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Oral history interview with Lisa Gralnick, 2007 October 29-30

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Lisa Gralnick on 2007 October 29-30. The interview took place at Gralnick's home in Madison, WI, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Mija Riedel has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2007

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Lisa Gralnick, interviewing the artist at her home in Madison, Wisconsin on Monday, October 29, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and this is disc number one.

So we've agreed to start at the beginning.

LISA GRALNICK: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were born in 1956 in New York.

MS. GRALNICK: Nineteen fifty-six in New York City. Both my parents were born in New York City.

MS. RIEDEL: What were their names, Lisa?

MS. GRALNICK: Howard and Sylvia Gralnick. My mother was a nurse, my father was a dentist. And then we moved to Long Island.

MS. RIEDEL: Which city?

MS. GRALNICK: We lived in several places. The first place we lived was Massapequa and—on the South Shore, and my father pretty much had his practice always in Massapequa.

MS. RIEDEL: He was a dentist?

MS. GRALNICK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And then we moved to the North Shore, to Huntington. We moved back to the South Shore. Kind of interesting, my father got sick at a very young age. He had a brain tumor when he was only in his 40s, and so he had—my father had to retire from practicing dentistry in his early 40s.

And so up until that point, we were living kind of high on the hog. My parents had bought kind of a fancy house, you know, a new fancy house in, sort of, a new Long Island development. And, you know, we had left New York City and move into this kind of fancy neighborhood. And then very shortly after that, my father got diagnosed with having a brain tumor and they sort of immediately had to downsize their life. And then we were—

MS. RIEDEL: Did he have to have surgery?

MS. GRALNICK:—I remember we lived in a very small rented house for a few years. He had surgery several times. He had surgery at the time, and then the tumor grew back—he had surgery at the time, and he was, after the first surgery, he was still able to walk and, you know, talk normally and that sort of thing, but he had lost too much motor skill and he couldn't practice dentistry anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you, Lisa?

MS. GRALNICK: I think I was 17.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were the youngest of three?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, I was the baby. And then the tumor grew back over nine year's period. And then when it grew back, it was actually more—it was larger and it was in a more difficult spot, it was lodged onto the brain stem. And so, at that point then—he already was retired from being a dentist, but at that point then he couldn't walk anymore, and he had serious paralysis, and he was in a wheelchair the rest of his life.

Both my parents are still alive. But, you know, my father's been handicapped—seriously handicapped for 30 years. So he got kind of a tough break in life, really.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Now, how did you mom handle that?

MS. GRALNICK: Amazing. My mom's an extraordinary person. She married for great love, and it has served her well because all these years she's taken care of this severely handicapped man and never complained about it, never treated him in any way like he was less than he ever was. Luckily, he was a very—always a very smart man, and very well read, and with all that has happened to him, he still has all his marbles. His brain is perfectly intact. He can still do the *New York Times* crossword puzzle if somebody writes the answers in for him. You know, and he reads—

MS. RIEDEL: Can he speak at this point?

MS. GRALNICK: —an enormous amount. His speech is definitely difficult to understand but, you know, it's still there. And he still has a certain amount of function left.

MS. RIEDEL: Didn't you say last night that he played an instrument?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, when we were young he played in a little jazz combo.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And your mom played piano?

MS. GRALNICK: My mom played the piano and I played the violin and my sister played the flute. And I would say it was, you know, I feel very blessed. I definitely grew up in a very loving family. Obviously, my parents went through some pretty difficult stuff in their life with my father's health. But I've always thought it was amazing, in so many ways, as an adult now, to look back and imagine what it—you know, now I'm way older than my father was when he was first diagnosed with having a brain tumor. And when I think now of how, sort of, flawlessly they handled the whole thing, so that we all felt very little change in our lives. You know, I mean, we were in those, kind of, selfish years—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: —you know, between—you know, the three kids, all between like 17 and 21, and how they were going through this thing that was going to change their life forever and we hardly even noticed, you know, our lives went on. And, you know, financially, their lives would never be the same. You know, my father was a dentist so he didn't have a pension, and he could no longer practice, and so they basically were going to live on whatever investments they had made for the rest of their lives.

And who can possibly predict something like that's going to happen in your life? Yet they managed—

MS. RIEDEL: Did your mom continue working as a nurse?

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, she did. Yet they managed somehow to, sort of, all make us feel like, even in the midst of all this, that we were like the most important thing on the planet. And I—you know, now looking back, I can't even imagine how hard that must have been, you know, because, you know, their concerns, I'm sure, were enormous at that time—how they were going to continue to live themselves, how they were going to continue to pay to send these kids to college, that were all three in college at one time, at that point. And, you know, but they did. And they did so brilliantly, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: And you and your dad took a jewelry-making class together.

MS. GRALNICK: We did. My first class I ever took.

MS. RIEDEL: You were a teenager.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, I was sort of a senior in high school, but I really didn't have—I skipped a year of school, so my—I was only 17 when I started college, so my junior and senior year of high school were done in one year. And I'll preface that by saying that I was, like, an unbelievably rebellious teenager. You know, I was doing drugs, and cutting school, and you know, I was very early to being sexually active.

And so my parents were—my parents, and my teachers, and everybody was, like, really anxious to, sort of, push me through and get me into college thinking it might actually save me. And it did. I forgot the question already now.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about you and your father taking a jewelry class.

MS. GRALNICK: Oh yeah, so my senior year, in sort of an attempt to, sort of, engage my father into doing something with me that might, sort of, help straighten me out a little bit, we enrolled in this Saturday jewelry class together at a local art center. And it kind of changed my life.

MS. RIEDEL: What about it appealed to you? Because you were into music and into math at the time, yes?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, well I wouldn't say I was into math though. I was really good at math, but it was kind of something that wasn't—I never really, seriously entertained math as a career choice yet I have this natural ability in math that was, sort of, you know, not something I nurtured; it was just there. But I think that I had always been, you know, sort of, creative. I mean, I was always drawing and, you know, from the time I was a kid the type of games that I liked were, you know, the arts and craftsy kinds of things, drawing things and making things.

But then all of a sudden I took that class and it was something that seemed to engage all aspects of what I was good at. It engaged my creative—my creative needs, but it also engaged this part of me that was very analytical and mathematical and precise. And so I discovered that I loved it, I loved the processes, and I was good at it; that it sort of seemed—I don't want to say to come easy, but it seemed to come easier to me than other people in the class.

And so, although I had sort of planned a career in music—that was all I had ever talked about was wanting to be a conductor and wanting to go to college for music, and was applying to schools as a music major—I sort of, out of the blue, announced that I wanted to go to college for art and I wanted to go somewhere where they had a jewelry or an art metals program. And it was kind of like, you know, everybody was a little, sort of, shocked that after one class I was, like, kind of, deciding I wanted to change the course of my life that I had been, sort of, primed for.

MS. RIEDEL: Where was the class? Do you remember who taught it? And do you remember what you did?

MS. GRALNICK: I don't even remember who taught it. You know, I remember it was a man. I remember it was definitely, sort of, an adult education, kind of, Saturday class. There was a variety of people, different ages, in the class. But I know that from the first class I took, I was absolutely sold by the processes.

MS. RIEDEL: What, in particular? Do you remember?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I remember the challenge of it. That this was like you were making things, but it was hard to do. Like it—it was, you had to really concentrate and be engaged with what you were doing, and think several steps ahead of what you were doing. And so it felt like not only was it a challenge to my hands, but it was an intellectual challenge.

MS. RIEDEL: Even then, so early on.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. And so—

MS. RIEDEL: What about it was an intellectual challenge?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, that, you know, so many things could go wrong in the process of making a piece, and that unless you were capable of really thinking ahead in a kind of clever sort of way—you know, creating sort of a strategy for how you were going to make this thing so that it would work, it wasn't, it wouldn't work. And I've realized later, as I've gotten older, that that sort of strategizing, in terms of building something, is definitely one of my strengths. It seems to be something that, sort of, comes naturally to me.

And to my great chagrin, as a teacher, I've discovered it doesn't come naturally to everybody and I expect it to. You know, I get so frustrated when my students make what seems to me like a stupid choice in the way that they make a piece, and then they don't have success. When I think, how come you, you know, you didn't think, if you didn't—if you did this first, and you did that second, that it work better. But for some people, that way of thinking just doesn't come naturally, but it did for me, and still does.

MS. RIEDEL: So you made a radical shift in choices and you went off to Kent State?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. My parents weren't all that pleased with me going to Kent State—[Riedel laughs]—because not only was the school just reopening after the Kent State killings of 1970, but I had gotten into, you know, much better schools because I had gotten—I had gotten very high scores on my SATs, especially my math, and had gotten into much better schools, and schools were interested in me coming as a math major. But I wanted to go to Kent State because it had a metals program and it had this woman, Mary Ann Scherr teaching there.

And, I mean, I was a complete neophyte. I didn't know who anybody in the metals field was, but somehow I had

latched onto the name Mary Ann Scherr. You know, I must have somewhere found her name somewhere in reading something. And so she was, like, the one name I knew in the metals field and she taught at Kent State, and they had a major in that. And, you know, there were dozens of schools in the country that had big-name people in the field teaching but I didn't know about them. This one I knew about, and that was where I wanted to go. And, indeed, I did.

Now, one thing that kind of saved me about going to Kent State was that Kent State had this honors college. And the honors college was, you know, incoming students, freshmen, you know—I guess it must have been if you had like an, sort of, overall grade point average, or SAT scores or whatever it was, you were invited to join the honors college.

And the honors college meant that you were in the honors college in addition to whatever school was your major. So I was a student of the art department but also a student of the honors college. And all of your freshman year courses that normally are required of all freshmen students would be taken through the honors college, except for your art classes, like your beginning drawing and all of that.

And that—enrollment in the honors college, was about the most perfect thing that could have ever happened to a person. They put you in this—in these very small classes. In your freshman year you took this one-year long class called Honors Colloquium, that only had 12 people in the class, and you were with the same 12 people for, you know, both semesters, and this one professor. And it was sort of like a Great Books class, you know. You know, it was just amazing. You know, we were reading Dostoevsky and Borges, and Robert Musil, and Heinrich Böll, and it was just an amazing class.

MS. RIEDEL: This was '78? No, '74.

MS. GRALNICK: No, this must have been '76.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. GRALNICK: No, excuse me. It wasn't '76; it was '72.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. GRALNICK: Seventy-six I started graduate school.

So—can you still hear me?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, you're fine.

MS. GRALNICK: Grab a smoke.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. GRALNICK: You're going to see, I can go on forever. You might have to tell me to actually shorten things and just shut up, okay?

Is it still on?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

[END MD 01 TR 02.]

MS. GRALNICK: And you know this honors class, as it turns out—because I had been really rebellious in high school, and I was one of those kids that, like, never went to school and everybody thought was not, you know, living up to my potential. I was so smart, and I always tested so high, but I never wanted to go to class and, you know, that kind of thing. And here I get to college and I'm in this room, you know, this class for a year with these 11 other students who were all at the top of their graduating classes, a bunch of real smarty pants—who, by the way, one of them went off and founded eBay, Gary Bengier. I mean, these were all people that ended up in different fields, later in life becoming very accomplished.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. GRALNICK: So that really was kind of the perfect mix for me, in that I was in the art department, I got to do my metals work, and I got to do my art, but then I was also in this incredibly intellectually stimulating environment in the honors college. And in a way, the people from the honors college and the honors colloquium really became my friends in undergraduate school. I mean, we were like these 12 people that were kind of inseparable for four years.

MS. RIEDEL: That's really unusual.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, it was.

MS. RIEDEL: And so you were exposed not only to all these different ideas and ways of thinking, through the books you were reading, but through the people you were reading with.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. And I was the only art major in the colloquium. I mean, I remember—well, Gary Bengier, the guy who founded eBay, who's now like the, you know, multi-millionaire, I remember the first day of colloquium him saying that I was the first Jew he had ever met. [Riedel laughs.] You know, he had basically grown up in Steubenville, Ohio, in like a steel mill town. And so these are these, like, smart kids coming from all over the country and, you know, to them, I was like from Mars being from—coming from New York, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Were most of them from the Midwest?

MS. GRALNICK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And so we had this experience of all, like, growing together in this enormous way. And all of us, kind of in common having had this feeling of—in high school, of not being intellectually stimulated and of, sort of, falling out of the mainstream, and feeling like we were, sort of, alienated and on the fringe. And then all of a sudden this colloquium felt like, for the first time for all of us in our lives, we felt like we belonged, and we were with the right people, and it was clicking.

So it was—it was—

MS. RIEDEL: Very powerful.

MS. GRALNICK: —pretty extraordinarily.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. So that was freshman year, and then what was your work like in college, your metals work?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, the two people I studied with in—primarily in the art department, were Mary Ann Scherr, who taught metals, and Mel Someroski, who taught enameling. And Kent State was one of the few places in the country—if not the only, other than the Cleveland Institute of Art, where enameling was its own area. You could—you know, my B.F.A., my major was metals, but Kent allowed for a major in enameling.

For instance, Gretchen Goss, who now teaches at the Cleveland Institute of Art, went to school at Kent State as a major in enameling. She was a graduate student. So the enameling program was very strong, and all of my early work had enamel in it. I mean, I think I graduated from Kent State as a very good enamellist, and if I received any early, sort of, attention for my work it was all as an enamellist, and I would be invited to schools as a guest artist to teach enameling.

And when I first went to graduate school, I mean, that was kind of the reason I think they even accepted me at New Paltz for graduate school because I had had such good enameling training. And they knew that I could, sort of, bring that into the program because enameling hadn't been that big at New Paltz yet.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the work like? What were you working on? Do you remember any of those early pieces?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, all of my work in undergrad and graduate school, actually, really came at a profound interest in primitive art. And during the years, sort of, of—I guess it was around my high school, you know, that I was in high school, the Rockefeller Collection opened at the Met, and it was really like a ground—a groundbreaking thing for there to be this, like, major collection of primitive art at a major American museum.

And, you know, people forget, I think, that primitive art being showed—we don't even call it primitive art anymore, but in those days they did, but let's say African art and Oceanic art. And this was—it was really new for major American museums to be collecting this work. You know, now we take it for granted. And I'm always telling my students, I mean, you should remember that prior to the 1950s, you couldn't find this work in any American museums at all.

So that was—and my parents had traveled to Africa—

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, a number of times, and so—

MS. RIEDEL: What were they doing there?

MS. GRALNICK: They went on safaris, and they were also interested in collecting primitive art—before my father

got sick.

MS. RIEDEL: Very forward thinking.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, so there was a, you know, an interest in that that came from something from, you know, when I was fairly young, and—

MS. RIEDEL: So this was around the house, you would see this?

MS. GRALNICK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This was around the house; I would see it. And my mother was sort of relentless about dragging us to museums growing up. And, of course, you know, when you're in—especially when, you know, we were little and, you know, when you're in New York you're getting to see some pretty important—and, you know, I mean, I remember so well the early years of the Museum of Modern Art, and even now it's hard for me to go into the new Museum of Modern Art, and you'll never get me to call it the MoMA—[Riedel laughs] —because it was The Modern. That's what you called it growing up, and I still call it The Modern. And so, you know, as New Yorkers, this was just sort of part of what you did. And so, you know, already I was, kind of, going there in undergraduate school but, you know, in undergraduate school you're not that much defining your work in terms of any real vision yet, because so much of what you do is assignments that you're given, you know. But once I was in graduate school, I definitely, full-scale went ahead—went into work that was having a dialogue with primitive art. And I was definitely, you know, reading Joseph Campbell, and—

MS. RIEDEL: *Power of Myth* sort of thing?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. The book that I was really, like, completely obsessed with was his *Hero with a Thousand Faces* which was like his, you know—where he, sort of, really laid down his theory of this sort of, you know, the fact that, sort of, all myths throughout culture and throughout time follow a certain kind of prescribed agenda that he calls "the Cosmogonic Cycle." And actually the title—in those days, you had to write an M.F.A. thesis which was similar to writing a dissertation. I mean, mine was probably, you know, 150 pages long.

And actually my M.F.A. thesis was on the Cosmogonic Cycle, and it was actually called "The Crisis in 20th Century Art." And it was kind of a thesis, sort of, talking about the confusion of where—what the function of artworks in a society without a strong mythic system are, compared to the, you know, the much earlier—you know, the much earlier relationship between art and religion, and art and mythology that was so close that the idea that artworks could exist outside of a system like that wasn't even on the radar yet.

So that's really what my M.F.A. thesis was about. And a lot of my forms were, sort of, coming directly out of primitive art. And enamel—

MS. RIEDEL: And this was at New Paltz?

MS. GRALNICK: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were studying with Bob Ebendorf—

MS. GRALNICK: Bob Ebendorf and Kurt Matzdorf.

[END MD 01 TR 02.]

MS. GRALNICK: And in undergrad I had had this enormously good training in enameling. My training in metals probably wasn't as strong—although Mary Ann Scherr was really an amazing designer and she had a fantastic eye for things, but it wasn't a strong technical training. She wasn't big on giving a lot of demonstrations and that sort of thing.

So I think my portfolio, when I applied for graduate school, wasn't as strong as it could have been technically. But certainly Matzdorf, particularly, sort of, saw in me, you know, somebody that was smart and, you know, had really good grades, and had ideas, and that, you know, I was sort of worth making an investment in.

And then in grad school, you know, I did this unbelievably, sort of, intensive education of myself and my technical skills. You know, I took all the undergraduate classes along with the undergraduates, so that I could learn hollowware. I mean, I'd never picked up a hammer in undergraduate school.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. GRALNICK: And Matzdorf was an amazing teacher of technique, just such a great, great organized teacher of technique. And so I very fast, you know, doubled or quadrupled my technical skill in one year—the first year of graduate school just because I was taking these classes and I was really under the tutelage of someone that just loved to teach technique.

Bob was sort of the complete opposite. He didn't really love to teach technique, but he also had an amazing eye. You know, he could just sort of look at something that was on your bench and, you know, say three words to you that would make all the difference in the world in terms of what you were doing.

So they were a good combination as educators. They had—each had their own set of strengths, and they were very different, and that made for a really sort of healthy dialogue. And you were, you know, sort of, constantly getting differing opinions from one of them or the other, in terms of what you were doing. But that was really healthy; it sort of forced you to reckon with it, you know, on your own.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And came out of grad school ready to go.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, I came out of grad school. I took a teaching job right out of grad school. My first teaching job, that I was hired back by Kent State to teach enameling. Mel Someroski, who I just adored—my enameling teacher who has since passed away—it's probably 10 years ago already—was going on sabbatical. And I was hired to teach enameling while he was on sabbatical.

So I took my first teaching job at Kent, and then right after that I got a teaching job at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design teaching metals. And again I was a sabbatical replacement for Christian Gaudernack, who was taking a sabbatical. And after that—after those two one-year teaching stints, I sort of decided, you know—especially the second teaching stint in Nova Scotia, I mean, you need to understand that I was a kid who started college at 16 and so I was—I had my M.F.A. by the time I was 20.

MS. RIEDEL: You were teaching at 21.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: There are students probably not much older than you were.

MS. GRALNICK: Exactly. And I had graduate students who were older than me, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Was that odd, Lisa?

MS. GRALNICK: It was. And I really felt at that time that I, sort of, needed to sow my oats as an artist. And at the time I, sort of, kind of, thought, oh, teaching's not for me, and I'm just going to kind of go back into the studio. But really, I wasn't ready for teaching. I didn't have enough to teach yet. I didn't have enough under my belt.

So I moved back to New York and set up a studio and just started doing my work.

MS. RIEDEL: In the city itself?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, first in the city, for a few years, and then I moved back to the New Paltz area. And during those years I had a studio set up; I was starting to exhibit my work. I was, at first, still doing work in gold and silver and enamel with this, sort of, influence of primitive art. The work was actually—

MS. RIEDEL: Were they vessels?

MS. GRALNICK: No, they were jewelry—all jewelry pieces. And they were starting to sell quite well. I had—the first gallery that ever took my work was the Sheila Nussbaum Gallery in New Jersey. I was right out of school. Sheila loved enamels, and she was extremely supportive of my work.

MS. RIEDEL: This is the early '80s, yeah?

MS. GRALNICK: Yep, yep. And this is 1981, '82. And she sold it well.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were supporting yourself as a studio artist.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, I was supporting myself. I did a little bit of part-time teaching of workshops. I taught at the 92nd Street Y in New York part-time. But mostly I was doing gallery shows. I was doing some of the high-end craft shows, like the Philadelphia Craft Show and the Smithsonian Craft Show. And for a few years I did the ACC [American Craft Council]; I did the original—one year I did the original Rhinebeck Craft Show, and then it moved to West Springfield and Baltimore, and I did those a couple of years.

So, you know, I had this sort of, like many other people before me and after me, you know, I had this little concoction of craft shows and galleries and teaching stints that altogether, sort of, constituted some kind of a living. And I pretty much—

MS. RIEDEL: And you made that work for a long time.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, I did. I pretty much did that—

MS. RIEDEL: For 10 years.

MS. GRALNICK: —until I took the job at Parsons, which was around 1990, and even when I took the job at Parsons, I wasn't looking for a teaching job. Parsons canvassed me. They had done with search for someone to head the jewelry program and they hadn't evidently been happy with the candidates search. And I just got a call from the chair of the department at Parsons, would I be interested in coming in for an interview for this job. And I thought, aw, what the heck, I'll go in for an interview.

And then I took the job thinking, well, I'm going to do this for a year and see if I feel any differently about teaching than I did 10 years earlier.

MS. RIEDEL: And was it a full-time commitment?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, when I—the first year I took the job it was an adjunct position; it wasn't full-time. But then the second year I basically said that I wouldn't stay if it wasn't full-time; you know, that it was a huge amount of work and I wouldn't stay if it wasn't a full-time job with benefits, and a normal salary, and all of that. And they gave it to me.

MS. RIEDEL: But you'd decided at that point to stay and to teach.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, but after the first year—you know, I took the job at Parsons—my work had already moved into the black work at this point. I had already had, you know, a number of—I'd had a exhibition at Galerie Ra in Amsterdam; I'd had a solo exhibition Artwear in New York; I'd had a show at the V.O. Gallery in Washington, D.C., which later became Jewelers' Werk Galerie.

And so I'd already had a number of solo shows of the black work. My career had, sort of, started to take off in, kind of, new directions. I was being included in—my work was being included in a number of European shows.

And so, in a way, I had kind of started, sort of, doing what I had wanted to do, sowing my oats as an artist. And at that point, it didn't feel so threatening to give up the studio time for teaching because I had had eight solid years of working in the studio full-time since graduate school—actually 10 years, but I had had those two years of teaching right out of grad school, so eight years we'll say.

All of a sudden, after the first year of teaching I realized that in those ensuing years I had learned something and now I had something to teach now. And there was a distance between me and my students that there hadn't been when I had taken those teaching job right out of grad school. Now I really was like on a different plane from them and I understood things that I hadn't understood at that time and at that age.

And it was kind of thrilling to all of a sudden experience teaching for the first time as being something that I actually could be good at. And Parsons was so amazing because you got the most amazing, devoted, hardworking, sophisticated students. And, I mean, I don't even know if I appreciated it at the time, but looking back now, having moved into a situation at a state university, I really do, sort of, see the difference of the kind of—you know, Parsons had an international reputation, so students were coming from all over the world to go to school there.

MS. RIEDEL: A specific art school too, yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep. And, you know, when I'd see what I'd throw out to my students, and then what they'd come back with—you know, the work that they'd make, even in the beginning classes I was so thrilled by it that, you know, teaching became this whole other thing that was just giving me so much joy, and so—you know, so much, sort of, meaning to my life, and that I realized I had something to teach, and I was learning how to give it, and it was working. It was showing up in the work that was being produced by my students.

And so all of a sudden I wanted to keep doing it. And I just sort of made up my mind at that time that I would keep doing it until it wasn't doing that for me anymore. If it was two years, if it was five years, I never expected to stay at Parsons as long as I did. And I never expected that, not only would I stay as long as I did—11 years, but that I'd go from that job right into another teaching job. I just thought, it's working now and I'll keep doing it for as long as it's working.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there the back-and-forth at Parsons, between your teaching and your own studio work that you've talked about here now?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, yes and no, Mija. I think that there—

MS. RIEDEL: One feeding the other, as opposed to detracting from the other?

MS. GRALNICK: Certainly it was feeding, in the sense that teaching always feeds your creative work, you're—you know, you're asking certain kinds of questions to your students, and those questions don't just go away when you come back to your studio. As a matter of fact they become heightened, and you start looking at your own work and your own practice, and saying, you know, am I doing what I'm asking my students to do? And if I'm not, you know, I need to be asking those questions to myself.

So yes, it was, but Parsons wasn't quite the supportive environment that I have now in terms of—you know that, at the University of Wisconsin, number one, I don't feel like I have to fight for the survival of my metals program on a yearly basis the way that I did at Parsons.

You know, Parsons notoriously is not particularly generous with their faculty. You know, there's very little research support; there's no tenure system; there's no provision for studio space for faculty. Faculty are, you know, hired and fired at sort of a whim's notice depending upon the direction that the school decides it wants to move itself the next year. So it, you know, in some ways it's a kind of dog-eat-dog environment.

The students are amazing, and that is the part of Parsons that I do miss a little bit, is the student body. You know, it was a competitive process to get in, and it showed up in the students that you had. They were amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: But here at Wisconsin you have the tenure; you have a studio right on campus.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. I have a fantastic studio. I get so much research support. I feel like there's a level of collegiality within the art department that we never had at Parsons. I mean, I genuinely love my colleagues here at the University of Wisconsin, even the ones that I don't get along with and I disagree with on just about everything.

There is genuine collegiality. I mean, we all see ourselves as part of a larger mission, which is to educate, you know, these students about art, and ultimately, when it comes right down to trying to get the best work we can out of our students, everybody rallies to the occasion and doesn't let petty differences get in the way of what—of our mission in terms of educating the students. And it's really, really terrific.

Whereas at Parsons—I mean, I was full-time, but most of the faculty at Parsons is part-time. During the years I was there, just in our little department—which was, sort of, the crafts department, that included furniture, glass, ceramics, metals and textiles, and then a major called "product design"—glass did not have even one full-time faculty member; fibers did not have one full-time faculty member; ceramics did not have one full-time faculty member. These were all departments—

MS. RIEDEL: For 10 years.

MS. GRALNICK: —that were run by adjunct faculty. So the only full-time faculty members in our whole department were the person—Constantine Boyn that taught product design, and me, that taught metals. So you can see that this was a school that was—Parsons was a school that had about—the total school only had about 25 or 30 full-time faculty members, and I think three or four hundred adjunct faculty members. You know, that makes a big difference.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. GRALNICK: And it makes it very difficult when you go into meetings, to talk about the, you know, mission of the departments, for people to talk candidly about what they think should be happening at the school when, you know, 80 percent of the people are worried about whether they're going to have a job next year because they have no job protection. They're already feeling a little annoyed that they don't have full-time contracts, and they're not getting health insurance, and they're not getting retirement benefits, and all of this kind of stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: It's hard to focus on the evolution of a program when you don't know who's going to be there.

MS. GRALNICK: And I have to say, since I've been at University of Wisconsin, I've become a real fan of the tenure system because I think that there is something to be said for that—you know, the reasons the tenure systems were built, which was, you know, as an ultimate goal to provide academic freedom, that people shouldn't be afraid of saying what needed to be said, that they might lose their job. And it actually works—[Riedel laughs]—on that level.

MS. RIEDEL: That's good news.

MS. GRALNICK: And it represents a commitment that your institution is making to you, you know, a long-term commitment. And as a result, you, as a professor within that system, are inclined to want to make the same

kind of commitment back to your institution that it has made to you. So it really does work on that level.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's jump back to Parsons, and talk about the transition in your work from enamel to the black acrylic. You've made numerous, severe, drastic transitions in your work over the years. That's a pattern. And the first one was from enamel to the black acrylic. How did that come about?

MS. GRALNICK: I have—that is definitely a pattern. Well, I was working—you know, I was just sort of going along, la-la-la, doing my enamel work, gold and silver, selling pieces to lots of, you know, collectors—

MS. RIEDEL: And happy with the work?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, obviously not happy enough or I would have kept doing it. I think that what was starting to happen was—this often happens with bodies of work with me, the body of work starts to reach this kind of level of refinement. And when it reaches that level of refinement, it becomes formulaic. You know how to do it well, and you could keep doing it—variations, you could keep doing it over and over again well.

And that's the point I had reached with the gold and silver enamel pieces. The pieces had started selling well, I could keep doing them well, better and better, but they were losing any real edginess to them. And so I was feeling sort of disgruntled inside about that, and I guess I kind of knew that it was going to be time to move on.

And then several fortuitous events happened, which was that I was driving along a country road in upstate New York, and I was actually delivering one of my, you know, gold-and-silver and enamel pieces to a client who had given me directions to their weekend house in upstate New York, and I passed by this amazing structure which turned out to be a black rubber house. And I found out more about the history of this black rubber house later, but at the time it was just—you know, I thought it was a mirage, it was just this weird thing that showed up in my life.

And I slammed on the brakes and just sort of looked at it from the car for like a half hour.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it literally covered in black rubber?

MS. RIEDEL: Yep. It's like stretched over an armature, and it turned out later that it was a house that was built for a choreographer in New York. And then the choreographer died of AIDS and the house was later built by the—bought by the actor, Willem Dafoe. But I didn't know any of this, all I knew was that, you know, this weird omen had showed up in my life, and I started going and visiting this house. Like I'd buy myself a cup of coffee and a buttered roll and drive over there, and sit in my car and just look at it. Do drawings of it, whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: What about it spoke to you? Do you remember?

MS. GRALNICK: It was just, you know, this incredibly sort of ominous threatening form. It had no windows—although I found out later that that house was actually sort of built a bit on the edge of a cliff. And on the other side of the house, that you couldn't see from the road, there were some windows, not many, but some.

Then two other events happened, almost exactly the same time, all within a couple of months of each other. One of which was—when I had been living in—when I had taken the job in Nova Scotia, I had discovered that in the harbor in Halifax, there was an old World War II submarine that was parked in the harbor in Halifax. And this image of this black submarine kept coming back to me. And it had that similar kind of blackness as the rubber house, that kind of blackness that, over a period of time, sort of starts to turn almost blue—I mean, like old car paint.

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

MS. GRALNICK: Then, I was in my apartment and I was listening to a record—and I still have the broken record, it hangs in my studio—it was [Richard] Wagner. And it was—at the time I wasn't particularly interested in opera, but I liked to listen to the orchestral music, you know, you the beginnings of the opera and the—now I've actually grown to love opera much more than I did then, but I always loved Wagner.

And we were still listening to records in those days, and something fell off the wall of my apartment—like a picture that was hung or something, fell onto the stereo while the record was playing and broke the record into a bunch of little pieces. So, for some odd reason, I took these broken pieces of record and I started gluing them together with five-minute epoxy and making a little house out of broken record that looked like the rubber house.

And that thing sat in my studio—in my studio for at least another year, or maybe two years, on my bench, just like this sloppy, broken house made out of record, while I continued to go about my work in the enamel and silver and gold. And then, at one point, I just sort of picked up that house. I had had enough time to, sort of—what was the word you used earlier when we were at my studio and you said, you know, you—oh, process, you

know, I'd had time to sort of process this thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. GRALNICK: And all of a sudden I started building these house forms, not out of broken records anymore, but I did some research and I found, you know, black acrylic and the chemicals that could be used to build things out of it and connect it. And I started—not really knowing where I was going but I, you know, I just started building these house forms and that kind of led me into this next body of work.

And it felt absolutely liberating to have, kind of, found this anonymous material that I could work, and that no longer had any of the associations of the preciousness of the gold and the silver and the enamel. And the fact that the materials themselves were so luscious that it was almost impossible—it felt almost impossible at the time to make any kind of statement within the context of these incredibly seductive materials that—you know, it just felt like beauty was getting in the way.

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

MS. GRALNICK: And all of a sudden I had this material that was just black plastic. It was the cheapest thing you could imagine, and it was so anonymous, and it completely fell on me now to make something out of this material that had very little value unto its own.

MS. RIEDEL: What I love about that first one though, Lisa, is that it came from—it literally was poetry, it was music. You literally built form out of content—this piece of plastic contained Wagner. I mean, metaphorically, for your work, that is an extraordinary, fortuitous event.

MS. GRALNICK: It is amazing. And I even discovered, you know, later I found out that I could heat-form the plastic and all of that, and make curves, but all of this I first did in the—with the broken record. You know, I actually took pieces and put them in my oven and said, now, can I—[Riedel laughs]—bend this a little bit and form it? And, you know, the interesting this is I go back and I wonder, well, you know, was it just originally that the idea of a broken record to me was so, sort of, sacrilegious, that, you know, the records—my records were so important to me that—and in those days I didn't have very much money so if I went out and bought an album, you know, the idea of having a broken one, you know, it was just like having an expensive, you know, piece of hand-blown glass, and it breaks, and your first impression is I'm going to try to glue it back together, you know.

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

MS. GRALNICK: But a broken record, you really can't glue back together and make it playable anymore. So, you know, was it just I wanted to, like, save this thing, so I was going to glue it back together and make it into something else worthy. I don't know.

But it's sort of interesting, I've always thought. But it was Wagner that broke that because, you know, this, you know, really, kind of, like, heavy German Romanticism was always something that was very much a part of who I am and still is. You know, I'm definitely interested in grand gestures and you don't get any grander than Wagner.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] But at the same time it brought to this grandness, and this poetry, and this large scale, the edginess and the brokenness of this black record. It also brought in the tension that's become so much a part of your work.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep. So I did the black work, I'd say—I'm trying to remember how many years it was, I guess I started the black work around—it must have been about 1986, and the very first ones. And I was certainly—

MS. RIEDEL: Through the early '90s, wasn't it?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. Maybe six years, which, as it turns out, I'd say anywhere between four to eight years seems to be the length of time. I never intended it this way, but it seems to be the length of time that a body of work kind of lasts for me. That it, sort of, starts, kind of peaks, then I, sort of, feel like it reaches that over-refined period that I talked about earlier where it's just getting a little too easy. And then that scares me. As a matter of fact, anything being easy scares me. [Riedel laughs.] I would have made a great Catholic because I really do believe in the virtue of suffering. But, you know, there's something in that—in Jewish stuff about—

MS. RIEDEL: A little suffering there too.

MS. GRALNICK: —suffering and guilt too. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So shall we talk about the black work now, or shall we just move through a general chronology and come back?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, let's talk about it a little bit.

MS. RIEDEL: It was completely different form-wise, technique-wise—everything about it was a huge deviation from what you'd done so far.

MS. GRALNICK: It was. It was a—it was a total tabula rasa for me, just going back to the beginning. And one of the things that I felt was lacking in my undergraduate and graduate education—and I don't blame either of the schools I went to for this; I blame something larger, which is that we haven't—that, in general, schools tended to be divided up into 2-D programs and 3-D programs. And you were either a painter or a sculptor.

But then when you got into the craft areas, things got really murky because now here you were dealing with objects that were three dimensional, yet surface was extremely important to those objects. And so you were dealing with kind of a 2-D and a 3-D aesthetic. And during the period of time when I was in school, it seemed like almost everybody was doing what were, sort of, basically flat broaches—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. GRALNICK: —that were—and I don't mean totally flat, but what I do mean is that they basically had a front and a back. And on the front you were either doing something textually—texturally or, you know, creating some sort of—

MS. RIEDEL: That's a Freudian slip. [Laughs.]

MS. GRALNICK: —yeah—narrative, or, you know, some sort of surface embellishment, or something painterly like, like an enamel, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, especially with enamel.

MS. GRALNICK: And one of the areas in which I thought we—I felt we were sort of lacking in our crafts education was the sort of remembering that even in the context of jewelry, not just hollowware, these were three-dimensional objects, and three-dimensional rules should apply; that we sort of weren't talking enough about the objectness. And so one of the great things about me doing the black work was that I, sort of, set myself an agenda to completely get rid of color, decoration, surface embellishment, any kind of graphic narrative flourishes, and I was simply going to deal with form.

MS. RIEDEL: So a complete negation of what you'd been focused on.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. And so a lot of the pieces that I did in the black work, especially the earlier ones, were really—were my own kind of, private kind of exercises to say, you know, they were—they were like right out of the Bauhaus. I was—you know, I was taking a hemisphere and cutting it up and reassembling it back together. They were like beginning design Bauhaus projects.

I was dealing with pure form, and I loved the idea that the material itself—nobody even knew what the pieces were made out of at first. Some people thought they were stone; some people thought they were like carved wood. Plastic seemed to be—because I matted out the plastic and it didn't really look very plasticy.

MS. RIEDEL: No, it didn't look plasticy at all.

MS. GRALNICK: Plastic seemed to be the last thing that anybody every guessed they were made out of. And it was a wonderful freeing thing because you were—if you didn't know what the material was, you were sort of forced to reckon with the form, you know, well, what is that? And I discovered in the process of making these pieces that—just in looking for inspiration, I became sort of obsessed with the forms that were all around me.

I started experiencing, sort of, my whole immediate environment as form. So when I would look at my car, and open up the hood of my car, I'd no longer see, you know, carburetors and oil pans, but I'd see forms. When I looked at my oven, I'd see the oven dials as forms. When I'd look at, you know, my reading lamp, I'd now be seeing it as forms.

And so I started seeing that the most fantastic inspiration was all around me, very close to home. And that there was a real beauty in sort of reducing these everyday forms—vacuum cleaners, and dust busters, into—you know, it really was a very Bauhaus exercise I was giving myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Which would—went into some sort of the training you'd had up until that point.

MS. GRALNICK: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: But this kind of led me—this kind of led me into what I think then was—became the body of work that was the strongest of the black work, which was that I just sort of became fascinated all around me with what you might call, you know, the, sort of, quickly becoming obsolete culture of industrialization, the kinds of objects that very soon you weren't going to have anymore because we weren't going to need them anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] For example?

MS. GRALNICK: Oh, the form—simply the forms, you know, telephones and, you know, hand-wound watches, and you know, all the kinds of analog things that were so much a part of products of the industrial revolution that were going to quickly—

MS. RIEDEL: Disappear with the digital.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. And I started developing a sort of sentimental attitude—[Riedel laughs]—towards the objects of industrialization in general. And a big part of that body of work, and the work that I showed for my Galerie Ra show, and then I showed at the Garth Clark Gallery in New York, were these pieces that were sort of like post-industrial fragments, you know, things that looked like they should have a place to plug in but they don't; or they look like they should be connected to something else. I became obsessed with looking at machine parts and—

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

MS. GRALNICK: —and going to these kind of salvage stores that actually would sell parts of the kinds of machines that were no longer even being used anymore, because as industry became more sophisticated, these, sort of, old mechanical machines, where cogs fit into other cogs fit into other cogs, fit into bearings, were quickly becoming defunct.

And so I was, like, collecting all this kind of stuff and that's really where my inspiration for a lot of that black work came from—the, sort of, beauty of the machine age that we—and you know, I really was sort of caught about as perfectly, just time-wise, as you possibly could get. I mean, I fell right in that period where, you know, you were still taking typing when you were in high school, and it was actually a big deal. I remember when I went to college, to get an electric typewriter, because they were, like, a pretty new thing, electric typewriters. And I remember getting that Smith Corona, and it being a big thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. GRALNICK: And I didn't get my first computer until probably—oh, it might have been four or five years into my teaching stint at Parsons. All of a sudden they just delivered these Macs to everybody's office, and dumped it on your office, and came and hooked the thing up. And none of us knew what the heck to do with it, other than, what's this big hunk of off-white-colored plastic taking up room on my desk for?

And so, you know, talk about, sort of, coming of age in the middle of that transformation, well definitely that was happening for me. And I was kind of—I mean, I remember having the old electric typewriter on my desk at Parsons and thinking, now, how do you make room for this and the computer?

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

MS. GRALNICK: And you don't. You don't need the typewriter anymore. You're supposed to throw it out now. So, you know, I sort of started looking around at my life and seeing that there was, like, a whole world of change that was about to happen, and I felt very sentimental about the old days. And I still, you know, have a little bit of—I get so frustrated because I have electric windows on my car and I would prefer to have the old wind-up windows because I don't trust those electric windows—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Yes.

MS. GRALNICK: —because eventually they break, you know. And you can't—there's no way you, as an individual, could ever fix an electric window, whereas a hand-cranked window you could actually take that door apart and fix it. I could fix it. I know I could. I have fixed stuff like that all the time, you know, old toasters and things that aren't working. But nowadays, I can't fix anything.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking about the black acrylic work and wondering if, at the time, you were aware—going from the silver and the gold to the black acrylic—if you were beginning to now think about the neutrality or the non-neutrality of materials? Had that thought occurred to you already?

MS. GRALNICK: Yep. As a matter of fact, that saying, "the non-neutrality of materials" came from Reinhard Mucha, who's—I had had my show—I was having my show in Amsterdam, and during that same trip to Amsterdam I went to Germany and that's where I saw his work for the first time, and in a catalogue I got about

his work in Germany, picked that non-neutrality of—"there are no neutral materials," right out of a quote from him in one of those catalogues.

And that became absolutely essential to me and my thinking about—and it's kind of funny because at the time, you know, I had become very interested in Jannis Kounellis's work. I had seen his work in Europe. He hadn't yet shown in this country, but then very soon after that he had a big solo show at what was then the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: And so at the time I saw the Kounellis show where he had, like, gold leafed a wall, and I was starting to work on my black acrylic, and I remember, you know, saying to myself, either I'm never going to work in gold again, or I'm never going to work it again until I can work in it in a meaningful way, the way Kounellis has as a sculptor. So that I never wanted to take it for granted anymore as, well, this is just the material that, you know, jewelers should work in.

And anything you're making—you know, this was the mentality that I saw out there, sort of, in the field, especially in terms of the craft fair world, and all of that, you know—any object you're making, you can make more money if you make it in gold, you know; you can charge more for it, and more people will buy it because it's gold. And I never wanted to be in that place again. So I thought, I may never work in gold again but if I do there's going to be a reason I'm choosing it, you know. So, yeah, you know, I became very, very conscious now that every single material you choose to work with carries a baggage with it, and you need to take that very seriously.

And I talk about that with my students, even just in general, about being a metalsmith, you know, if they want to work in metal. And they don't have to work in metal, they can make—work out of other materials, but metal brings a whole lot of baggage into an object; and that you shouldn't assume, just because, you know, you're in this—you're in this metals department, that you have to work in metals, and you shouldn't make that decision cavalierly. It should, you know, all be part of whether or not it supports what you're trying to do.

MS. RIEDEL: So what brought you back to metal from the black acrylic?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, you know, I'd had this—I had had this wonderful event. I had, at the time as—you know, it's a little, a little bit a part of metalsmithing lore anyway, so there's no point to hide it—but, you know, I had had this relationship with this Swiss jeweler, Otto Kunzli, for a number of years. And Otto had come in—flown into this country, and we had together gone to Chicago to see the Kounellis show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

And the show was—and part of the show was in the museum, but the more important part of the show was in these turn-of-the-century abandoned factories and warehouses throughout Chicago, all these installations he had done—you know, one of which was the gold leafing of a wall in an old factory space, and you know, he would do his quintessential gold leafing of this entire old brick wall, and then just hang a coat rack with a coat and hat hanging on there.

And this crazy event happened which was—and I was very, very deep into my—in my black work at that point, probably almost kind of to the end of it, I had already had my show in Holland, and—anyway, you know, Chicago's the Windy City, so I'd gone to see all these shows, riding the freight elevators in these old factories up and down to see these pieces—gone; checked out of the hotel; got in a taxi; gone to the airport; come all the way home from the Windy City and discovered that some of the gold leaf from one of the Kounellis pieces was in my hair.

Which was a just a kind of crazy thing to happen. It had made it through, like, the streets of Chicago. I had evidently gotten very close to one of the pieces and, you know, I have this, sort of, bird's nest of curly hair anyway, and it was there. And Otto pulled it out and said, you're not going to believe this; don't move; there's gold leaf in your hair—[Riedel laughs] —from the Kounellis piece—and this was already back in New York now. And I saved that piece and I actually made it into a little reliquary and sent it to Kounellis, like, at the time, via the Leo Castelli Gallery, which was still around and representing Kounellis, but that's a whole other thing.

But I sort of started entertaining the idea that I might use gold again but I was going to think of gold, sort of, the way you might use a gem stone on a gold piece; that it was going to be—if I used gold at all, I was going to start back into it in a very tiny kind of way. And so there was a series of pieces that I did that were all made out of black acrylic, and they had little flecks of gold in them.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think I ever saw any of those.

MS. GRALNICK: Well, there was, like, this series that I called the Telephone Pieces, that had all these little holes

drilled out of them, just like the receivers of—the old telephone receivers, only now in—there was a little tiny fleck of gold in each one of those little holes. And then a miraculous thing happened, which was—well, a number of miraculous things happened, which was I was, at this point—

MS. RIEDEL: Are there little miraculous coincidences that precede every series, Lisa? [Laughs.]

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: There must be. [Laughs.]

MS. GRALNICK: I was—I was on a, kind of, good run in terms of getting grants. I had gotten, you know, I had gotten,—I don't remember the exact timing, but I'd gotten, you know, a NEA [National Endowment of the Arts] grant, I'd gotten a grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts, and I'd gotten this big Tiffany grant. I don't think I'd gotten the Tiffany grant yet, but I had definitely gotten the first of my NEA grants. And then I had this idea that I wanted to be able to make a body of work in gold—and this is the body of work you and I were talking about earlier over lunch—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK:—that Ron Porter bought one of the pieces—

MS. RIEDEL: Right. The very geometric—

MS. GRALNICK: —it was really like the first body of work I showed with Susan Cummins. But my goal was that if I was going to do it, I wanted to be able to cut into that gold with the same freedom that I'd cut into the plastic. I didn't want to have to feel precious and fussy about it. I wanted to be able to think of gold as an industrial material just like plastic—this is an artist's material.

And so I took my grant monies and lumped them together, and I still didn't feel like it was enough. And then I started getting on the phone and calling people who had been buying my black work—sort of, collectors that had been collecting my black work, and saying, I've got a deal to offer you. And the deal is, you know, if you send me a thousand dollars, or five thousand dollars, or whatever amount you want to send, for gold, for the purchase of gold. You'll get a piece back that's worth the amount of money you gave me in gold.

So me, and my time, and creative work is going to be completely free. You can take that piece right away and melt it down and get your five thousand dollars back if you want—or your one thousand dollars, or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Where did this idea occur to you?

MS. GRALNICK: And so the only thing I was getting out of it was I was getting that big quantity of gold. I wasn't going to make any money off of those people's money, but what I was getting was a big quantity of material that I could cut into with that same freedom. And that was important to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there many takers?

MS. GRALNICK: Oh, yeah. And so there ended up being a body of work then of—you know I don't remember the numbers, but I'd say it was about 25—I think I ended up buying about $30,000 worth of gold, between what I got from people, and then the grant money, which allowed me to buy these, like, big pieces of sheet gold, because gold was much cheaper then that it is now. And I could do exactly what I said. I could just be free with it. I could cut into it, and build with it, and like it was cardboard—cutting and bending it and playing with it. And, of course, I saved all the scrap.

And I gave about half of the work—once the work was all photographed and documented, about half of it went back to the people who had given me the money for the gold. So half of the pieces, there was no ability for me to earn any income from, other than the fact that I got to, you know, take my shots and have the pieces in my portfolio, but now they—and they could choose which pieces they wanted. And then half of the pieces got, you know, sold by Susan Cummins, and eventually all sold.

So the money all came back to me, probably three-fold in the end anyways, and the people who had—

MS. RIEDEL: And they were all broaches?

MS. GRALNICK: —yep, and the people who supported me were getting a great deal because they had basically paid nothing for the pieces, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: —and as it turned out, the price of gold ended up tripling, so, in the end if they decided to melt them down a couple years from then, they were making money on the deal. I had been a good futures investment—[Riedel laughs]—so there wasn't kind of any way you could lose in the end.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: So I produced this whole body of work in these very industrial-looking pieces. They were very much like the black pieces. Also, I didn't want to have to go from doing these big, sort of, monumental black pieces, to these really tiny little fussy gold pieces, so obviously the gold pieces were smaller than the black but I still wanted them to have—be big enough—

MS. RIEDEL: They were heavy, as I remember.

MS. GRALNICK: —that they could have some sculptural quality to them. And having that much gold to cut into allowed me to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And that was the early '90s, yes?

MS. GRALNICK: That was—that probably started just—yeah, that was probably just around 1990, when I was finishing up the black work and starting on—and that was a very short body of work compared to my other bodies of work. I mean, I got the gold and then I just made as many pieces as I could out of it. And I—you know, I definitely didn't work on that body of work more than two years, and it may have been all made in a year, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That seems much more condensed.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Then—well, did the antigravity pieces follow?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, then the mechanical pieces came next

[END MD 01 TR 03.]

MS. RIEDEL: We're just about to talk about the mechanical work.

MS. GRALNICK: So right about this time—well, I had—back when I was in college, I had taken some physics classes and I was really interested in physics. I had taken a theoretical physics class in undergraduate school that was taught by this brilliant Dr. Spielberg—and his son, as a matter of fact, was in my colloquium. He was a professor at the university—his father, was a physics professor. And then I really entertained an interest in theoretical physics for the rest of my life.

And at certain points I, sort of, pursued that interest with more seriousness than at other points. And right around this time, I took this class with Alan Lightman, and the class just blew my mind. And not only did it blow my mind, but—I don't know, I discovered that—again, you know, sometimes it takes taking a class in something to, kind of, realize that it, sort of, taps into something that you, sort of, have an ability for, or that you didn't know you did. And I realized that certain things in the physics class were coming very close to things that I was interested in in my artwork.

MS. RIEDEL: Like what, Lisa? Can you think of a couple of things?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I think—one of the things that Alan Lightman commented on in the class—because the class was, it was definitely a class that was, sort of, geared for, you know, for neophytes, not for people that were physicists by profession. But it had a lot of—mostly people that were in, sort of, affiliated sciences—you know, it had, like, some bunch of physicians in the class and, you know, biologists and astronomers. But I was the only person in the arts that was—had taken the class.

MS. RIEDEL: Back to your Kent State freshman group?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. And one of the things at lunch one time that Alan Lightman commented on was that, in a way, I was having an easier time with theoretical physics than the rest of these empirical scientists were because I, number one, had the ability in my mind to, sort of, imagine ideas as tangible things in your mind, and I didn't—they didn't need to be proven to me. I could imagine possibilities, and then I could see possibilities as almost like transparencies through which you could look through one possibility, into another possibility, into another possibility, like premises.

And it was—I thought it was sort of a fascinating observation for Dr. Lightman to make but then I realized it

really was true. And it actually, you know, went, sort of, went back to the reason that metals was attractive to me in the very beginning—that I could actually see things that way. I could see one step into another step into another step. You know, I kept remembering those old biology textbooks that we had when I was in high school where they'd show you the human body with these thin transparencies—and you'd peel one up and there was the circulatory system; and you'd peel one up and, you know. And that you could think of ideas that way, as transparencies.

So at the same time that I was thinking about that—about theoretical physics, I was also still, sort of, obsessed with these, kind of, pieces, these, sort of, remnants of the mechanical world and the industrial revolution. So I started thinking of jewelry, specifically, as the possibility in which I could make pieces that were completely devoid of any extraneous adornment or decoration, and that could be machines, in their own right; and that, in a way, jewelry was kind of a design problem, and that I could create objects that did something.

And what they did wasn't that important. What they did was a folly—they wound a gold ball up, up and down; or wound three gold balls up and down; or wound a chain up inside of an inner mechanism. They were follies, it didn't matter what they did. What did matter was that they were, sort of, tools of a kind, and that they—that they could be seen that way, that their jewelryness, and what made them work, became what the piece was about—not the decoration to it but the, sort of, essence of it.

And this, sort of, essence of the kinds of principles of physics that make things work. I mean, physics and the industrial revolution are, of course, deeply, deeply connected. The industrial revolution was—and mechanics in general, are based on the idea that there are certain forces of nature that you can work—you can harness in order to get the job done. And they will work forever, indefinitely, because the forces of nature aren't going anywhere—gravity, and magnetism, and the strong-weak nuclear forces.

So this is what the mechanical pieces were sort of about, a kind of distillation of the jewelry object into a mechanical tool. Instead of being influenced by the forms of industrialization, now making, kind of, a less—a less superficial transition where now the jewelry object becomes an object of industrialization.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Distilled down to its absolute essence, right? Nothing extraneous whatsoever.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. So every part of the piece functioned to do something. The pieces were all made of oxidized silver and 14 or 18 karat gold. And I tried very hard to give them a sense of—even just color-wise in the way looked, of old tools that I collected. I collected a lot of old, you know, measuring tools, and nautical devices, and medical tools. And a lot of times they were all made out of this, sort of, you know, graying stainless steel, and brass, and so I was looking for that, kind of, color combination of these old precision tools. And so that's what they were, in a sense; they were tools.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because the concept was their craftsmanship.

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

MS. RIEDEL: The two were absolutely united.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. You couldn't separate it, and if you didn't make it perfectly, I wouldn't work.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] During these early phases, what do you remember—besides physics, and math, and music—as early influences, and sources of inspiration?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, you know, of course, I had artists whose work I was interested in. I mean, I—

MS. RIEDEL: Who were you interested in, who inspired you?

MS. GRALNICK: —I definitely remember—and this, you know, really goes back to when I was in undergraduate school, I mean, I remember seeing a show, the first show ever of Tom Otterness's work at the Museum of Modern Art, the Modern. And he was an absolute emerging artist at that point, because they had this little room at the Museum of Modern Art where they had these tiny little shows of, sort of like, young up and comer emerging artists, and they had this show of Otterness's work. And, I mean, I remember that having a profound impact on me.

I certainly remember always having a strong fascination with Duchamp's work. And I think that, at the same time, I had, you know, for as long as I can remember, this love of, you know, going to flea markets and looking at old tools. And, as I said, my father was a dentist, and I remember loving—you know, in those days dentist offices all had those autoclaves where they'd sterilize the tools in, and I remember actually, like, loving, when my father was out of the room, going over to the opened autoclave where the stuff had just been sterilized, and

looking at these beautiful old tools sitting in there.

So there was, you know, a kind of fascination with those tools.

MS. RIEDEL: And we could mention that we're sitting here in your dining room surrounded by tools.

MS. GRALNICK: Oh yeah, an interesting offside—I'd say about—gosh, it could be 20 years ago now, but I don't think it's quite that long, the *New York Times* published this huge article. Like, for the *Times*, it was like several full pages of the *New York Times* and it was called, "The Private Lives of Dentists."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. GRALNICK: And the article was being published on the occasion of them discovering that the largest suicide rate in any profession was amongst dentists. But one of the things—and I still have a copy of the article stashed away somewhere because, I mean, it was, sort of, that's really significant in my life, to read it, because it sort of talked about, in the article, the connection between dentists and goldsmiths. And how it was so much a similar personality type that went into one field or the other, except that goldsmiths were ultimately—when the work was done, for the most part, you were handing it to a client that was happy with it, and it was to celebrate a happy occasion, and there was joy involved.

Where dentists would put the same kind of meticulously—and energy into what they would make, but most of the time people were concerned about, how painful is it going to be to have it done; you know, how much is it going to cost; why did this terrible thing happen to me that I have to have this crown built? And so the, sort of, satisfaction at the end was greatly diminished by the fact that you were putting, you know, all of this intense craft into something, and hardly—nobody ever even looked at it. Like, hardly any patients would even say, give me a mirror and let me look at this crown you built for me, and tell you how beautiful it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: So I thought that was really interesting because so much of my childhood was, you know, being raised by a dentist who, I think, was probably a very, very good dentist. I know that I have memories, as a child, of my father having patients that were flying in from Florida to continue going to him after they had moved to, like, other parts of the country. But—

MS. RIEDEL: That's a good dentist.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. But he was also depressed, you know, most of those years, and kind of complaining about that he—and as I got older and sort of talked—went into art and started doing what I do, he would often, sort of, say, I wish I had chosen to do what you did.

But I think that there was, you know, something nevertheless that stirred me, you know, in those early years—of being around somebody that was a dentist, and seeing those tools, and kind of watching what he did. And then watching even the way he would do other things. If he was going to try to fix something around the house, he always did everything with this, kind of, precision—meticulousness and preciseness that, you know, I certainly think affected me.

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

MS. GRALNICK: We were—I know we were in the early influences questions—the early influences question. But, you know—and then, of course, I was always a big reader. And reading has always been—as I get older it takes on this, it's taken a different place in my life, as the way that it used to, because it used to be that I, basically, was always reading. You know, every day there was always a book I was reading, and I was reading a certain amount of it, you know, every night before I went to bed, or whatever. I don't read like that anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: But you did for years.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. But I read in a different way now. Now I much prefer to say, you know, I'm going to do nothing but read for the next three days and I read books cover to cover in one sitting. You know, I lay—I sit in a chair or I lay on the couch in the living room and I read, and I just get up for nothing but meals, you know. And I have found, as I get older, that it's a much more rewarding experience for me than to—for the reading to be broken up, with real life intervening in between.

Now I like to think of a book as an object that should be experienced in one sitting, if you can. Or if it takes three days to get through it, then I do it that way. So, you know, there might actually—I mean, I still, of course, read the *New Yorker*, and the, you know, magazines and stuff, but when it comes to reading books, I read them in one sitting now. And so I just take a Sunday and I read a book cover to cover. But then the rest of the week, I might not be reading anything at all, other than, you know, magazines and—art magazines, and reviews, and

that sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Any particular books that you can think of, especially during these early years?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, the very early years, you know, I was definitely, you know—as I mentioned, read everything that Joseph Campbell wrote, you know, that was back when I was in my 20s. And then also Hank Raleigh, who was a professor at New Paltz, and he was really one of—he was an extremely important person in my life. I couldn't have written my M.F.A. thesis without him. And later, when I had my—did my catalogue of my black work for my show in Holland, I asked him to write the introduction for the—Sarah Bodine and Michael Dunas wrote the main catalog essay, but I had Hank Raleigh write the introduction because he was such an influential person in my life.

And he really was teaching classes at New Paltz in criticism in a way that, at the time, nobody else, you know, was really. I mean, now most schools have these types of classes in art departments, but it was a relatively new thing at that time. And he was just the most brilliant man. And he gave me several books that kind of changed my life, I'd say. He gave me Herbert Read's *Art and Alienation*; and probably even more important than that, he turned me on to Ortega y Gasset, who was very, very influential in my life. He gave me—it's not called, The Death of the Avant Garde. What the heck is it called. It's something of the avant garde. And then after that, I read *Revolt of the Masses*, and, you know, this was all, kind of, Marxist aesthetics.

And I also had a philosophy professor from undergraduate school, that I stayed in contact with at the time, who got me reading Noam Chomsky, and linguistic theory, and also what, for me, still remains one of the most brilliant books ever written, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, by Henri Lefebvre, also, you know, a French Marxist philosopher. And Henri Lefebvre's coming back right now, in terms of the work I'm doing right now in my mind. Well, not so much my work but my thinking about labor in art, and all of this is—I keep going back, I've actually reopened that book now, you know, almost 30 years after I read it the first time, and I'm like reading it again.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about that, labor and art, because that's been significant for many years in your work.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. So that stuff was all—and then I also, you know, I loved [Arthur] Schopenhauer. I still think Schopenhauer, even to the 20th-century and 21st-century mind, has something to offer—has a, you know, the sort of point of view about the work of art acting as a kind of transparency that, I think, still find very interesting. And under-investigated by the contemporary mind, the idea that, you know, the work of art exists as a kind of window through which you, kind of, enter into a world inaccessible any other way.

So I was reading all that. I also always read fiction, you know, so, and I guess my all-time favorite fiction writer will always be Thomas Bernhard, the Austrian writer. I basically—everything that he has written that's been translated into English, I've read. He's been dead for quite a number of years now, but everything—every once in a while a new book of his gets translated and so I'll read that, but one hasn't come out in a couple years now. But he, Thomas Bernhard, who, sort of, writes, kind of, sort of, [Samuel] Beckett-like, they're novels, but they're all one complete sentence—[Riedel laughs]—you know, there's no paragraphs; nothing much happens; they exist almost totally in the mind of one character. And, in a way, they have a connection to the work I'm doing now too because his books are a lot about hearsay, the notion of hearsay, you know, and this kind of idea that what we know—what we know about everything in life is basically hearsay. The notion of the truth is really—it's really glorified hearsay.

MS. RIEDEL: Which leads right into the labeling of The Gold Standard, Part III.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. Exactly. Exactly. So where were we? I lost—

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about early influences. We were also going to talk about—because I think it's an early—

MS. GRALNICK: The labor.

MS. RIEDEL: —influence as well, labor. Yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, art and labor. I mean, this came very early for me. And, you know, I've talked to my mother about this a little bit, and, you know, as your—my, you know, parents are in their 80s now, and as your parents get older I think it's really, really important, and not enough people do it, that you try to have these kinds of conversations with them before they, before they die, where you find out as much as you can about your own childhood and about the things that you don't remember, the blanks that they can fill in for you.

MS. RIEDEL: How interesting that would be.

MS. GRALNICK: And my mother remembers and describes me very much as—you know, from, there's no question, from the time I was very young, I was a smart kid. You know, I was always the smart kid in the class, and it really continued all through high school, you know. And within my family unit I was, you know, I was, sort of, considered the one that was going to become the brain surgeon—[Riedel laughs]—little did they know, but yes, I was that kid. But what was odd is that my mother's memory of me is that even though I was that kid, I wasn't a bookish kid. I was very, very much, sort of, entangled with the physical world, and that—

MS. RIEDEL: Very hands-on.

MS. GRALNICK: Very hands-on. And she claims that, as a kid, you know, I would go out and I would fill garbage bags full of acorns during acorn season, and I would just be out there for hours and hours collecting acorns. And then I would bring the garbage bag full of acorns in and I would want to sleep with them in my bed at night. And she said—she said she has memories of finally, after day and days, of having to tear these bags of acorns away from me because they were starting to rot and smell, and I didn't want to part with them.

MS. RIEDEL: What was it about them? Did she remember?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I don't think the acorns themselves meant anything to me, but I think that that love of—kind of, this, sort of, repetitive task of actually physically doing something that ended in a product—[Riedel laughs]—you know, a collection that you had,—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. GRALNICK: —the work gave you something and it was this bag of acorns meant something to me, and she said that she has—you know, there's a lot of stories she could tell about what seemed, sort of, like eccentric behavior to her, as a child, in terms of this, you know, kind of, getting a, sort of, bee in my bonnet about a task that I wanted to do and then doing it in an incredibly, sort of, disciplined—

MS. RIEDEL: Determined, methodical.

MS. GRALNICK: —determined, kind of way, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: And I always thought that was kind of interesting because I do think that some of my—occasionally some of my colleagues at the university—we have a revolving chairmanship and so, sort of, anyone that's a professor within the art department could potentially have to become chair at some point for a period of several years—and several of my colleagues have said, when we were, kind of, voting on a chair the last time, you know, you'd make a good chair, let's put you up for chair. And I'd say, are you kidding me?; that putting me like at a desk job would be the absolute death of me, you know.

That would be, like, you have no idea, like, how much you would hate me after several months because once you, sort of, take my hands out of the studio, my hands aren't getting to make something anymore, I would be so unpleasant to be around. And I really mean it, I wasn't joking. But, you know, utilizing my mind without there actually being a physical, sort of, labor kind of thing that I'm doing that is part of it, is very difficult for me.

And, as a matter of fact, even—as much as I love to write, even like three days of being in the household and writing, I start to feel like I'm going to go bonkers afterwards because I sort of feel like my mind's going to explode without that labor aspect—the physical labor aspect going along with it, you know. So I think the mind and hands together, that's sort of circuitry for me is extremely important.

And then there's this other aspect that I never really liked—although, you know, people will, sort of, accuse me of taking an incredibly, sort of, elitist attitude in terms of the arts because they all—they might say, well, you really don't care at all, you know, about making stuff for the masses. And I don't. So, on that way, they're right. But nevertheless, in terms of the actual making of the object, my connection to, you know, what we would call the blue collar world; my connection to the automobile mechanic, and the bricklayer, and the—is extremely strong.

And I get a great deal of satisfaction, personal satisfaction, from the simple equation that you can actually put this many hours into something and it equals something that you produced, something tangible that you've produced and you've done well. And there's something so beautifully perfect about that relationship, as an artist, that I find very disturbing—the notion that's become part of contemporary art, of the, sort of, the artist is the orchestrator, but not the maker. The artist as, you know—well, I just have a whole crew of people that work for me and I'm going to tell them all what to do, how to make this piece, and I'm going to sit back at my desk and put my feet up on the desk and watch my artwork get made in front of me.

That would be very difficult for me—nearly impossible because, to me, that sort of direct making is so much a part of the satisfaction. And the idea for the piece, the concept—I could never think of that being enough.

MS. RIEDEL: Does your work evolve as you're working on it?

MS. GRALNICK: A little bit, but not always. Sometimes I know exactly what I'm doing. But I haven't done it until I made it. Just thinking of it isn't doing it. Just coming up with the idea, for me, isn't doing it. It's the combination of coming up with the idea and then having, you know, having the chops to make it. And so, to me —

MS. RIEDEL: Is that—is that—

MS. GRALNICK: —coming up with the idea to having somebody else make it would be like taking away, you know, a whole part of the equation.

MS. RIEDEL: Is it the value of the technique?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, I think it's the value of the technique, but I also think there's, you know, this almost zen-like kind of satisfaction that you get—

MS. RIEDEL: Doing the work.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. I mean, I think it's not unlike, you know, somebody that goes to the gym for two hours every day. And maybe they're at a point, in the way they look, that they don't need to spend two hours in the gym because they already look so buff. But for them now it's become a part of something they prove to themselves every day, that becomes a part of—a fabric of their character. And it keeps their—keeps their character kind of solid and strong.

And you know, sometimes students that I have at school tell me about these, sort of, you know, odd things, you know, they'll say, oh, you know, I can't—I can't come on this field trip on Friday because I'm on the rowing team; or I can't, you know, come to this thing on Sunday because I go to church, and, even though I'm not even that much, that religious, for some reason, just going every day.

And I never say, don't do those things; what do they have to do with making art? I always think, if there's something in your life that's, kind of, giving you a sort of fortitude, in terms of character building, I think it's a really good thing to hold onto. And I don't think it even matters that much what it is, really.

MS. RIEDEL: And do you equate that somehow with labor?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I think labor—yeah. I think, you know, labor and work, and the idea that the artist—you know, I think there's this part of me that, if I was going to be really honest, that—

MS. RIEDEL: Please.

MS. GRALNICK: —wants, as an artist, to be the intellectual and the scholar, and wants to be able to participate in the conversation on that level. But—

MS. RIEDEL: And you do.

MS. GRALNICK: —what?

MS. RIEDEL: And you do.

MS. GRALNICK: But then there's a whole other part of me that, you know, could, at a given moment, have somebody walk into my studio that I love and care for, and say, would you make us wedding rings, and think, god, how nice. I'm going to be able to, kind of, be in my studio making something, and just making and not—there not having to be any great intellectual content in it but I get to just enjoy making, which I love to do. And guess what? I have the skill set that actually allows me to do it well. You know, I actually know how to do this, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: And there must be something about the sheer making that draws you. We were looking earlier at the ceramic work that you made, just for the sheer joy of making, without big concepts.

MS. GRALNICK: I do. I can't think of anything I like—you know, two years ago I went in the summer and took a ceramics class at Haystack. And I'd been to Haystack—

MS. RIEDEL: Who was teaching?

MS. GRALNICK: Mark Ferris, he's at the University of Minnesota. And I had taught at Haystack before but I'd never gone as a student. And I can say that, of my entire life, that was the closest thing to a true, perfect vacation that I've ever had. And what was I doing? Making stuff. And I was making stuff—I had absolutely no pressure on me to be making art, I was just making because this wasn't going to be anything I'd ever show. You know, if I came home with anything, it would just be stuff for my house. And I had somebody else teaching me, so I had a master that I could look up to.

I mean, what more perfect situation could there possibly be in life that you can put your trust in another person who's going to teach you how to do this, and you're going to make. And I had so much fun that, if I could afford to, I would do it every year—go and take a ceramics class in the summer at Haystack. It was absolutely so much fun. I was getting up at like five o'clock in the morning every morning, and I was in the ceramics studio for like hours before breakfast.

And you know, I realized that, for me, that's—it's my work, it's my profession, it's my recreation, it's the thing that I really, really do love to do.

MS. RIEDEL: To make things.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, I mean, I love to bake, I love to build—you know, I'm a really good pie maker, anything that involves, sort of, the building of something just gives me so much pleasure.

MS. RIEDEL: What is it about metal that nothing else does, that keeps you so engaged?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —and then, separately, gold as well?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I would say, the first thing is that it's hard. And, you know—and I said this earlier in the interview, and there's no question that it's true with me, that I'm only really interested in things that are hard to do.

MS. RIEDEL: And at the same time, you said it came easily to you.

MS. GRALNICK: It came easily—well, it came easily to me, that I'd certainly realized I had a kind of, you know, potential for this, that it fit me. But I will always, in my studio, be pushing myself to a further technical challenge so that it's hard for me. I'll always be trying to make something that's harder.

And I think that also is the reason why I change my work, because once it becomes easy for me to make these pieces, and they become formulaic, both intellectually and technically—like, well, I've made this, I've worked this way now, in so many pieces, I can build—when I think of how hard it was for me to build these pieces in the beginning, and to know how easy it is, I don't really want to do them anymore.

And so, you know, metals, you never can really get cocky when you're working in metals because, you know, there's a disaster around every corner. [Riedel laughs.] No, you have to—you really do have to have your antenna up all the time. And it—nevertheless, it still constantly humbles you. You know, something is almost to completion and then you melt a part of it, or you, you know, solder something wrong, or whatever—or you file it too thin and it collapses, or, you know, there are things that happen all the way through the process that, kind of, keep you on your toes. And, you know, I find that constant humbling, in the face of a giant, kind of invigorating.

And it's, you know, it's funny, I talked about taking this ceramics class and how great it was to, sort of, have a teacher, have a master. And as you get older, that gets harder and harder to have. You know, as a kid, you have it in your parents, you know, and your teachers, and then all of a sudden you're the teacher, you know, and people are constantly looking up to you.

But you want to still have that relationship with something that's sort of on a higher plane to you. And metals, kind of, never disappoints me in that way. It's always, sort of, on that higher plane. And it rewards you, of course, number one, with its innate immortality—the fact that once you've built this thing, unbuilding it becomes nearly impossible, you know. It lasts forever, and history has proven us—sort of, proven that to us.

And then there's also this, sort of, something great, that I love that you're, like—you know, you're participating in the kind of most basic, sort of, process that has been around since the beginning of civilization. It's about as primordial as you can get, you know, metalworking, ironworking, goldworking. I mean, these things—not only do they go back thousands of years, but they are virtually unchanged in the way that we do things for thousands of years. And we still are, technically, trying to reach the heights—technical heights, that have reached, you know, during certain periods of history, where we still can't even get back to figuring out how they made, you

know, some of those Faberge Eggs, and some of the stuff that was just technically so astounding.

So I think I love it for all those reasons. But I think I love it the most because I know it. And that's—you know, that's kind of an important thing for me, in that I assume, really, that I just as well, you know, could have become a surgeon, or could have become violinist, or could have become a bricklayer, and that I would feel the same way about all those practices—that I think that you love what you're good at.

You love something that you've learned well and you're good at. And as you get better and better at it over the years, you have fluency in it. And fluency is freedom, in the world—the fact that you have something that actually you can control and can allow you to express whatever you need to express, and put out into the world. And so, had I become as good in metal as in another material, I'd probably feel the same way about that material.

So I'm not so sure that my love is really metal, as much as it is that I love my practice, and that I have a practice; and that it affords me that kind of control; and that I was able, within my life—and everybody doesn't have this—to have invested a concentrated amount of years into one thing that I could get really good at it. And I think if you find anything in your life that you can do that with, you're very blessed.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think about that as a teacher? I was talking with Heikki Seppa a while ago, and he was talking about one of the things he felt was most important to give his students was a sense of technical mastery, because with that fluency came a freedom to make whatever they could imagine.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah it is important to me. And this is sort of a big issue in metals education right now, because what I don't want is my students—and I don't want this of myself either, what I don't want is my students to consider technical mastery enough.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MS. GRALNICK: I don't want them to just be making pieces that strut their technical stuff and have nothing else important about them.

MS. RIEDEL: I would think of it more as a starting point.

MS. GRALNICK: Right, but on the other hand, you know, your technical mastery, you know, as Heikki Seppa says, once you have it, and it's large, you have this arsenal which you can avail yourself of, when you need it, without being afraid to say, oh, I'm not even going to try to make that piece because I can't make it; I'll have to tone the design down a little bit.

And so I'm constantly pushing my students, if they have an idea and it's seeming like it's beyond what they can make technically, that's as good a reason as anything to make it, because imagine what you'll have under you're belt when you've made it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And what a great reason to learn a technique, because you need it.

MS. GRALNICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: Because you need it. And so, you know, it's—mastery, for me, is extremely important—well, it's not all that different than learning a language that, you know, you can become more and more precise in terms of what you want to say, the more tools you have to say it. And once you see that process working—and it's a very difficult thing to explain to beginners because when beginners are taking their first metals class it's so frustrating. And you wouldn't even believe the horrible things I read that students will say in their student evaluations in the first metals class. You know, I mean, obviously they're not all bad but some of them will just, you know—"This is the most frustrating class I ever took;" and "I've never tried anything so hard;" and, you know, "No class I've taken has ever demanded so many hours of work," you know.

But the thing about it is is that you have to, kind of, get—once you get the rewards, it starts to feel worthwhile. Then all of a sudden—you go back and, you know, you spend, you know, four weeks working on one little piece and you see that it's worthwhile, because you've done it before and you know what you'll get at the end—and all of a sudden it's worth that price. But in the beginning it just seems very, very frustrating.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there specific things that you try and teach your undergrads, versus your graduate students?

MS. GRALNICK: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you talk a little bit about what you teach?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, and once they're a graduate student, we're really not dealing with technique that much.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MS. GRALNICK: In the first couple of semesters of metals—the beginning class, the first couple of semesters, are really technically oriented. We're really trying to teach students the basic building-blocks, in a fairly traditional way, of metalsmithing, so that they can—and we try to do it in a—I'm quite different than a lot of—we might say, my American counterparts, in that I think that I teach more based on a European model.

And I'll tell you the difference, and that is that a lot of American students—or a lot of American programs will, sort of, teach beginning metals, and the first class or so, as a, sort of, well, you know, we want you, from the very beginning, to express yourself and make art, and, you know, here's the techniques we're going to learn, but this is still about you expressing yourself in making art.

And I teach in a much more sort of methodological way, which is that I want you to get these technical skills under your belts as fast as possible so that you can use them. And so I want to try to expedite this process. And so these first projects are not about making art at all, they're about you learning how to make a perfect cube, perfect sphere, perfect cone in metal. And that's exactly what you're going to do, you're going to make—you're going to do these technical exercises.

And so there's a lot of just technical exercises where there's no art. But what there is is—there is an introduction to a practice. And I see it that way, as this is—this is you acquiring the tools of your practice. And once you've acquired those tools, you're free to never use them again, or you're free to reinvent them, or you're free to pick and choose through them. But within the context of this, sort of, everybody-make-what-they-want kind of mentality, I can't tell if you've really learned these. But if we keep a, sort of, exercise model to the way we learn them, I can tell right away whether you've gotten them or not gotten them, and we can move on.

MS. RIEDEL: And do you make that clear to the students from the start, that these are the tools that you need and so we're just going to knock them out.

MS. GRALNICK: And I try to, sort of, approach—again, you know, I try to approach the teaching of even these exercises as—I don't want to necessarily say a kind of zen-like process, but there is a, there is a kind level to that, which is that—you know, there is a virtue to, you know, learning a method of doing something, and then achieving that goal that you've gone after—and that you have to, sort of, see it as a kind of super-charged experience, you know, and, you know, sort of like a mental test—mental and physical test.

So I don't want to say that I'm like a drill sergeant, but in a way I am kind of like a drill sergeant— [Riedel laughs]—you know, like the guy in the military that's saying, you know, do a hundred—a hundred sit-ups. Yeah, a hundred sit-ups isn't necessarily going to make you a better soldier, but what a hundred sit-ups is going to do is—could possibly be teaching you the discipline that you're going to need to be a good soldier.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Well, there is something to be said for moving through a sheer number of pieces or sheer quantity of material.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. Right. So, you know, I try to—I try to jam in, in like the first semester or two of metals, as much technical stuff as possible, in that, later we can, kind of, get past the technical stuff in the more advanced classes. And that means the advanced undergraduate and the graduate level classes, in that then we can really be talking about issues.

But I don't—even in those classes, I don't sort of believe in this, sort of, I-just-want-you-to-express-yourself mentality. I don't believe in that actual—actually method of teaching or approaching the making of art, quite frankly. I mean, I'm not all that interested in seeing a bunch of students, you know, making pieces that they say are about their life, or about their childhood, or their family, or—

MS. RIEDEL: Do you frame this teaching as the means to an end? I mean, are they aware of the fact that you're teaching them technique in order that they can better—

MS. GRALNICK: Oh, well I'm teaching them way more than technique. I'm teaching them—what I'm trying to teach them in the advanced classes is that—

MS. RIEDEL: I was thinking about the beginning classes.

MS. GRALNICK: Oh.

MS. RIEDEL: Even for the beginners then, is there a sense that this is a means to an end?

MS. GRALNICK: It's a means to an end, but also it's its own end too. So we try to kind of see it both ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, interesting. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. GRALNICK: And then when we get into the more advanced classes, I try to really get them out of the thinking about expressing themselves, and try to get them into the mentality that—and this is something, in my opinion, that you have to do if you're teaching art because a case can be made, of course, that art cannot be taught. And if you have decided to be a university professor and teach art, you ought to, in my opinion, subscribe to the notion that there are principles by which you can teach art.

And one of the things that I think can be taught is that making art is—that you are kind of a researcher. And that, unlike a lot of other fields of study, the whole world of knowledge is your oyster, you know—everything. Nothing's off limits. Nothing's out of your field or out of your range, it's all in your field; and that, within your own practice as a metalsmith, it's possible to sort of change the course of your own practice. This thing that has been around for, you know, thousands of years, it's possible that you can change its course by the work that you do.

But the only way you can do it is by taking a sort of critical stance towards it. And so one of the things that I sort of forced my students to do is—when we get into the more advanced classes, is to start answering to certain kinds of problems that I put before them. But they're never—I don't give the kind of assignments that are, you know, do a piece about your childhood, or do a piece about flowers, or do a piece about, you know, a botanical piece.

I don't give those kinds of assignments. I don't believe in them and I don't give them. But I might give a piece that says, you know, make an object that's about function without being truly functional. You know, that kind of thing. A sort of creation of a problem that involves a certain amount of thought before you even start making the object, about, what the heck does she mean by that?, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And addressing function at the same time.

MS. GRALNICK: Right, and what part it may or may not play in the future of our field.

Or let's see, one semester we took a whole semester with my grad students on body parts. And everybody in the class had to choose a different body part. And so somebody chose an elbow; somebody chose a mouth; somebody chose an armpit, whatever. And there was a—it was a whole series of parts to the project, all involving that one body part.

The first part involved taking Polaroid pictures of the body part on themselves or on different people and then they had to alter that body part and take Polaroid pictures of it. So, whatever—pull up the mouth, put safety pins in your armpit, whatever you wanted to do, alter it—pull it, tape it, color it, whatever. Take pictures.

And then they had to build me a scientific model of that body part. Those were my—that was my favorite part of the project, the scientific models were absolutely beautiful. So if it was a knee, it had to be a model of how the, you know, the knee moves and works—or the mouth, or whatever. And this all led to, finally, in the semester—the end of the semester, what would be called the jewelry or body adornment project that involved, you know, sort of designing a new way to adorn that part of the body.

And, again, you know, back to those mechanical pieces we were talking about of my—in a very—we're not thinking about—what we're thinking about is a kind of distilled, almost industrial design or approach to that body part. At least for this project, that doesn't mean—and several of my students then ended up later doing bodies of work that actually were a direct—coming out of this project.

And so I'm always thinking in terms of the projects as being their own kind of research models, that a student who is interested could then build on it later. But simply being able to show them how a body of work can start—how you can start and you can build an idea, in a deep kind of way. And so I'm always trying to come up with projects like that.

Last year my undergraduates had a project where I brought—you see all the stuff that I collect, tools, and instruments, and—so I brought in, let's say there were 15 people in my class, I brought in about 30 different things from my own collection of objects made out of metal. So they were antique telescopes, spyglasses, tools. I have this—some of the stuff's up at school, but I have this, like, antique gyroscopic ship's lantern, and this antique tin folding cup that I love, and all this, kind of, weird stuff.

I put it all out on a table and I said that everybody had to choose one thing on the table—one of these objects that I was bringing in. And the assignment was as simple and straightforward as you can—you have to take exact measurements of this object, like precise measurements, and then you had to reproduce the object in silver at a different scale. And the scale had to be—it couldn't be like half the size, it had to be like a weird—like, 37 percent of the size. And other than that, it had to be an exact reproduction. So the only thing you were

changing was the scale and the material. And so it was sort of an assignment on the simplicity of the methodology that can actually make a profound difference between the thing that you were looking at and the thing you produced. And those simple kinds of factors can make a huge difference.

At the same time, these undergraduates were honing their technical skill in an amazing way because—you know, somebody did, like a corkscrew. And getting—making a corkscrew that's this big, that big, and have it still work, is a challenge. And I mean, these were, like, I think probably my favorite pieces ever produced by undergraduates in all my years of teaching. They were absolutely stunning.

And we photographed them all with the original object, and then their piece next to them. And the relationship between objects was astounding. And I kept thinking back to Hank Raleigh, this professor in graduate school. This was a very, kind of, hip—well, this was very much in the air in those days, in terms of talking about contemporary art, was the notion of visual differences. What actually makes this object different from every other object in the world?

And so this became very much a, sort of, dialogue that I could have with my students about visual differences—if you just very overtly control what you're going to change and what you're going to keep the same. So it allowed us to talk about appropriation and, you know, it allowed us to talk about a lot of things. And, again, you know, then some students took this off. You know, got so excited about what they did that it sort of led into a direction where they made several more pieces off of what they took from that assignment.

So I'm kind of controlling in that the way that I teach is not just sort of teach my students the technique and then let them go and make art. I take the teaching of the art part as seriously as the teaching of the technique that I want to—I want them to go out into the world with the skill set that means that they will never, ever say I have no ideas for a body of work because ideas will be something that they can come up with whenever they want, by just setting themselves a problem.

[END MD 01 TR 04.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Lisa Gralnick, interviewing the artist at her home in Madison, Wisconsin, on Monday, October 29, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Disc number two.

When we ended with disc number one we were talking about undergraduate teaching—ideas as well as technique.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. The kind of assignments that you give. And, you know, I was just going to add stuff about graduate teaching, which is sort of a whole other thing because I think with, you know, graduate students there's sort of an assumption that they already have the technical skills under their belt. I mean, occasionally they come in and they're missing some of that and then they can sit in on some of the undergraduate classes to get up to snuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Like you did.

MS. GRALNICK: Right, like I did. But mostly, you know, our graduate program is three years long and, you know, the goal really is, in graduate school, that you send these students out with a body of work. I take very seriously the M.F.A.; it's the terminal degree in art, and, you know, the equivalent of a Ph.D. And then I also take very seriously that we even offer such a degree, that this is an academic degree in art—and what does that mean?; and is there a field of knowledge backing up such a degree, an academic degree in art? And I think that there is.

So it's really important to me that my students not only come out producing a, you know, a strong body of work that has a strong foundation, but that they also be fully versed in what's going on in their field—what the current issues are in contemporary art, that they're well-read and articulate, and that they potentially will be leaders in their field. And so I'm very demanding in terms of my graduate students. I mean, I certainly hope, in the end, that they're doing a body of work that feels personal and that they feel strongly about.

But, again, I really demand that that work, sort of, come out of a research model, and that they—that there really is something that they've investigated in depth. And I'm always sort of pushing them to go deeper and deeper and deeper, you know. And so far, it's been really great because our graduate students have just had a really great success rate—with our graduate students in metal, doing great work, getting teaching jobs afterwards, you know, winning awards in the field, and that sort of thing.

So I'm very proud of them. Graduate students are like the frosting on the cake of teaching, they really are. I mean, quite honestly if I could have, you know, described my perfect teaching job, it would be only teaching graduate students. Undergraduate students can be frustrating because, you know, out of—however many that come through your classes in a given semester, you're just going to have to accept that there's only really going

to be 10 percent of them that are really serious about what they're doing.

When you get into graduate students, since you've, sort of, hand picked them for your program, you know, they're, generally speaking, 100 percent very serious about what they do. They've already made a commitment to your field, and to studying with you, and all of that, and so it's a whole different ball game.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You've talked—when we talked a couple weeks ago, you talked about teaching now, from a very anti-design stance.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. That's very true. That's something that's become—it's funny, I just had a conversation with someone else about this. You know, all of us that were trained at a certain period of time—even now, but more so even 20 years ago, you know, all the original, all the original art departments in America—which, you know, it's important to, kind of, remember that studying art, as an academic discipline, is not that old in this country. The early art departments were founded—you know, sometimes there were painting classes that were, sort of, almost like finishing school classes—well, painting's one of those things that, you know, a girl who's going to get a college degree should have taken a water color painting class, or that kind of thing—and the early art departments were basically that, you know.

And, you know, the first M.F.A. programs were only founded in the late '40s and early '50s, and they were all kind of founded on the Bauhaus model. So consequently it still survived all these years that the foundations training in art was Bauhaus-based. You know, you were taking 2-D design and 3-D—drawing, 2-D design, and -3-D design, which is the Bauhaus model; and that within that model you would learn, you know, the principles of design, you know, symmetry; positive and negative space; you know; color theory, all of this.

And it's limiting. It's suggests that there are, kind of, absolutes into what make a work of art work, and not work. And so I feel like, in a lot of ways, I've spent a big portion of my adult life as an artist, kind of, trying to unlearn those things I learned in foundation programs, partly because I think—number one, I no longer think that, sort of, trying to achieve a sense of unification with any given piece is necessarily a good thing or a strength. I'm more interested in work now that is sort of agitating.

MS. RIEDEL: Clearly. [Laughs.]

MS. GRALNICK: And the Bauhaus, sort of, didn't account for that. And the other thing is that contemporary art has its, sort of, own agenda. And I'm constantly reminded of Andy Warhol's gemstone paintings. And I don't know if you're familiar with them because they were not very—they're not very widely known, and the only reason I know something about them is that we actually have an art historian at our school that's actually published on them, and gave a lecture on them. I had seen them in New York, though.

But they were—they were these, sort of, paintings of, like, blown-up gemstones that he did. But then he also would add, like, sort of, diamond dust, kind of, on the surface. So that, if you saw the paintings at a certain light, it would also, sort of, glow like—

MS. RIEDEL: A gem.

MS. GRALNICK: —like a gem. And I think this is a very interesting—they harken very interesting distinction between things that have happened in contemporary art that were very different from art of the past, which was primarily, sort of, about mimesis, and that the art object, sort of, existed as, you know, in a way, as an image of something, and the idea of the art object actually being that something—no longer being in an image of something.

And this isn't—I'm not talking about the difference between figuration and abstraction, I'm talking about something else. I'm talking about, like, phenomenological difference. And where—how did I even start this thought? Where were we—where were we starting when I started this thought, because I know it's leading somewhere?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we were talking about anti-design, and teaching.

MS. GRALNICK: Oh, yeah. So I think that it's impossible to really talk about design anymore since what we're really taking about is not—we're no longer talking about a way a work of art is, sort of, intended to fool the eye, we're now presenting an authentic experience within a work of art. And that's a very different thing, because authentic experience has no limits.

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

MS. GRALNICK: And so I'm actually more interested now in work that breaks the rules than that follows the rules; and work that has a kind of obsessiveness to it, like, you sort of look at it and you, kind of, go, I can't

believe anybody's even crazy enough to do this. And I don't mean just technically, but I think where it, sort of, goes beyond and, sort of, snubs its nose at any rules of the game, is what's more interesting to me.

So I'm always, kind of, trying to push my students, sort of, over that edge. They come with an idea, and then I want to—I want them to go even—push it over even—

MS. RIEDEL: Further. Right.

MS. GRALNICK: —further.

MS. RIEDEL: And so that—stretching it beyond where they would—

MS. GRALNICK: Right. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —normally think of stopping.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. So the idea of there being this, kind of, universal language of art—I don't buy it anymore. I don't buy it at all. I think it's—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, you've discussed the idea of an artist creating a language through their body of work.

MS. GRALNICK: That's right, an idiosyncratic language, and that's more interesting to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I would think so.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: And we'll talk about The Standard of Gold [series], a little later. But you've also talked about teaching, and telling your students to forget everything that you've just been suggesting for the past period of time—

MS. GRALNICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —because you've had a new thought, or an epiphany. Would you describe that?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I'm constantly reevaluating. I mean, teaching art is a difficult thing because you're—you are evolving as an artist at the same time you're teaching art. And so presenting any absolutes is nearly impossible unless you want to just adopt a kind of position and say, well, I'm just going to stick with this throughout my teaching career, whether or not—but of course there are artists that do that within their body of work for their entire career too—

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. GRALNICK: —and just, sort of, keep doing the same thing. I don't happen to be one of those. And since I don't happen to be one of those, as a practitioner, I really can't be that way as a teacher. But I, sort of, believe in the fact that, you know, that making art is, kind of, constructing an argument, a kind of persuasiveness. That you're going to constantly be reevaluating what the best way to make that argument is, and what exactly it is you want to persuade your viewer to, kind of, buy into.

And so it seems to me that as I get further along there are—I mean, I find that there's work that I was not interested in at all in my 20s, at certain periods of time. I mean, I was much more interested years ago in Minimalism. I've no interest in Minimalism anymore. I'd be far more inclined to be interested in Baroque work now than I would be Minimalism.

So what I'm interested in is constantly changing. And it's constantly changing because if I, sort of, adopt a stance for—a position or a stance for long enough, and analyze it for long enough, then immediately it—or ultimately, at some point, I'm aware of its limitations, and then I want to move on and look into something else, and then a new door opens up.

And so my students are, sort of, used to the fact that they are not—never going to get out of me, sort of, the words, this is good or this is bad; this is good art, this is bad art what you're making. What they are going to get is the fact that it's possible to make an argument for almost anything; and that I'm going to, sort of, constantly be playing the devil's advocate in terms of looking at their work; I'm going to—I'm going to be more often than not, be making an argument against what they're doing instead of for it, so that they, sort of, learn how to, kind of, defend what they're doing.

And I'm going to constantly be reevaluating what I say to them. So I may say to them, at one point, that I think

that what they're doing is about this; or I think that what they're doing is—perhaps I might say, wasted energy; maybe I think you're barking up the wrong tree if this is what you're interested in doing. But then I could easily come in next week and say, you know what, I've been thinking about it all weekend and I completely change my mind, I have a whole other take on it; or, I can make an argument for what you're doing by thinking about it this way.

And so it's sometimes very frustrating for them that I don't come in as the voice of absolutes—I know what good work is, and I know what bad work is. But, you know, we already talked earlier—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: —about the fact that I don't really—you know, even in terms of this great institution of the art world, and what makes it into the Whitney Biennial, and what makes it into the great museums, and all of that as being the great work, and everything else not the great work—I don't buy it at all. You know. As far as I'm concerned, we simply need to, sort of, understand why it is that certain work is getting the attention that it is and other work isn't—at a given time in history, being the climate of what our culture is about, and what the institution of the art world is about.

And I think it's a really healthy attitude to take. Not a sour grapes attitude—not a, well, they don't want my work for this show so their show must suck—not to take that attitude. But to simply take, sort of, the attitude that the merit of your work is, sort of, not going to be judged. The true merit of your work is not going to be about what the art world thinks. You're going to have some successes out there and you're going to have some failures, and enjoy the successes for what they are. But there has to be something deeper that, sort of, allows you to own your work, that nobody can take away from you. And if you have that, then the rest of it is, sort of, unimportant.

And I'm very fond of saying to my students, you want to be Matthew Barney, you can be Matthew Barney. You know, I sort of, believe anyway, in general, that you, sort of, get exactly what you want in life—no more and no less. It's all—it's all available to you if you ask for it and you want it bad enough. So I think it's really possible, instead of spending your career in the studio making the best work you can—and I think people do this all the time, spending your career out there going to shows and going to exhibitions and looking at what is getting attention in the art world, analyzing those trends and then making a body of work that perfectly predicts those trends. And I can guarantee you, you will get into the Whitney Biennial and you will get your Matthew Barney status, or something similar.

And that doesn't mean I'm accusing Matthew Barney of doing that. It's irrelevant whether he did or he didn't. The point is that I think if you want to devote your energy to thinking about making art like somebody thinks about putting on a new—you know, a new—

MS. RIEDEL: Line of fashion.

MS. GRALNICK: —dish detergent, yeah—

MS. RIEDEL: The new spring line.

MS. GRALNICK: Right—what's this thing that's going to get the consumer's attention, you can do that. But, ultimately, what will you have achieved? Money. That's basically it. That's what you'll have achieved is money and, you know, perhaps some list—things, some fun as a result of whatever bit of fame comes out of it. But you probably will have spent a lifetime of the drudgery of making work that you don't really want to be making so that you can have those rewards, just like the person that's making the dish detergent is, you know.

So those choices are there for you. And I, you know, I never say don't make—you know, don't do this, and do this, but I'm so irritated of people saying, well, I didn't get into this show; well, how come I didn't get into this show; how come so-and-so got into the show and I didn't get into the show; how come so-and-so's work was in the museum and mine's not in the museum?

Well, I think your answer is almost always there. If you look at so-and-so's work and you look at your own. And it's not necessarily that their work was better. Their work might be better than yours but it's more likely that, you know, their work has something that's more pressing in terms of the desires of the curators of that show, at that moment, than what yours has. And that's not a good or bad thing. You could have put the two same pieces of work out 10 years earlier, or 10 years later, and a different—

MS. RIEDEL: Completely different results.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. So, you know, I try to, sort of, keep it, sort of, honest in terms of these issues of relativity that are inherent in making art. But the one thing that I don't tolerate is laziness—lazy minds, lazy hands, you

know, this, sort of, idea of whipping something out and then saying, I don't know why it didn't get in the show. Well, hello—that's another issue. You know, either you have a really serious commitment there to what you're doing, or you don't.

And I'm not—I try to be fairly democratic in that I'm giving a lot of attention to all my students, but—and this will be the end of my, sort of, soap box, but I pretty much don't have any time or interest in somebody who, you know, whose commitment is questionable.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And it seems that that's one of the major things you try and get across as a teaching philosophy, something that your students will take away with them is that it's not a question of whether something is liked or disliked, but the seriousness of your commitment, the seriousness of your purpose, the integrity of the thought process, the integrity and the discipline of the practice.

MS. GRALNICK: And if the commitment is serious, you can probably talk me into being interested in just about anything that you're doing.

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

[END MD 02 TR 01.]

MS. RIEDEL: What do you see as the place of universities in American craft—history, movement, current scene?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, one of the things—and I'll start out with a, sort of, negative statement, which is one of the things that I think has got to change and is changing, is that crafts departments, in general, have to, sort of, stop taking this, sort of, insular role within art departments.

MS. RIEDEL: And we should clarify, straight off the bat, that you're in an art department; it's not a craft department.

MS. GRALNICK: It's not a craft department, and we don't have a craft department at our school. We have a 3-D department, and within the 3-D department there are areas of specialization—there's sculpture, metals, furniture, glass, and ceramics.

We do not have a textile department within the art department, the textile department at our school is in the Department of Human Ecology, which is a whole, kind of, other story that goes back to—it's a good department, though, but it goes back to the days when, sort of, textiles were considered women's work I guess. We're not the only school in the country that has it that way. Syracuse University had it that way for years too. But that's another story.

But I do think that—even when I came to the University of Wisconsin, and this wasn't unique to the University of Wisconsin, this was at schools all over the country—you know, metals students or ceramics students were like in their own little insular world, in their studios; sort of, hanging out just with each other; not showing up for, like, the visiting artist lectures that were going to be painters or sculptors or printmakers; not contributing to the larger dialogue of contemporary art; only interested in the big names in their own field, whether it was in ceramics or metals. And I feel really strongly that that has to change.

It certainly has changed at my school. I mean, I, sort of, came in right away and I would just not tolerate my graduate students not showing up for everything within the art department and participating in the larger dialogue about contemporary art. And I think this is really, really important because that, sort of, insular status has really, in kind of a way, been at least partially responsible for programs closing, you know. If programs stay insular like that, departments start to think they could do just fine without them.

MS. RIEDEL: They're not part of a bigger picture.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, they're not part of a bigger picture of the future of art. So, for starters, I think that's really important that contributing, both in terms of the work that's produced and in terms of the dialogue around the work being produced from crafts departments is really important.

I don't particularly subscribe to the notion of, well, crafts departments should just stop making functional work and just start making sculpture using craft materials. I'm not really interested in that argument at all. I certainly don't want my students to just be sitting around making, sort of, craft fair kind of functional jewelry or functional hollowware. They don't need to go to a university to do that. They can go to their local art center and get skilled enough that they can do that if they want.

So I'm not interested in that, but I am interested in us holding on, within our given practices, to the things that define our practice and allow us to be, sort of, particularly acute at being critical of our practices. And this is really, really important to me, so that, you know, my students, as metalsmiths, have a very, very specific

ownership of a history that not only relates to the field of metalsmithing, but relates to the domesticity; that relates to the history of gender issues; that relates to the history of imperialism. And there's all kinds of things that are very distinctly related to metalsmithing.

And it's my, sort of, hope that they will, sort of, attempt to bring the field into the 21st century through a medium that's, sort of, uniquely charged to address some of those issues.

MS. RIEDEL: With an awareness of its history, in order to make an intelligent comment on its current state.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. So just saying I'm going to adopt the language of sculpture but work in metals, to me, is, sort of, irrelevant—then go into the sculpture department. But within what we do, the parameters of uncharted territory are so large that, you know, we really try to push our students to, sort of, keep within certain parameters that define objects as crafts. And one of those parameters is—I feel pretty strongly about this, the sort of relationship between the object and the human body, the, sort of, sensualism that's implicit in craft objects that these were—whether or not they're functional objects anymore, the objects that are made in the future; and for the most part there's not that much need for them to be, except maybe in jewelry; we certainly don't necessarily need any more coffee cups or, you know, that kind of thing; or, if you want some, to have some hand-thrown coffee cups you can go to a craft fair and get them.

But I am interested in the fact that sculpture has very much moved in a direction where, as a field that has defined itself by a, kind of, distance between the object and the viewer; and that crafts, sort of, still holds onto this, kind of, intimacy between the object and the viewer—that the original objects that were produced in craft media were intended to be handled, for a cup to be picked up, for a pitcher to be poured from, for a piece of jewelry to be worn—and that that intimacy between—almost like accessibility that's, sort of, implicit in function, is something very interesting that can still be used by craft artists, and it can be used quite effectively and subversively without being functional at all.

So, you know, I kind of encourage my students—

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about earlier—that bait and switch standard.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, that bait and switch.

MS. RIEDEL: Draw them in with something that appears to be one way and then proves to be something completely different.

MS. GRALNICK: Exactly. But there's a niche that can be carved out by the fact that there's a familiarity with our medium in one way, and you can actually, sort of, seduce your viewer in, and then, sort of, subversively offer commentary. And I think Myra's work [Myra Mimlitsch Gray] is a perfect example of somebody really effectively doing that. And, of course, there's lots of other people out there too, but, you know, she's a perfect example of somebody who is still executing her work with this meticulous craft in the format of trays and vessels and cups. And, you know, once she's got the hook in there, then all of a sudden you realize that there's more than meets the eye here, and there's very—some very pointed commentary in the works.

And so I would like our field to, sort of, hold onto that. Not only hold onto it, but push it further. Carve out a niche that's relevant to contemporary art, that we offer in a way that nobody else can. So I'm very reluctant, at this point, to allow a student to, number one, just decide that they want to just, sort of, focus on a technique for the sake of technique, or that they want to just focus on, you know, making traditional hollowware and no further than that. These are kinds of things that are not appropriate for me for an academic situation. There needs to be some level of edginess to the work, and a level of engagement with the mind. That's important to me.

So I'm not looking, nor will I ever be, for things like craft fairs to end, or for there to be a level of craft practice that is about keeping alive traditional techniques, or that's about providing the public with a slightly better functional object than you can buy at Target—or more interesting, or more idiosyncratic. I'm not against any of those parts of the craft tradition. But I consider, in an academic setting, that our primary mission is the teaching of fine arts, and that craft is an element, you know, a, sort of, periphery—not even periphery, but just, sort of, one of the, kind of, rivers flowing into that larger ocean, you know, that will contribute to that conversation.

MS. RIEDEL: What can metal contribute to that conversation that nothing else can? What is it poised to bring?

MS. GRALNICK: Metal is only a material like any other material. So, in itself—

MS. RIEDEL: But with its history as a craft form.

MS. GRALNICK: Nothing really. But its history has a great deal to offer I think. And there's so many tangents that you can go that I can't possibly offer them all. Certainly there's the history of metal as a primarily

functional medium, in terms of its use industrially, its use in terms of, you know, cups and flatware; and then its history as a presentation medium, you know, in terms of presentation silverware, and all the pomp and circumstance that goes with that; and the making of ceremonial vessels, and awards, and trophies, and, you know, all of this stuff is so interesting to me.

Then there's the history of jewelry, which of course includes metal but is not limited to metal and is, sort of, being explored through body adornment—issues of body adornment and body politics that I think is really interesting. I mean, I think that, you know, there are issues related to solipsism that I think that jewelry can directly identify. The fact that—and, in a way, you know, this was an issue that was, sort of, being dealt with, you know, back in, like, 1909 by Georg Simmel when he, sort of, talked about body adornment being this, sort of, interesting medium in which you could, in a socially acceptable way, you could both, sort of, belong to the club and distinguish yourself within the club.

And it's really, really true. It's a medium that already is ingrained enough into the social structure of our society that nobody thinks it's weird if you go out in public wearing a piece of jewelry. Nobody would question that. So if the jewelry is—it is a piece of jewelry, yet it's, you know, made out of paper, or garbage bags, or whatever it's made out of—an unusual material, or it's taking an unusual form, again, it makes it very easy to, sort of, take a subversive attitude in a socially acceptable way. And so it offers a lot in terms of being able to play in and outside the rules in a very easy way.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. And, of course, there's, you know, this other issue, even more so related to solipsism, of us having these, sort of, rules within our society that, sort of, allow us to, kind of, move in and out of social situations without being noticed too much and, sort of, blend in at the same time. There is this increasingly need for individuals within society to, sort of, know they're alive, you know.

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

MS. GRALNICK: And so jewelry offers a kind of odd, sort of—odd sort of mode for that. And the issues of—you know, there's all these great issues within our society of, you know, the gold and the diamond ring being the, sort of, the symbol of wealth and status, and, you know, how big is your—how big is your husband's dick, look at my diamond ring, you know, that kind of thing. And I just made that one up on the spot [Riedel laughs]—but you know what I mean. It was the quickest way to say it. And so jewelry also, you know, lends itself to so many methods where you could, sort of, get in—especially gold and diamonds and precious materials, where you can, sort of, get in and, sort of, start jabbing away at some of that stuff. And that stuff wasn't—definitely wasn't invented in the 21st century, I mean, that's been—that's been going on pretty much as long as gold jewelry's been made, that's it's been sort of an indicator of the social class that you belong to.

There are just all these multitude of avenues that metalsmiths and jewelers can go that aren't necessarily related to the actual material itself but certainly are related to its history of use within our society that one hopes students will go to. And then there's, you know, whole other avenues in which, say, my colleague, Kim Cridler, who, you know, whose work is—I would be very easy to just call it sculpture because it's on the scale of sculpture.

You know, she does large-scale works but her works are very much about ornamentation. And that we always, sort of, assume that large-scale sculpture's not about ornamentation, small-scale metalsmithing is about ornamentation. And here she breaks the rules right away by taking that vessel form, and those ornamental motifs, and making them very large. And the lines simply become blurred and there is a, kind of, obvious, sort of, implicit subversiveness in her taking on the sculpture vocabulary in a sort of craft way.

So I think what we can't forget is that it's not the material but it's the attitude towards working with materials that's so important to what we do. And that it's not about the metal but it's about the fact that we have a practice of the way we work with materials—with expertise, and control, and discipline, and skill that allows for a kind of object that can't be produced by somebody that has not been part of that practice.

And, consequently, it allows for a finished product that really couldn't be farmed out to somebody else to make. You know, it's not just an idea that—it's not just a work of art in which the idea is one thing, and then the finished product could be made by anybody. It's a work of art in which the making of it, and the process of making it, are so integral to the subject matter—

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. GRALNICK: —you can't separate them. And it's—when you look at the object you wouldn't be having a full appreciation of it without a recognition of the skill and labor intents in making it. And that skill and labor becomes a certain kind of commitment to the idea, to the concept.

So it doesn't mean that I don't see that happening in some work that would be called sculpture, the same exact idea. But less and less, it's certainly not as much part of the sculpture vocabulary. For most of the people that I know, that are working in sculpture, the main reason they're making the work themselves is because it would be phenomenally expensive to have somebody else make it, and have it come out as good as they want it to come out. And if they reach a point in their financial status that they could farm it out, they probably would. But, for the most part, metalsmiths don't feel that way because then there's really no point in being a metalsmith if you do feel that way.

MS. RIEDEL: How does what you teach at some place like Penland, or Arrowmont, or Haystack, how does that differ from what you teach?

MS. GRALNICK: It depends on the class that I'm teaching, but for the most part it differs greatly.

MS. RIEDEL: I would imagine.

MS. GRALNICK: I mean, I did teach at Haystack a couple summers ago, sort of, like a truly advanced class that was, sort of, made up mostly of people that were, like, graduate—already graduate students in metals programs here or there, or in some cases even professionals already. And that was a class about—you know, that really was, sort of, about, kind of, building a conceptual foundation for your work, and creating a research model, and exercises in how to do that.

But most of the time when you're teaching at Arrowmont, or Penland, or Haystack, you're teaching a technique, you know. It's a class in, you know, box construction, or a class in enameling, or a class in working—learning how to work in gold. And most of the people that are taking the class are coming for that reason, to learn a technique. And occasionally within the class you get some people that are really advanced and want you to, sort of, take them to another level besides just learning technique.

But if I was to come in with the same kind of agenda that I do when I'm teaching my graduate students at the university, to students at Haystack, or Penland, or Arrowmont, most of them would really think they didn't get their money's worth; they didn't get what they came for, which was, like, the little technique tricks for their bag that they can take back to their bench.

So those tend to be classes that are more for either, one, hobbyists, or, two, people that are professionals but are just kind of looking for some quick tricks to add to their bag of tricks. Which is fine. There's nothing wrong with that. And if somebody was teaching a technique that I didn't know how to do at Haystack or Penland, or, you know, even at this point in my career, I would sign up for it and for exactly that reason. So there's absolutely nothing wrong with it but you're not providing a real academic kind of environment and academic teaching experience. It's a whole different kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: So most of the guest teaching you do then tends to be in universities?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I've sort of stopped—not completely, but I've definitely sort of stopped doing the workshop circuit. And that's not because I don't like those places. And as a matter of fact, I love Haystack. So it's because when you teach all year long, the last thing you really feel like doing is teaching a two-week class over the summer—although I would never say no to Haystack because I love Haystack so much.

But I do a lot of traveling around, you know, doing guest artist—

MS. RIEDEL: During the year.

MS. GRALNICK: —workshops at other universities and art schools, but that is— —you know, as an educator, how important it is to you when guest artists come into your own program, and that your students can be—see a really good lecture by an accomplished visiting artist in your field; can get a critique from that person of their own work; sometimes a technical demonstration; sometimes a group discussion perhaps on some readings. These things are so important to your own program that you feel a responsibility when another university, you know, asks you to come—for whatever kind of pittance they have to pay, you know—to do it because you know how much it enriches your own program.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. GRALNICK: And plus those opportunities usually give back. You know, you end up seeing work that's happening at other schools; you get to, sort of, compare and contrast how that work compares to what's going on at your own program; and have conversations with the faculty member that teaches there about teaching issues, and models, and how you can improve your programs, and are you going through the same thing I'm going through with your students; and you get to look at undergraduate work that might be interesting for you for potential graduate—

MS. RIEDEL: Graduate students.

MS. GRALNICK: —students. So there's so many things that you get by—you get back by doing those university teaching circuits. And they can be exhausting. I mean, I had one year—I think I mentioned this to you, that I had so many frequent flyer miles, and I was, like, overdoing it. You know, that I was, like, literally getting back from one gig, and teaching my class the next day, and then leaving on a plane for another one, you know. And it was too much.

So, you know, you try to limit it to, you know, maybe doing a couple of them a semester and that's it, so that you're not out of town too much for your own students, that everybody's getting the best of you that they possibly can. But I really try not to say no to those things. I really try to squeeze it in if somebody asks me because I know almost nobody invites somebody to come as a guest artist to their program unless they really want them.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm sure.

MS. GRALNICK: I mean, they've had to hustle up the money; they usually have had to make an application to a visiting artist committee. And so if they've gotten the approval to get you to come, you want to deliver the goods because you know how important—you know, how bad you would feel if you got the money for somebody to come and then they wouldn't do it, you know, or couldn't do it, or whatever.

So, you know, the commitment to teaching has to be something that you—if you feel it then you've got to kind of be willing to go all the way with it. Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: What involvement have you had over the years with SNAG [Society of North American Goldsmiths]?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I've never served on the board, although SNAG has asked me repeatedly, years and years in a row, to run for the board, and I haven't done it. And I'll be honest about why I haven't done it, although I don't discount the possibility that I might do it in the future. I always say that but then I don't do it. I think that, you know, SNAG—being on the board of SNAG is a huge amount of work. And there's a lot of things about SNAG that I'm critical of, so I would probably be, as I often am, a big mouth, unpopular person on the board who would, sort of, want to change everything.

I only have so many hours in the day, as everybody else. And it's already cut pretty thin between my studio practice, and my teaching, and then, sort of, traveling around and giving lectures at other places. And I sort of decided at a certain point that being on the SNAG board wasn't the best use of my time and energy. That, like, sitting through meetings where people would be arguing about things, and that kind of thing, is maybe better done by other people—you know, by people that maybe don't have full-time teaching jobs, or maybe don't have busy studio practices, or just love that sort of politicking kind of thing.

And, you know, at some point I might do it. I considered doing it while I was on sabbatical since I would have a little more time, but then even then I didn't want to give up my studio time while I was on sabbatical, and my freedom to travel when I wanted to. I always go to the conferences. I mean, there's—

MS. RIEDEL: And you gave a lecture of one not long ago.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, I've given—I gave a lecture. I've given a number—you know, I gave a lecture on my own work a number of years ago; then a I gave a lecture recently that was, sort of, more general on the field; and a lot of times I go to the educator's forum which, you know, used to—

MS. RIEDEL: You also did an "Exhibition in Print"—curated one for them.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. I curated an "Exhibition in Print." The magazine [*Metalsmith* magazine] is certainly interested in having me write more for the magazine. They've called me a number of times about writing pieces, and I've agreed now to write a piece on Iris Eichenberg up in the new metals—Artist in Residence at Cranbrook.

And they've been incredibly nice in terms of the writing, like just sort of, kind of, giving me an open invitation that they will, sort of, public anything I'm willing to write. So if I have an idea for something that I want to write, all I need to do is, sort of, call and tell them what my idea is, because they desperately need writers, you know—and I'm going to put that back in your court, Mija. [Riedel laughs.]

So I'm definitely more interested in being—of an involvement with the magazine than I am with the organization. And that's partly because, you know, writing is something so interesting to me, and the magazine performs a very, very important function in terms of documenting our field for the future. We don't—you know,

there aren't too many other things that—there's probably nothing else that really documents our field the way that journal does, and so—in a regular kind of way—so I'm certainly interested in supporting the publication in any way I can.

Have I been critical of it at certain times? No question about it. But critical doesn't mean not supportive, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. GRALNICK: So *Metalsmith* I'm certainly interested in. I like Suzanne Ramljak. I've been very impressed in the last couple of years of how she really, sort of, shows up for things, and comes out for things, and I think that's really good. So the SNAG organization, in so many ways, I think, is at times confused in terms of wanting to try to be all things to all people. And, you know, I think that I would really like—considering there are other organizations like *Ornament Magazine*—I mean, I would like it to sort of just, sort of, give up on being all things to all people and, sort of, take a stand as being the academic arm of the field.

MS. RIEDEL: It is, though, don't you think? But you'd like to—

MS. GRALNICK: Well, kind of it is—

MS. RIEDEL: —see it go further that way.

MS. GRALNICK: —you know, but then they need the membership. They need the membership numbers—for the dues, and the conference participation of having, you know, other people come to these things that maybe are just practicing metalsmiths but not academics or involved with the academic arm of the field. So, you know, it's this delicate juggling act that I think is hard to do because our field is small. If we were a larger field it would be easier to just say, okay, we're the academic arm of the field and, you know, let all those jewelers that do craft fairs have their own organization, or whatever, and fine.

So my involvement, you know, is that I'm supportive of the organization; I participate as much as I possibly can in what they offer, but I'm not so sure that I want to be part of the running of it. And maybe that's simply because, you know, I think I've, sort of, chosen the modes on which I feel like I can affect my field in the best ways, knowing who I am and what's the best use of my time. And you just can't do everything.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

This might be a perfect place to leave it for today.

MS. GRALNICK: Good.

MS. RIEDEL: Pick up tomorrow.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: Perfect. We will end for now. Thank you so much.

[END MD 02 TR 02.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing artist Lisa Gralnick at the artist's home in Madison, Wisconsin, on October 30, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number three.

Morning.

MS. GRALNICK: Morning.

MS. RIEDEL: We've agreed to start this morning where we left off in Lisa's series of work, with the three sculptures that you did in the early '90s, the reliquaries.

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I had, you know, sort of completed that early body of work that was the mechanical pieces and the sort of industrial-looking works in gold. And then I had taken this residency at Oregon School of Arts and Crafts [OSAC]. They have the senior residency that was about four months long, from May through September. And that's when I was working on those sculptures. And I guess that, you know, I sort of made up my mind before I went on this residency in Portland, Oregon that a residency is a really good opportunity to kind of try to leave your old baggage behind and do something different than what you've been doing.

And, you know, the influence of Kounellis and certain people that have made me kind of question materiality and gold were definitely still looming in my mind. And so I made up my mind that I was going to work on some small

sculptures in that four months time at OSAC, and that the one sort of limitation that I gave myself was that old sculptures were going to have gold in them. And it's interesting now because when I look—think of the work I'm doing now and I look back that was really kind of—in a way, pivotal for me in terms of what I'm now in that I felt it was sort of significant for me to pull gold out of its realm as a jewelry material and be able to use it as a material in sculpture and as a supercharged material in sculpture.

And then the other thing was that—that my work up until this point, especially the black work and mechanical pieces really were sort of highly theoretical and conceptual. And I was definitely interested in pursuing a more sort of poetic, romantic side of myself in the work that I started doing that summer as OSAC. So those were pieces—I mean, they—oh, one of them, *The Golden Bird*, used as a starting point. Yeats' poem, "Sailing to Byzantium," where he talks about his desire for immortality through his artwork as the golden bird singing to the lords and ladies of Byzantium of what is past and was is yet to come. So in my piece there's just a golden ball that is in a test tube suspended over water, basically, and in the base of the piece is the tip of my finger cut off with an Exacto-knife wedged in between two microscope slides.

And so it was a sort of piece about sort of my own desire in terms of my work to sort of float above my own—my own mortality. And the pieces were also very much kind of about—so they were very—all three of them very literal in terms of their—you know, one of them came right out of Faulkner in terms of their inspiration, and they were also sort of very much about an exercise in how through materiality you can create metaphor.

Sorry, I cut you off. You were about to ask me something.

MS. RIEDEL: There is a scientific sensibility about them too, a tension between the poetic and the scientific that is especially compelling.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. They all sort of use test tubes and, you know, steel and stainless steel and nickel and juxtaposed, of course, with the incredibly warm glow of pure gold. And—but they were very personal pieces. One of them was called *Black Heart* and it had—actually a black lead heart encased, sort of hidden in a test tube full of sugar. And that piece actually came out of a nickname that a friend had given me when I was in college, where they called me Black Heart. It was—the expression came from the fact that I'd had these—these and not be a very let's say, new-age kind of person. [Riedel laughs.]

It's almost embarrassing for me to admit this, but having had a number of very sort of intense, kind of mystical experiences early on in my life. And where, like, I dreamt things that have actually ended up happening to people and I would constantly be having this experience where I would—in college, where I would go to a party and there would be somebody at the party that was a complete stranger to me. I'd never met them, but they were bringing something into the social situation—some kind of baggage that—it was like other people's baggage would get stuck to me, like, I would be unable to enjoy myself at the party because what somebody else's sort of bad stuff was being brought in and it would kind of attach itself to me.

And so a friend gave me—it was kind of a play on black hole, the way black holes sort of pull light in, but then don't emit it back out. So a friend had given me that nickname, Black Heart. So that piece was sort of about that. So, yeah, these were—they were really very personal pieces and they were—even though they had that sort of scientific edge about them, they were also pieces that were very deeply rooted, I think, in issues that then I started to deal with later more directly in the reliquaries that sort of had to do with the fact that I always had this incredible contradiction in me of this very emotional, romantic soul, and this very analytical, scientific, mathematical mind. And I mean, they've been sort of battling themselves my entire life, and so those pieces were, like, sort of through the lens of these kind of—sort of scientific images really kind of about a fragility that—

MS. RIEDEL: There was also, because they were not wearable—

MS. GRALNICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —there was a sense of detachment and observation.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep, yep. And it's kind of interesting because the wearability issue was also—kind of occupied a very polemical place in my life over the years, because—the truth is that if I was going to make jewelry, I wanted it to be wearable, but wearability as an issue was never interesting to me and it still isn't. It wasn't something that—that I thought a lot about in my pieces, and I always—whether the piece was on somebody, or it was on—sitting on a table, or in a display case, I always experienced it and imagined it as an isolated object, not as a piece sort of attached to the human body, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Did you like the idea that it was portable and mobile?

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. I did like that very much and I liked the idea that, you know, a piece of jewelry was something that someone could sort of hold in their hand and look at very, very close, as opposed to something

that you actually had to look at from a distance in order to take it in. I liked that you could sort of envelop it.

MS. RIEDEL: And somehow loose in the world when somebody—

MS. GRALNICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —it's just bound to show up in unexpected places.

MS. GRALNICK: It's true. But the idea of wearability in the sense of fashion and that kind of thing and the theater of wearability—and all that, no interest to me. I don't think I'd really—even in terms of the black work, although people liked to think that the theatrical aspect of those black pieces was interesting to me and was part of the body of work, it really wasn't. Except in the notion of them being perhaps sort of anti-jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: The sculptures—there were three of them, they're the only sculptures that you would make for a very long time. What prompted them, and then what prompted you to stop making them and go back to jewelry, and continue with the reliquaries?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, one of those hard things for me, Mija—and we'll talk about this later when we talk about my current work is that—and we talked about it a little when we were talking about teaching is that I always felt very tied to my field as a metalsmith, and I always sort of felt that I never wanted to sort of pander to the notion that making sculpture was somehow more serious art than making jewelry, or making functional work in metal. And so I was always very frightened of moving into making, quote, unquote, sculpture, because I didn't want it to be interpreted like that, and I saw a lot of bad sculpture being done by craft artists who somehow thought that just the idea of taking away the function and making it sculpture was somehow going to make it a more valid work of art.

And so it was—it always sort of represented a very risky foray to me into making a sculpture that—that that I could be entering into that terrain where I was, like, it looked like I was trying to play with the big boys. And that was—you know, I never wanted to do it for that reason. And so even after I made, you know, that little jump in that summer at OSAC, what I ended up doing is sort of taking what I got from those pieces and distilling them back into a body of work that were jewelry pieces. And then it was many years, you know, a good 15 years until I started doing the pieces that I'm doing now that, you know, could characterized as sculpture.

And it was part of the reason that it was really important to me to keep the gold in those, quote, sculpture pieces that I was doing then because I still wanted them to really have more of a dialogue related to my own practice than they did to the practice of making sculpture. And keeping that connection that I was a metalsmith and I was a goldsmith in those work and that may ability to work with a material like gold in a sculptural context was supercharged in a way that a sculptor making a piece that utilizes gold wouldn't be. This was my—this was the material through which I had found my voice, and so it represented something different for me than, say, for Kounellis or—you know, there was—over the years there's been, you know, a few other—Jolly Beyers and a few other people that have made pieces that have utilized gold in them, Kiki Smith. But I knew that my use of gold was different.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting because you've used gold on and off from the very start. You've always come to it with a new idea.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep. It never ceases to—you know, it never ceases to disappoint me in terms of the many layers in which it can unfold as a supercharged material. And so I can't even imagine that it ever will. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Given its history and its cultural implications.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: Its ability to serve as a metaphor is almost endless.

MS. GRALNICK: But once I was done with that small group of sculptures that I in Oregon, then I came back and started working on the reliquary pieces. And then—

MS. RIEDEL: Which are the early ones?

MS. GRALNICK: The first one was *The Tragedy of Great Love, Size Six*.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] It's the ring piece.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, I have the gold—that perfect gold wedding ring, and then two little compartments for salt and sugar. I think Daphne Farago has that piece, and which could mean that it's actually in Boston now, but I don't know—I'm not even sure, since I haven't actually seen the Boston show yet.

So those pieces—all of those reliquaries, and that was a—you know, that was a large body of work for me. You know, I think there was altogether about 20 of those pieces, and all of them were very personal. I tried—and—personal, but not shall I say autobiographical in a sense of—that, you know, occasionally, they did have elements in the pieces that could be sort of pulled out of my own personal narrative, but only sort of in service of a larger—a larger idea.

MS. RIEDEL: I remember ideas about value and about fragility, in particular.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. They were very much about a number of issues. Number one—and this is a—been a recurring issue for me in the sculptures that I did at OSAC too—the relationship of me as a person—you know, as a living, breathing, mortal person with flesh to these objects that I make that then go into other peoples' hands. So there was, you know, always a relationship, always a question for me about kind of how supercharged an object can you sort of make and let out of your studio and it'll still be something that another individual could own and even wear.

And, you know, this was sort of an envelope in those reliquaries that I was really interested in pushing. Can there be pieces with a cut-off tip of my finger and my own blood and my own hair? And, you know, an eaten rose leaf from my own garden, and you know, how much of my personal stuff can be in there and can it still be an object that's even touchable by another person?

So that was an issue that was—you know, pushing that envelope's important to me. I was already, at that point, very seriously into questioning, in general, the phenomenology of the work of art, and what actually is this object I'm making in relationship to all other objects in the world. And, you know, what's different about this object than a chair, or a stapler, or a refrigerator, or anything else? And does this object act as a sort of window through which the viewer can somehow through a physical world access some kind of meaning that really isn't physical?

MS. RIEDEL: That goes back to Schopenhauer, yeah?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, Schopenhauer. So that was—continued to be a big question for me. So in so many ways, like, if you look at—well, the piece called *Phenomenological Oddity*—the cube piece which is certainly about the work of art, and then pieces like *Green Torment/Pink Death*, and—

MS. RIEDEL: That was so beautiful.

MS. GRALNICK: I loved that one too. That was probably my favorite one of all. And then the last ones with the roses, the *Beauty and the Theory of Relativity* and *A Rose by Any Other Name*, which were sort of all three pieces that were sort of questioning notions of beauty and what—how I myself define beauty, what I think its place is in the objects that we make. I certainly—I got sort of obsessed with this definition of beauty, what I thought of it. I sort of created a metaphor for it in my mind and a metaphor with blue water—the notion that you could look at an ocean—you know, a beautiful—a beautiful photograph of the South Seas Islands from a distance, and see that turquoise—beautiful turquoise water, but you could actually never pour yourself a glass of that turquoise water.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Right.

MS. GRALNICK: You know, as soon as you—as soon as you went into that ocean and tried to put it in a glass it was clear, and the idea that beauty really wasn't something that you could ever covert, or isolate, or describe, that it was—that it was actually kind of a phenomenon—and a sort of combination of a whole lot of factors at one given moment in time that could never be reproduced.

MS. RIEDEL: Always depending on some sort of context.

MS. GRALNICK: Right, exactly. And so that it really—it really wasn't something that ever could be described and, in a way, it wasn't something that had any substance of its own. It existed in a sort of constant state of becoming. And *Green Torment/Pink Death* was very much about that—about the sort of act of becoming about the fact that even as I would look at the—at this point, I'd become a serious gardener and I would look at the plants in my perennial garden and I'd watch them form their buds, come up out of the ground in the spring and form their buds. But as soon as they were getting ready to bloom, they already smelled of death to me. The flower hadn't even opened yet and I could just see a little hint that it was going to open. And for me, simply the possibility of the loss of potential that it could become took away the notion of beauty to me, inherent in the notion of beauty was this act of becoming, this sort of—sort of potential.

And so that was something that was in a lot of those pieces, sort of questioning what this phenomenon was that we called beauty and whether or not beauty was almost a meaningless word that we had given for something that we had no other way of describing, and that our—or my attempts to deconstruct it could possibly yield

some interesting subsets of the notion of beauty that were actually more instructive than this big broad word. You know, it's sort of like talking about God or talking about—you know, beauty is just this word. I mean, what does it actually mean? It means whatever—the context in which you yourself are using it in and then that context becomes much more interesting thing to talk about. I mean, is it—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, there's an irreducibility.

MS. GRALNICK: Is God about goodness? Is God about ethics?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: You know, is—so—and those issues are much more interesting to talk—for me, to talk about than God.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So there's an essentialness and the irreducibility to it—

MS. GRALNICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —that really spoke to you, and a metaphorically-loaded meaning that came with it, and then the context.

MS. GRALNICK: And within that body of work there was also a lot of—like the piece *Red Circle/White Ground* [1996] that actually coincidentally the Smithsonian [American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.] bought.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: It was a kind of pivotal work for me because I actually took *Red Circle/White Ground* from an Arthur Danto exercise where he—in the contents of sort of setting down his thesis about the primacy of artistic intent and that the artwork was inseparable from the artist's intent, that the—you know, the notion that had been entertained for the artist where—that artworks were this sort of open-ended thing that were—could be interpretable by anybody any way they wanted, was sort of unacceptable to Danto. In his mind there was one and only one correct way to interpret an artwork and that was what the artist intended. But the logical conclusion of that theoretical stance was that, in a way, the work of art and its objectness become secondary to that intent.

And so although I found his arguments—and still do—incredibly seductive, I always would come to this—this sort of mea culpa where I would say, you know, I just can't—he—I just can't go all the way here with him because I still think that there's something there in the object that just kind of exists on its own terms.

So this was something in *Red Circle/White Ground* you know, that exercises something like this. Imagine if you had a room full of paintings done by painters and every painting was identical. It was just a red circle on white ground, and you had ten paintings done by different artists, red circle on white ground, and let's just imagine that each one of those paintings had a completely different title to them, you know. And—oh, you could make up any kind of title. You could say, you know, "Sunset over Montego Bay"—[Riedel laughs]—you know, and then you could say, "The Woman's Room."

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right. [Laughs.]

MS. GRALNICK: You know, and then you could say—you know, I'm just making things up, but—and the point is that those work of arts—on one hand, you could say completely changed on the basis of what the artist's intent was; but then, on the other hand, the reality is that—you know, that they're all exactly the same thing, and of course, you know, that snow shovel—you know, or that urinal that Duchamp used, the object is the object is the object, and then—and the artistic intent is something else.

So that piece was very much about me sort of grappling with those two issues, which I can't say that I even—you know, at this state—these years later that I necessarily have a resolution. I mean, I go back to those questions all the time. What is the relationship of my intent to the object that I make? And, of course, this is—you know, this also gets us into sort of things that I'm—become concerned with more recently in terms of the reducibility of objects.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: But at that time it was more a simple question of how much supercharged intent I could put into the object, and then what the relationship of that was to this physical thing I had made, that then was going to leave my hands and go into other hands.

MS. RIEDEL: There was another piece too, Lisa, remember, that had the shredded $50 bill—

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, *In God We Trust*, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Water in it, and gold?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, that—it was a—there was one—there was one *In God We Trust* that had a little tiny vial with a shredded $100 bill in it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: And then there was one with a similar format that had a little bottle of the blue water edge, *The Long Desire*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. GRALNICK: And, of course, that blue water sort of represented that—you know, sort of beauty as a phenomenological event and although we kind of try to covet it and try to reproduce it. And the—*In God We Trust*, for me, that piece was sort of very much about the sort of element of trust that's sort of inherent in what we could call the work of art as a transaction, as a kind of economy.

You know, I—you know, when you walk into a store and you buy something that costs you $100, you're kind of—there's kind of an element of trust in there that you're assuming that this thing you've got is worth $100, or you wouldn't pay $100 for it. And, in a way, the work of art has that same kind of element of trust, where you know, I, as the artist—you might read something that I have written about the work of art as an artist—and you have to sort of trust that what I'm saying is in the work, is there, that I didn't just, you know, slap this thing together, then come up with a premise for it after the fact.

You know, there's an element of trust there. So that piece *In God We Trust*, although it had the—you know, cut-up money that was cut so small that it was now like powder—you know, you couldn't actually ever put it together and use it. There was no way really for you to know whether I had cut up a $100 or a $1 bill, you know, because now it would all look the same. Other than that if you don't trust that I did what I said, then the whole transaction, you know, is meaningless and it holds sort of economy of the way—the way works of art sort of float through our culture and impact it has no meaning.

So there really is a—[telephone rings].

MS. RIEDEL: Do you need to get that?

MS. GRALNICK: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. GRALNICK: You know, I think about the simplest thing—about how, you know, we go into a clothing store and, you know, some of us—and I include myself as one of this—doesn't like to buy synthetic fabrics. So, you know, I'll be looking at the label on the garments to see if it's 100 percent cotton or 100 percent wool, or 100 percent silk, or whatever—whatever it is. And this—it's amazing how that stupid, little, tiny, printed tag has so much power that we look for it and that could make or break whether we're going to buy this garment, depending upon what is written on that little tag. But who the hell knows whether it's true, anyways.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: But that sort of economy of the sale and purchase of garments is absolutely dependent on that tag being there and that we trust it.

MS. RIEDEL: This goes back to labeling, which comes to the fore so much in your current work.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, absolutely. It does. So there were—in that whole body of work—and I think it's kind of interesting, Mija, considering that probably more so than any body of work that I'd ever did, those pieces were very, very supercharged from an personal standpoint. Some of them to the point where I really didn't know that anybody would ever buy any of them because I thought would I wear something, you know, that was, like—had this much of, like, somebody's flesh, both metaphorically and in some cases, genuinely, in it? And I sold every single one of those pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: They were some of the most poetically-charged works you ever did. The materials weren't incredibly diverse, and the references were diverse, but each of them resonated on a different level.

MS. GRALNICK: So it's just sort of, you know—you know, although kind of in the end I sort of most of my bodies of work of—you know, after the fact sort of gotten cleaned out, but that one in particular was one of the few

bodies of work that actually was selling while I was making it, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. GRALNICK: I remember, you know, the first show I had at Susan Cummins Gallery [Mill Valley, CA] and, you know, actually we sold a number of the pieces and Susan sold a number of them at SOFA [Sculpture Object and Functional Art fair]. So they didn't seem to be, you know, as the expression goes, as hard of a sell as some of my other work, you know?

And, of course, I never really think about that in terms of the making of a body of work, whether it's going to easy or hard to sell. For me, it's irrelevant to the making of the body of work, but I do find it sort of interesting after the fact, you know?

So those were very, very personal pieces to me. And I—one of the areas in my own teaching—it's sort of interesting is that I'm really, really reluctant to let my students do overtly autobiographical work or overtly narrative work. It's not generally my—not generally my—my sort of inclination in terms of the direction I want them to go.

And I think that the reason is that I think it's very, very difficult to do well, and I think that students are young and their level of experience in the world is sort of limited, and I think that—that when students start doing—trying to do work that's sort of autobiographical, it very often ends up being trite, and you know, there's nothing worse, that I hate worse than trite autobiographical work. You know, it's sort of like—and I even would say this about my own—as if my own paltry life would have any significance to anybody. You know, and I can't imagine that some 19-year-old's going to, so—

MS. RIEDEL: So you have the research model set up, and the personal can filter through.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. But nevertheless, I always sort of—you know, I kind of went back and forth in my own life, with my own work between the sort of desire, since I had always been such an incredible lover of music and such an incredible lover of, you know, literature and the great books, and you know, German Romanticism and, you know, Russian literature. And it—there was always a side of me that was sort of interested in sort of the great issues of life and the grand gestures. And so I do think I'd done this dance of kind of—kind of going there for a while, you know, kind of brushing with those kind of themes and then sort of pulling back and going into a much more sort of theoretical, intellectual place in my work, and doing that sort of dance back and forth.

And, in a way, my life is like that too because on one hand, you know, my life is so much about working and teaching and thinking and writing. But there's this whole other element of my life that, you know, has had great love and great pain and, you know, I can't deny that when I'm in the midst of that, those kinds of experiences, I'm ready to drop it all.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Interesting.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: But you still go to the studio no matter what, Lisa, every day, and so even when you are in the throes of that, the work's—if not first—

MS. GRALNICK: Yep. It's always been my salvation. It's always been the one thing that saved me from myself, you know, truthfully. It's my life raft.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] It's served that purpose and it's also—

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —well, it really hasn't reflected where you are necessarily in your life. You've always managed to keep that separate.

MS. GRALNICK: But it's—it's—you know, like in that—in the reliquary pieces, I did *The Tragedy of Great Love*, which was done really sort of in reaction to—to, you know, a relationship that I was in that—that I considered a relationship of great love which for me no relationship was ever worth getting engaged in if there was no potential for great love.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: I mean, really I can go years without being in a relationship and I have no problem with that. But, you know, I'll bet every chip I have if I meet someone and I think there's a potential for great love. So that piece was sort of about that kind of all-or-nothing sort of way I've lived my life in a particular incident in which

perhaps—you know, perhaps sort of ended badly in terms of what the rest of the world would think as the way things end badly, but in my opinion, was worth it.

MS. RIEDEL: So there was a period of these more personal, more poetic works—the reliquaries—in the mid-'90s. And they were pretty much bookended by The Golden Lockets in '94—

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —and then the return to the gold work afterwards?

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. The Golden Lockets—

MS. RIEDEL: Ninety-nine, with the rings?

MS. GRALNICK: You know, it's kind of funny but now, you don't know it when it's happening until you have years—you know, I had it—you can look back and say these bodies of work in gold really have kind of peppered my entire career for the last 20—you know, 25 years that I keep going back to these bodies of work in gold and then I sort of walk away and then I come back to it again.

And so, yeah, I had done these lockets and they were actually much earlier. They were even before, I think, I did the sculptural pieces at OSAC, or maybe they were right after I did the sculptural pieces at OSAC before I started the reliquary pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Ninety-four, I think, yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. And, you know, they were—you know, pretty much these just simple gold lockets that were empty that had these kind of flesh-colored cords on them, and I saw those as these sort of incredibly kind of intimate pieces of jewelry. You know, my idea always was for them and that was why I put the flesh cords on them. My idea always was for them that they'd be something that you'd wear inside your clothes and that although they were made out of gold, the—at least sort of theory was that you'd put it on and nobody would know you had it on because there'd be no chain that you would see and that person that bought them was aware, or they would put their own object inside.

And so, you know, there was sort of—kind of detachment from me, you know, with the idea of the creating a true functioning piece of jewelry that wasn't supercharged with my agenda in it, but that could become supercharged by the wearer.

MS. RIEDEL: And there was a hiddenness to them, a secrecy, and a real intimacy.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, yeah. They were—you know, they were smaller than most of my work. They had—a lot of them had—you know, you opened them up and then it had another compartment inside of another compartment.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. GRALNICK: You know, the idea that they were sort of this process that the wearer would have to go through to get to the thing inside and perhaps to show the thing inside to another person that, you know, there was sort of an engagement in terms of time that you would have to have to look at this piece. And they were very, very simple. They had no decoration on them at all.

MS. RIEDEL: There's a quietness and almost a sense of collaboration with the potential wearer.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, absolutely. And—and, of course, then I went into those other reliquary pieces that we were just talking about, but that I saw as having no collaboration with the wearer.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly, yes.

MS. GRALNICK: I mean, you were wearing my story.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. It was full up. [Laughs.]

MS. GRALNICK: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. They were dense.

MS. GRALNICK: But when you closed all them they became very simple.

MS. RIEDEL: Simple, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. GRALNICK: So you could go out in public wearing one of them without anybody knowing you were wearing a supercharged object, and then it just—in almost all cases just look like kind of an interesting sort of architectural, sort of almost modernist kind piece of jewelry with these kind of clunky handmade chains and—

MS. RIEDEL: Not unlike what you'd done in the past and were more straight forward architectural pieces of jewelry—the gold brooches, for example.

MS. GRALNICK: Mm-hmm, right. So they—they absolutely existed on two levels. They were like pieces that were two—every one of them was two pieces and it's sort of funny because every one of those pieces in terms of the documentation I have for them has two slides—one closed and one open, and it's really—it's like you can't experience the piece both sides simultaneously.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. And then you went into the architectural rings.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Which were interesting because they were again very architectural. When you wear them out in the world, all closed up, they appear to be simple, architectural, very bold rings.

MS. GRALNICK: Those were actually done for a show that I had at Jewelry Works Gallery called—and it was a show of rings and etchings, and they were called—something like—the show was called something like—like "Beauty and Temporality: Studies of Buildings and Flowers," and they were absolutely pieces in which the outside—again they had, like, two levels—the outside of the piece was very much based on—on a sort of codified architectural form and—

MS. RIEDEL: Pyramids, onion domes, that sort of thing.

MS. GRALNICK: Exactly, exactly. And then inside—and, of course, I'd become a serious gardener by that time, and I had already got involved then with my husband Gordon, who was a gardener and a horticulturist, and—so those pieces—the flowers inside I took very seriously—the flowers inside being sort of botanically correct. You know, they were all little hand-fabricated constructions and they were all my favorite flowers. And then the buildings, the outside of the rings that you could see from outside were all architectural forms that sort of related to the part of the world that those flowers were indigenous to.

And—but there was an—a kind of other level that they were playing with which was, you know, the notion of beauty as this temporal thing that lasts for a minute and it's gone and then, of course, the ultimate act of—of, at least, it's man's attempt to achieve a sort of immortal kind of beauty and that's architecture. So, you know, there was a definite play going back and forth—you know, and an argument certainly could be made that—that all the seeds of architectural forms exist in the natural world. Certainly, almost everything we know about structure comes from the natural world, pattern and structure.

MS. RIEDEL: The flowers were incredibly complex and detailed—

MS. GRALNICK: Yep, yep.

MS. RIEDEL: —whereas the exteriors, the architectural forms were absolutely simple and reduced to the most basic essentials.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, but for instance, in the flowering, the eremurus flowering, that was sort of the outside was this kind of pagoda form—

MS. RIEDEL: Pagoda, yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: —and you could really see in the structure of the eremurus, the foxtail lily that's native to the Himalayas. I mean, you could absolutely see where that kind of architectural form could come from, formed from the natural world that were indigenous to that part of the world, all these incredibly complicated tapered structures that existed in the botanical world in that part.

So—and the connections, I wasn't really making them up. They were there, but you know they were—and then I did these etchings that were sort of schematics of the pieces and how they kind of went together and broke apart to forms that—I always sort of saw that body of work as its own little—it's own kind of poetry, it's own little exercise, and you know, it was a kind of—a conceit, like, I sort of wanted to pull away from sort of such heavy intellectual work and sort of do a body of work that was just sort of fun little exercise in beauty—something that just gave me a lot of pleasure to make.

MS. RIEDEL: And a real emphasis on form?

MS. GRALNICK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I've got to just—let's turn this off for half a second. Let me grab some more coffee.

[END MD 03 TR 01.]

MS. RIEDEL: From the rings you moved right into the series of gold brooches, which were very much based on the idea of making paper models in gold.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep. Those gold brooches—and from a jewelry standpoint, I've always thought that those were actually a very, very successful body of work. But they came out of, like, a number of different things, one of which was that after years of teaching I just loved the paper models that—I've always required my students to make paper models of their work, and I always make paper models. And I'd find so much in terms of my own models and my students that so often the models themselves had a kind of freshness and directness to them that would get lost in translation, that the kind of over-workedness that was often part of the process of making something in metals and it taking so long to make and being filed and sanded and polished, you would sort of lose something about that directness.

So—so, first and foremost, I think that the paper—the gold pieces were about trying to get—find a way of working that was very direct.

MS. RIEDEL: Which you'd done once before with gold, when you tried to just cut into it and use it and—

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were retuning to, the idea from a different tack.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep. And also, I wanted to go to work a little larger in gold and the only way that that was possible was without it becoming number one, phenomenally expensive and even more importantly, phenomenally heavy, because gold is a heavy metal. You know, gold is almost twice as heavy as silver. So when you get into working in larger pieces in gold, if they're going to be pins or earrings, whatever, they're really not wearable.

MS. RIEDEL: Right

MS. GRALNICK: So I wanted to build a—kind of work larger and which meant working in much thinner gauges of material, and so I also needed to find a way that the pieces could be strong in such thin gauges. So there was a combination of different things and on top of that—and we really haven't even gotten into really music, but you know, music was an extremely important part of my life. I was, you know, as a young person, a very serious violin student and I continued really playing from the time I was in second grade, all the way until I graduated high school, and then I continued to play somewhat in undergraduate school. And then I sort of had—I sort of kind of walked away and gave it up for a lot of years because my life just became so much about making art and being a metalsmith and my studio work that I sort of just never played anymore.

And then at this point in my life, I started playing again and taking lessons again.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. GRALNICK: And I had a number of real looming questions in my mind related to music. And when I came back to it as an adult, in addition to starting to take private lessons again—and it's very different when you start taking private lessons as—you know at 40 years old or in your late 30s than when you're a teenager, because there were certain things I knew about making art that I didn't know at that point.

And so in addition to—I remember when I was a kid and I took lessons, you know, you had to do music theory and there was, like, your violin teacher, in addition to whatever it was you were practicing that week, you'd also have this little theory book that was almost like a math book, you know, that you had to bring in and had done your exercise too.

But it never really made much sense to me as kid, and then, all of a sudden, as an adult, I started getting music—taking out on my own music theory books and buying music theory books and reading about music theory on my own. And I started asking my teacher, who was a fantastic musician, questions about music theory. And, all of a sudden, it was like this grand picture started coming together for me. I started—I never really quite understood, let's say, why a concerto was—you know, say, the Bach "Concerto in A Minor"—why is this concerto written in A minor? What does it mean for it to be written in A minor? And I don't really understand. And of course, in a very logistical way, the key signature that a piece of music is written on refers to the amount of sharps and flats that it has.

But almost consistently, in any complicated piece of music, those sharps and flats change throughout the piece

of music. So why even bother writing it in a certain key if a good portion of the piece of music isn't even going to be in that key. It didn't make any sense to me. And then all of the sudden I started realizing that what these pieces of music were is like a journey within a key and that the whole sort of point of it being a concerto in A minor was that it started in A minor and it ended in A minor and the whole meat of the piece was the way it was divergent from that key and that without that structure within which it was written, it was impossible for it to deconstruct within the body of the piece and come back again.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: And this was like an unbelievable "a-ha" moment for me that will probably forever have changed my life in terms of the way I see things. And we talked earlier—I can't even remember what was in this interview or if it was in our private discussions about me thinking that I wanted to sort of forget everything I'd ever learned in foundation programs and—

MS. RIEDEL: Right. We did say that yesterday.

MS. GRALNICK: And this was kind of the first important moment for me to realize that, in a way, a work of art was, instead of it being sort of the static thing that had rules, that within the body of a piece there actually could be this process of deconstruction that took place.

So I had certain things I wanted to work on in that group of gold pieces. One was to try to get a kind of freshness of the paper models.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: Not an overworked kind of look, but a freshness. Like, what you see is what you get. You can actually see how the thing was made in the piece. But it was also a kind of contradiction that I wanted to set up, which was the idea of something incredibly precise, and structured, and measured out, but on the other hand, at some point in the piece, it's starting to deconstruct. That structure is starting to deconstruct and implode on itself. And there in, for me, was the sort of romance of the piece, that you can actually have something almost mechanically perfect, but then at a certain point, it sort of deconstructs into obvious hand work.

And so I was very conscious in all those pieces that I was going to be sort of cutting this gold out with my jeweler saw and folding these pieces, like, scoring and folding them like they were paper. And then I wasn't going to go back in with the file at all. So every—all these little teeth marks from the saw would be there and you would see every single sign of how I made the piece. Nothing would be hidden. And as a matter a fact, a good portion of those pieces were made from just one sheet of gold that was completely scored and folded up. Sometimes two, but I don't think any of them used more than two sheets of gold. So all of the angles are scored out of one piece.

And so the structure is—if it's strong, and they are strong—it's all sort of—it's not assembled structure, it's structure that sort of comes from within. And I always sort of felt that way about music and especially, of course, the structure on which all Western music is written, the tonal system and what they call the circle of fifths, which is this eternally recurring system on which all of the keys exist on—in kind of a cycle. So that if you get enough—if you put enough flats into a key system, you'll end up into a sharp key. And you're just going to keep sort of going back around the circle and around the circle.

So the idea of having a—that I could actually have a very sort of mathematical kind of an object that had a sort of mathematical precision, but on the other hand, that it could have a kind of deep beauty was a real challenge for me in those pieces and I actually felt that for the most part they achieved what I was going for. They had kind of a surface that was like skin.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. GRALNICK: You know, the gold had kind of a slight texture to it that was like skin. They were very thin and very light and sort of unfussy in the way they appeared and then they—

MS. RIEDEL: But they could be very detailed too.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: And a lot of them had a kind of fringe.

MS. GRALNICK: And a lot of them had all this incredible delicate saw marks—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. GRALNICK: —that again, you know, they weren't over-refined. One of the things during this period was I had met Gordon, the man that I would later marry, and we both loved music. And so in addition to me take—you know, starting to play the violin sort of regularly again, we were listening to music a lot and going to concerts at Carnegie Hall a lot, and we were listening—every single Sunday we listened to Glenn Gould playing the "Goldberg Variations." It became—I mean, in our entire relationship and marriage became kind of ritual.

And once in a while, we would a variation and listen to somebody else other than Glenn Gould playing the "Goldberg Variations." And a few times we heard the "Goldberg Variations" performed live by several, you know, accomplished musicians in New York. And we had a sort of standing argument about whether the "Goldberg Variations' were purely mathematical or whether they had a kind of romance to them. And I found them very emotional and Gordon thought they were very mathematical. And we both loved them beyond belief for our own reasons. And there was a constant sort of debate of why they were so good, and why Glenn Gould's interpretation of them was so good.

So this was just this sort of continuing dialogue about the relationship between structure and form. I started, in my own lectures, actually playing what for me had always been the most beautiful piece of music ever written, the "Brook Concerto," and—height of Romanticism—written in, you know, like, 1860. And we had heard the "Brook Concerto" performed by—you know, oh, my God—a number of—you know, by Maxim Vengerov and a bunch of different well-known violinists. And in my own slide lecture on my work I would actually include second movement of the "Brook Concerto" and I put the musical notation for the concerto up on the screen in slide—you know, the sheet music. And then I'd play it and I would say how do you get—this is pure mathematics. Musical notation is pure mathematics. How do you get from here to there, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: From the abstraction and the math to the emotion.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, yep.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: And that was my body work at that point was about: How do you get from that abstraction to that emotion? When no matter how you look at it, all you get to work with is, you know, these notes on a page that refer to points on a tonal system and blocks of time. And that's it: pure mathematics. Yet, in that arrangement of that incredibly mathematical system, you can produce something that there's no question about—can move someone to tears. You know, moved me to tears all the time.

So this became, you know, within that body of work, this kind of recurring question for me that can you stay within a strict mathematical system. Well, I knew you could, because music did it and create that kind—that poignancy. And I just kept pushing.

And I remember one of the last pieces that I did from that group of pieces I gave to Susan Cummins after she had closed the gallery, and I was coming for a visit out to California after she had closed the gallery and I wanted to bring her a gift. And there had been a party for closing the gallery where a lot of people gave her gifts, and I was unable to come to the party. And it was kind of important to me for this particular piece that it be given to somebody anyways because it was probably the one more than any other one that I had pushed the envelope so much that the deconstruction of the structure now was so fragile that the piece probably couldn't hold up to being worn. It was so fragile; these little tiny filaments were barely holding on. You know, I'd cut—I had cut the metal in certain parts into so many pieces that it was so fragile.

And so in the end, it was my favorite piece from the whole body of work, but I also knew that it was the last and that it was sort of pushing the envelope beyond the point—almost to the point where the piece couldn't hold together. So I sort of wanted it to be owned by someone who would just sort of enjoy it in its objectness and not necessarily think that they had to wear it. I don't think Susan's ever worn it and that's fine with me. She probably herself senses—and she doesn't wear many of the pieces that she has anyway, and she probably senses that it's too fragile to be worn.

But once I got to that point where I was sort of, you know, going from—you know, in a way going from quarter notes to eighth notes to sixteenth notes to thirty-second notes to the point where now it was just deconstructing so fast that, you know, it was almost correcting itself to death.

MS. RIEDEL: You'd taken it to the logical end.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, mm-hmm. Then I sort of knew that it was sort of time to move away from that body of work, and that's always been the way it's happened for me with bodies of work. That I sort of feel that I kind of push it to its natural conclusion and then at that point I would just be repeating myself and I would just be making more pieces for the sake of their being more in the world that people might buy, or want, or be able to show. But I don't have any interest in doing work, you know, for that reason. My life is too short.

And I have too many bodies of work that I still want to make and finish, to extend the body of work, you know, a year beyond when I need to.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was the end of the gold brooches.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, mm-hmm.

MS. RIEDEL: And then the next body of work leads us into the current body, The Gold Standard.

MS. GRALNICK: Most definitely.

MS. RIEDEL: Now you'd moved from New York to Wisconsin.

MS. GRALNICK: That's right. I'd taken a job at the University of Wisconsin. For the first year in Madison, I was still finishing up the last of the gold brooches. I had—that work was sort of the work I was—you know, engaged in when I took the job in Madison and I still had sort of the last of those pieces to kind of get out of my system, including the one that I just described that I gave to Susan.

When I got here—plus, when you first move to a new place, the first few months of a new place, in a new studio, a new working environment, a new teaching job, you sort of long for something familiar. So keeping working and get—you know, I ended up doing maybe at the most sort of four or five of those pieces as the first work that I did in Madison. Finishing up that body of work and it also just allowed me a way to get right into work when I got here, when everything else was strange.

MS. RIEDEL: And you arrived to a studio of your own—that was part of your professorship.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. Part of my package was a studio space, which was an enormous blessing. I never take it for granted how great it is that I teach at an institution that provides studio space, because that meant a big thing for me to know that I would be able to come and get right into working.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's right on campus.

MS. GRALNICK: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's easy back and forth between the studio and class.

MS. GRALNICK: Very, very easy. And I had been teaching 11 years at Parsons and in the last block of that time, I had been commuting from Upstate New York, from Rosendale, which is near New Paltz. So my teaching experience was very different. I couldn't just pop in for an hour to go to a meeting or see my students. I was living, you know, 90 miles from where I was working. So I was very concerned in making this move to Wisconsin about how great it was going to be if I could have my studio and my living environment and my teaching environment all very close to one another. And it's been absolutely fantastic having that.

As a matter a fact, at times I think about moving out of town and getting some land and all that, but it's so great being able to stop into school for half hour on a non-teaching day and just help a student with something. Stop in, go to a meeting, then go to my studio, then go home. And I can actually make that little circle of things six times a day, if I need to.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, which may also account for the wonderful back and forth between your studio experience and your classroom experience.

MS. GRALNICK: Absolutely. My students can stop—my own private studio is right on campus, but it's not in the same building as the art building, so that I'm not—my students aren't right on top of me. I'm not, you know, too available for them, but on the other hand, if they need me, they know where they can find me. They can call me up at my studio and say, I really need ten minutes of your time. Can I come up to your studio and show you something, or get your advice on something? And I always say, yes.

So there's this great kind of, you know, I'm there, but they're not—you know, I'm not right there. My students—it's not like my studio is, like, right next door to the metal studio. It couldn't be more perfect. And I had had my studio at home in New York and it's sort of coincidental because I started moving into working in all this plaster in the work that I'm doing and it would have been absolutely horrible to try to be doing that at home, because it's so messy. And so it's been a real blessing not having my studio at home so that I can be doing this messy work and not traipsing it all over the house.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: And the other thing was that in those years when my studio was at home, because I'm really a

very sloppy worker. My work itself is incredibly neat and meticulous and people are constantly shocked by this and I can't explain it, you know, but the work is neat and meticulous, but the environment in which I produce it is a big mess.

MS. RIEDEL: Why is that, do you think?

MS. GRALNICK: I have no idea, really. But it's the truth.

MS. RIEDEL: You don't need a clean, organized working space.

MS. GRALNICK: No. No.

MS. RIEDEL: Clearly the contrary.

MS. GRALNICK: I couldn't—I couldn't even work if it was a clean, organized space. [Riedel laughs.] But when I had my studio at home, then my whole home became like my studio. You know, if things got too crowded in the studio, I was moving into the dining room table and the kitchen table and the bedrooms, and I was using every available surface. And it's been very nice now to have my studio somewhere else and that I can actually leave that messy studio at the end of the work day and come home to some degree of order at home.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's a large space. Do you think that it's partly responsible for the fact that you've been able to take on a project which is huge—larger than any of the other series you've done, more complicated—

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, I think—

MS. RIEDEL: —three different stages, so far, and perhaps ultimately four. What were the seeds of this series? How did it come about?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I was thinking about that body of work before I even came to Madison.

MS. RIEDEL: I would think so. Has the feeling been long percolating?

MS. GRALNICK: So it's not something that just, like, popped in my head the moment I came to Madison, but one of the absolute beauties of being at this great research university for me, and I never take it for granted, is that I've gotten research support here.

MS. RIEDEL: Pretty much every year, yes?

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. Every year, I've been here, I've gotten a research grant, and, you know, in addition to regular research grants, I've also gotten some sort of specialized grants, like the Vilas grant, which is additional support that you're getting, you know, on top of your regular research grant. And so –

MS. RIEDEL: And these have enabled you to do things that you couldn't possibly have done otherwise.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. You know, the body of work that I wanted to do, this Gold Standard body of work was very, very expensive because I was going to be working in gold and—and I also knew from the very beginning that if I embarked on this that it was sort of a long-term project. So it wasn't—it wasn't the kind of thing, well, you know, I can get five pieces done and send them off to a gallery and there might be—you know, they might sell them and the money might come back. It just wasn't that kind of body of work.

It was going to be a large investment of time until it was done and the pieces individually weren't going to have much meaning until the body of work was done and it was shown as a body of work. Then maybe there possibly might be some sales, but I also knew that it wasn't a body of work that was—and we'll talk a little bit more about this after—but it wasn't—certainly wasn't a body of work that was about sort of pieces of jewelry that people were going to be able to kind of put on and walk away with. And even the pieces that are jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: It's very much sculpture.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It is the return to sculpture and requires far more space than your other series.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. So the research support allowed me to embark on something in sort of totally uncharted waters for me, to say that that word "research" really was going to have meaning, that this was going to be a project that the university was going to be investing—investing in long-term in my creative output. And I—I could do exactly what I wanted to, without any restraint, knowing that I would have my regular salary coming in from teaching and that this could be done without thinking at all about whether or not it might bring me any

income later, which I never really thought about much with any bodies of work, quite frankly, but that's another story.

So, you know, the university gave me the support which allowed me to buy the gold I needed for the body of work and then buy more and more and buy equipment and tools and machines that I needed to be working in the plaster—

MS. RIEDEL: Because this was the first time you were—

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: And—and that coupled with, you know, having the studio space to do it, it was amazing. You know, I can't—I can't possibly describe how lucky I feel that I've gotten that kind of support, and truthfully, I know almost nobody else at a single of the university that gets the kind of—in my field—you know, maybe—maybe there's a few other big research universities that give that kind of support to their art faculty, but not many.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. GRALNICK: So—so I don't take it for granted for a minute, and I sort of feel like—you know, in a way, that I'll always long-term being sort of indebted to the university for my ability to produce this body of work.

So I sort of started—you know, when you start a new teaching job, a big part of your life is about teaching and not just teaching, but building a relationship with your department and your colleagues and your institution, and so you tend to for the—you know, you know that you're going to be going up for tenure, so you tend to sort of be—volunteer for everything and agree to do everything that you're asked and mostly feel happy that you've been asked and try to contribute on every possible level that you can.

So it meant that—you know, first few years my creative output was definitely going to be in slow gear because of that, but in a way, the timing was kind of perfect because I was starting this new body of work. I didn't want to rush into it. I wanted to—I wanted to have time to get the kinks out. I had to learn mold-making. This was a whole new thing for me. I had to do an enormous amount of experimentation till I got things up to work the way I wanted to them to work.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's describe at least the first section, so people listening or reading have a sense of—

MS. GRALNICK: Well, you know, the first part involved the fact that I wanted to—the body of work was called The Gold Standard and it was going to have several parts, but the first part was going to sort of deal with the notion of gold as a commodity. And so, you know, something funny kind of happened, which was I had moved to Madison. I had sold the house in upstate New York. So I came with, you know, whatever money I had from the sale of my house in upstate New York, which wasn't a lot, since I—you know, I had mortgage on the house.

And I thought that houses in Madison were going to be a lot cheaper than they were and I discovered that they weren't. And I discovered that, you know, my little—you know, my little nest egg that—of whatever it was, you know, $25,000 that I had wasn't going to get me very far in terms of down payment on a house in Madison. And one night, just for the fun of it, without even thinking about it, I took all my—whatever was left of my gold brooches that hadn't been sold and I put them on a scale and said, geez, if I was to sell all—all my work and my possession right now, how much would that get me in gold? And I never thought of my work, my gold work in that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: But, all of a sudden, I thought—and, of course, I really wasn't going to melt down all of my work and sell it for scrap, but nevertheless the act of doing it sort of brought very close to home how powerful a commodity gold is. And then I started thinking in my mind, well, okay, here's how much gold that would take me to buy a house. Now, how much gold would it take me to—you know, how many nice dinners would one of these pieces buy me, or how many—and I just started to sort of playing around in my mind.

And, you know, almost—like a scale, gold versus this, gold versus that and, of course, it was so interesting since the price of gold changes every day to even think of it that way because I could say, gee, today, this piece of gold would buy me one month's rent and next—you know, next week, this same piece of gold would only buy me a half of month's rent, or you know, that kind of thing. And so I started just taking this material and thinking of it in the most crass sort of indirect kind of terms, this absolutely gorgeous, warm, glowing—you know, yellow glowing material with such a distinguished history in the arts and thinking in the most crass kind of terms.

At the same time, the price of gold was fluctuating drastically and as it fluctuated drastically, you sort of started noticing that, you know, if you'd go to sort of your regular old kind of jewelry store counter at Kmart, or a jewelry store in, like, a shopping mall, Kay Jewelers, or something, that it seemed like jewelry was kind of getting thinner and tinnier. You know, they were starting to make, like, even chains out of like hollow links because gold was becoming so expensive.

So all of this was coming down at one time and then I just decided to start this body of work where I took—and I very carefully chose the things I took. I chose objects that sort of represented certain kinds of value systems and resources within contemporary culture. They were things that were particularly interesting to me. The first piece I did was a sink and—and I would make molds of these things. And the sink, of course, to me was very supercharged, number one, because it automatically had this connection to an artist whose work I love, Robert Gober, and so—and Robert Gober's sinks for me had, like—I mean, they had just always been really one of my favorite works of art.

[END MD 03 TR 02.]

MS. RIEDEL: We were discussing the objects that you've chosen for this project that were meant to reflect culture and the time they're from, so computers and coffee—

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, I chose—I chose things for different reasons and across the board I was looking for objects where the object itself seemed to have a value that sort of superseded what its monetary value was anyway, that it was an object that sort of symbolically represent sort of a larger—a larger value system within contemporary culture. So, of course, the sink—the sink was kind of a—kind of a very charged object for me in that, for one thing, it represents running water, which is sort of what we consider the cornerstone of civilized society. Then sinks, in general, sort of represent our sort of obsession with the sort of fetishization of kind of bathroom and kitchen appliances that have become very much part of modern culture, people wanting these sort of magnificent—magnificent toilets and sinks and bathtubs and kitchen ranges and that sort of thing.

So it was, you know, very much a charged object for me. And—and then, of course, there's this sort of added thing, which is that the hardware of sinks, the faucets and the handles and all of that, is already something that is sort of associated with a gold signifier because—you know, over the last, say, 20 or 30 years, they started gold plating these things. So why would somebody want gold plated faucets in their—on their sink?

So the things that I chose were a sink, a book, a gun, a violin, a computer, bags of Starbucks coffee—

MS. RIEDEL: Italian shoes—

MS. GRALNICK: —a cell phone, Italian shoes, things that I—good and bad, things that I thought represented objects that were sort of a cross—sort of a cross—cross-section of the kinds of the objects that are in our material culture.

I also looked for objects that were not necessarily all—all new. I was looking for—for instance, I felt that a computer, in this case, a Mac G4 computer was some—was an object that represents the way certain kinds of things in our culture change so fast that you could actually—you know, 100 years from now, you could peg that particular computer probably in, you know, a five- to 10-year span as being when it was from, whereas other kinds of objects, for instance, a violin, you know, hasn't changed in—what, 500, 600 years or since the invention of the—what we could consider the modern violin.

So I was looking for cross-section of objects in that way to sort of show the fact that the kinds of things we live with are both very fast-changing kinds of objects and oddly rooted traditional objects whose design doesn't seem to change much at all. So my first goal was, in my mind, to translate this object into a quantity of gold. So I decided that I would take a day that I started the object and on that particular day, I would find out how much it would cost to buy that object on that given day, whether it'd be a computer, or a violin, or a book, and then take the price of gold on that day and actually say, you know, this sink, if I were to buy it today—even though it was actually a vintage Kohler bar sink that I was using—you know, what—and Kohler doesn't even make that sink anymore, so I would actually take that sink and look for that exact sink on the internet at a place that sells, like, vintage bathroom fixtures and get a price for it and translate that price into a quantity of gold on the same day, the day that I was going to start the piece related to the sink.

All of these objects, I wanted to translate into plaster castings and this was a whole new area for me. So I had to learn mold-making, which I sweated through on my own for a year, through books, and just kind of trying to figure out how to do it. And the first one, the sink that I made was actually what's called a waste mold, which is the way I learned to make plaster molds when I was in college, which is that you are actually making the mold out of plaster and pouring plaster into plaster. And the only way to get at your casting is to chip away the outside plaster with a chisel and hope that it breaks at the right spot because you put some kind of release agent in between the plaster mold and the plaster casting. It's a real pain in the butt.

MS. RIEDEL: I imagine.

MS. GRALNICK: And the worse part about it is if you don't get a perfect casting, you've destroyed your mold in the process of revealing the casting inside. But this is the old way that molds—plaster molds were made. After I did that one, I knew that there was a better way to do it than that and I started experimenting with doing rubber molds with plaster—what they call plaster mother molds and using latex rubbers and just sort of playing around.

The second piece I did, the book, I actually did that way, with a latex rubber mold. But after about a year of sweating through the first molds on my own, I actually managed to learn a little bit more about mold-making through actually spending a little time following a professional mold maker around in his studio in Indianapolis. And at first, he didn't want me to do it. I asked him and he didn't want me to do it. And then he actually saw my work, the first part of The Gold Standard pieces in an exhibition that was being held at Ball State University, which isn't far from Indianapolis, and then he agreed to let me come to his studio and sort of follow him around.

MS. RIEDEL: Because he's a very serious mold maker as well; he flies all over the world.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, yeah. He is a professional mold maker. He takes, you know, molds off of architectural friezes in Europe so that they can be repaired and—and does, like, molds—sort of life-size—life-size figurative work.

MS. RIEDEL: He wanted to make sure you were serious before he let you into the studio.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. So once—once I learned better mold-making technique from him, then I sort of knew what I was doing a bit more, but it was still—the mold-making process took long time to get good at and a lot of the molds took many castings until I got a good casting, because I was making molds of things that in some cases had very fragile parts to them and weren't—you know, they weren't designed to be made out of plaster. So it wasn't always easy. You know, I had to pull a lot of molds before I got a good casting.

So my idea was that I would actually fabricate a section of this object in gold and that section of the object in gold would correspond to its value, and that it would sort of flawlessly integrate with the form which the rest of which would be rendered in plaster. So the pieces would be life-size and there would be a fragment in gold, and the size of that fragment would change depending upon how high the value of the object was that it would need to have more gold.

MS. RIEDEL: And if the fragments were separated from the plaster mold, it would still be identifiable as part of that particular object.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. The actual section that I chose was very important on the object because in some objects I can only render a very small section of it. And so—for instance, on the violin, I chose a section of the scroll top, at the top, which is, you know, sort of undeniably from a violin. And for the book, I chose a little section on the corner, where you can see—well, when a book is open, you know, the pages sort of lie one on top of the other and it's, you know, undeniably a corner of a book, even when it's separated from the book.

MS. RIEDEL: And that book was the "Language of Art," yeah?

MS. GRALNICK: Oh, it was *Art as Language*, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: *Art and Language*.

MS. GRALNICK: And—Hagberg's *Art as Language* and a chapter called "Against Interpretation."

So—so the objects—you know, the plaster parts were very fragile, so—and that was not coincidental that I wanted those castings in a material that could be sort of juxtaposed against what we would consider one of the most malleable and long-lasting materials known to man, gold, juxtaposed against an extremely fragile material, a material that has absolutely no malleability. It can't—it can't, in any way, shape, or form be moved without breaking. And there was going to be no paint on the plaster, so any imperfections that were in the castings were just going to become part of the object. And it was the material that had, at its very roots, in terms of the canon of art history—it was a model-making material, a material that was meant to be a step towards a more final work of art.

So all of these aspects of the material were important to me, the idea that it could sort of disintegrate over time. I saw the plaster parts of the pieces as phantoms, as if it was allowing you as a viewer to imagine the entire object through the context of this gold fragment.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. GRALNICK: And when I'd photograph them, I'd always photograph them against a white background, because the idea was that the white plaster—on one hand, would certainly be part of the piece, but on the other hand, would have the sense of sort of disappearing. And so in all of the installations I've had thus far of the exhibitions, it's always sort of important to me that everything's on white. I've been making sort of white display bases for the pieces and that the white—the white plaster could actually, over a period of time—I mean, I'm not rushing it—but start to disintegrate, start to break, start to crack, eventually not even be part of the piece, you know, 50 years from now, 100 years from now, but the gold will always survive, this little section that on one level symbolically represents the whole piece at a given moment of time.

Now, one of the things I love about the whole body of work is that implicit is this sort of journey like we talked about with music earlier, this idea that the relationship of that gold fragment and the larger piece is a relationship that only had meaning in a precise kind of way for one given day in the history of time, when the price of the object was such and the price of gold was such.

MS. RIEDEL: Which you've meticulously recorded in elaborate plaques.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, so every one of the pieces has these engraved plaques that documents the price of gold on that day, the price of the piece, how it translated into a quantity of gold. And this was a big challenge in the making of the pieces because, you know, it's not as easy as it sounds to say, well, I need 1.3 ounces of gold in this piece and I want to make this section out of gold. And so a lot of times, I would make a section out of gold and it come out too light or too heavy and I'd have to melt it down and start over.

So there was a certain amount that I could sort of try to figure out scientifically, but there was a certain part—there were certain parts that were just this constant back and forth of shaving a little off here and getting it to come out the right weight with the right fragment size that I wanted, which meant some of the pieces of gold are solid, some are hollow, some are made out of a very thin-walled gold, some are very thick-walled gold, so that the weight would come up right.

But I took that process very seriously. I took the process that I was going to document something with a—for a given moment in time in a very precise kind of way that this was—you know, one little—you know, one little moment in history that—where two things were going to be weighed against each other with a certain legitimacy.

MS. RIEDEL: How many pieces in this first phase?

MS. GRALNICK: The first section has 20 pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: And you made those over a period of a couple of years?

MS. GRALNICK: I'd say that the first part took about three years. I've been working on the body of work about five and a half years now, and the first part was about three years of that—making the plaster castings and the gold parts. And I had a show—the first show was just the plaster and Part I, the plaster and gold pieces and not even all of them were done yet—about 15 of the 20 of them were done. That was the show at Ball State University.

Then I had a second show at the museum at Ohio Wesleyan University and that was also only Part I. And at that point, Part I was completed, though, all of the pieces of Part I. And then recently, I had an exhibition now that had all of Part I and Part II and then the beginnings of Part III, which I'm still working on right now, which we'll talk about in a little while.

So the first part—you know, there could possibly be a few more pieces in the first part that I'll add. I've already kind of started on another piece that I had wanted to do, which was sort of the value of a work of art, but a work of art in a generic kind of sense. So I'm going with sort of like a landscape painting, a true—a true—you know, a real painting sort of bought on eBay by sort of—kind of what you would call—sort of a mid-level artist, the kind of things a middle-class person might buy to hang in their living room, that they might spend $800 or $900 on it and it would be a big purchase. And so that—that piece has already begun and that has been sort of in my mind to have that in the body of work.

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

MS. GRALNICK: So—but for the most part, Part I is done now.

MS. RIEDEL: There's a revolver in Part I—

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, there's a gun.

MS. RIEDEL: —which is interesting because I don't think you've mentioned that.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah, small—it's actually a—not a new gun, a slightly older, kind of vintage Colt semiautomatic, very small—sort of a lady's gun, a little lady's handgun, they would have called it. And that gun I borrowed from somebody to make a casting of it, but then I took it to a gun store and asked them what they would sell a gun like that for. So I used the amount that they told me that that would be the price they would put on it. So it was a gun they were familiar with. And, you know, though the guns from those times were actually very beautiful things—you know, separate from the other issues. But I wanted that—I wanted that particular kind of gun because I wanted—I wanted the sort of double-edged sword implicit in guns from that period of that—you know, on one hand, they were guns and these were definitely not guns for hunting. You know, these were—

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking about the objects that convey edginess, in particular, and I think of the gun immediately, and the cigarette.

MS. GRALNICK: Yeah. Oh, yeah, there's a cigarette that represents my smoking habit and it's a casting of my hands holding my Camel Light cigarette and the cigarette is all made out of gold. And—and the solid gold cigarette represents—I think it's a year of my smoking habit. So that's what I could get as a solid gold cigarette, which I kind of sort of like because I always liked, you know, in the old days, when people, like, after they retired from companies, they'd get like a gold lighter or something. [Laughs.] I'd get a gold cigarette. [They laugh.]

And the plaques on these pieces, as we'll talk about later, also became an important part of the body of work, which I knew that from the very beginning that there was going to be a sort of—I'd already become incredibly obsessed with the sort of iconography of labeling systems and the categorization of objects in museums. And I had started a little project a number of years ago with my students, my graduate students of—going to the Art Institute of Chicago. We were creating a cataloguing system for all the metal objects in the whole Art Institute, the whole Art Institute collection. So—which, of course, they—they're not all together. They're in every room and every collection throughout the museum, but we were creating our own cataloguing system.

And so I would take my students on these trips to the Art Institute and I would be like your—you know, your museum docent—that I was going to—I would go in ahead of time and prepare these tours of the metals pieces in the collection. And each time we would go in, I would give a different lecture that would take us from one room to another room, to another room that would sort of present the history of metals in a different way through basically the same objects.

And so we sort started sort of putting—taking these notes and—and then I started giving them sort of roles that they had to play in terms of—in terms of rewriting the—rewriting the labels for these objects in a context of a different way of looking at the history of metals and the way it was presented because, of course, when you go to, say, a major museum like the Art Institute, you know, you're going to find metals in the European decorative arts and metals in the Medieval collection, metals in Greek and Roman art, and metals in the craft collection, and you know, metals in the design collection. They're going to be everywhere. And at each time, their labeling system is going to be talking about them in the context of the larger collection within—within which they are, not in the context of the history of metals.

So we started playing around with that, and this became sort of an obsession with me. I started going, say, to the Museum of Contemporary Art [Chicago, IL] and standing back and just watching the way patrons of museum would come in and go right for the labels. And sometimes you'd actually watch people go to the label to a work of art, spend a good solid two to three minutes reading the label and thinking about it as they looked at the label and then glancing at the work of art and walking on to the next one. And you'd be surprised how consistently you can watch people do this. They really aren't looking at the objects in the contemporary art collections. They're looking at the labels, as if some—you know, if they look hard enough, some hidden words will be in there that will actually help them understand it.

And so—so this became a sort of obsession with me, the way that we sort of take those labels as gospel truth. And—and so in my first part of The Gold Standard, the fact that these labels were going to give you this very, very precise information about the weight of the gold and the price of gold on that day—so on one hand, they were giving you the most detailed information you could possibly ask for and the other hand, they were telling you nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: Nothing of importance.

MS. RIEDEL: Just very objective details, facts.

MS. GRALNICK: Right.

And I kept thinking about how sometimes, when I order, say, rubber to make my molds, you know, these material and data sheets would come with the rubber. And, on one hand, they're telling you everything that—by

law, they have to tell you about this stuff that they're sending you in the mail and then, on the other hand, they're not telling you a damn thing, you know, about what it's good for or how to mix it, or all of that.

So—so the first part of the body of work was really about putting together the labeling system for the first part of The Gold Standard was really about making these sort of—as sort of professional-looking plaques with as sort of what looks like it's the gospel truth, objective information that's come down from the experts for you to see, that's got to be unquestionable, yet it only has meaning on—really on one given day in history and it really has no meaning in terms of what the body of work is about anyways. Like, do you really care? But you do, nevertheless.

MS. RIEDEL: It's the formal introduction of language into your examination of objects and language, and the dialogue between them.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, so the first part of The Gold Standard—I mean, there's a—I think it remains to be seen how the rest of the world will think about these objects, since I still haven't really exhibited this whole—this—I'm not even done with the project, so I haven't exhibited it in its entirety yet.

But the first part—you know, there's a kind of distance, a kind of—you know, almost like you're looking at things under bell jars, almost scientific examination of one thing against the other.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely, yes.

MS. GRALNICK: The only thing is that you can't deny that the gold parts were made by a goldsmith and that just by the nature or the beauty of the material and sort of craftsmanship in the making of the gold parts that they're sort of beautiful, but on the other hand, you're also sort of conscious of the—they're just being this sort of analytical approach to the art object that—where the artist is, you know, on one level, completely non-present, which of course, was very much sort of implied in the body of work because the notion of the artist being kind of non-present is something that I'm sort of interested in any way in terms of contemporary art.

MS. RIEDEL: There's an interesting dialogue, I think, between the group of the objects creates the context in this case and the objects themselves, so much of them in white plaster are almost a blank slate.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And there's an interesting tension created by the need for the group as a whole in order to create context—both in the gold fragments in each objects, and then for each object as part of the larger group of objects—fragmentation is part of the story.

MS. GRALNICK: I think that's true. You know, and I imagine—I imagined and looked very much at the fragments separate from their objects in the process of making them. And at one point, I took the fragments off of—the gold fragments off of all of the objects and just sort of put them in a pile in the middle of my studio and sort of photographed them kind of in a pile. And it was so bizarre because they just—they went completely dead when you took them out of their environments, out of their context. And I thought that was really interesting. Even though they were gold, they—they completely lost something without their context. And you—actually, if you separated them and looked at each gold fragments separately, without its plaster, you read the context, but once you put them in a big mound together, you know, they completely lost their context.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. GRALNICK: So I found that really, really interesting. So I definitely was—you know, like, there was—there's a vacuum cleaner in the body of work and it's a vacuum cleaner that I bought—when I first moved to Madison, I bought a vacuum cleaner at, like, a Salvation Army and it was—I think it was $29.99, and so it has very little gold because I used the value of this old Hoover from a Salvation Army.

And that was another thing that was kind of important to me that there'd be this variety of—because we also sort of—there's sort of an obsession with vintage things and antique things within art culture also. And I have, as I'd told you before and I think we'll talk about later, you know, I'm completely obsessed the last year or so with this book, *Friends of Interpretable Objects*, which is very much about the way objects within—in the material world, in general, within our society are sort of preserved and destroyed and the institutions that are about preserving and destroying things for different reasons. And those reasons are simply kind of based on a collection of people we could call—that are friends of interpretable objects. And it's a really interesting notion and a lot of the book goes back to a discussion, the sort of most—what you might call the most noteworthy discussion on a subject, which was the iconoclastic debates and in which works of art were indeed being—being destroyed.

So this sort of became part of Part I also, which was that the variety of the kinds of things that we live with in

terms of the fact that, you know, you could actually sort of go to your local dump and find certain kinds of things that everybody seems to be wanting to throw away and other things that you never see at the dump because everybody seems to know that they're worth something, at least at this given moment in time. They may not be worth anything 20 years from now and 20 years ago they may not have been worth anything. And so, you know, those value systems within—within our culture are constantly changing.

So I was sort of interested in—in that particularly, and I thought about it a lot when I chose the objects, the particular objects on that—I mean, I have a cell phone in there that I did in 2003 and the cell phone will look hilarious to you now because it's like—you know, when cell phones were still like—you know, people would have those mobile car phones and they were—they're big. They're like the size of a regular phone. And now cell phones are so tiny that nobody would carry around a cell phone that's so big that you can't even fit it in your purse, but that's what the early cell phones looked like. I mean, it really was a cell phone that I had at that time. I had gotten it when I moved to Wisconsin, for like making the trip cross-country.

So, you know, I—I definitely think that we have—we live in a culture that sort of fetishizes things and the things that we fetishize are quite interesting and they tell a lot about us and of who we are. And so the idea that the value of things is—is sort of about—about money is pretty funny considering that, you know, for a good portion of history, money itself was simply a sort of symbolic piece of paper that represented gold. And gold is the most changing—you know, constantly changing commodity that we have. There's almost nothing else whose price changes every single day.

So it's kind of the cyclical thing that only works as a larger system. You can't sort of pull apart an individual part of it and say, this—this equals that. It's all—

MS. RIEDEL: Exist in time.

MS. GRALNICK: —it's all co-dependent, yep.

[END MD 03 TR 03.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Lisa Gralnick at the artist's home in Madison, Wisconsin, on October 30, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number four.

Before we continue on with The Gold Standard, Parts II, III and then in theory, IV—we were just talking about *Friends of Interpretable Objects*—let's discuss writers and critics, and, in particular, any critics of craft that you feel have been particularly important.

MS. GRALNICK: Well, critics of craft, of course, is a hard one because it's not a huge pool—[Riedel laughs]—to talk about and I wish it was a larger pool. On the other hand, within my own field, there's been, for one, Bruce Metcalf, who I still think that his essay from many years ago from *American Craft*, "Replacing the Myth of Modernism" was one of the best things written and I still—it's the first thing I require my incoming graduate students to read, and not only to read, but we use it sort of as a starting point for a larger argument that I think they should disagree with some of the things that Bruce says in "Replacing the Myth of Modernism."

I think Bruce, at this point, would disagree with some of the things he said in that piece, but I think that nevertheless, if you consider the piece a polemic and that it opened the door to a kind of intensely pointed point of view that everybody was feeling, but nobody was actually saying, about sort of what was happening in the craft movement, say, in the '60s or '70s.

It was a brilliant piece of writing and there's been a number of pieces that Bruce has written since then that I think are good too, but I still think that was kind of his seminal piece. And I'm sort of still waiting for him, in a way, to write the definitive follow-up piece to "Replacing the Myth of Modernism," but I often give my students a number of his pieces to read. And I can't really talk about the critics and writers that are important to me without talking about what I give my students to read, or require them to read.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. GRALNICK: The other sort of seminal work in my book that, in a way, is about as appropriate for craft artists as you can get is Dave Hickey's essays on beauty, *The Invisible Dragon*. And I actually force my students to really deconstruct that entire book, and especially the essays where he's talking about Robert Mapplethorpe and the sort of—what he considers the sort of underlying issue beneath the arguments about censorship in the NEA. And all that stuff that was surrounding Robert Mapplethorpe is, in Dave Hickey's view, a much more important issue that what was deemed dangerous about the Robert Mapplethorpe works were not necessarily that they were dealing with homoeroticism, and dealing with not only with homoeroticism, but often, homoeroticism in the black population, but that they were doing it in a way that was so beautifully and elegantly crafted that it was impossible for even the most right-wing person not to be seduced by the beauty of those images. And that's

really what was, in Dave Hickey's opinion, what was dangerous about those pieces.

And so he really, in his essay, steps into territory about what a work of art can possibly do through its craft in a subversive way. That was an extremely important argument to make and *The Invisible Dragon* is exactly what he says. That's the thing that can be underneath it all that can sort of far transcend politics, and that is the objectness of a work of art. So I consider—still consider that a seminal work, that there are people that will sort of—kind of say, well, Dave Hickey is old-hat at this point, and he's not a major thinker on the scene anymore, but as far as I'm concerned, that's still an extremely important work for my students to read.

And then, there's just several essays by Rosalind Krauss that I have them read. Nobody can really compare to Rosalind Krauss, and I think in terms of—shall I say the comprehensiveness of her thinking? She was just such a damn smart woman. And we also always read Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation*, and we sort of view that one kind from a polemical point of view too, because I think actually within her one argument against art interpretation is an argument for interpretation at the same time. In a way, she takes both sides of the fence and that's what's so great about it.

You know, in crafts, to me, the most interesting person on the scene in crafts right now is Glenn Adamson right here, who we had right here at the University of Wisconsin when I first came here on the faculty. He was working at the Chipstone Foundation and teaching part time in our art history department, and he's at the V&A right now, but he was a real loss to us. And he just wrote this catalogue essay for this show that was at the Milwaukee Art Museum on Gord Peteran, furniture maker, that I think was one of the most brilliant pieces of writing that I have ever read on dealing with the work of a craft artist.

And we had him also give a lecture here. Gord Peteran came as a guest artist for the art department, and then we had Glenn here, Glenn and Gord Peteran together doing a lecture, in conjunction with Gord Peteran's show, and I felt that it was really quite a brilliant presentation. And then Glenn came for the opening of the Helen Drutt show at Houston and gave a little talk on jewelry. And if there's any person at this moment—and I can say this because I've already talked to him about it—that I would be sort of interested in having write about my work at some point, it would be him because he's got a really unique vision—

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. GRALNICK: —and he's coming at the field in a rigorous sort of way. But then there are other people considering yours truly, who's interviewing me right now, that I think has a voice that can really contribute to our field, and I think I would really like to see more smart people writing about the field than we have. There are some great essays in the little Peter Dormer book, *The Culture of Craft* book, that I think are fantastic, and I have this great little sort of anthology of decorative arts writings, mostly from sort of the English arts and crafts period, [Susan Buck-] Morss and Georg Simmel and Adolph Luce and all of this. That's a great little text book that I use with my students.

And then I have always—one other book that I sort of require my graduate students to read is [Arthur] Danto's *Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Ar*, which I think is a brilliant little book, in my opinion, his best book—not everybody agrees with me on that. And I have them read some of the old Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproductio*, which I think actually is more—rings true more than ever before, and Susan Buck-Morss's *Aesthetics and Anaesthetics*—so some of the kind of classic essays of art history and critical theory.

I go back all the time to those October books that sort of chronicled the whole sort of October series of art criticism that were—they were all published by Harvard, I guess, and they are just fantastic. And then there's been some good books on beauty theory that have come out. I recently read Umberto Eco's *History of Beauty*, which I thought was actually quite an interesting book, and I always thought [Martin] Heidegger had a lot of good stuff, interesting stuff. I sort of pick from kind of here and there, and I can't say that I'm sold by anything, but then I'm also, I think, not sold. I think that almost every argument that I read has something that I pull from that I find interesting.

One of the reasons I love that Tamen book, the *Friends of Interpretable Objects*, so much is that he's coming from a whole other place, sort of outside of the art world. He's coming sort of—he's primarily a professor of humanities and linguistics. He's sort of talking about the art world now less as an art critic or an art historian, kind of as a cultural critic, and I'm finding that a more interesting point of view, seeing art as a participant in a larger system and that the role that—the type of work that gets produced in different times is a direct result of the role that the institution of art is playing in society at a given time, which is a direct result of all kinds of other issues that are taking place.

And then there's this whole other thing, which are all these books that have come out of the Leonardo [Book] Series of MIT Press, that are dealing with the interface of art and technology, especially this one book that I talked about down at the Houston ACC Conference, *Metal and Flesh* by Ollivier Dyens. And most books are

particularly interesting to me, and even like Richard Dawkins's *Selfish Gene*, and books that are actually sort of analyzing the changes that are—you might say, the changes that are taking place as a result of the digital age in our makeup as human beings that, in a sense, is changing the face of the artwork simply because our ability to process information is changing.

It's not better or worse; it's just different. It's changing in a different way, and it's one of the reasons that fields like visual culture are becoming so important right now because what we always considered fine arts as kind of its own separate entity is now so blended with the larger fields of fashion and pop culture. And it's almost impossible to talk about one without talking about the other.

And the unfortunate side of the quote, unquote, information age is that the importance of direct experience is greatly diminished now, and whether or not something like crafts has the possibility to sort of reinvigorate that vacancy, I'm not sure, but we can't deny that it's happening. We can't deny that people all over America are chatting to one another sitting in front of their computer screens, and meeting each other romantically on computer screens, and people are doing their research on computer screens, instead of getting up and handling books at the library.

And this is all undeniable that this is happening, and plus the fact that people are in general altering their bodies and the technology is very close for us to become the perfect physical specimens that we would like to become if we want to go that direction. And so the normal kind of triggers that are sort of—the levels on which art functioned in terms of triggering us on a sensual level, our receptors for that sort of thing are just not as sharp as they once were. And they're going to become duller if we don't use them, until they'll just sort of become obsolete; just like the appendix is or whatever the hell kind of organs have become obsolete, our senses will become like that and I think they sort of are starting already.

So I will often grill my students on odd little things, weird little things. I'll come in in the morning and I'll say, did anybody notice that that tree in front of the art building was in bloom on their way in, or just stupid stuff like that. And I'll realize that, in general, my students are much less conscious of the world around them than a generation before. They're like talking on the phone as they're walking down the street.

MS. RIEDEL: Listening to an iPod.

MS. GRALNICK: There are certain things that they're intensely tuned into and they've sort of grown up in this world where they tune those things in and they tune everything else out. It's kind of scary.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Shall we jump back to The Gold Standard [Part] II and III?

MS. GRALNICK: I think we should.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. GRALNICK: So after I finished Part I, then the next part that I wanted to do involved collecting jewelry, knowing that there would be a third part, and I would make the third part out of that. I would recycle all that collected jewelry. Now, implicit in this second part was the fact that because gold is an infinitely recyclable material, and the truth is, even now and even with the horrible stuff we know about modern gold mining, and that because there's so little gold left on the planet in the form that's left on the planet now. In the old days, panning for gold and big chunks of gold showing up are pretty much over, and now to get the gold, it's in such small quantity that terrible, terrible processes, chemical processes, have to be used to get the gold.

And so we already know that most of the gold that is being refined at refineries and made into new jewelry, and all the other things gold is used for, is recycled gold already, a large percentage. And that's one of the fantastic things about the material is that you really—you go to your jewelry store in your local mall, and it's very possible that the jewelry that you're looking at has bits of unbelievably horrific elements of history in that gold, where it's—if it could talk, if the gold could talk, it would have some stories and it's more perfectly recyclable than just about any other material known to man. There's no loss when you recycle it. It's cheap to recycle and it recycles so perfectly that there's really no loss.

So one of the things that I really wanted to do was to collect jewelry from people. That was sort of broken jewelry, jewelry they didn't want anymore. I didn't really care what form it was in, so I put posters—[Riedel laughs]– you're laughing because you saw my poster. I put posters all over campus that said, "Recently divorced?", "Think your boyfriend or husband has lousy taste?", "Want to get rid of some painful memories, need some extra cash?" And people called me. I left my email and people called me and I started setting up a little business with a scale and I have a little sign where I posted the price of gold that day, and I paid people a small percentage above the going price of gold.

MS. RIEDEL: So you paid them as if it were scrap?

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, I paid them as scrap and I let them know I was paying at scrap. And depending upon what karat it was, I figured out the cost and I bought gold from people. And then I also went into some junk stores and bought. I went into a couple of sort of antiquey-junk kind of stores and said, do you have any broken stuff that you just want to sell as scrap and they always did. And I'd say, I'll pay a little bit above scrap value if you'll sell me some—so there was one store a little out of town here in Mazomanie that sold me a bunch of broken pieces of jewelry. It's sort of an antique store. And then I bought some stuff on eBay, but if the price went above scrap value, I didn't bid any higher. But I managed to buy a lot of things at scrap value on eBay, so lots of jewelry.

And then I also had people that just sort of left pieces in my mailbox at school, who saw my poster and just had like an old wedding ring or something, and didn't even want to get paid for it—just sort a note, "For your project, Lisa," and "I'd like to just get rid of this."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: And so I kept the lots together, so if it was one single wedding band, it stayed by itself; if a person sold me 10 broken chains and a pair of earrings, I kept that together. And the idea was that I'd melt all this gold jewelry down, but you have no idea how supercharged it is when somebody comes in and actually hands you a lot of jewelry that they're selling for scrap. And the amazing thing about jewelry is—and when you think about yourself, you'll have to admit I'm right—that pretty much, people remember where every single piece of jewelry they own came from. This boyfriend of mine 20 years ago bought me this; my mother brought me back this pendant from a trip to St. Louis; this was my grandmother's; this I bought at a street flea market. But they remember.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you ask them all the stories?

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. And so I ended up with all of this jewelry that I, of course, wanted to melt down. And this is a very complicated thing, melting this jewelry down, because it was all different karats, and so I would have to alloy this back into usable material for me. But luckily, I bought some coins from some people that were pure gold, 24 karats, so if I wanted to work in 18 karat, I could add a little bit of the coins and raise the karat up a little bit. But once I started collecting the jewelry, I knew that I had to keep these lots together and that if I was ever going to melt it down, I was going to have to leave sort of evidence behind.

So then, I started on basically a year's project, Part II of The Gold Standard, in which I bought gold from people, and then I made castings of the jewelry, so I would keep the lot together. I would sort of carefully lay the little pieces of jewelry out on a table and make a mold of the jewelry, and then make plaster castings, so they were positive—perfect positive reproductions of the jewelry. And I thought they were—from the very beginning, when I did them, I thought they were really haunting because gold jewelry without the gold is like—it's a completely different thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Some of those chains were so fine and so ethereal, they were almost like ghosts, yes.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. So once I had made one or two of these castings, I thought they were really just so beautiful. And so in the end, I bought approximately 30 different lots of jewelry, some of them that were one wedding band and I might have only paid the person $17 for the gold in it or something, and some lots that had so much stuff that I might have paid $2,000 for it. And of course, the price of gold was going up at this time, so towards the end, I was paying a lot more for the gold than I was in the beginning. That was an intense year in terms of the price gold changing, which I was—in a way, I was actually glad.

And I documented every single person who I bought the lot from, how much—what the price of gold was on that day, how much I paid for it, and whatever comments they made to me about what they were giving me. And there were people that kind of said, I don't want to talk about it. And so that's what I documented, "I don't want to talk about it." And then there were other people that you couldn't get to stop talking in terms of where every piece came from.

So I made these plaster castings and I—they were very rough. They looked sort of like dug-up tablets, and that was sort of important to me to hold onto that. I kept them all rough because when you pull away the clay edges to the mold, when you pull the castings, they just left these rough edges. And I could have sort of trimmed them and made them these neat little tablets, but I really wanted you to really have the sense that these were castings taken from something, and so I left them very rough and—

MS. RIEDEL: And it enhanced the edginess and the contrast between these very fine castings and the very rough—

MS. GRALNICK: Then I did one last thing, which was that before I started melting down the gold, I kept a little remnant from each lot, sort of a tiny little bit of evidence that I didn't make this up. This thing really existed.

MS. RIEDEL: Here's a fragment of the chain, here's a portion of the clasp.

MS. GRALNICK: And again, the labeling system became really important. The first part of The Gold Standard, number one, had these laser-etched plaques that I had brought to a company and had laser-etched, so they looked very—so clean and permanent. And now I was moving—I was gently moving into a more subjective interpretation of history, you might say, and so these had little plaques under glass. And I was also thinking kind of the 1950s sort of display systems. I have very strong memories of the old Museum of Natural History when I was a kid, and how the displays—the labels and everything, it was all kind of a little bit funky, and it was all sort of that old kind of light-mapley sort of wood and that institution kind of look and everything was sort of—this was before the computers, so everything was sort of hand-typed.

And you actually had a little bit of sense—much more than you do now when you go to a museum—that there was like a person behind this label, like there was actually somebody that typed that label. And I even remembered that some of the labels would sort of look like they might have been—had white-out on them, that somebody typed over; whereas in the age of computers, that just doesn't exist. So there was a sense of authenticity to the label. So all the labels for this body of work, each tablet got its own separate stand, and then the labels were sort of under glass and they were typed with a really—one of those really old manual typewriters, the black ones where the letters are kind of raised, and everything typed sort of—

MS. RIEDEL: Unevenly, yes.

MS. GRALNICK: Unevenly, yes. And then underneath the glass would also be a little fragment of gold. So I saw these as sort of another step from the sort of distance that you had from Part I, and now it was—the sentiment was kind of coming closer to you. It was definitely a sense that there had been a person there, and of course, in the personal aspect of this jewelry, on each plaque would be some sort of little—if there was something significant that the person said about the jewelry, I would just pick out a sentence and put it on the plaque.

MS. RIEDEL: That's very personal in comparison and very much narrative—

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, and they are.

MS. RIEDEL: —the collections of six or 10 bangles, the broken chains, all the little religious pendants.

MS. GRALNICK: Right. And some of the people would say something sort of—like the person that sold me 12 bangle bracelets, would say something not particularly profound like, oh, I used to wear them all at one time on one arm. But of course, it's not profound, but also we sort of remember that period when women would wear all those, sort of the hippie days when you'd wear like a zillion bangles on one arm. And then some of these pieces were so incredibly poignant that it was almost heartbreaking to think that somebody had sold this thing.

There were these two pieces that belonged to a World War I admiral in the navy that were made as commemorative pieces and the man died, and this was just stuff from his estate that somebody was trying to get rid of because they were gold and so expensive and they could bring in a little bit of money. And there were these like hand-engraved—one was a watch fob and one was a little plaque made out of gold, and it's almost heartbreaking to think that somebody's family just like sold these for scrap value. So in a way, I was grateful that it was coming to me, instead of going to a refinery, because at least I was going to leave evidence of it before I melted it down, that it existed, and if anybody ever wanted to know that it existed, I had evidence that it had.

And just sort of backtrack a little bit in that this issue, as a Jew, and as a Jew being born in the '50s, definitely the postwar generation, this issue of evidence was a very crucial issue in my upbringing. And I think it's really kind of important to remember that the American-Jewish population is very conscious that very, very soon there will be no witnesses left to World War II, that the survivors will be—the last survivors will die probably within the next—certainly, within the next 20 years, there won't be any witnesses left because we're already, what, 60 years since the war.

And so evidence, the idea of the importance of evidence, is something that's been sort of ingrained in me from the time I was very young that if there isn't some evidence, it could easily be said it never happened. And so the idea of melting all these pieces down without leaving some evidence was kind of important to me. So that was a whole year's time, The Gold Standard, Part II, and there is about 30 tablets and I sort of just—in a way, I see all the tablets as one piece.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've displayed them once as one piece, or most of them, not all of them.

MS. GRALNICK: Each one is displayed separately, but I displayed—when I had my recent exhibition, I displayed them all on one long shelf down the whole gallery wall. And so they really do kind of read as a narrative, and even in terms of the date that I bought the gold. So we are really sort of experiencing the process of me just

going through buying all this gold. You're sort of imaging it, these people. Here, this person sold her—two people sold her on one day and here was a week between when she bought and the next time, and that kind of thing.

So I spent a whole year just doing that, making these molds and pulling these casts. And then I was kind of ready for Part III, which was going to be, I knew, probably the most time-intensive part, although I had no idea Part I was going to take three years, but it did, but Part III was going to be actually now using this recycled gold. And between you and I, I'm sort of grateful it worked out the way it did. I had no idea that the price of gold would go as high as it is right now. It's damn near $800 an ounce now, and so I'm grateful that I get to use all this recycled gold for this last part, and even if it's a lot—the refining of it, for me, is a lot of work. There's something that's just so great about it.

And of course, philosophically it was so great because this gold already had been somewhere before and I was sort of returning it to history. And such a good portion of the jewelry that I bought was just really the kind of horrible commercial chains and stuff that people buy that it felt so great to be sort of like banishing that stuff from the planet and making it into something more interesting, anyway. And we wouldn't have nearly the need to do any of this terrible, terrible mining of gold if people would just get rid of all that broken stuff that's sitting in their jewelry boxes that they can't seem to part with, even though they never wear it. That's another story.

So the last part, in a way, was the third part—not last, because there was going to be one more part—is probably the most important and most interesting, and that is that it's sort of the creation of historicized objects. And so I'm actually making pieces out of the recycled gold, but I'm not—for the most part, I'm just melting the gold down and rolling it out and making it into usable sheet and wire and everything else for me. And so I'm using basically, what's now fresh material. And there will be very little cases where I'm using any of the actual—that you'll see any of the actual jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: The original elements.

MS. GRALNICK: Although there is one case and one piece, which we'll talk about. And so I'm imagining almost a lost history of gold. I'm imagining pieces that obviously, weren't made at certain times in history, but could have been made in history. So there is a sort of kind of aspect of roman à clef about it that I'm kind of creating a biography sort of based on fact, but that is ultimately fictional. And so—and I'm looking for particular points in history in which gold may have played a part in the history, or particular parts, places where I think that gold may not have necessarily played a history, but I think that jewelry or a gold object can still comment on something related to that point in history.

And I'm also interested in what you might say is kind of casting a doubt on history as we know it, because part of this thing with the labeling systems is that I'm becoming more and more conscious, as we get older, that we have this canon of art history that we sort of accept as sort of etched in stone. And that canon of art history is nothing more than a giant collection of objects that someone has tried to make sense of, and that they continue to try to make sense of and that they continue to sort of change the way they're making sense of, and that it's really sort of important to remember that museums, as we know it, are a relatively young thing compared to the history of art, and that we've pieced together a lot of history, not just art history, but history in general, through the surviving objects. And there may be a lot of holes in there that would change the whole picture if some new objects appeared, and it happens all the time, when new objects appear or new excavations or archeological excavations are done, and new objects show up and it's sort of like, oh, my God, we had no idea that they were doing this in the year of blah, blah, blah.

So I'm kind of playing with this in a very pointed sort of way. So, for instance, there's a piece that I call *Victorian Chastity Belt Necklace 1879* [2007]. That's the title, and of course, it wasn't actually made in 1879. I made it just six months ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, historical fiction, yes.

MS. GRALNICK: But I'm giving it a date and it's also a piece that sort of, in a way, spans across centuries because the basic design of the piece is coming actually from a medieval chastity belt. And that was pretty much the only period that we know for sure that there was a practice of chastity belts being made, and there is a museum in Florence that has a number of these medieval chastity belts, and several other museums in the world, but there, a museum that has probably the largest collection of these steel medieval chastity belts.

And so I sort of based my design on that, but then I kind of put my piece in the Victorian period because there was this great repression of women in the Victorian period, and there was also this almost kind of a myth, or a rumor, throughout the Victorian period about chastity belts. And so it was a question that historians were dealing with for a while, whether actually during the Victorian period, there was sort of a reemergence of a practice of women wearing chastity belts, or if there was a reemergence of an interest in chastity belts as a kind of fetish object. Now scholars are seeming to think that there really is no evidence that women were forced to

wear chastity belts ever during the Victorian period, but there's no question that there was a sort of fetishization of them, and to the point there were actually some early sorts of designs for kind of women's lingerie type stuff in the period that was based on chastity belt kinds of designs.

And then I bring it right into the present in that my piece actually has, around these areas that were supposed to be, in the original chastity-belt design, that were supposed to sort of create these openings in the vagina and the anus, so that people could perform their bodily functions while they were wearing a chastity belt—women. I've actually put human hair, from my husband, actually, from his head and from his beard. So the piece has this sort of kind of disturbing visceral quality that's right there in the present. The human hair is there and my little label on the piece—and the labels now in Part III are all handwritten in my hand with pencil.

MS. RIEDEL: There are also incredibly delicate roses in the gold work.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So the real contrast between the roses—

MS. GRALNICK: That sort of Victorian design sense, which was really very feminine during that period, even in terms of the clothing men wore, is in terms of the decorations on the piece. The whole chastity belt has these little hinged elements, which was how the original chastity belts were made with all these little hinged elements, but now mine were all gold with little roses on each one, the kind of design touches that would have been on fancy lingerie, little embossed roses.

MS. RIEDEL: And yours is a neck ring with a very long, extended pendant.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. So it kind of cuts across cultures, and the object exists on five or six different levels. And that's sort of what I'm after in these pieces now, true, sort of hybridized objects that are not exactly contemporary, not exactly historical objects, that also, in the little handwritten labels that I'm writing in pencil in my own hand, that suggest the total sort of subjective and arbitrary way in which we talk about objects. I'm telling you exactly what I want you to know and no more and no less and I'm giving you the provenance, if I think it's important where the object was found, what year it was made in.

In that particular case, it actually says recent DNA testing reveals the hair to be from a man's head and beard, which is just the kind of thing that you never would have had in a museum blurb 20 years ago, but you can very definitely expect to see in a museum blurb now or in the very near future, that we're going to know those kinds of pieces of information about objects. So on one hand, it's incredibly, incredibly specific of the moment and on another hand, it sort of crosses centuries.

And then the other thing is that these pieces are all gold. And that's the thing that ties them together, is this material that doesn't change, this material that is one of the few materials that we really have that art objects have been made out of that pretty much doesn't deteriorate at all over hundreds and thousands of years. So you look at those pieces from the King Tut treasure and they could have been made yesterday, and it's one of the real beauties about gold is that there's no point in trying to make the piece look old, even if I'm dating it 1879, because it wouldn't look old. It would look like it was made yesterday.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, too, in Part III that gold figures so prominently in each piece, whereas it's completely missing, absent entirely in Part II, and present only very sparsely in Part I. So it really arrives.

MS. GRALNICK: That's right. The gold arrives and it arrives in an incredibly morally ambiguous way and that was—

MS. RIEDEL: Very edgy.

MS. GRALNICK: —really important to me in the last part that there be a moral ambiguity to every single piece, because number one, gold is a sort of mercurial material. It has been associated with so much bloodshed; it's also been associated with sort of unimaginable periods of imperialism, with all the good and bad that you could associate with that. And of course, it's also associated with some of those magnificent objects made in the history of man.

So it's complicated and it, of course, has this amazing ability to be melted down and then all of its moral ambiguity gets erased and it starts fresh again. It can completely renew itself in that way. It can completely be absolved of its sins and reborn again. And it's one of the reasons that it's always been—from the time of the Aztecs, it's been this material that whole armies would invade places, take the gold, melt it down and then the evidence of their crimes would be gone forever.

MS. RIEDEL: Disappear.

MS. GRALNICK: And of course, that was done on a grand scale and then that was done on the scale that I'm dealing with in the second piece, in terms of the teeth of concentration camp victims that were—their fillings and crowns knocked out and melted down by the Nazis. And so that piece actually imagines a military medal made in 1940 for a Nazi out of gold teeth, and of course just to make it sort of a little more in your face, I actually am making it, my piece out of gold teeth, and not melting them down, while I'm actually melting my own gold teeth, creating gold teeth, sort of returning the gold back to where it was originally.

And so in that case, I made a piece called *Military Medal 1940* and imagined a piece that could have been made. Nineteen forty was sort of the year that that Rudolf Hess got his great promotion to become commandant of Auschwitz. It was sort of the culmination of his military career, and so I also give a provenance for this piece, imaging that it was made in 1940, and it's actually engraved, "For R.H." on the back, and then imagine that it was a piece that wasn't found until something like 27 years later on a farm in Poland, which is, of course, where Rudolf Hess was found before he was hanged after the Nuremberg trial. So I'm sort of, based on history, imagining a provenance for this piece and it has a little part that hangs with the words "*Arbeit macht frei*," which of course, were the words "Work makes freedom," the sort of ironic text that was used on the gates of pretty much all the concentration camps. And supposedly, that was Rudolf Hess's sort of invention, that those words should be put on the gates on all the concentration camps. He did it first and then it was sort of repeated at all the camps. And I copied my text in the way that the letters put together in the exact size, not from Auschwitz, but from a different camp, from Teresenstadt. And then the piece has all these—this, just a circle of gold teeth surrounding sort of a concave surface covered with red garnets from all over the world. It looks sort of like a pool of blood.

MS. RIEDEL: The garnets are all slightly different shades of red.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, they're all different colors. They're from all over the world and they—I sort of wanted to kind of represent a little bit the Jewish Diaspora all over the world, and the sort of—what became sort of a blood stain that exists everywhere in the world now. And then there are these little pieces of chains hanging from a pin that, again, sort of imaging the jewelry pulled off concentration camp victims that would be melted down, and there are all little ends of chains with the catches sort of still on there so that you—

MS. RIEDEL: The little clasps.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. They sort of just have a sense of the violence in the act and the sort of incompleteness of lives cut short, and that sort of thing. And these were actual, in this case and so far, it's the only piece that I've done that where I actually kept the chains that people sold to me, sort of imagining that those chains themselves could actually contain that gold in some way anyways. And so those weren't melted down, so they're just sort of assorted different kinds of commercial chains and different karats with different catches on them, little fragments of them, hanging down like a fringe that would be a on a military medal.

So that's a second piece and it's interesting because that piece was, as you can imagine, a sort of a particularly personal conceit for me. I made up my mind that from the very beginning that that piece was going to be in the body of work. And nobody was going to talk me out of it, even if it was a disturbing piece for people to see. It was one that I sort of had to do, and so much so that actually, in the handwritten blurb on that piece, I sort of attribute it to a Polish goldsmith named Ilsa Glorensick which of course, is my own name jumbled. It's sort of paying homage to my own kind of Polish-Jewish roots and my own family's extended family's extermination during the war.

And that was my own sort of feeling of kind of experiencing that history sort of as a, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." I remember, a number of years ago—it must 15 years ago—going to Dachau. They have sort of museums set up there now. And the thing that was sort of most disturbing to me about going there was that I saw all these faces in the pictures that looked just like me. They were dark, curly-haired young women with big brown eyes and my nose. It was like I was—these weren't aliens to me. These were all people that kind of looked like me. So I remembered more than I had ever in my life of all the stuff that had been kind of ground into me from the time that I was young, that "Do not forget; we can't forget," and the evidence, as I talked about earlier. All of a sudden, seeing those pictures was really sort of—really, the reality hit me. So that was the second piece in The Gold Standard, Part III.

And then the third piece that I've done is this piece called *The Hair Noose*, which is—it really is kind of this very long piece, and I collected little fragments of Victorian hair-weaving, all from—Victorian hair-weaving was done as a sort of—primarily as a sort of mourning ritual. When somebody would die, their hair would be saved, and weaving would be done. If the woman had very long hair that died, it would be possible to weave a very long piece out of the hair. The person—if it was a man or someone with short hair, you could only weave a very short piece out of their hair.

MS. RIEDEL: Very elaborate and detailed designs.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. They're very elaborate and there was a whole little tool that they used that was a little round table that separated all these hairs and women would sit around the table and do this as a group, weave these things. And hair-weaving was used in brooches, it was used—earrings were made, necklaces. And they also would just make these sort of ropes that were used for men's watch fobs as mourning jewelry. And of course, all of this kind of came to great heights after Queen Victoria lost her husband and all England was in mourning and then mourning—the rituals of mourning became really a fad in England, and especially during the Edwardian period, the late Victorian and the Edwardian period.

So I started collecting pieces of this hair, mourning hair-weaving, that was actually attached to men's watch fobs, and I was only looking for the watch-fob pieces. And I had been collecting them for actually a number of years, and I would find them in antique stores and at flea markets and sometimes on eBay, where the hair was kind of damaged. And then I could buy them for very cheap, because the jewelry that would be attached to them would actually be like just gold-filled, not particularly fancy. Every once in a while, the watch fob would be made out of real gold, but for the most part, they made them out of gold-filled. And so I just started saving these sort of damaged pieces and I cut the damaged parts of the hair-weaving off.

And so some of my pieces are only a couple—an inch, two inches long and then I managed to find some other pieces that were almost six inches long. And I was collecting them and then I constructed little spacers that connect one piece of hair-weaving to another out of gold, the recycled gold. And I just created this big hair noose. And then it has this very fancy Victorian style tassel hanging from the back, so it has this combination of being incredibly somber—I'm in a noose—and then having a sort of Victorian conceit hanging from it, this tassel.

So there was also again, a kind of combination of—I think the Victorian period is very, very interesting, in that it was sort of a period of almost silly kind of flourish, but on the other hand, sort of a very dark, repressive period. I mean, this was a period when women were getting put in mental hospitals for having orgasms. They were considered mad, and so, at the same time, they were sitting by candlelight in the dark, weaving hair from dead people. I mean, what an odd sort of combination of strange, visceral kind of practices with then deep, dark repression and Calvinism.

MS. RIEDEL: And you said you've thought that some of the most interesting artwork comes out of the most repressed and difficult historical times.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. So this piece was sort of a combination of that, and I sort of pretended that the piece was made by a famous woman from the Women's Suffragette Movement, Lucy Burns; again, just giving it a provenance, giving it a specificity, that meant that somebody, at some point, in order to make a statement about men, may have collected all these watch fob—this woven watch-fob hair and said, let's, like, destroy them and make them into a more meaningful symbol. So again, the piece has kind of, on one hand, a dark humor about it; on another hand, a sort of disturbing quality to it.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. GRALNICK: And then I made this other piece that's just as weird. I've always loved when you go to museums and they have all these—especially when you're really go into the antiquities and they have all these strange little tools and things, and they just kind of make up what it might—it might have been a farm in—let's say, a farm implement, or it will say, writing instrument, or it will say—it might just say, piece of adornment—[Riedel laughs]—because they have no idea where it might have—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: It looks decorative.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. GRALNICK: But, they have no—it doesn't suggest any part of the body that it actually connects to. So, I've always found that really fantastic, and it draws home to you—at that moment, when you come to those particular labels, it draws home to you that nobody really knows anything. We're projecting on all of this stuff, especially all the work that—all the objects that are found pre-photography. So my gold piece—and I sort of collect medical instruments. I collect antique medical atomizers and other kinds of antique medical instruments. So my piece is just a kind of—a little bit a compendium of all the weird things I collect.

MS. RIEDEL: It's the one that's completely gold as well, so far.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, it's all gold, it has no other materials. And it's weird enough that you sort of, in your mind, can think that this might have—maybe imagine something that it does, but there's nothing definitive in your mind that says, oh, I know for sure what this thing was used for.

MS. RIEDEL: And there's something very sinister about it, too.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, yes. It sort of suggests that it was used for something related to the human body and that it might have been used for something related to liquids in the human body, but you're not sure. It could have been like some kind of weird enema syringe, it could have been some kind weird sexual device, it could have been something for cleaning out your ears. Who knows? And it could have even been some kind of torture device. So I just kind of say, I give it—sort of do the best I can, and say, medical implement, tool. Who knows what it was? And then I say, provenance unknown, and then I date it from like, 2500 BC to 1900 AD—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. GRALNICK: —which of course, is—sometimes in the museums, they give you like 200 or 300 [year] stretch, but you usually don't get a 4,000 year stretch—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: —when it could be from. And just for fun, I stopped at 1900 AD, only because there was this aspect of me, that just thought it was sort of fun to cut off a little bit of history, as if—like, we don't want to just say we have no idea. So by cutting off 100 years or so off of this, we're going to say, we have some idea that it wasn't made in the last 100 years. So there's that piece, very little information other than just kind of a curious object made out of gold. But even that, in itself, is interesting to me because a curious object made out of gold is different than a curious object not made out of gold.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. And that's completely made out of gold, there's nothing—yes.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, completely. So, it already peaks your interest in terms of certain things which was—this was obviously a tool or an implement made for a wealthy person, for a king, or a chief, or a wealthy person. Then there's the issue that maybe it was made out of gold because, until the development of stainless steel, which is a relatively modern thing, gold was the most sanitary metal there was, because it doesn't change, it doesn't tarnish, it doesn't oxidize. And so, it wasn't uncommon, as you know, sort of up until not that long ago, like, eyeglass frames would be made out of gold because—before there was stainless steel, certain things had to be made out of gold, just so that they could be sanitary and not start tarnishing. And that was the reason ear wires were always made out of gold and now, you can actually get stainless steel ear wires and posts.

So that's just a curious piece that allowed me to sort of have kind of fun with form. And the other thing about that piece is that it has no surface decoration whatsoever. And that was kind of important to me, because one of the things that can sort of instantly date a piece is surface decoration, and the kind of tools used for surface decoration, and whether it was fabricated or cast. But in the way that I made the piece, it's pretty much impossible to know whether the techniques that were used were primitive techniques from 400 BC, or techniques used in 1850. So I completely left off anything that would be a definitive time marker. And so it does have a sort of sense of gold object sort of pulled off from Troy or the Thracian treasures, or places where these kind of strange objects show up, or early African, really heavy, gold, African nose rings and bracelets that were just kind of very primitively cast. Sorry, what were you going to say?

MS. RIEDEL: Part III relaties to Part I. It is directly, intentionally, the opposite of section one—

MS. GRALNICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —which is so clearly dated to the 19th and 20th century—

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, right.

MS. RIEDEL: —versus things that are so historically ambiguous.

MS. GRALNICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So again, not only are the pieces in Part III commenting on each other historically, and in relation to the museum, but they relate back to Part I.

MS. GRALNICK: That's right.

MS. RIEDEL: So, there's a larger picture—

MS. GRALNICK: That's right.

MS. RIEDEL: —that's being created over all three sections of work.

MS. GRALNICK: And I do kind of see the whole body of work as a cycle. So I anticipate that I'll be working on Part III the entire year that I'm on sabbatical now, maybe even a little bit longer. And then, there's Part IV, which I will start this year before Part III is done because Part III doesn't have to be done before Part IV is started, but I consider, at this point, the way I'm seeing it, Part IV, the end of the cycle, which is going to be drawings.

And I've already kind of—I don't want to use the word invented; let's say, reinvented. I've been doing research and experimenting with creating sort of a gold pen, which when I say, "gold pen," I really mean just a stick of gold that I can draw with, like you're drawing with charcoal, but I'll be drawing with gold. And if you draw with the gold on a rough material, say, a piece of sandpaper, even if it's very fine sandpaper, you're removing material off of the stick as you're drawing and you're leaving a gold line.

And the experimentation that I'm conducting is in the fact that I can—and I haven't invented this. I'm just trying to refigure something out that had some history in the Middle Ages. And by alloying the gold with some lower-melting-point metals like lead and mercury and a very, very small amount, trace amounts, I can make that pure gold even softer than it is. And then, the line that I get will be even darker and more dense and richer, and that's what I'm experimenting with. And so, the last part of the bodywork is going to be drawings, but the drawings are going to be accompanied by labels.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. GRALNICK: And this time, the labels will be gold. And so, this sort of brings us on one hand—and the drawings are going to be drawings of pieces in museums. So on one hand, this brings us full cycle back to the beginnings of gold, and on the other hand, it brings us full cycle into the sort of agenda of contemporary art, which is that the object becomes sort of a mere ghost of itself and the label, the interpretation, becomes the part that's the most precious, that the most sort of time and effort gets put into the content, the reducible content.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, exactly.

[END MD 04 TR 01.]

MS. RIEDEL: You've done a wonderful job of describing each of these individual aspects of The Gold Standard. Perhaps we could talk briefly about how you see them relating one to the other.

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I definitely see it as one body of work. As a matter of fact, I've been—you know, sort of reluctant to show it at all up until this point because my goal really is to show it as an entire body of work when it's completed and then document it in a catalogue, because I kind of see it as a cycle and—

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely—it feels very much like a single body of work and a cycle.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. And I think that it allowed me, sort of through the lens of one material, to explore a number of issues that, for me, have to do not only with this sort of history of my own field, but the sort of—I don't want to say changing agenda of the craft—of the art object and the craft object, but the sort of changing phenomenology of the work of art and how it is we define the object as a work of art, and how that has kind of changed over time and sort of redefined itself in sort of every new period in history and will kind of continue to redefine itself.

And actually I feel like even within my own lifetime I've sort of seen this cycle happening that—and I'm actually predicting that we are going to have a—which would be great for the history of crafts—I'm kind of predicting that we're going to have a kind of resurgence of interest in objectness and the irreducibility of objects kind of in the next generation.

MS. RIEDEL: In relation to the digital and virtual?

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, and also in relationship to the fact that, you know, we've sort of kind of gone through a period—and you know, it's funny, as an educator, I even see—you know, we've gone through a period where—where there was sort of an emphasis on kind of idea and concept over objectness, and so that—so that the—the, you know, kind of what you—what you—what you're writing in your artist statement becomes more important than the object itself, and how the piece can be sort of defined through language as an idea.

And, of course, objects themselves or truly potent objects are never really fully reducible into language. And this was kind of, you know, an argument—and this is what got me sort of interested in reading about the iconoclastic debates because this was really an argument that was, you know, at its height happening in the 5th, 6th, 7th centuries related to the creation of religious icons as—as—you know, and the question really was: If you were creating, say, a painting of Christ, or religious icon, what exactly was that relationship to—of that image of Christ to the sublime? Was it fully reducible? And if it was fully reducible, it made it heretical. But if it wasn't

fully reducible and that was a thing unto itself, then the heresy wasn't really there.

And—so this was being debated back and forth and—and as you know, in terms of Christianity and ultimately Catholicism, certain sort of practices happened—and changes happened in terms of the creation of certain religious rights like communion and the issue of—the ritual of the consecrated hosts and all of that that were sort of a direct way that the Catholic Church was sort of getting around the issue of the heresy of icons, that there could actually be a kind of symbolic act that could be sort of understood as a symbolic act, but that people wouldn't necessarily be falling to their knees during this ritual, that it could—there could be sort of almost this glass wall in between the object and the experience.

And so I think that at a certain point, there is going to be a re-interest in what you might call highly-charged objects of art and—which won't be easy to talk about, but they will allow for a kind of direct visceral experience that's sort of missing from contemporary life because of the digital age and—and the fact that, you know, people are in many ways sort of living vicariously, and it's becoming easier and easier to live vicariously because the quality of the virtual experience that's offered is getting so much closer to reality that the—the temptation is great to not bother with how messy reality is.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Where would you like to show this work?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, this is a bit of a problem—you know, an issue for me in that I had all of these years built into a reputation primarily as a jeweler and the—I didn't mention this earlier, but in the first part of The Gold Standard work, I had made the first pieces of the plaster and gold pieces. I had actually—some of the little gold fragments, I'd actually put pinbacks on the back, thinking, well, these pieces could come out of the plaster and be jewelry. And it's kind of interesting because then I started questioning myself why I was making these gold fragments jewelry.

And I remember Michael Brenson was visiting us as a, sort of visiting scholar at the University of Wisconsin. I had him come to my studio and we sort of talked about this because I was really uncomfortable with the fact that I was making this jewelry and I knew deep down in my heart that it was—I was trying to hold on to something. What I was trying to hold on to was sort of my ties to a career that was rooted in a certain field and that had nurtured a group of collectors that collected jewelry that might have no interest now in what I was doing.

But I couldn't really nevertheless defend it to myself. So after the first two or three pieces that had pinbacks on them, I started leaving them off. And the question I was asking Michael Brenson was whether I should go back and remove them from the first ones. And he didn't think I should, that he thought that was something interesting about that, that within the body of work my own struggle with certain issues was apparent in the fact that they were on the early ones and now they weren't there anymore. So I took his advice and left them that way, but the question still remains that, and as much as I sort of hate to admit it—and even with the new pieces that are jewelry, they're certainly not jewelry in the sense that anybody's going to wear them to a cocktail party. They're only jewelry in the sense that that's—that is—the format, the art object is taking for conceptual reasons.

And so it's—it's quite obvious that I'm sort of about, as fully as you can, now produce the body of work that kind of falls between the cracks here and that I'm—I am definitely working with the tools and the processes of my craft as a goldsmith in a body of work that is dealing primarily with issues related to contemporary art, more than craft issues. And that leaves me in a bit of pickle since I've, up until now, sort of nurtured a reputation that is mostly within crafts and most of the galleries that I have dealt with in terms of being a jeweler are not appropriate for the work that I'm dealing with. And the way, up till now, I'd solved this is by sort of showing at university museums, which—one of the beauties of university museums is they don't tend to be so compartmentalized. They're small enough that they don't tend to have a department of crafts, a department of decorative arts, a department of contemporary art, a department—you know, they're just a museum and so they tend to be more likely to find it easier to show work that sort of falls between the cracks.

And, you know, I worked for many years—I had worked with the VO Gallery when she first opened and then I continued to work with the gallery after Joke van Ommen died and the gallery was bought by Ellen Reiben and it became Jewelers' Werk Galerie and I had a number of shows in both venues. And I worked with, you know, several galleries in Europe, with Galerie Ra, Amsterdam, and then, of course, for many years with the Susan Cummins Gallery, which was for—for the lion's share of my career my major gallery. And I was completely traumatized when the gallery was closed. You know, I had really such a great experience with the gallery and, you know, someone or a group of people had sort of invested a period of time into nurturing my career and finally finding some kind of collector base for my work and—and not to mention sort of building a relationship of trust that becomes so important with a gallery.

And, you know, so it was really—it's been really difficult for me to—since the Susan Cummins Gallery has closed,

for me to sort of find a relationship with a gallery that has worked. And quite frankly, even if the Susan Cummins Gallery was still open, who knows if even Susan Cummins would have been interested in showing the work I'm doing now in her gallery simply because her primary areas were painting and jewelry, and I am sort of not quite fitting into either one of those. She may had been interested simply because by that point she had sort of represented me for long enough that there were people that would be interested in new work that I was doing even if it wasn't—didn't quite fit into the mold.

But I am in a bit of a crisis here with that situation; I don't think I'm alone. You know, I've had these conversations with Myra Mimlitsch Gray who, in a way, has been dealing with this crisis longer than me because her work never was primarily jewelry and, on the other hand, her work was never really primarily hollowware in the sense of traditional hollowware either. And so her—her work was always a difficult fit for craft galleries, yet a big risk for fine arts galleries. And I'm sort of in the same pickle right now, which is in a way, if I break into the fine arts gallery world, after 30 years of sort of—kind of moving up to a good position in terms of my field, I'm sort of starting from scratch again; I'm down at the bottom rung, and you know, no one will know me from Adam.

And so that's—that doesn't upset me. That doesn't really frighten me. I don't really have a problem with that. In a way, I sort of like it, you know, because it gives you the sort of whole new challenges, whole little new ladder to try to climb up. And the other thing is that, as I've already discussed with you, you know, when bodies of work got little old for me and got a little too easy for me, that's when I would start to get frustrated and get itchy feet and want to do a new body of work. And so, in a way, this whole thing sort of represents kind of a new challenge for me and—you know, recently, somebody was interested in possibly taking my work to sort of one of these art fairs that they have in Chicago, in Miami, Basel [Switzerland], that sort of thing, and—

MS. RIEDEL: One of the SOFA fairs?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, not SOFA, though, one of these sort of, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: A fine art version?

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. And, you know, I've sort of decided that I am not really ready for that in that I have this real luxury that I've been working on this body of work now, you know, for five and a half years, and I feel very patient in terms of getting the body of work done and then, you know, in a way, sort of shopping it around, finding the right venue for it.

And—you know, I'm 51 years old, and so it's not like—it's not like I feel this desperate feeling like it has to happen tomorrow because I'm going to die and I don't feel this desperate feeling like I'm so young that I have to have my first show. I've had shows. And so I'm sort of in a good place about feeling good about my career and my work right now enough that I'm going to—I'm going to wait till I'm ready, and then I'm going try to present it in the best form I can and try to find the right venue for it and I don't want to exhibit in the wrong venue. A number of people have asked me, galleries have asked me to, you know, exhibit part of the body of work at, say, the SOFA show or that kind of thing, and I'm just not interested in breaking it up and exhibiting it in that kind of marketplace sort of mentality.

It's a body of work that's—you know, doesn't even really work in that kind of—in that kind of mentality. There're—pieces aren't made really as commodities. Eventually, yes, am I interested in selling work to people that are serious art collectors or craft collectors? Yes, but—but the work first has to be understood in the context that it was made, which means that the person who's even—might be interested in it, needs to see it in the context of the entire body of work, recognizing that if they were to buy a piece, what they're buying is an element of a much larger statement. You know, and they have to understand its place in that statement before it can really have any meaning.

But this is a problem that as work in the craft media starts to change and the field starts to change that I'm not alone in this problem. I mean, there's going to be more and more practitioners that are going to be—feel like and there are that are going to feel like they're in a sort of pickle than I am, and it's sort of time now for some—I think, some new galleries to kind of come on the scene.

The interesting thing, Mija, is that the trend has been sort of in the other direction, which is craft galleries becoming more like stores, where they have their sort of permanent artists that are out on display all the time, and then the tiniest little space where they might have changing exhibitions. And so as they become more and more like stores and less and less like galleries that actually—like clean out the whole space after one show and install a whole new exhibition, those places become less and less appropriate for me, and more and more I need a sculpture gallery just because, you know, this isn't work that you can—you can give me, like, one little showcase window and I can put the work out.

So I do need to find larger spaces; the university galleries and museums work well. And, you know, finding a sculpture space would be perfect even if it's not a topnotch sculpture space at this point. I don't really care. I'm sort of more interested in seeing it displayed in the right context and—and sort of working from there.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I was going to ask you how you see craft evolving over the past 30 years of your career, but it seems like your work is going in one direction and you see the craft field—

MS. GRALNICK: You know, yes and no. I think what's happening is—and maybe it's always happened, but I think that the divisions are becoming perhaps more extreme and that is that the field is really splintering more. There used to be much more—you know, I remember—gosh, I remember going to, like, the Rhinebeck Craft Fair, you know, back in the late '70s, and you'd walk through that craft fair and there was this incredible diversity of people who were doing, like, beautiful but purely functional ceramic plates and coffee cups. And there was absolutely no—even pretense to be making high art. It was just beautiful functional craft or baskets, and then there were people who were like right out of university programs that were doing cutting-edge work and that were there and recognized that they might only sell a couple of pieces you know, all weekend to maybe some serious collectors that might make their way through.

And that sort of diversity was okay because—I don't know—the field still felt sort of so small and new that we were sort of happy to have anything that kind of tied us all together. But now, you know, these areas of focus are rather splintered and even at this point right now I feel very little in common with a functional crafts person and what their life is about and what their goals for their work are about. And that doesn't mean that in any way, that I'm looking down on them, quite the contrary, but what it does mean is that the field itself may have to start defining itself a little bit by these separate contingencies and allow these contingencies to pursue the goals that are appropriate for what they're doing, and in some ways, magazines like *American Craft* are—you know, are almost oxymorons at this point because is there really something—a particular American—you know, *American Craft* tries to show this diverse—

MS. RIEDEL: Array—yeah.

MS. GRALNICK: —array of work from the purely functional, even sort of regional folk art kind of—and then the people that are at the sort of cutting-edge of the field from a sort of intellectual and academic standpoint and all they really have in common is a material that they might be using and, in some cases, not even that, maybe just a training that they came out of or—and does it diminish both, you know, by trying to throw it all in one—you know, in one sack together?

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think so?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, I don't know. I—I think it's a kind of difficult question and I think that I would like to see there, in a way, be an organization that represents sort of more people like me, but are there enough of them for that organization to have, you know, any significance? I don't know.

Maybe, I think, it would be interesting to have at least some—some sort of dialogue in print on issues related to this sort of, you know, blurred place in between. I certainly think that—that the American craft movement has moved forward and one of the really positive things that I see is the way it's moving on the academic level, that the work that I'm seeing coming out of academic programs like my own and lots of others, you know, lots of other—especially the really good programs—is work that is really both conceptually challenging and still sort of honoring this tradition of making an objectness and a rigor within a practice. And that kind of combination, seeing that happen is so fantastic that it—it upsets me when I see one or the other half of that conversation being lost, when I see work that's being done that's rigorously challenging, but completely forgetting about the practice, and the making, and the objectness, or work that's holding on to the practice, but it's nothing about—it's about nothing other than craft and it's not sort of moving the field forward.

So I think the fact that I'm seeing this happen, where this combination of both things is happening, and it's one thing we had talked about I think over dinner last night or whatever, about this all inclusiveness of craft. It frightens me a little bit, the idea that craft now wants to sort of merge itself with design, and wants to merge itself with installation art, and wants to merge itself—it wants to sort of absorb all the—sort of contingencies out there. And that worries me a little bit simply because we have, you know, a history and a discipline and a practice in all the craft media that has a kind of rigor to it, and I'm sort afraid of that getting more—that rigor getting watered down, and that it'll just be sort of like anybody can make anything out of anything and learn to do it five minutes before they make the piece and that's craft. And I'm afraid that's sort of where we're going to—where we're going to end up and I don't want to end up there, so—

MS. RIEDEL: There's a value in the labor that—

MS. GRALNICK: There's a value in the labor. There's value in the skill and the discipline to—

MS. RIEDEL: The practice itself.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: If you were asked to define yourself as part of a particular tradition, could you?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, metalsmithing, for sure—I mean, I have no problem. That's the easiest thing for me to say is metalsmithing and goldsmithing, that I'm part of that tradition. And I really have no problem with that because I see that—in my mind, I see my field having a future and that future isn't necessarily in the making of functional objects, but even if it isn't in the making of functional objects, I think it's really important to remember that, in a way, painting's whole history wasn't in functionalism.

That was primarily making, you know, the great—you know, what we would call the sort of great breakthrough periods of painting in the Renaissance and—I mean, this was all religious painting, paintings made for churches and cathedrals and/or commissions by sort of rich patrons of kings and queens and—you know, wealthy patrons and, you know, Rothschilds and the sort of thing, and that's—that was the history of painting.

And when there was no longer any need for painting to fulfill those functions, painting reinvented itself. And nobody questions that contemporary painting is a continuation of a long tradition of painting. And I think that the fact that we sort of question that crafts and metalsmithing, particularly, and crafts, in general, can move forward past its functional roots and still claim those roots as an important part of its history and as what they're doing, a continuation of that tradition is silly. It is.

You know, I mean, can anybody look at somebody—you know, like Myra's work and not think it's a continuation of a tradition? But it also sort of comments on the changing times that we live in and the relevance of those traditions to that time. So—you know, in a very subversive way, and that's the beauty of these traditions, is that by holding on to them, you own the greatest card to subversiveness that you possibly can—you know, you possibly can use, once you let go of that tradition, then the leap you've made becomes so much less effective.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think of your own work as part of a particularly American tradition or an international one?

MS. GRALNICK: That's an interesting question, Mija, because I remember that when I had shows in Europe, they would talk about my work being distinctly American and when I have shows in America, they would talk about my work as being—seeming to be very European, especially when I was doing the black work.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. GRALNICK: And—and so that's a really good question. I mean, I went through a period where I traveled a lot and then I went through a period where—you know, in the last 10, 15 years—where I didn't. And so I don't think that traveling has had that much to do with the work that I've done in—recently. On the other hand, if you'd ask me if you think my—if I think work is distinctly American, that would be sort of hard for me to say too only in that—it's kind of hard for me to think particularly, say, of American artists who have influenced my work or who my work looks like or—on the other hand, I think my work is—I think perhaps my work is distinctly American—as distinctly American as—as a sort of American with European roots type of work could be.

I mean, I think my work is sort of indicative of the kind of work that is able to come out of Americans, considering almost all of us originally, either through our parents or grandparents or great grandparents come from somewhere else, and so we bring in art sort of worldview into our work. But one of the great things I think about—I don't really—I experience this feeling more when I am in Europe than when I am in America, is that—is the kind of diversity of our society. And you don't—you forget how diverse our society really is until you go to certain countries in Europe and you realize that we really do live in an incredibly diverse society.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. GRALNICK: And I think that's one of the things that allows for certain kinds of work to happen, and I think also we have our own unique tradition of—now, that we can call our own that—that, you know, is only 50 years old, but our teaching of art in academic—not in academies, but in university situations, where you can get terminal academic degree in art, in university situations, where you're not being trained on the academy model, and this is very unique to America, that students are actually studying metalsmithing in universities, in art departments at universities and not at trade schools, not at academies.

MS. RIEDEL: Or apprenticeships.

MS. GRALNICK: And it does breed a little more of a sort of cross-disciplinary approach than you tend to find in work out of—I'm not talking about jewelry that's in non-precious materials and that sort of thing. I'm talking

more about sort of having discussions about making art that are completely separate from your own practice, which really happens in the university situation—has to.

So I do think there's—you know, I'm probably more a product of—of American culture than I am of European culture. I also think I'm probably, you know, ultimately, more a product of having grown up in New York and you know, in—what you would be—what you would call an educated family, you know, and in the vicinity of a big—you know, big metropolitan city, as opposed to say—you know, as far as I'm concerned, the difference between having grown up on a farm in the Midwest than the way that I grew up, is probably a greater difference than having grown up in New York, or Amsterdam, or Paris, or Munich.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

[END MD 04 TR 02.]

MS RIEDEL: Over all these different bodies of work and time, how has your working process changed and in particular with this new group, which is so different?

MS. GRALNICK: Well, it's a good question because this particular body of work, especially Part III of The Gold Standard that I've been working on, has involved a very, very different change of working process for me and which has kind of been both thrilling and about the scariest thing I've ever done because I feel like I'm sort of like at sea without a lifeboat.

You know, normally, when I did the black work, when I did the reliquaries, when I did the gold folded pieces, I really kind of started with a conceptual base and that conceptual base really sort of—sort of brought me into—you know, I really worked from the sort of the very clean research model where I would—where I would sort of now have a series of limitations that manifested themselves in kind of a style that would be in each piece.

And so once I knew that I was doing, say, a body of work out of very thin gold and pieces were going to be folded and they were going to be based on paper models and they were going to be based on a kind of geometry, the pieces all sort of hung together stylistically in a certain way. And there became a bit of formula that I was working under. And so in a way, the hardest part of the body of work was—existed at the beginning in terms of deciding what I was going to do and then it became sort of variations on that idea, explorations all under the umbrella of a given idea.

Now, The Gold Standard is a very different kind of process, especially Part III because every single piece that I'm doing now, I'm wearing a different hat, and I'm not intending for there to be a stylistic consistency with any of the pieces. As a matter of fact, quite the opposite, they could actually each look like they might have been done by a completely different person in a completely different century. I mean, there're certain things about the way I make things that, of course, you can't deny, but each time now with one of the pieces in Part III, it's like I'm starting all over from scratch and I'm sort of figuring out a whole new approach to making.

MS. RIEDEL: It's the first series that isn't really a series.

MS. GRALNICK: Yes. So it's been very, very scary because each one that I make, you sort of have this feeling like once I decided what I'm going to do and then I make the piece, there—it's almost like every time you have an exhibition, you get a little depressed after the exhibition before you start a new body of work. Well, I'm going through that now after each piece in Part III because each one involves now me sort of—sort of—really kind of having a sort of closure at the end of that piece and now opening up a completely new chapter for the next one.

And it's a very, very different way of working, where I don't have—in my mind, I don't have all the pieces of Part III designed in my mind. I'm taking each one as I go and sometimes as I'm working on one, I'm kind of thinking about two or three more that might come after, but the decisions for each one relate mostly to that piece and it's—having a kind of completeness onto itself and not having a stylistic connection with the one that I did before.

So it's been a very scary approach for me. It sort of involves kind of separating from the sort of tropes of making that I'm used to. And as scary as it is, I keep sort of telling myself that that feeling—that I'm sort of—I'm sort of out of my comfort zone—is the greatest feeling in the world. And if I—you know, that to me is really the feeling of being alive, being out of your comfort zone and we all know that it's the feeling you have when you travel that makes you feel so alive.

And so I sort of think, you know, thank God, at this sort of mid-career point of my career that I can feel that—that I'm out of my comfort zone. And I'll keep knowing that I'm creatively viable if that's the place I could stay for the rest of my life.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you so much. It's been great.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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