musee des Arts Decoratifs in Paris, were produced in limited edition of 35 each. I changed the scale a little, but the overall design is close to the original piece. I received many inquiries from collectors and decided to use this method to produce multiples. These pieces were sold out and given away in a short time.

MS. MILOSCH: I believe it. It's quite fascinating. It's almost like you invented a way for making artists' prints, multiples, in silver. What other methods did you develop in electroforming?

MS. CHOO: Industries have been making multiples various ways for years. One of the methods I came up with was the technique of encasing an object in wax and then plating a perforated form or solid form over it. This means that you can encase an object within an object. The object will show through the perforated form, or if the form is not perforated, the smaller object will be enclosed in the larger form.

For example, in my electroforming class, I had a male student. I think he was depressed. He never sparkled, and he was shy and withdrawn. And being his teacher, I was responsible to get him involved in his work. So I talked with him at length, and I asked him what he liked most. He said he likes his gerbil.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, goodness gracious!

MS. CHOO: I didn't know what a gerbil was [they laugh], and he explained that his gerbil was constantly running on a wheel inside a see-through cage. When we were talking, his eyes lit up, so I suggested that he should create his gerbil in action.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, boy, a gerbil.

MS. CHOO: He started by making a gerbil in wax. He was immediately interested. Then, we copperplated it and melted the wax out. When he completed the copper gerbil, I came up with the idea to make a cage around it. So he made a solid wax cage, embedding the copper gerbil inside, with the gerbil sitting on the rod, and drew open lines on the wax cage, like the cage he had at home, with silver lacquer, and then electroformed. When he melted the wax out, the gerbil was inside of the cage, and when he cranked the handle, it made the gerbil run. This was the first time I saw him smiling and happy during the entire semester. [They laugh.]

Without this student, I would not have thought about embedding an object inside of wax. We were going to use a battery or electronics to make the gerbil move. But the semester was over. This method can make many layers of metal or nonmetal objects inside layers of larger forms.

MS. MILOSCH: That's hilarious. You are a talented teacher. What other examples do you have? Any other examples of your interaction with your students?

MS. CHOO: I always have to come up some improved or newly developed techniques, which I don't think I would have done without students. Their mess-ups are usually the catalyst for new ideas and methods to teach students effectively. One mess-up I remember was dealing with electro-applique.

[END MD 02 TR 04.]

MS. MILOSCH: Jane Milosch, back interviewing Chunghi Choo. Now you're going to talk about how one of them had messed up and it led to this discovery of something called electro-applique. What is electro-applique?

MS. CHOO: I named the technique "electro-applique" in the early '70s. This technique allows layers of relief work

on metal surface through the plating technique. It is done by applying resist, such as asphaltum, on the areas of metal objects not to be raised by plating and leaving areas of a metal surface open to plate relief design. Electro-applique can be also done on nonmetallic objects such as glass, plastic, fiber, ceramics, and rubber by drawing the designs with conductive silver lacquer to plate the relief. I am pleased that this new method will help metalsmiths, jewelers, and sculptors who wish to create any relief work on any of their objects, easily, effectively, and in short time.

And would you want to hear another story about how I further improved the electro-applique method?

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, because some of the pieces that you've made utilize that. So could you? Yeah, tell me a little bit more.

MS. CHOO: As you mentioned, some of my silver or brass vessel forms have intricate designs of copper relief design. This is done by covering up the whole piece with resist such as asphaltum, then scraping the pattern into it to open to plate copper relief. The asphaltum is then removed with solvent.

My other pieces that you may have seen relief designs are drawn and pressed on the surface of metal vessels with chartpak graphic tape or any other resist tape. Then the whole piece is sprayed with colored enamel or lacquer paint. When the paint has dried, tapes are removed and lightly etched with nitric acid to plate the relief design. The script patterns, or open metal surface, also should be further cleaned and etched using nitric acid, so that the appliqué plating will permanently bind and grow from the etched grooves, or open metal surface. The copper electro-applique design is visibly contrasted on silver or brass, as well as other painted colored-metal forms. Some of my other pieces were done with copper electro-applique work on copper forms. Then the whole piece is plated with silver or gold.

May I tell another story about a student who had messed up electro-applique that led me to further improve the method? While this student was working on the electro-applique on her vase, the electro-appliqued relief work almost separated from her piece. Apparently she had forgotten to clean and etch her surface of the vase, so the plating did not bind well.

MS. MILOSCH: So what did you do?

MS. CHOO: So in this student's case, I helped clean her piece, then we plated the whole piece to seal it. If she wouldn't have messed up, I never would have come up with the technique of sealing the whole piece. Again, students are the cause and inspiration for teachers to develop problem-solving techniques.

MS. MILOSCH: So you've taught for a number of years, so I imagine you have some other stories. Is there anything else that comes to mind?

MS. CHOO: Well, yes. I have many, many stories. [Milosch laughs.] But I will tell you just one more.

MS. MILOSCH: Okay.

MS. CHOO: I had a student who was having a new baby and needed money very fast to buy a washing machine. She was very interested in electroforming at the time, so I came up with the idea to use tapered wax candles to make multiples of rings. She drew many rings with a silver lacquer all the way down each candle. She even set some stones in the rings. We electroformed the rings on the candles and sure enough, there were tons of beautiful rings that we then goldplated. She sold the rings at the local Thieves Market and got more than enough money to buy a washing machine after a short time.

MS. MILOSCH: That's amazing. That's better than turning straw into gold, turning wax into gold. Do students and artists come to you to learn - you know, do they come to study with you specifically to learn about electroforming, because this is really something you've mastered?

MS. CHOO: There have been many groups of professors, artists, and students who came to learn electroforming from our program from different parts of the world. And, of course, I do still teach this technique to our university students.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, I know you also teach silent metal forming. Can you tell me more about this technique?

MS. CHOO: Yes, in the late '70s, I started to teach and explore with my students what Mr. Jack Lenor Larsen named "silent metal forming." Though this technique is not new, it previously had no name. Since then, as a part of all three courses I have been teaching, and all other metals classes, the silent metal forming technique is taught.

Silent metal forming is a process in which pieces are formed from a single, unbroken sheet of metal, cut out, and shaped into three-dimensional objects by bending or rolling or folding, mostly by hand with no, or minimal, use

of tools and no soldering. It doesn't produce noise pollution.

MS. MILOSCH: Can you explain this process because, you know, normally you think of people hammering away, making lots of noise?

MS. CHOO: The process is very simple. Usually a two-dimensional paper pattern is cut and then folded or rolled or bent into a desired 3-D form as a model. Then sheet metal is cut out to exactly match the paper pattern. A 3-D form is then made from this single, unbroken sheet of metal by rolling or folding or bending. This method is simple and direct, and some beautiful forms can be produced quickly and easily.

MS. MILOSCH: What kind of objects do your students produce when using the silent metal forming?

MS. CHOO: Students have been producing countless creative objects, including sculptural jewelry, hollowware, flatware, furniture, light fixtures, and many other creative consumer products, for indoor or outdoor use, for many years. My students and I further improved the silent metal forming technique. For example, one of my grad students, Sung Ran Kim, developed a silent metal forming technique of manipulating spun bowl form by rolling or stretching or bending by hand to make quick, creative sculptural forms, for the first time in the field.

MS. MILOSCH: Have you had any other silent metal forming success stories that you could tell us about?

MS. CHOO: Yes, I must mention that our program is also known as the place where the most creative menorahs are found. This is due to some of our students' work of menorahs produced using the silent metal forming method. Images of my students' and my menorahs were first published in TWA [Trans World Airlines] Airline Magazine in the December issue of 1986. This was followed by invitational exhibitions of our menorahs at the Jerusalem International Judaica Fair, Jerusalem, Israel; "Hanukka and Other Jewish Lights, Exceptional Judeica by American, European, and Israeli Artists," at the Jewish Quarter, Beverly Hills, California; at the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City, and in Chicago. I did not have any Jewish students at that time, and because I didn't show the students real, existing menorahs, their pieces were fresh looking and extremely creative. I didn't want my students to have preconceived ideas about what a menorah should look like.

MS. MILOSCH: That's pretty amazing, because that is one thing that I noticed when I came to Iowa City, is that there really isn't a Jewish population like there is in Ann Arbor, Michigan, or in the Detroit area, or many other major cities. It's still hard for me to believe that so many people have never seen a menorah, but, yes, with your Iowa students, it's very possible. Do you use technology to aid in production?

MS. CHOO: Yes. Today, this easy, simple, and direct silent metal forming technique is aided by cutting-edge technologies such as CNC (computer numerical control) cutting and forming capabilities, which allow for the speedy mass production of pieces. Many of our students' pieces have been produced in multiples working with industry, and their work also serves as gifts to our scholarship donors. The students have also sold their work to gain income for their studies. Our metals program encourages students to utilize our 3-D printer, use of 3-D computer modeling, as well as other digital technologies.

MS. MILOSCH: That's interesting. Do you encourage your students to produce for income?

MS. CHOO: Absolutely. These cutting-edge digital industrial techniques will continue to be helpful to art students after they leave school. They will be able to earn money when they mass produce successful designs for the marketplace. So I strongly encourage my students to mass-produce their pieces, along with producing one-of-a-kind, expressive personal artwork, to support them financially.

MS. MILOSCH: That's exciting because I think that is one thing that is wonderful about artists working in the craft field, is that they can produce two different types of work - production and one-of-a-kind objects, and they often feed into each other.

[END MD 02 TR 05.]

I'd like you to tell me a little bit more about your early career life.

MS. CHOO: If you would like to see my pieces produced during my early career life, you could see some of them at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City. So far they have about 10 metal pieces and three textile pieces of my work. I had a very busy early career life filled with teaching, and I had a few romances during that time, which all together left only a little time during the summers to produce my own work. So I stayed very late nights; sometimes I didn't sleep at all to produce my pieces.

MS. MILOSCH: Aha.

MS. CHOO: [Laughs] I also traveled a lot and entertained large numbers of people quite often. I don't know how I did, but I did.

MS. MILOSCH: Because you have a lot of energy. How do you do it with a busy life and hundreds of students?

MS. CHOO: Fortunately, I don't require too many hours of sleep, and I have been healthy.

MS. MILOSCH: Tell me a little bit more about your textiles.

MS. CHOO: Well, during the '60s and '70s, when hippies were tie-dyeing T-shirts, I used this ancient technique of tie-dye, which I learned when I was a little girl, to create a new art medium. I produced monumentally scaled tie-dyed textile work using colorful dyes to create lyrical abstract, expressionistic imagery. The design and colors in tie-dyeing are precisely controlled by sewing, tying, and dyeing. Sometimes this technique is called plangi or tritik. Some pieces have two or more layers of dyed images on transparent silk fabric. The layers are placed one in front of the other, with a space in between, giving a constantly shifting effect of colors and images. Sometimes colors on transparent pieces look like a spray of colors floating in mid-air. Some wall hangings are shaped, and some are left puckered.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, they're beautiful. Do you ever produce representational images?

MS. CHOO: I produced just one piece with representational images, a very large piece with deer running through a forest. It was produced with two layers of fabric, with images on the transparent fabric front layer and images on an opaque fabric back layer, with space in between to create depth. I used stencils and air-brushed acrylic paint to produce this piece.

MS. MILOSCH: Why acrylic?

MS. CHOO: Acrylic paint prevents the colors from fading.

MS. MILOSCH: Have you taken any other directions besides wall hangings with your textile work?

MS. CHOO: One of my other directions in my work was not intentional, but by pure happy accident that I developed wire mesh forming in one afternoon in 1989. I was struck by the malleability and translucency of wire mesh. I was cutting and folding a square of the wire mesh in the same way as origami paper, like I used to do when I was a young girl. I folded a square of mesh diagonally into fours, then bent two opposite corners together and fastened them. Then I bent the two remaining corners over the fastened ones, creating a basketlike enclosure. I saw immediately that this simple procedure lent itself to a wide variety of 3-D forms, and I remember that I was thrilled by the unlimited possibilities. When wire mesh is convoluted, various combinations of bending above and below the elastic limit can be utilized to create dynamic tensions which support and retain the desired shape.

MS. MILOSCH: What appealed to you about this technique?

MS. CHOO: Many things about mesh forming appealed to me, including the fact that it is technically easy and fast. Wire mesh basket forms are airy, buoyant, and quite elegant. I embellish some pieces by adding things like antique Oriental fabric or Chinese or Korean calligraphy. These things add layers of associations to the formed wire mesh object. I very much enjoyed this new direction producing various wire mesh forms easily and fast, in a short time.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you use layers in mesh forming as well?

MS. CHOO: Yes. I build up layers of forms in different colors of wire mesh, resulting in constantly shifting variegated iridescence enlivening and enriching the total effect. This is an effect similar to some of my earlier textile work made with multiple layers. The characteristic appearance of wire mesh is like a woven transparent fabric and can be also formed.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, they're beautiful. They are very lyrical, and the fact that you can - it's almost like seeing through a solid form.

[END MD 02 TR 06.]

Let's talk a little bit about your inspiration. Where do you get your ideas for your work, and how have your sources of inspiration changed over time?

MS. CHOO: I think my intellectual concepts and intuitive spontaneous inspirations go together with the physical process of making my work. Throughout my long career life, I have produced diverse artwork, including jewelry, hollowware, flatware, textiles, sculptures, paintings, light fixtures, and objects in mixed media. I have taken many different directions and have been inspired by many different sources. I have used a wide range of traditional and contemporary materials and techniques; these also lead my work to different directions.

MS. MILOSCH: What is your design process like?

MS. CHOO: Most of the time, the designing of my work comes intuitively and spontaneously. Maybe part of this approach to creating work comes from my experience with the practice of Oriental calligraphy.

MS. MILOSCH: Tell me a little more about the calligraphy.

MS. CHOO: Calligraphy is considered the highest form of artistic expression in East Asia. Calligraphy challenges the artist's intellect, emotion, hand-and-eye co-ordination, and it involves the individual artists' intuitive mastery of proportion, space, and placement of individual elements to make a unified and visually satisfying composition. It cannot be constructed mechanically or by pure intellect. I think the sweeping movement of the brushstroke has influenced me by giving a flowing energy to my work, as well.

MS. MILOSCH: I would agree with that. I can see that. Your work is very - well, I wouldn't say simple, but it is very elegant, and the lines are very simple. It's reductive. Tell me more about that.

MS. CHOO: To reach the simplest form in my work, I focus on the very essence of what I'm creating and eliminate everything superfluous.

MS. MILOSCH: And how do you get to that point?

MS. CHOO: It comes naturally. I don't have to consciously think about it. I enjoy producing pure forms that are beautiful, with simplicity and harmony. I like to see the pieces evoke a sensuous joy and grace, and speak through their inner beauty. The inner beauty appears when I get rid of mere superficialities.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you find inspiration from anything else, anything in particular?

MS. CHOO: I find inspiration from wherever or whatever comes to my mind. It could be a form from nature, a flower, and most of the time, I take risks and venture out and sail from whatever is there. Some of the better pieces I produced this way contain a spark that brings the pieces to life.

MS. MILOSCH: I would agree with that. Is there anything else that is important to your inspiration?

MS. CHOO: Yes, harmony is important to my work and space. I hope space in my work produces an effect of tranquility and serenity. I don't like to see conflict, tension, ugliness, or raw expression in artwork. I don't like to bring pieces into my own home that create conflict or tension.

MS. MILOSCH: I can see that in your work; it's very focused, with a meditative element. And you don't "mess around" with the superfluous, added decoration. Any decorative element is, instead, integral to the design of the overall piece. What else do you mean when you talk about harmony?

MS. CHOO: Well, when I speak of harmony in visual art, I have the ideal of a musical harmony in my mind also. I am addicted to listening to harmonious and emotionally moving, beautiful chamber music, sonatas, concertos, and opera by the great composers' masterwork and performed by great musicians. I love music from Baroque to the Romantic period. Good music from these periods is harmonious and flowing, unlike most of the current music compositions, that are not harmonious.

MS. MILOSCH: Who are your favorite composers, and can you tell me a little bit about how music influences your work?

MS. CHOO: My favorite composers include, [Johann Sebastian] Bach, [Domenico] Scarlatti, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Puccini, [Giuseppe] Verdi, and many, many more.

MS. MILOSCH: All those composers, huh?

MS. CHOO: Yes. And I believe good classical music influences my work to be harmonious and flowing like the music. The masterpieces of classical music are harmonious, with nothing to be added and nothing to be subtracted. To me, good art is the same way. I try to make my artwork as beautiful as good music.

I would also like to say that classical music has played a most important role throughout my entire life. Music has nurtured and enriched my being, and I think it will continue to have influence on my art. Music fulfills me and elevates my emotions to a creative and ethereal plateau that lets me immerse myself in wonderfully productive hours. I never get tired listening to many piano sonatas of Beethoven, Mozart, Scarlatti, and good piano trios, and many good operas. Of course, the pieces are played by the best performers. Not one of my pieces was produced without music.

MS. MILOSCH: Does function play an important role in your work?

MS. CHOO: Yes. Most of my work is functional, to uplift daily life. I try to integrate the functional aspect into the form of the piece, and the form enhances the functional element of each piece. And also many of my pieces have a rounded bottom surface creating a floating effect, which makes the piece visually light and self-contained. I like to see in my functional pieces simplicity and grace of form, and I like for each piece to appear sensuous, joyous, aesthetically fulfilling, and a pleasure to use and a pleasure to view when not used functionally. I like to express happiness, harmony, and beauty in all my work.

MS. MILOSCH: And I think your work certainly achieves this, and in so many different ways. How has making art objects influenced your life, would you say?

MS. CHOO: I have been blessed with a good life. I think, this is because of I am creating art objects and being surrounded by beautiful art objects and using many of them in daily life. As well as my love of music, my exceptional husband and friends, all combined to make my life happy, fulfilling, and joyous. Also, teaching is an important part of my life and gives me great joy. Many of my students produce fantastic works and this also contributes to making my life exciting and satisfying.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, I can see that. You give a lot and receive a lot back. What about the selling of your own work?

MS. CHOO: During the '60's and '70's, some of my work was sold while on display in invitational exhibitions at galleries, and sometimes I sold directly to collectors and museums. Because the Museum of Modern Art has displayed my pieces since the early 1980s, they have drawn the attention of curators and collectors. I was informed that two of my pieces are among the few contemporary silver pieces acquired by the Museum of Modern Art since 1970, and one of my decanters has been on display many times. I read in the MoMA's letter saying that over two and a half million people visit the MoMA each year for the last 10 years. Up to 2007, including the pieces at the MoMA, approximately 58 pieces of my work are constantly displayed in museums and other public places. This, and photos of my work in publications, draws the attention of curators and collectors to my work, and I still receive inquiries from them.

MS. MILOSCH: I believe that. How did your work first come to be recognized? Do you have any other examples of how this happened?

MS. CHOO: Two pieces collected by the Metropolitan Museum of Art have also drawn interest by collectors and curators. Both pieces are a one-of-a-kind pieces. One is a tie-dyed wall hanging acquired by the museum in 1974. It was exhibited in "Notable Acquisitions 1965-1975" and other times. Another piece is an electroformed copper - silver - plated container I produced in 1979. It was acquired by the MET [Metropolitan Museum of Art] in 1980. This particular metal piece was chosen as one of approximately 125 master design works the Metropolitan Museum of Art collected during the last 100 years, and exhibited in "Modern Design 1890-1990."

MS. MILOSCH: What an honor. How long was it on display?

MS. CHOO: The exhibition "Modern Design 1890-1990" was in 1992, and the exhibition "Modern Metalwork" was on display until 1994. A major book publication by Craig Miller, titled Modern Design in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: 1890-1990 [New York: Harry N Abrams, Publisher, 1990] included this, my metal container, and I have noticed many collectors, schools, and curators have this book.

MS. MILOSCH: I know; I've got that book.

MS. CHOO: At the moment, the MET has displayed this particular container [Container, 1979] in a show called "One-of-a-Kind: The Studio Craft Movement" [December 22, 2006-December 2, 2007]

MS. MILOSCH: I've seen the exhibition, but can you talk a little bit about the premise of the show?

MS. CHOO: According to the MET's publication, this show is a representation of the studio craft movement in the United States during the post-World War II years. It includes about 50 works of furniture, ceramics, glass, metalwork, jewelry, and fiber from the Metropolitan Museum collection.

In the late 1970s, there was an anything-goes climate and a newfound freedom in artistic expression. Artists began to experiment with different materials and processes, with the end result of bold, abstract, and sculptural art. I am honored that two of my works are in the prestigious MET's collection. I know that the MET draws one of the largest public audiences, as well as professionals from all over the world. Sometimes I also receive inquiries from collectors who saw my pieces at the MET. The Container, 1979, was also published in another book "Women Designers in the USA 1900-2000: Diversity and Difference" [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000], edited by Pat Kirkham.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you have a relationship with specific dealers and the sale of your work?

MS. CHOO: Because I do not have much time to produce my own work, I don't have a contract with any specific dealers selling my work yet. But the Brown Grotta Gallery [Wilton, CT] sold some of my nonfunctional mixed-media wire mesh basketry in the past. And because I support our small-town Chait Galleries in Iowa City, my sculpture and a light fixture was sold by them at a very low price in the last year.

MS. MILOSCH: I have to say that's pretty astonishing. So many artists have relied on galleries to sell their work.

MS. CHOO: Maybe in the future, when I have more pieces, I will have galleries and dealers.

MS. MILOSCH: What about pricing your work, if you didn't have a gallery doing that for you?

MS. CHOO: [Laughs] I am not interested in making money from my work. The good thing is I have a job that pays for my simple life. Sometimes museums are buying and sometimes collectors are buying my work, but the prices of my works are reasonable.

MS. MILOSCH: I know many of your works have been acquired by many museums and public places, and your pieces have been exhibited widely and in many publications. Can you tell me some of the specific instances that you are particularly proud of?

MS. CHOO: It is a long list of places, embarrassing. I have been working in the craft field since the mid-'60's, so I have been showing my work widely. My assistant, Anne Hansen, checked briefly, and she said, up to 2007, 49 of my metalworks and 9 textile works were acquired by 19 major museums in the Western world and 10 other public institutions. And she said that, up to 2007, my work has been exhibited in approximately 309 invitational exhibitions in more than 160 cities of 35 countries in the European, North American, Asian, African, and Australian continents, and pieces were exhibited about 43 times in New York City. Anne also said that reviews, feature articles, photographs of my work, and articles by me have been published in more than 127 publications.

MS. MILOSCH: That's pretty impressive. Which museums have collected your electroformed pieces?

MS. CHOO: My electroformed hollowware pieces are in the collections of the Musee des Arts Decoratifs, Paris; the Museum of Modern Art in New York City; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; the Museum fur Kunsthandwerk, Frankfurt, Germany; Det Danske Kunstindustrimuseet, Copenhagen, Denmark; the Museum of Arts and Design, New York City; the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in New York City; the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (which your gallery purchased a piece last year); and the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas; Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio; Jewish Museum in New York City; and the Art Institute of Chicago; and others.

MS. MILOSCH: And don't forget about the work I acquired for the Figge Art Museum [Davenport, IA], which used to be the Davenport Museum of Art; they have a spectacular piece which traveled in the "USA Today" curated by Paul Smith. How do you feel about your work being so admired? I mean, it must give you a great sense of accomplishment.

MS. CHOO: I'm very humbled. It has been a joy for me to express beauty through silver. I am humbled and pleased when people respond favorably to my work.

MS. MILOSCH: What are your most important commissioned works? And can you tell me a little bit about how those commissions came about?

MS. CHOO: One of them was a commission in 1981 by the late William Hewitt, CEO of John Deere, who commissioned me to produce a major freestanding screen to divide the interior of the entrance of the northeast site at the Waterloo John Deere Works in Iowa, a major building. I was very much challenged in taking this commission. The piece is approximately 10 feet by 24 feet, a large, double-layered, see-through fabric screen with a representational image of a forest with 43 deer running through it. And when I was writing the bill to John Deere, I was very humble and wrote \$5,000. My companion then, Dr. Charles Read, insisted for me to ask for at least \$20,000, because I spent many months producing this piece and the work is beautiful. I had him write out the bill, and I ran away. Shortly after, I received a \$20,000 check.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, that was still probably even a fraction of what the piece was worth.

MS. CHOO: And I also did a couple of other major textile pieces for Mr. Hewitt's San Francisco home. I was informed that Lee Radziwill, Jackie Onassis's sister, was the decorator displaying my work in his house.

MS. MILOSCH: Have you done any other commissions?

MS. CHOO: Among a few, another one was in 2004. I did commission work for the Jewish Museum in New York

City for its centennial celebration. The Silver family donated \$5,000 for me to produce a silver spice container in honor of their father, Mr. Stuart Silver, for his birthday. I am not concerned with money, and I admired their intention, so I produced two pieces, one with Hebrew letters etched into it and one without. Luckily, they picked the one without the letters. My pieces don't work very well adorned with letters.

MS. MILOSCH: So you've never had fixed prices?

MS. CHOO: I never had fixed prices, and I never charge anything to my close friends or my assistants or my students. I am happy that way.

MS. MILOSCH: I can tell. But you have some beautiful things by your former students and assistants.

Does a sense of spirituality, I think, seem to play a role in your work or religion? And in what way, if it does?

MS. CHOO: Yes, I was able to afford buying many students' work for my own collection for many years. And in my work, maybe some sense of spirituality, but religion does not play a role in my work. I am not a religious person. I have to say that I appreciate all the messages that churches send in terms of helping people, but I have been doing these things all my life. I also appreciate the Biblical art presented in places like the Sistine Chapel, cathedrals, and other historical sites and museums around the world, but I do not take part in worship or church. But I made one piece showing astrological signs, actually a representational piece; I'll show it to you later.

MS. MILOSCH: Okay, great. In what ways do political and social commentary figure into your work?

MS. CHOO: Although many of my students are into producing narrative work about political and social issues, social commentary does not figure into my work as a whole, but I love to read and learn about current events. I produce works that are beautiful, harmonious, and aesthetically pleasing.

[END MD 02 TR 07.]

MS. MILOSCH: Well, here I am with Chunghi Choo in her home in Iowa City. Chunghi, can you discuss the difference, if any, between a university-trained artist and one who has learned his or her craft outside academia - the academy?

MS. CHOO: I know there are many innovative, brilliant, and gifted artists who were not educated in academia. I have found many of them to be very open-minded and interested in learning, reading, museums, and galleries. In a world where information is abundant and meeting people is not restricted, independent studio artists are able to learn through interaction with people, publications, the Internet, traveling, and workshops, as well. No artist can flourish without the ability to learn. Success all depends on the individual.

MS. MILOSCH: That's beautiful. Do you think students training at university have a distinct advantage?

MS. CHOO: I would say students at the university are well nurtured, if they have a desire to learn and are interested in developing themselves. The university setting, to me, is like giving nutrients to students to grow. But this is only true if students have the desire to learn and improve. Academia could be a failure, too, if students are lazy and they are not working hard, or they are not focused despite the educational opportunities.

MS. MILOSCH: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] How do you nurture your students? How do you think - if you had to tell somebody that, how would they go about it?

MS. CHOO: I do strongly believe that my students and artists, all, should have a well-rounded foundation. This foundation can be acquired inside and/or outside the academic setting. The broader the exposure to all forms of art, including music, theater, literature, dance, psychology, sociology, and traveling, et cetera, the better. If students and artists are curious, that is best.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you think there are advantages to studying at art schools?

MS. CHOO: There are many advantages to studying at an art school. Students gain and learn from various courses like art history, theory, and criticism. Knowledge is the key ingredient to success. Another advantage of studying at an art school or university's good crafts department is that the tools are readily available, and if a student wants to set up his or her own studio, they would know what equipment and tools to buy. They would be able to set up a studio faster, and maybe better, than someone who has not had exposure. They will have learned techniques through demonstrations and been given guidance throughout their learning process. Reading and viewing books and journals and seeing slides and work by other students and artists will stimulate them to be creative.

MS. MILOSCH: What has been your most rewarding educational experience?

MS. CHOO: Because of my long educational experience, I have been able to produce a wide range of artworks in many different mediums, such as metalsmithing, which includes hollowware, flatware, and jewelry, as well as, textile, weaving, ceramics, mixed media, sculpture, painting, drawing, design, woodworking, home furnishings, calligraphy, et cetera,; and I studied in history and theory of Western and Oriental art and painting, aesthetics, teaching methods of art, philosophy of art, and other art courses. Most recently, I took a printmaking course at the University of Iowa, specializing in foil stamping.

I can't imagine myself away from the educational system. I always want to be stimulated and challenged to learn and improve, for me and for my teaching. I think that if I was not educated, I would not be able to teach, inspire, and stimulate students. I am very fortunate to have a wide range of experiences and knowledge in art and life that helps me inspire my students, at least I hope so.

MS. MILOSCH: And you're very curious, even now. Tell me about your teaching at the University of Iowa.

MS. CHOO: I enjoy and love teaching students. Along with my teaching, since 1968, I have done administrative work as the head of the metalsmithing and jewelry program until 2001, for 33 years. I humbly received several awards and honors from the University of Iowa for my teaching. They are the Helen Kechriotis Teaching Award in 2007; the F. Wendell Miller Distinguished Professor of Art in 1996; the Regents' Award for Faculty Excellence by the State of Iowa Board of Regents in 1993; the Amoco Senior Teaching Award in 1987. I learned that I was nominated for all of these honors by current and former students, and directors and deans.

MS. MILOSCH: That's very impressive. What courses do you teach at the University of Iowa?

MS. CHOO: I have been teaching a variety of courses, including beginning jewelry and metal arts, intermediate jewelry and metal arts, graduate workshop in jewelry and metal arts, mixed media workshop, summer workshop. I teach graduate and undergraduate majors and non-art majors and special students, and I give special workshops for visiting artists from different parts of the world.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you find teaching metalsmithing to be more challenging than other art areas?

MS. CHOO: Yes, metalsmithing and jewelry is one of the most complicated and difficult studio art courses to teach and learn. The course work is mostly focused on one-on-one teaching, in addition to classes of group teaching. To help individual students with artistic development of conceptual and technical skills, I give personal attention to each student's aspirations. Each student is entirely different from all others, culturally, artistically, intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, and their capabilities are different. A solution for one student may not work for another.

MS. MILOSCH: How do you approach the different students?

MS. CHOO: I try my best to teach and inspire differently for different personalities and different stages of their aesthetic and technical development. I use my many years of teaching experience, my intuition, and I try to read my students' minds and creativity and try to respond to their different personal styles. I can suggest how to refine each individual style by bringing their personal expression to life. I teach students techniques, and I show them lots of books, slides, and examples of different artwork, and give them the freedom to do their own thing. They respond by being themselves. I offer suggestions, advice, criticism, all of which I hope to be constructive. Confucius said he showed his students how to lift one corner of a handkerchief; after that, it was the student who had to lift the other three corners. I hope that maybe I do that.

MS. MILOSCH: That's a wonderful analogy. What are some qualities you believe make up an educator? Or let me just say, what are the qualities you think an educator should have?

MS. CHOO: I believe that a teacher has to be physically and mentally healthy, positive, and happy - a teacher should have a happy nature. They also have to be very generous, giving, love what they are doing as an artist, and love teaching. A teacher must have a dynamic personality and be the master of the widest range of techniques, always striving for innovation. The best teachers are not only good at their own work, but bring out the best in their students.

MS. MILOSCH: I would agree. Do you think it takes a special kind of person to be an educator?

MS. CHOO: Talent, skill, and intelligence contribute to making a great teacher. Some of the great artists do not become great teachers. Sometimes they do not seem to have enough patience and generosity for young students and do not know how to inspire students. I must say, a teacher must be committed to excellence in teaching.

MS. MILOSCH: I think being committed to excellence is really important. How do you convey this? How do you commit to excellence?

MS. CHOO: In my case, I teach individual students every day spontaneously, giving technical demos, critiques, and advice on the spot, so students can improve their technical skills and creativity. I think a lot about how to teach effectively. I intentionally produce my own work at the same metals studio where students are working, so they can observe my working process. We work side by side, day and night, and weekends, so I can continue to teach and help students. My students may see me as a good role model by continuing to develop new ideas for my work, and I am showing them that working hard and long hours will lead to success. I am continuing to develop myself as an artist and educator, and I give time, energy, and support to individual students and encourage them to be people who contribute beauty and value to the world.

MS. MILOSCH: I have to interrupt here because I think that is true of your work, but some art educators let go of their own work, and other artists cannot teach, while you have achieved such a balance. Like you talked about balance and harmony in your work, I see balance and harmony in your teaching and in your making of art. And very few artists are confident enough to work in front of their students, to take risks with their students watching them. They feel distracted, so it's so amazing to think that you've produced these works working side by side with your students.

How do you inspire your students, though, to create original objects, so they're not copying your work?

MS. CHOO: While students are learning and refining technical skills, I give them freedom and encourage them to explore concepts and materials to their fullest potential and create works without boundaries of the medium and, most importantly, to be innovative. And I encourage students to develop their own creative expression and not to get hung up on current trends or copy other people's work. My students and I are always close to each other, but my students do not copy my work or each other's work.

MS. MILOSCH: It sounds that you and your students work very well together.

MS. CHOO: Yes, we do. My teaching is open, honest, direct, and very giving. I let students know how they are performing. If they are doing poorly, I teach, inspire, and encourage students until they improve. If they are really not able to improve, or continue to make mistakes and continually go into a wrong direction, I fix it for them so they can see and learn. I ask the right questions so students can think critically about a solution. I know that the emotional state of the individual students is important to the work they are producing. I care about each student and celebrate triumphs, and help with their personal problems also.

MS. MILOSCH: Now, your program is known for its innovations, both conceptually and technically. How did you encourage this at the university?

MS. CHOO: I always encourage students to look for new inspiration, concepts, and techniques. Whenever I have new findings, I immediately inform students and urge them to begin to experiment and push to the limit of the medium and explore all possibilities. My hope is to stimulate students' creativity by kindling an interest in searching out new concepts, as well as new techniques. If students are using new materials, they have to come up with new techniques to produce fresh artwork.

MS. MILOSCH: Do new innovations bring a spark of joy into the studio?

MS. CHOO: Of course. My students and I have been improving and developing many techniques and concepts through the years. We have celebrated many successful results, which means we are celebrating constantly. Many of my students have pioneered using new materials never before used in the field. I'm thrilled and happy about that, my joy as a teacher is having my students surpass me.

[END MD 03 TR 01.]

MS. MILOSCH: Well, it takes someone with a tremendous awareness of self, such as yourself, to say that you're proud to have students surpass you. I think that they are actually building on your instruction, and that's an amazing foundation. Now, tell me, how do you feel about art education?

MS. CHOO: Art education is not just about making a particular piece of jewelry or sculpture. I have always tried to nurture and inspire individual students' creativity. Thinking creatively is a skill students carry with them, not only into whatever profession they choose, but also into every aspect of their lives. I inspire them to live with art in all forms. I believe that the arts are central to living creatively. They bring together nature, aesthetics, and spirit.

MS. MILOSCH: I think that's beautiful. You don't practice religion, but that's deeply spiritual, I think. How has your position in the art world helped your students?

MS. CHOO: Throughout my teaching career here at the University of Iowa, I have found pleasure, excitement, and rewards when my students' works are exhibited and published with mine. I simply tell gallery directors and

publishers that I will not show my work unless they show my students' work. Our exhibitions and publications have brought our program more visibility and attention from the craft world.

[END MD 03 TR 02.]

MS. MILOSCH: Okay, Chungi, I'd like to go back to your relationship and friendship with Jack Lenor Larsen. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

MS. CHOO: I have much to say about my relationship with Mr. Larsen, with a heartfelt gratitude. As you know, Mr. Larsen is a passionate supporter and advocate of contemporary craft and artists. I have been one of the many lucky artists who he discovered, whose work he supports and promotes widely. I was blessed with fortune that my large, colorful abstract expressionistic, painting-like tie-dyed wall hanging caught Mr. Larsen's eye while he was juring "1969 Young Americans" at the Museum of Contemporary Craft, and he invited me to exhibit my textile work at his main showroom in New York City.

My solo exhibition was held in 1971. Jack Lenor Larsen, Inc., publicized my show with a wonderful statement about my textile work, and this publicity letter was widely distributed to professionals in the art world and interested public. Within two hours of the opening of the show, many good things happened. One of them was the Metropolitan Museum of Art wanted to acquire one of my wall hangings. This solo show was really the most important event in my career life, a major breakthrough into becoming known as an artist.

Mr. Larsen is a very thoughtful and a big giver, and I have been constant humble receiver of lots of his handwritten notes and fabulous gifts, including good books and precious rare treasures, even brochures of concerts, operas, theaters, and exhibitions he attends, to share the experience with me. I have been always touched by his thoughtfulness in details and generosity. Mr. Larsen has been my greatest mentor and compassionate supporter of my career and personal life since 1969. I am totally grateful to him. I am also very honored and thrilled that I am one of the "four sisters" he adopted many years ago.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's lovely. Wow. That's very special. You have to tell me who the other three sisters are at some point!

MS. CHOO: I will.

MS. MILOSCH: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's great. I'm so grateful to you. You actually introduced me to Jack Lenor Larsen. I had not met him until we were at Chicago SOFA and you introduced him. Tell me, how else has he been supporting your career?

MS. CHOO: Mr. Larsen has included photos of my work with comments in some of his major books he authored or co-authored, for example in *The Dyer's Art: Ikat, Batik, Plangi* [New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976] and *Jack Lenor Larsen, Creator and Collector* [London/New York: McFadden, Stack, Friedman, Merrell, 2004]. He also included my work in many national and international shows he curated for museums and galleries. Visitors to his homes both at LongHouse in East Hampton [NY] and his Park Avenue apartment in New York City also see my work there. Mr. Larsen introduced me to the curators late Stewart Johnson and Arthur Drexler at MoMA. Both curators liked my metalwork and acquired two pieces on the spot in 1980, and he introduced me to many other special people.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow. He's donated some of your work to major museums, hasn't he?

MS. CHOO: Yes, he donated my work to major European and American museums, such as the Musee des Arts Decoratifs in Paris, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City.

MS. MILOSCH: Where else has your textile work been exhibited and acquired?

MS. CHOO: My textile work has been exhibited at many international and national invitational exhibitions from 1965 to 1983. Some of those are: "Fiber Works," the work of 49 artists from 16 countries at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1977; "The Dyer's Art: Ikat, Batik, Plengi," at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York City, and this exhibit toured in the U.S. 1976 to 1978; solo exhibit at the Hachmeister Schnake Galerie, Munster, Germany in 1982; "Five American Textile Artists' Work" at Chateaux de Grignan and other places in France in 1983; and many other places. In the late '60's, my textile work received four awards. Three pieces are in the permanent collection of the Museum of Arts and Design, New York City; one is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and another one was collected by the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, New York City. Also the John Deere Waterloo Works, Waterloo, Iowa, owns one piece, and one piece was acquired by the Strayer-Wood Theatre of the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls. In addition, I was invited to jury the "First Fabric Design International" and "International Students Fabric Design," for the First Surface Design Conference in 1975. I wrote an article titled, "The Textile Surface," the review of these competitive

exhibitions, in the April 1976 issue of Craft Horizons. I was at that time actively producing my work in textiles.

MS. MILOSCH: Have you stopped producing textile work?

MS. CHOO: Yes, in the early '80s. I would like to go back to paint on fiber again soon.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, I can see, though, again, there's been this dialogue of materials, even when you work in metal or fiber, Chunghi; there's a vocabulary that's yours.

Now, tell me a little bit more about Paul Smith, the former director of the American Craft Museum; tell me how he discovered your work.

MS. CHOO: It was in 1972 when Mr. Smith invited my work for the exhibition "Fabric Vibrations/Tie and Fold Dye Wall Hangings and Environments," work by eight American textile artists shown at the Museum of Contemporary Craft. He must have seen my work on display in New York City at the Jack Lenor Larsen showroom in 1971.

The first time I met Mr. Smith in person was at the old building of the Museum of Contemporary Craft, across from the current museum, West 53rd Street. I could not recognize that he was the curator and the director of the museum because he was climbing a ladder, hanging artists' work by himself for this exhibit.

Mr. Paul J. Smith has a remarkable eye and an outstanding talent and ability for discovering new expression in craft in all media. As a passionate promoter, he finds notable works by unknown and known artists, and he exhibits and publishes their work. He is such a warm, kind, hardworking, and brilliant writer and a distinguished curator and author of several major books of exhibition catalogues of contemporary American craft. He has done this for over 50 years and still continues.

MS. MILOSCH: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I would agree. Without Paul Smith, I don't know where this field would be or how it could have been really documented.

Would you like to explain more about this exhibition and when it was held, because I think Ted Hallman was one of the artists that was actually in that show, but I'm not sure.

MS. CHOO: This "Fabric Vibrations/Tie and Fold Dye Wall Hangings and Environments" exhibition was organized and curated by Mr. Paul J. Smith, exhibited first at the Museum of Contemporary Craft in 1972, and then he made it possible for this exhibition sponsored by the SITES [Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibitions Service] to tour from 1972 to 1975, through 15 major cities in 11 countries of the Eastern and Western Europe, the Near and Far East and the Pacific Islands. In this exhibition, five of my monumental-scale tie-dyed hanging panels were included with the work of seven other American textile artists.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow, that's during the beginning years of the Renwick Gallery. Are there any other major exhibitions he included your work in?

MS. CHOO: Yes, Mr. Paul J. Smith included my metalwork also in many major exhibitions at the American Craft Museum, including their international and national traveling exhibitions. Among them are "Craft Today: USA" - this exhibition was first exhibited at the American Craft Museum; then the exhibition traveled to 15 major museums and galleries in 13 European countries from 1989 to 1993 - and "Craft Today: Poetry of Physical," an inaugural exhibition of the new American Craft Museum in New York City, and this exhibition also toured to six museums in the United States from 1986 to 1988. And "For the Table Top," at the American Craft Museum in New York City, and this exhibition also toured eight major cities in the USA from 1980-1982. All of these major exhibits were organized and curated by Mr. Paul J. Smith.

Since 1972, Mr. Paul J. Smith has been showing my textile and metalwork in major national and international traveling exhibitions and publications of his books, among them are Object For Use: Handmade by Design; Craft Today: USA; and American Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical; and others. So I am very grateful for all of his ongoing many years of support and promotion of my work and for showing them in many parts of the world.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow, that's amazing.

[END MD 03 TR 03.]

This is Jane Milosch interviewing Chunghi Choo. We're continuing a session on Tuesday, [July] 31, [2007,] still at her home.

Chunghi, I'd like to ask some more personal questions about things that have influenced you in your work and in your life. I'd like to know if you have a favorite artist or artists?

MS. CHOO: Many, many, but I have - among many favorite artists, one is the German Friedrich Becker. To me,

he was one of the most important people in the development of modernism in contemporary jewelry and silversmithing during the second half of the 20th century. He has been an inspiration to thousands of contemporary silversmiths with his powerful, unique, and unmistakable motorized innovations. I think thousands of jewelers are influenced by his work. He introduced new forms and also used stainless steel and synthetic gems. He made jewelry, hollowware such as teapots, flatware, and candleholders. He showed distinguished simplicity and mechanical images in his work. He was a goldsmith, craftsman, sculptor, inventor, designer, and engineer. He taught in Dusseldorf and was recognized as an outstanding teacher. He died about 10 years ago. And he must have been a very fun person also. I heard all of the students he taught loved him.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you have any other artists that you are fond of?

MS. CHOO: Yes, many of them. Among the metal artists in America, Professor Stanley Lechtzin, who is an internationally recognized jewelry artist. I salute Professor Lechtzin for his major contributions to the metals field, for his pioneering use of digital technologies and electroforming to produce revolutionary artwork. He is a brilliant artist and a perfectionist. I love his work. And Tom Joyce, a self-taught, one of the most innovative and prolific blacksmiths, who is also a recipient of the McAurthur Foundations "Genius" grant. I love Tom Joyce's work, including his forged iron plate. And I also love professor Helen Shirk's colorful metal vessel forms. She is another innovative distinguished artist.

MS. MILOSCH: Who else do you like?

MS. CHOO: One of the most outstanding Korean metalsmiths and sculptress, Professor Kyung-Hee Hong. Her work is refined, simple, and sophisticated. One of her works has been on display in the permanent collection exhibition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a piece I donated many years ago.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, I have heard her name, and I think I've actually seen her work. Anybody else?

MS. CHOO: And Michael Rowe, a British metalsmith, for his simple forms of sculptural golden hollowware - very beautiful. And many other metalsmiths' work I love. I could go on and on, but would you like to know my favorite painters?

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, I would, because you first studied painting.

MS. CHOO: Yeah, I am interested in painters. I love Cy Twombly's work. His paintings are blurring the lines between painting and drawing, very sensitive. And I love Helen Frankenthaler's paintings very much. Her paintings are intuitive, sophisticated, and her colors are very beautiful.

MS. MILOSCH: I have to tell you something. The first exhibition I worked on in Detroit was the Helen Frankenthaler retrospective, and your early textile pieces and her paintings share a similar aesthetic.

MS. CHOO: But you know what? I saw her paintings after I did my own work. So I was so shocked and thrilled.

MS. MILOSCH: That's exciting.

MS. CHOO: And then I like Marc Chagall. Of course everybody likes [Henri] Matisse, and I like him, too.

MS. MILOSCH: I can see that same joie de vivre in your work.

MS. CHOO: Yeah, and I like Mark Rothko, and I like many, many other painters.

I would also like to mention artists in music. I collect every CD, DVD and books by and about Maria Callas, a dramatic soprano.

MS. MILOSCH: You know, I admire Maria Callas's voice, too, and you know, you don't hear people in the craft world talking about voice very much, but when I see some of your silverwork, I see the voice being extended beyond what one think is possible, and the melody and rhythms of your pieces - I can see that.

MS. CHOO: Oh, thank you.

MS. MILOSCH: Now, with all the teaching that you do, all the work, do you have any time - and we know the music - do you have time to read very much? And if so, what have you been reading recently?

MS. CHOO: Well, most recently I read two small books, mostly on the plane and at the airport. One was by my favorite American soprano, Renee Fleming's *The Inner Voice: The Making of a Singer* [New York: Viking, 2004]. I collect CDs of all of Renee Fleming's performances, and, of course, all of Maria Callas's, and I am, I must say, a passionate collector of music CDs and DVDs of classical music and books of many visual artists.

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, I see all of these CDs and DVDs displaced in this room, but I also see a lot of records, still, so you must have a lot of those early recordings.

MS. CHOO: Yes

MS. MILOSCH: Especially Maria Callas.

MS. CHOO: And another small book I read was Kurt Vonnegut's *A Man Without A Country* [New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005]. I bought this book right after he passed away a few months ago. I think this is the last book he wrote. I like the simplicity in his writing of the complexity of the human condition. I also admired looking at his intuitive original drawings and calligraphy in this book.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow. Any others?

MS. CHOO: Another book I read recently was *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times, and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* [New York: Random House, 1958], by Aline B. Saarinen. This book was a gift to me by my best friend, Renata Sack. She gave it to me because I lived with Mrs. Loja Saarinen.

MS. MILOSCH: So Aline Saarinen was Eero Saarinen's second wife?

MS. CHOO: Yes, she was.

MS. MILOSCH: So who was Eero's first wife?

MS. CHOO: Lillian Swann Saarinen, and she was a ceramist whose works were sculptural ceramics.

MS. MILOSCH: You know what? I think we had a piece of hers in the Detroit Institute of Arts, actually. So tell me a little bit more about Aline.

MS. CHOO: Would you like me to talk about Aline B. Saarinen's book?

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, please.

MS. CHOO: Aline B. Saarinen received the Guggenheim Fellowship in the mid-950s, and she wrote this book, which is a biographical study of major American art collectors and became a bestseller at the time, and Peggy Guggenheim is included in this book. I also read *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict* [New York: Universe Books, 1979], by Peggy Guggenheim, many years ago.

MS. MILOSCH: Wasn't Aline B. an art critic?

MS. CHOO: Yes, and I found out that she was the associate art editor and critic for the *New York Times* and became a television personality for NBC. And she made documentaries such as "The Art of Collecting," and her last position she had before she passed away was chief of the NBC Paris news bureau, and she died in 1972. I remember Mrs. Loja Saarinen, and we watched TV together when Aline B. Saarinen was on, and she was a beautiful-looking woman on TV, but I never met her in person.

MS. MILOSCH: That's very interesting. Are there any other publications that you'd like to mention?

MS. CHOO: Well, I just swept through Barack Obama, his *The Audacity of Hope* [New York: Crown Publishers, 2006]. I had to read this book after I attended his speech and rally at the University of Iowa last month. I think he's a brilliant man. Now he's leading the fight to end the Iraq war, and he chose principle over politics to change Washington, D.C.

MS. MILOSCH: Somehow you manage to find time to read.

MS. CHOO: I wish I had more time to read. My reading material is so varied day by day. It has been my habit for many years to go to the art library and sweep through the art journals and new art books for my relaxation and to catch up with what's going on currently and historically.

MS. MILOSCH: Can I interrupt one more time? I'll never forget the first exhibition that I curated in Iowa, which included your work. I don't recall that anyone else read my catalogue essay and immediately called me with comments, but you did! I remember thinking, "She actually read every single word." That was thoughtful. You really do - I can see - you read things. So do you read any journals?

MS. CHOO: Yes, the journals I sweep through include *Artforum International*, *Fiberarts*, *Ceramics Monthly*, *Architectural Review*, *Sculpture Review*, et cetera, and books new each month at our art library. I enjoyed viewing the *Berlin Art Now* [Mark Gisbourne. New York: Abrams, 2006] last week. Now we have a new, beautiful

art building designed by the architect Stephen Hall. Our new art library is a heavenly place, which is packed with fantastic collections of art books, journals, exhibition catalogues, et cetera, from all over the world.

MS. MILOSCH: So would you say that your reading helps you with your teaching?

MS. CHOO: Of course. Through this, I am not only gaining knowledge and inspiration for myself, but it also is helpful and useful for my teaching. Our art school does not have a course teaching about contemporary craft, its history, theory, and criticism.

MS. MILOSCH: I'll have to come back and teach that someday, but in the meantime - [laughs]. I would love to teach that class.

MS. CHOO: I hope so.

MS. MILOSCH: Someone needs to do that.

MS. CHOO: Perfect.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you read anything else?

MS. CHOO: Well, living with a medical doctor who was a Harvard fellow, and who is still doing research, we receive lots of medical journals, but I don't read them. I only read just a few things like the Harvard Health Letter; in a way, I am pretty much updated with their new findings for health matters. And I also look at cookbooks and enjoy different chefs' presentations of food. I am also glad we have the Food Network on TV. In this country, people's standard of food is becoming higher. I enjoyed reading Anthony Bourdain's Kitchen Confidential [New York: Ecco Press, 2000], and I enjoyed looking at Mario Batali's cookbooks, and books on Issey Miyake, especially his sculptural costumes.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, it's obvious that you're interested in the whole person, and that if everything you're putting into yourself is great and well, and you're well, it's going to come out in your work. So it's amazing. Do you tend to read any newspapers with regularity?

MS. CHOO: I enjoy reading the Sunday New York Times if I am free on Sunday and I go through two local newspapers every morning. I would say, when I was younger, I used to be an avid reader. I read many classics and junk books as well. Of course, my love of opera led me to read Shakespeare's Macbeth and Othello. I remember I enjoyed reading Tolstoy's Anna Karenina and many other books. These days I am constantly giving books to Goodwill.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, I'd like to be there to pick up some of your books, because they're bound to be very edifying and interesting. Have you read any new publications in the field of metalsmithing? You know, more journals?

MS. CHOO: Well, I read Metalsmith Magazine and other books on jewelry and metal arts from Europe, Asia, and this country. I really would like to see practicing, experienced artists in the field do some historical research and write an informative, quality textbook with new digital technologies such as CAD/CAM and CNC technologies, producing art books equivalent to what Mr. Oppi Untracht did in the early '80s' Jewelry Concepts and Technology [Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982] and Metal Techniques for Craftsmen: A Basic Manual on the Methods of Forming and Decorating Metals [Doubleday: Garden City, New York, 1968].

MS. MILOSCH: Can you just say a little bit about Oppi, because I came across that book?

MS. CHOO: Ever since I read Mr. Oppi Untracht's book in the late '60's, I have been appreciating and respecting his exceptional gift as an author, who wrote many articles and several of the most influential and informative books available today in the field of metal crafts. His books are filled with profusely illustrated guides to design, old and new techniques and materials. I was thrilled to meet and talk with Mr. Untracht many years ago. He is a very giving gentleman, and a metalsmith, jeweler, an enamellist, researcher, and renowned author. I require my students to read Mr. Untracht's books.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, I remember when I was writing on your show and your students' work, that's when I first read that book. And also, when I was working on the Ancient Roman show, I found that book again, and some of the techniques he talks about in there. Who are some of your favorite writers in the field of craft?

MS. CHOO: Beside Mr. Oppi Untracht in the field of metalworking, Mr. Paul J. Smith, Mr. Jack Lenor Larsen, Mr. David Revere McFadden, and Mrs. Rosanne Raab are four other writers who I respect and appreciate very much. Their publications are inspirational and educational, showing various materials, techniques, trends, and artists and their work in all media of craft with their research and comments. Their publications have been helpful for my teaching.

MS. MILOSCH: That's great.

[END MD 03 TR 04.]

We were talking about some of your favorite writers on craft, and we talked a little bit about Paul Smith before, but is there anything else you'd like to tell me about Paul Smith?

MS. CHOO: Yes, again, Mr. Paul J. Smith has been making a major contribution to contemporary American craft. We know through several major books of exhibition catalogues, documenting the artists and their work, and many exhibitions, including major national and international traveling exhibitions, he organized, curated, and collected outstanding works of contemporary craft for the American Craft Museum for over 24 years. Without Mr. Smith's documentations and publications, contemporary American craft would not have been presented historically, strongly, and cohesively. Mr. Paul J. Smith will leave a great legacy.

MS. MILOSCH: Tell me a little bit about David McFadden and your friendship with him.

MS. CHOO: As you know, presently, Mr. David Revere McFadden is the chief curator and vice president for programs and collections at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, a position he has held since 1997. While he served as assistant director for collections and research at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the National Design Museum of the Smithsonian in New York City, from 1978 to 1995, he acquired one of my textile pieces and a teapot for the Cooper-Hewitt Museum.

Up to date, Mr. David McFadden has organized more than 150 exhibitions and has been the author of more than 100 catalogues, essays, and critical reviews on glass, ceramics, fiber, wood, metal, and design works from Europe, Asia, and America. His publications and lectures have been valuable resources for artists worldwide. Mr. McFadden has also been knighted three times, in Finland, Sweden, and France. Mr. McFadden is a very kindhearted person, and a brilliant scholar of art, writer, researcher, and one of the most important curators and leaders in international craft today. I respect him very much.

MS. MILOSCH: Can I ask you - and you don't have to answer this if you don't - because you and I have been talking about craft, do you feel anything about the American Craft Museum changing its name to the Museum of Arts and Design?

MS. CHOO: As I understand, the direction of the American Craft Museum has changed to a new era, focusing materials and processes that are embraced by practitioners in the field of craft, art, and design, as well as architecture, fashion, interior design, technology, performing arts, and art- and design-driven industries. So we have to get used to the new name MAD.

MS. MILOSCH: Okay, I was just curious. Well, tell me a little bit more about Jack Lenor Larsen.

MS. CHOO: Yes, I would like to. As you know, Mr. Larsen is one of the foremost authorities on world crafts and a major collector of international contemporary and traditional craft objects. He is a world-renowned innovator of weaving and fabric design and the corresponding technology. And he is a very handsome and elegant man, with his very own individualistic style, and he is a brilliant and distinguished artist, scholar, author, curator, speaker, and entrepreneur. I respect his hard work, his huge accomplishments, and his extraordinary life.

And I want to mention also his home, LongHouse in East Hampton. The famous LongHouse is Mr. Larsen's living museum. It is filled with beautiful, rich, and historical and current artists work in all mediums from all over the world. And the 16 acres of magnificent gardens are Mr. Larsen's creative work, as well. He is an exceptional gardener and aesthetic designer of landscapes, and he created an absolutely beautiful environment with trees native to all corners of the world interspersed with wonderful sculptures by well-known artists. LongHouse is a foundation and open to the public on various weekends, and I know the public loves experiencing and viewing his collections and the gardens, and learning how to make one's home a work of art.

MS. MILOSCH: Great. You have talked about his publications and about Mr. Larsen. How have his publications actually influenced you in your work or your teaching?

MS. CHOO: I respect Mr. Larsen's writings about international fiber arts and crafts in all mediums. All of the 10 major books he authored or co-authored, including *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric* [Jack Lenor Larsen and Mildred Constantine. Kodansha America: New York, 1986]; [Jack Lenor Larsen:] *A Weaver's Memoir* [Harry N. Abrams: New York, 2003], and *Jack Lenor Larsen: Creator and Collector* [David Revere McFadden and Mildred Constantine. Merrell: New York, 2004] - all are richly illustrated with many photos of work by outstanding artists. They are a source of inspiration, and they are educational. His collections and publications have influenced my knowledge on craft in all medium - aesthetics, design, old and new techniques and materials, history and cultures, and more. They also have kept me up to date on artists and trends in the field of fiber and crafts. Mr. Larsen is a living encyclopedia of knowledge, and he is tirelessly active, influencing the field of crafts, aesthetics,

and design throughout the world.

MS. MILOSCH: That's a beautiful tribute to Jack Larsen. Tell me about how you came to know Rosanne Raab.

MS. CHOO: My first contact with Mrs. Rosanne Raab was in 1984. She invited me and my students to show our work in the exhibition "The Extension of the Hand" at the General Foods Corporation headquarters collection gallery. One of my pieces in this show was acquired by the General Foods Corporation.

Mrs. Rosanne Raab is a well-known authority of modern American silver. She has organized and curated many major exhibitions in metals, which she included my students and my work. These include "Silver: New Forms and Expressions" [and] "Benchmarkers: Women in Metal." In this "Benchmarkers: Women in Metal" exhibition, two of my students and myself were presented among 31 American women metalsmiths who had significant impact on hollowware and flatware in the second half of the 20th century, she wrote in her statement. She also has served as juror of a great number of exhibits and has lectured extensively and published many valuable articles on metalwork for various publications. Her brilliant and hard work has brought attention to the field of metal craft, and it has opened doors for many metal artists to gain professional success.

Mrs. Rosanne Raab has the intention of publishing a book documenting the last 60 years of American hollowware and flatware. It would be an important teaching text on the subject and would raise awareness for American hollowware and flatware and its changes in expression, techniques, materials, and trends.

MS. MILOSCH: Now, I know you didn't mean to make a pun here, but raise and raise hollowware is pretty funny.

MS. CHOO: Yes [laughs].

MS. MILOSCH: That's very funny, and also, I have to say, it was my pleasure to meet her not too long ago. I've admired her work, as well, and very few people understand the kind of hollowware and flatware. Tell me a little bit more about Rosanne Raab, so we've got that on the Archives.

MS. CHOO: Yes, she's also the founder and director of Rosanne Raab Associates in New York City, a firm specializing in silver work and jewelry and other craft mediums and design. She continues to push the limits and has a great message; I quote, "There are so many roles in life open to you if you are willing to learn the vocabulary and are determined to make things happen." Rosanne Raab is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Bard Graduate Center for Decorative Art in New York City.

MS. MILOSCH: That's great.

[END MD 03 TR 05.]

We're still in Chunghi Choo's home. We've already talked about how you view yourself as Korean American and when you became an American citizen - I think it was in 1973? Do you feel things are different now than when you became a citizen in the '70s and people were actually practicing their political - their rights as, you know, as American citizens?

MS. CHOO: That's right. Back then, I remember students demonstrating against the Vietnam War. It seems that people were more patriotic then. Students got involved in political issues, but they don't seem to do so as much now. Though it seems people in Iowa City and students here are mostly democrats. So most of the people support Barack Obama for president; that is a good thing.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, you grew to adulthood in Korea, but now you're a citizen of the U.S. I'm wondering about your sense of identity. How do you feel? Do you feel Korean? Do you feel American?

MS. CHOO: October 1, 2007, will be the 46th year I have lived in America, a long time, though I remain loyal to my complex Far Eastern heritage. I remain Oriental in emotion, devotion, discipline, outlook, spirit, and moral values, and I enjoy freedom in American life. I had the good fortune to grow as an educator, artist, and person under the influence of two great cultures.

MS. MILOSCH: How do you use both aspects of your background in life? How do you see yourself combining them?

MS. CHOO: I take an aspect from both of my beautiful backgrounds and use them to enjoy life. The enjoyment of life is like the enjoyment of art: it is to be achieved through harmonizing the spirit and the body. The mind cannot do it alone, because art is made and experienced through the senses. I know what is life-enhancing for me, and I seek it out. I feel lucky to have my deep-rooted Asian heritage in conjunction with my newfound American citizenship. It is probably fair to say that I have succeeded in appropriately identifying whatever aspect of the great traditions of East and West are essential for me to create work, that is uniquely my own. If someone thinks there is Oriental/Occidental influence in my work, maybe they think it is my duality, though my

work presents my own particular personal expression.

MS. MILOSCH: I have to interrupt again. I think that's so beautiful, because what you said about the spirit and the body, and art is made through the senses, that sensorial aspect is so deeply rooted in the idea of craft, and I think you transfer that to your students through your own work and your teaching. Has your Asian education influenced you? Your early Asian education?

MS. CHOO: Yes, I think so. My early education in Oriental philosophy and aesthetics have given me many gifts that I think I integrate into my life and my artwork, and I am grateful for that. I still think of images of my childhood in Korea that inspire me. When I was a little girl, I used to go to the museum to see gorgeous, simple golden crowns and other beautiful and sumptuous things, including old ceramics and metalwork from Korean history. Like that little girl I was then, I still love simple, aesthetic things.

MS. MILOSCH: At the Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis, I saw the most amazing Korean furniture collection. The furniture designs and decoration are breathtaking, and they have a beautiful catalogue. I've heard it's one of the best collections of Korean chests in the world.

MS. CHOO: I'd love to see them.

MS. MILOSCH: And there is a lot of metalwork on those chests. Where does American craft, metals, glass, wood, fiber, clay - how do you feel American craft ranks on an international scale? What's your opinion?

MS. CHOO: I rank American craft the highest, conceptually and technically. I believe America is the center of the crafts in the world today, with American craftsmen traveling internationally and bringing back the crafts they learned from other countries and ethnic crafts that were brought by immigrants. The crafts in the U.S. are freely creative and strongly individualistic. It has great innovation in the use of various materials and techniques, as well as the availability of cutting edge technologies. Some craft artists in other countries are now influenced by American craft trends, I think.

MS. MILOSCH: And in general?

MS. CHOO: In general, American craft, including metalwork, tends to be a lot more diverse in materials, concepts, and techniques, and many craftsmen are producing mixed-media objects. European work used to be simpler, calculated and focused on form and function. I think most American university professors encourage students to become creative, while providing an abundance of new materials and techniques. Many American craftsmen, including metalsmiths, are expressive; some of them are using storytelling and narrative. The trends and diversity in crafts are wide open now internationally.

MS. MILOSCH: That's really interesting. I just want to say that you had a lot of Asian and European students come to study with you, and I know your students have gone back to Asia and Europe, as well, so you've really watched this over the last 30 years.

[END MD 03 TR 06.]

We were just now talking about Asian and American influences in your work, and we were talking about the differences between America, Asia, and Europe, and over the last 30-plus years, you've had students go back and forth. I think we need to take time and talk a little bit about your students' success, and I'd like to know how it makes you feel, because you said something that most people would never say, in that, for you, you know you've done your job as a teacher - and you love the idea - when your students surpass you. I don't think that's really possible - while their work may be exceptional - and I'm sure a lot of them would never think that they have, but you have trained and inspired many to outstanding careers as artists. And many of them have work in the Renwick's collection. So tell me how you feel about some of their success.

[END MD 03 TR 07.]

Tell me how you feel about your students' success and how that makes you feel.

MS. CHOO: I am very proud of them. I thrive on my students' success and happiness. I have been blessed with many talented, gifted, and hardworking students. They deserve recognition in the field. My link to the professional art world has been helpful for my students and for our program's visibility. I have helped in making it possible for students' outstanding work to move from the classroom into prestigious museums' permanent collections and many private collections, as well as exhibitions and publications. May I brag about some of my students accomplishments?

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, that would be fantastic. There is enough time. This is important.

MS. CHOO: I could write a book, because many things developed here, and, well, first of all, many of my

students, while they were studying with me at the University of Iowa, pioneered the use of new materials, materials never before used in the field. For example, Sandra Mayer-VanderrMey pioneered using various products used in science and technology, including laser and video discs, printed circuitry, computer chips, holography, and more, to create her futuristic metalwork, some of them have been used in movies and TV episodes, including "Star Trek: Next Generation" and "Voyager." And Jocelyn Chateauvert, her monumental scale of handmade abaca paper sculptures for ceiling and interior space, jewelry, and home furnishings are absolutely innovative and magnificent at your show "From the Ground Up: Renwick Craft invitational 2007," this spring. Thank you for that. Jocelyn Chateauvert pioneered the use of her handmade abaca paper as medium, and some pieces combine abaca paper with metal.

MS. MILOSCH: I agree. I still don't know anybody who makes anything remotely like her work.

MS. CHOO: And internationally recognized Mary Merkel Hess - her sculptural fiber works and basket forms are so innovative and beautiful. You gave her an exhibit at the Cedar Rapids Art Museum in Iowa, which you also organized and curated. Thank you for that also.

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, and Mary is always excelling in something new. We have two outstanding works by Mary Merkel Hess at the Renwick Gallery. And I don't know if you know this, but we awarded her a commission for a huge federal courthouse that's being built in Cedar Rapids [note: this commission was never completed], and her new work is amazing. She's going to Egypt, so it'll be interesting to see. Who else, Chunghi?

MS. CHOO: First, I want to call Mary Merkel Hess to congratulate her.

MS. MILOSCH: Yes, you should.

MS. CHOO: I'm so excited for her.

MS. MILOSCH: They're beautiful.

MS. CHOO: Yeah, and I have so many students who used new materials. I will just give you a couple more names. Delores Chance, she pioneered the use of corian as her medium, and she transfers photo images on a corian surface and forming corian by heating, then bending or twisting. And Julie Swanson, she pioneered foil stamping on neoprene rubber to create artware, and she made gems with foil stamp and acrylic. Cody Bush pioneered the use of carbon fiber for his hollowware, jewelry, and other sculptural work, which was new to the field, and many, many more.

MS. MILOSCH: I can still think of a lot of them. How do you feel when your graduate students excel?

MS. CHOO: I am thrilled. Outstanding works of many of my graduate students, produced while they were students, has been acquired by prestigious major museums and public institutions in the past and recent years.

MS. MILOSCH: It's amazing.

MS. CHOO: Yeah. That includes John Horn and Mary Zeran's work acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and Anne Graham's work designed while she was a student acquired by the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Museum, and Lonna Keller's work acquired by the Smithsonian's American Art Museum - your Renwick Gallery. And also, last year, Alison Brunson and Cody Bush's work was acquired by the National Ornamental Metal Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. All produced these pieces when they were students.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah.

MS. CHOO: And in addition, more of my former graduate students' work has been acquired by many prestigious museums.

MS. MILOSCH: Can you tell me whose work, so we can get this list?

MS. CHOO: Many, many; I'll give you just some. Many of my former students contact me from time to time to give me the good news - they include Sung Ran Kim, Kee-Ho Yuen - and Jane Benjamin's works were acquired by the Museum of Arts and Design, New York City; Kee-Ho Yuen's work, by the Renwick Gallery. And James Malon-Beach - he's now an internationally acclaimed artist for his personalized medallions, which were acquired by the British Museum and the Netherland National Museum of Coins and Metals and other museums. Mary Merkel Hess's 3-D paper sculptures have been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Arts and Design, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Anne Graham's work was acquired by the Mitsubishi Corporation. And also Barbara Nilausen's pieces are collected by the Renwick Gallery and the American Craft Museum. Sandra Mayer-VanderMey's jewelry has been purchased by all those movie actors and actresses, like Candice Bergen, Harrison Ford, many Hollywood people. Her work has been also purchased by Paramount movie studio. And Nicola Vruwink's work was acquired by the Seattle Museum of Art and the Swedish Medical Center, and

more.

[END MD 03 TR 08.]

MS. MILOSCH: Okay, ultimately, how has the metalsmithing and jewelry program at the University of Iowa influenced you?

MS. CHOO: Well, our program's influence on me has been an exciting and happy one. Teaching has been fully challenging, stimulating, joyful, rewarding, and sometimes physically exhausting. As I mentioned before, students have been a catalyst for me to improve and develop various techniques, also.

MS. MILOSCH: The show that I curated called "Forging Ahead: Contemporary Metalwork in Iowa" featured the work of graduate students over the last 30 years, but also a few works by undergraduates, and I have to tell you, I've never, in a museum exhibition, featured undergraduate work, but the level of your undergraduates was so high. And then I know the University of Iowa has had a couple of shows dedicated to your students' work, and you also have helped organize and encourage exhibitions to come to the University of Iowa.

Now, you mentioned scholarships and donors before, so can you tell me a little bit more about that?

MS. CHOO: Yes. In 1986, I started fundraising for my students' scholarships and for the metals program in order to keep the best undergraduate students for our graduate program and to bring outstanding students from in state, out of state and from foreign countries. Our yearly fundraising has been successful.

MS. MILOSCH: How many donors do you have?

MS. CHOO: Now we have about 130 scholarship donors supporting the metals program. They are loyal to our program, financially supporting all graduate students, and outstanding undergraduate students, with partial tuition and material cost. I am grateful for the scholarship donors' ongoing support.

MS. MILOSCH: Chunghi, in my 17 years of interviewing artists who are also the head of their department at universities, you are ahead of the curve as an artist and an educator who recognizes that in order to have great students, they have to be financially secure. You went out and built a group of supporters to make this possible, and this is unique and should be commended. I mean, this should be a model. In fact, I think artists' fellowships are the only way that they feel free to really explore without the pressure of having to sell or move or worry about the next semester, so I just want to say, for posterity, you were an innovator even in that regard. I'm sure that your colleagues in the other departments were made a little uneasy by this, because what you were doing was innovative and new, even in terms of fundraising.

MS. CHOO: I had to do it for necessity. I would like to mention one of our donors - he passed away many years ago - the late Mr. Gar Osten. He was my friend and also my astrologer. He established the scholarship fund for us. Mr. Gar Osten donated \$100,000, in his mother's name, Louise Osten. It is a memorial scholarship, and this \$100,000 fund has grown and has been producing interest, funding scholarships for many years.

MS. MILOSCH: That's fantastic.

MS. CHOO: And the amazing thing is, former presidents of our university, Hunter Rawlings and Mary Sue Coleman, our college deans Judith Aikin and Linda Maxson, our art school directors W.J. Tomasini, Sam Becker, Dorothy Johnson, and John Scott have all been contributing personal funds to our program. And my husband and I have also been donors. And almost all 130 donors are our friends.

MS. MILOSCH: You started it. I'm not surprised you were blazing the trail first. I want to go back to your work. What are the similarities and differences between your early work and your recent work?

MS. CHOO: Although materials and techniques I use are constantly changing, I think the aesthetic expressions are similar. My early metalwork was produced mostly in silver, using traditional and contemporary metalworking techniques, and since the early '70's, I worked a great deal with the electroforming process, producing hollowware. These days I have been producing most of my pieces in aluminum or copper or brass, using the silent metal forming method. Most of the time, the surfaces of these metal forms are colored with patination, or powder coating, or anodizing, or acrylic paint, to give colors to these metal surfaces. So the finished pieces do not require maintenance. But I still do love silver, and I will continue to produce silver pieces.

MS. MILOSCH: Tell me a little bit more about what you think about silver or how you feel about silver.

MS. CHOO: Although many of my most recent pieces are not made of silver, the joy I get from a silver piece makes me continue to work in the field. The appeal of silver work exceeds the technical difficulties of production. I was and still am drawn to silver because of its preciousness, its intrinsic beauty, and its mysterious range of color. Silver gives off a shine and a calm softness, or it could also take on hard edges and a rather cold

character. Its mood can change. It is a precious and beautiful material.

MS. MILOSCH: Not unlike a lot of great music.

MS. CHOO: [Laughs] That's right. Objects of silver reflect light and take on a real-life quality. It brings a happy sparkle and energy to any setting or surrounding. It has been a joy expressing beauty through silver.

MS. MILOSCH: Yeah, well, you're all about art and life and the joy and beauty in everyday.

How do you feel that technology has aided in the production of metalworks? I'm just sort of stepping back to the bigger picture.

MS. CHOO: As you know, all metalsmithing has gained from contemporary cutting-edge digital technologies. These techniques bring greater ease and unlimited possibilities of cutting and forming metal and multi-production of art objects, whether they are in precious metal or stainless steel. The metalsmithing field is rapidly evolving through the artist's experimenting with newly available technologies. I hope the American silver industry does not overlook the design of a young student, which I find to be superb. I hope to see more American designers' work mass-produced by American industry for the world. I know metalworking is going through a dynamic transition because of new technologies now. I believe more of the general public will purchase creative and beautiful work designed by artists, even mass-produced by industry.

MS. MILOSCH: So in light of this talk about technology, what do you think is the future of the handmade object? I mean, people bat this around, but I know what I think; I want to know what you think.

MS. CHOO: I do believe that handmade objects will never die. I think the more technology takes over, the more buyers will want handmade objects.

MS. MILOSCH: That's what William Morris thought, too, in the 19th century. How has the market for American craft changed during your lifetime?

MS. CHOO: When I began to produce my work at the Cranbrook Academy in the 1960s and through the '70s, it was a boom time. Universities had strong studio art departments available for artists, and major influential books were being written by authors such as Oppi Untracht. Traveling craft exhibitions were being organized alongside media groups like SNAG [Society of North American Goldsmiths]. It was a period when the crafts were really taking off. And during the '70s to mid-'80s, I remember that there were many private patrons for crafts, and the rise of galleries in this country. In general, there was a good market for craft objects.

From the mid-'80s to present time, the middle market for craft has been declining. Yet some recognized craftsmen's work has been selling at high prices. And I think due to the role of the Internet and websites, the middle market is slowly recovering these days. But, as you know, the lower-priced artwork has been selling easier than pricey ones by not-very-well-known artists.

MS. MILOSCH: When would you say that your quote, unquote, career life started? To me, it seems like you've been living art from the day you began, by observing and experiencing beautiful things in your life through a heightened sensitivity, but tell me when you think your career life as an artist began. And what was the market for craft like at the beginning of your career?

MS. CHOO: I would say my life as an artist began when Mr. Jack Lenor Larsen discovered me in 1969 and he invited me to have a solo exhibition of my textile work in his main show room in New York City in 1971. When my early career life was active in the '70s and early '80s, the craft field was flourishing and there were many good markets for crafts, as I mentioned before. Craft objects were being collected in major museums and presented in many exhibitions and publications. Some museums were dedicated wholly to studio craft, like the American Craft Museum and the Renwick Gallery, and they also produced craft publications. My pieces were also sold at galleries while on display in group shows.

MS. MILOSCH: Fantastic. How has the market been treating emerging metalsmithing artists, do you think? And how is the market for your work these days?

MS. CHOO: In this country during the mid-'80's to present time, there have been closings of craft departments at universities, including metalsmithing departments. It has been a difficult time for emerging metalsmithing artists to find a teaching position. Though at the same time the University of Iowa's metalsmithing program has been progressive, and more students are taking the courses. So we even added another instructor, Mr. Kee Ho Yuen.

Some of the emerging artists are successful and selling well if their work is outstanding and their prices are reasonable, mostly through their own website or crafts fairs; they are marketing themselves. Some emerging artists are not too successful because they are not producing enough or the prices of their work are too high.

Some are too lazy to produce, and some just don't care. In my case, I still get inquiries from museums and private collectors about my work. Sometimes they buy or give my work as a 25th silver anniversary or as a retirement gift. Somehow, collectors are attracted to my vases; they like the piece by itself, even without flowers; the vessel itself becomes the flower, they say.

MS. MILOSCH: I know, like the beautiful piece in the Renwick

MS. CHOO: Thank you.

MS. MILOSCH: What involvement have you had with the national craft organizations?

MS. CHOO: I never was involved with any organization politically, but idealistically, I support the American Craft Council and SNAG. I am a member and an elected fellow of the American Craft Council. I support the Council, and I have been nominating and voting for fellows, honorary fellows, and the gold medal recipients. I was informed that I am a distinguished member of SNAG; the organization also publishes *Metalsmith* magazine. I do sometimes give suggestions to the editors of *Metalsmith* magazine and the *American Craft* magazine to bring attention to outstanding and first-rate emerging artists and their work that might deserve publication.

MS. MILOSCH: That's fantastic.

MS. MILOSCH: What would you like to offer to the field, if you wanted to pass something on?

MS. CHOO: Well, a few things.

MS. MILOSCH: I mean, actually, I think you've already given a tremendous amount to the field.

MS. CHOO: What I want to offer is not only for crafts artists who produce one-of-a-kind artwork but also artists who produce multiples to sell for their economic benefit. Mass-production art objects available to the public at an affordable cost will give the artists an opportunity to influence the public's aesthetic sensibilities. The quantity of craft art objects produced in this country is very small, so small that most of the general public is not aware of the products. So what I am encouraging is for crafts people to be highly productive in both one-of-a-kind as well as production artwork, and give artistic taste to the American culture. To create, produce, and promote art, we need tremendous support, financial and promotional, from the federal government and the state. I would like to suggest to crafts people to write often to legislators and talk to them, so that the government will learn to lift the artistic culture in America and provide support.

MS. MILOSCH: Very, very well put, and it's very ambitious. Tell me, how can we do this?

MS. CHOO: I have to say that knowledge is essential. Students, teachers, collectors, the general public - all have to know a lot about craft artwork. Collectors need to be informed about what they're buying. With artists like [Pablo] Picasso, [Vincent] van Gogh, Matisse, there are lots of publications available about their work, but this is not the case for the collectors and buyers of contemporary craft of today.

MS. MILOSCH: How can craft be elevated?

MS. CHOO: We need more publications and publicity in the field of crafts. The books should be affordable and informative, with research and reviews, with lots of photos of past and current artists' work attached, with an artist's statement, materials, and techniques. Craftsmen should also encourage the public to seek out exhibitions. And since today most people watch TV and use the Internet, TV and the Internet should focus on the crafts. I have always been encouraging people to live with art objects and use them in daily life. Actually, we don't need to educate people. The objects themselves will do it for people.

MS. MILOSCH: You know who else said that, felt that, since you love reading, writing, literature? Edith Wharton, when you read her novels, the whole thing is that beauty does it for us, and it's just kind of helping to take - show people this, and the objects do it themselves.

MS. CHOO: And my students agree. We talk about this constantly.

MS. MILOSCH: This is fantastic. You've made some wonderful observations. Tell me a little bit more about why you think this is true.

MS. CHOO: In general, most people are detached from art. Part of the reason is, I think, that they do not use art objects in daily life. People will have to realize how much pleasure comes from having and using art objects in daily life. The pleasure that comes from using art objects is great. Art refines one's mind and the spirit. Each person must experience art personally to gain insight. For example, I bring my students to concerts and recitals where musicians perform Schubert's or other great composer's work. A student may have never heard a note of Schubert's music but will walk out of the concert with me appreciating and liking it, even punkers and rockers

do. And I noticed that when people are buying art objects like artist-made jewelry or ceramics, they enjoy it and continue to buy artist-produced pieces.

MS. MILOSCH: Chunghi, there's also a book, Luigi Giussani's *The Religious Sense* [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press,] I have, written by an Italian priest, and it's about the spiritual in art and life, and what you just said here, I want to look at this again, because it's really critical to understanding art in daily life. You said, art refines one's mind and spirit. I have to say, working in Washington, D.C., and considering all the horrible stuff going on in Iraq, I think art elevates our humanity, and you are right. For me, I can't deal with the politics sometimes, but I feel that art is the greatest ambassador, and you have been producing ambassadors through your work and through your students, so you also see experiencing something for oneself; that is, there's no escape from one's own "I." You're teaching them to look at their own "I," both with their physical eyes and their interior, intuitive eye. It's very, very beautiful.

MS. CHOO: I hope so.

MS. MILOSCH: Do you feel the same way about other types of art?

MS. CHOO: Yes indeed. I feel the same about dance, music, theater, architecture, literature, all forms of creative art. I see also many Americans disinterested or disconnected in cultural events here, but when they travel to foreign countries, they tend to rush to museums. The reason might be superficial. I wonder how many people go to their own little town museums. Many towns do not even have their own museum or gallery. Why? If people are exposed to good artwork, they will develop good taste, and will have museums or galleries in their own town. It is a cliché for me to say, but I feel strongly that great nations like the United States deserve good art. I think it is getting better, but very slowly.

MS. MILOSCH: I've got to throw in one more thing before we stop. What you just said is so important. Living here in Iowa City, we talked about the museum's collection in Cedar Rapids Museum of Art and about how many people from Iowa City had not been up to Cedar Rapids, but when we had the "Art in Roman Life" exhibition and earlier when we had the Iowa metalsmithing show at Davenport, a lot of people visited these museums for the first time. There is an exhibition that I'd love to curate, "Edith Wharton to Martha Stewart: The Evolution of American Style and Taste," and you just helped to articulate the thesis for the exhibition, about how people need to be exposed and learn to see, to live with art.

Now I want to do a little step back and say, describe, who is Chunghi Choo? I want to know. I want to ask that question. Please tell me, who if you had to describe yourself, how would you describe yourself?

MS. CHOO: I can tell you only what friends and my students are telling me. They say I have a positive and happy nature. I am blessed with a good personal and professional life, and that I am energetic and I enjoy teaching and making artwork, and that my heart is bigger than myself. And I am obsessed with good food and good classical music. I love New York City, because New York City is a paradise of the best chefs in the world, cooking exquisite food, and the world's best musicians give recitals, concerts, and perform operas, besides visiting fabulous museums and shopping. That's what friends and students are saying about me.

MS. MILOSCH: That's great.

[END MD 03 TR 10.]

It is Tuesday still, July 31 [2007]. We just had a wonderful dinner. Chunghi, it's been great being here with you the last two days. I have learned so much about how you live your life and beauty and your graciousness in hosting people and bringing many people together and challenging them and your way of life. It's quite moving.

I just want to go back to a few more basic things, especially your contribution to electroforming in the United States. Have you published technical information on this technique?

MS. CHOO: Not yet. But 30 years ago, my then-teaching assistant, David Luck, gave some technical information on electroforming and photos of student work for books like *Electroplating and Electroforming for Artists and Craftsman* by Lee Scott Newman [New York: Crown Publishers, 1977] and *Electroforming for Metalsmithing and Jewelry* [Seoul, Korea: Madang Publishers, 2003], by one of my former graduate students, Sung Ran Kim. Articles of our program's electroforming and students' work have also been published in journals, including *American Craft*, *Metalsmith*, *Metropolis*, *University of Iowa journals* and other publications. These publications also gave our program broad exposure to the field.

MS. MILOSCH: That's great.

[END MD 04 TR 01.]

This is Tuesday evening. It's 11 o'clock at night. It's been an amazing two days. Chunghi, I'm still looking at all this great work in the room, but I have to ask you one question because, I know at some point, I really think you will be retiring, and what will you do after you finally retire from the University of Iowa, after heading that metalsmithing program for so many years?

MS. CHOO: I have a lot in mind. I hope I can live long enough to do all of this. First of all, I would like to spend more time with my husband.

MS. MILOSCH: Oh, that's nice.

MS. CHOO: I have also been collecting images of former and current students' outstanding work, as well as some of mine, to be published as our metalsmithing program's catalogue. I would like to exhibit these pieces at one of the major museums in this country, accompanied by this catalogue. I would like to produce this as a record of my many years of teaching. It will be a fantastic collection of different styles, expressions, techniques, and materials. Our metals program has been consistently conceptually and technically innovative, and this catalogue will show that. The money from this catalogue's sale would be put into our metalsmithing scholarship fund.

MS. MILOSCH: I know that's a project you've actually started and have been working on for years and put a lot of your own money in. Anything else?

MS. CHOO: Well, also I would like to mass-produce some of my designs through industry.

MS. MILOSCH: Wow.

MS. CHOO: I hope so. And I would like to do many other things. I have been collecting LPs and CDs for many, many years and I would like to make CDs featuring the same songs sung by many different vocalists and the same pieces played by different pianists, et cetera, to make a comparison and give them to my family and my dear friends. I have also been cataloguing different parts of my favorite music that have moved me deeply. I will take these excerpts and make CDs to give to my dear friends and family.

MS. MILOSCH: Very nice.

MS. CHOO: I would also like to take some time to write letters to people who have touched my heart. They are musicians, writers, teachers, family members, dancers, and many friends. Many people who have touched my heart have already passed away, and I wish I had written them before their death. Maria Callas, Glenn Gould, Arthur Rubinstein, Pablo Casals, and many more already have passed away. I just heard that the wonderful Beverly Sills died last month. It is too late to write to some. I will be writing thank you letters to magnificent Cecilia Bartoli, Renee Fleming, and Murray Perahia soon.

MS. MILOSCH: So I can imagine that that's not all. Do you want to continue learning new things with all travels that you still have ahead of you, other things?

MS. CHOO: Yes, I want to take a music appreciation class and other courses at the University of Iowa. And I will be a volunteer worker for our community.

MS. MILOSCH: Well, I'm going to ask you to sum this all up a little bit. How would you like to be remembered, Chunghi, when someone's listening to your interview and they've gone through all the papers, or they just go through part of them, how would you like to be remembered?

MS. CHOO: Maybe as a giver and nothing else.

MS. MILOSCH: All right. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Smithsonian Archives of American Art

Second interview of Chunghi Choo, after the Iowa floods

Conducted by Jane Milosch

July 26, 2008

MS. MILOSCH: I was very concerned to hear the news of extreme flooding in June 2008 in Iowa City, and would like to know how it has affected your program.

MS. CHOO: As I am sure you know, the Iowa River flows through the center of the University of Iowa's campus,

passing by the arts center. The buildings of the departments of music, theater, English and philosophy, and art are located along the riverbank, and all were heavily flooded. I don't think even the experts knew how high the river would rise. We were informed by university officials that the water would rise to a maximum height of four feet. When we were in the art building and received this warning, students, faculty, and community residents joined together to help move things from the buildings. Many people came out to fill sandbags to protect the art building.

MS. MILOSCH: What else did you do to prepare for the flood?

MS. CHOO: In our metals program, we took all of our tools, teaching slides, books, equipment, computers, and heavy fireproof boxes filled with slides of former and current students' work, compiled for our program's planned catalogue; we elevated everything eight feet above the floor. We stacked the workbenches on top of each other and even built shelves on the benches to protect these materials.

Unfortunately, we were not informed of the significant power of water. Over seven feet of water was capable of moving everything around in the room. So all the materials we had lifted high up from the floor and were shaken and turned upside down by the waters flowing into the room and dropped into the water. All of my irreplaceable books and thousands of slides of my students' work, teaching materials, together with priceless documents, were ruined and destroyed. Only a few items were saved from the flood, thanks to our hardworking lab technician, Mr. Benjamin Anzelc, who had placed the electroplating solution into polyurethane barrels. He also saved a number of metal stakes, but they were heavily rusted. Our hammers with wooden handles were all damaged, as was our new 3-D printing equipment and all other tools and equipment.

MS. MILOSCH: How does the University of Iowa propose to deal with this huge loss?

MS. CHOO: I was informed that the University of Iowa has a good flood insurance, and the state and FEMA will cover the cost of the lost equipment, tools, and studio building. Rather than thinking about what we have lost, I try to think positively and focus on rebuilding our studio quickly. Unlike in other natural disasters that come without warning, such as hurricanes and tornadoes, no one got hurt in the flood. Mr. Anzelc, with Professor Kee Ho Yuen, has been purchasing new equipment and tools for our program, supported by FEMA now. All studio art programs will be using a huge empty space, the former giant hardware store Menards. We will probably have to remain in this building until our art building reopens or is newly built, supported by FEMA, the University of Iowa's flood insurance, and the State of Iowa. We don't know when, hopefully soon.

MS. MILOSCH: How do you provide guidance and help your students deal with such a great loss and motivate them to continue working in such temporary facilities?

MS. CHOO: During this transition time, it will be very challenging to teach students, but we will make a new start. Mr. Anzelc has already designed the new space so wonderfully to function for the program. After a time of destruction always comes a time for creation and rebirth, so I view this sad setback as temporary.

Of course, the most important positive fact is that the most precious treasure our program offers remained wholly intact, which is the talent, creativity, and knowledge of the students and dedicated faculty and staff in our program. And so I will continue to try to inspire students to exercise their creativity. They can begin by making drawings and models, so that they are ready to produce as soon as all the new equipment and tools has arrived. Fortunately, our books at the new art library, which is located on the second floor, were saved. And, we can rent visual materials from the Society of North American Goldsmiths. Although my books and teaching materials were all destroyed, I still have many years of experience in my head to share with my students. The same goes for Professor Kee Ho Yuen and Mr. Benjamin Anzelc; they possess amazing knowledge and experiences.

MS. MILOSCH: Did you hear from many of your former students in response to the damage losses to the studio?

MS. CHOO: Yes, I was very touched by the many phone calls I received from former and current students, friends, scholarship donors, and relatives from many places. The news of the so-called 500 Year Flood was broadcast nationally and internationally on television, the Internet, and newspapers. Although our visual materials were lost, I would like to say that many of my former students have generously offered to scan images of their own work on discs, as well as their resumes, to help replace the lost material for our program's planned catalogue. I am recommending that university administrators ask for funds from also the State of Iowa to build the art school studio areas higher, on second and third floors, together with all other buildings along the riverbank. Then our students could once again draw inspiration from glancing at this beautiful Iowa River. Many people in Iowa City suffered great losses through the flood, besides the university.

MS. MILOSCH: This is not the first flood you've experienced since you started the program at the University of Iowa?

MS. CHOO: No, Jane. We had another bad flood in 1993, which we were told would not happen again perhaps for a hundred years. We experienced this second terrible and much worse flood only 15 years after the previous flood. Last winter we had icy storms, and in the spring we had violent tornados. I know many parts of the world had forest fires, tsunamis, hurricanes, and typhoons.

I hope governments of all the countries in the world finally recognized that a drastic change has to be made to reverse and stop global warming. As humans tamper with nature by emitting excessive carbon gases into the air, nature strikes back. And in the end, nature always wins. So we must respect and obey her wishes to live in closer harmony with the ecosphere and flora and fauna. We all must work towards changing legislation to establish new laws to help society change from fossil fuel to renewable energy. As an artist who cares about living in harmony with the world, I would like to see more public transportation. It always amazes me that we can have so much progress in new technologies but not much has been done to move away from oil and coal as forms of energy. We need legislation to enforce new methods and practices. I firmly believe this latest flood was created by us, humans. It is a good thing that people in the world over are becoming aware of the huge global problem of the warming of the atmosphere. We must help inform others and our government, and other countries, to take action and help save our planet from global warming and general pollution.

[END OF SECOND INTERVIEW.]

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