Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Robert David Brady, 2008 March 10-12

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

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Robert David Brady on March 10 and 12, 2008. The interview took place in Berkeley, California, 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.

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

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Robert [David] Brady at the artist's studio in Berkeley, California, on March 10, 2008, for the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art. This is disc number one.

So good morning, good afternoon.

ROBERT DAVID BRADY: It's working. You can tell.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it's working. I can hear.

MR. BRADY: All right.

MS. RIEDEL: We thought we'd just start off briefly commenting on where your work is right now. You just finished a show at Braunstein/Quay [Gallery, San Francisco, CA], and it's a really interesting time, because you're working in both clay and wood for the first time in a while, coming full circle in some ways.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, that's fairly true. Actually, I was just writing a statement yesterday on my computer for the American Crafts Council because they are doing a little article, and I've been anointed as a fellow —

MS. RIEDEL: Congratulations.

MR. BRADY: — whatever that means exactly, but it's a nice distinction. So I was trying to give them a little sense of my history, because they had a question regarding clay, wood. About three years ago, actually — to digress in time slightly — I began to readdress clay like I hadn't in 17, 18, 19 years. And so the show before this just current one was all ceramics. This was just a little over two years ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: And it was not only all ceramics, but it was all abstract. There was nothing figurative at all, not even obtusely, not indirectly, not any which way.

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

MR. BRADY: So two things happened there. I began to feel like I needed to shift with the wood in a way that I needed 20 years before with the clay. I needed a break from that. I needed some kind of major shift in my work, and it was kind of accidental that I discovered wood.

But in any event, I worked with wood very passionately for a long period of time. It got to be where I felt like I was in need of another shift, another sort of more major change of some sort. I'm still not even sure what that is at this point — this is two years later — but clay began to kind of call me back.

And I also — I had made a small piece, not thinking much about it and it laid on a shelf about a year and then I fired it one day and I hung it on the wall, and it was a very simple little geometric structure and it began to speak to me. Each day I went into the studio, I'd look over at it and it would just talk to me, you know? I keep looking and go, wow, how can this little thing have this much presence or call to me so powerfully, or powerfully enough?

So I began to explore that idea and I blew it up in scale and made it much more complex. And that became the show at the Braunstein Gallery where it was all clay, all abstract and all wall pieces which is — I mean I've always favored the wall as a support mechanism for objects that I make often times, you know, but not solely. I've never had — ever had an exhibit where I didn't use pedestals or have free-standing pieces. So it was shocking in that in for the first time in 18 years, all ceramic, and then I knew that it was all abstract, it would

weird people out, or kind of flip them out because they so much associate the human figure with my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: It confused them about that, and then the fact that it was all wall pieces was just strange.

It's just like I had an avoidance — there's a little bit of a guilt association utilizing the wall as a kind of a convenience, or a convenient way to present three-dimensional objects or a sculpture, because obviously, the piece doesn't have to work in the round. It decreases the complexity necessary for — I don't know if it's easier or not, but it seems like it's an easier way to go than making a fully three-dimensional in the round piece, so even though I've always, like I just said, kind of favored the wall for much of my work. So I had that show, and what also people didn't realize — a lot of people who don't know my history is that that work went back and kind of tapped into early interests.

MS. RIEDEL: From the Davis, some of those — [inaudible] — pieces?

MR. BRADY: From Davis, from grad school.

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

MR. BRADY: And I did some more of that subsequent to grad school, and that's a whole story in itself of how and why I shifted away from that toward the figure back then, kind of a big story there. It takes some explanation anyway.

So for me, it wasn't that unusual to be back there and doing that, and the difference between these works and those works then is fairly large, but the relationship is very connected. So I did that, and I went on making pieces like that for some time after that exhibit as well, but then, the issue of do I want to work with wood, or yes, I do, and so what am I going to do with the wood?

Anyway, the figure — it wasn't like the figure just stopped being an interest of mine. So I began to make wood things and shift kind of back and forth from wood to clay, and back and forth every few months or however the pattern was. And the wood tended to be figurative and the clay continued to be this abstract stuff.

And the recent show was a mixture more heavily weighted toward the wood side for sure, with some ceramics. And the ceramics are different than they were a couple of years ago in that they're still wall pieces, but I've reduced the overall scale of them and made them more dense, and brought some pretty strong color to them for the most part.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: There was one and it was just white, but I've been making them in pretty charged colors, so color which is not usually a big thing in my work over the years, although I've used it at times, has become kind of an interest in this current work.

So right now, I'm kind of there. I see this sort of slightly visual where I'm doing the clay and it's abstract, and I'm doing the wood and it's figurative. And I still want some stuff to shift to the wood. I think there were some things in that show that were either an attempt or an indication of some shift that's beginning to happen. There was one piece in the show actually that — did you see the show?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: When you come in the front door, right to your left there was kind of abstracts structural wooden piece, and it had this black sort of bivalve form in it.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yes, almost an infinity form to it.

MR. BRADY: Kind of a mitosis shape in it. Well, that was making with the wood what I've been making in the clay.

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

MR. BRADY: If we took that form out of it, it was very much like the clay pieces that are abstract wall pieces that refer generally to — not specifically, but they refer loosely to Asian language.

MS. RIEDEL: I was thinking that when I was looking at the ceramic pieces — there was a real reference to language and to glyphs, yes.

MR. BRADY: Yes, exactly. I've always loved symbols, and I make up a lot of symbols. I don't worry about whether

they have any kind of history or truth to them, but I make them up. I put them on my pottery as images, and I also respond to true symbolism from all sorts of sources. And the thing about Asian language is originally, it was simply a pictograph of something.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: So this means tree and probably, if we could go back a couple of thousand years, you and I, from a completely different culture, could look at one of their Kanji or symbols for tree, and we would be able to interpret that, or we would guess, more often than not, that it meant, tree, house, man, woman, whatever, river. But as time goes on, as I understand it, every once in a while, the change of their address of the design of their symbols, that was usually mandated by an emperors who all of a sudden said, hey, let's review this. And they would streamline it and they would abstract it more.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. BRADY: So now today, we look at these symbols, and I don't think many of us could guess what any of them mean because they're too abstracted. But in that abstraction, they still have an echo of the source or the truth — at least to the objectivity of some of the first symbols that were understandable.

So I am not trying — I don't even look at Asian language at all and refer to it and to make a piece that has some sort of essence of a particular symbol or Kanji. I don't do that at all, but what I find interesting about abstraction, that true abstraction is that when — even when we can't understand the source material that an artist responded to, we feel a certain kind of weight and measure and believability in that abstraction, because it's based in some kind of observation or truth.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. There's a reference to something.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah, it could be architecture, someone like Franz Klein or Hans Hofmann, people like that. I don't believe those are just arbitrary marks.

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

MR. BRADY: Surely, gesture is a big part of Abstract Expressionism, a very important thing, kind of kinesthetic involvement with the body and mark-making and the tools and the material. But they're dealing with spatial relationships and breakup of space that I would have to believe comes down to observation about relationships of things that have those qualities. So architecture would probably be a big part of that, I would think, you know, inside, outside, planes.

MS. RIEDEL: Curves, dimensions, right.

MR. BRADY: Yes, dark, light, all that kind of stuff. So let's see, where was I? Oh, anyway, so when I make these things, even though I know that there is a kind of a general appreciation and response to Asian language and the sort of indirect symbolism that I experience with them, when I try to make them, I want them to be — somehow, I just want them to land beyond just sheer composition, because it's — forever I've been a kind of a critic of work that just is based on composition, pleasant composition.

And almost any artist who understands design relationship can put together some parts and pieces and make a very pleasant composition. And I consider that rather lean on content. And now I'm making these things that are toying with that weakness or that — you know?

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

MR. BRADY: They're teetering right on the edge, whereas normally, I'm not dealing with composition in that sense at all when I'm making figures.

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe that's part of the point. You said you're constantly looking for a challenge or somewhere to push yourself, so working doesn't become just routine. Maybe this idea teetering on that brink is somehow intriguing?

MR. BRADY: Maybe, maybe, but it scares me, like I just — so I keep playing with these relationships of these bars of clay that create this composition.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: And I look for some sort of — the word I might have trouble finding right now that I usually use — a certain kind of resonance to occur.

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

MR. BRADY: And I'm not even sure — it's not based on a particular, specific idea. And somehow, it goes beyond just sheer pleasant composition, you know.

I'll play with it this way and that way and this way and that way until something happens, and I can't even describe what that something is except that it resonates with me and it seems beyond the obvious. And it seems to open a door to some kind of complexity or a relationship that is not obvious and that is fairly interesting, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this happening just during the construction phase or is this happening also as you're glazing and thinking about color — the color seems so significant in these.

MR. BRADY: Well, I think the form is the form. The color changes the overall energy of the piece for sure. And sometimes a piece — well, most all the time, every ceramic piece, no matter what it is that I've ever made, kind of calls out for what it wants in terms of color, surface or, you know, dark, light, whatever, rough, smooth.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That's a purely intuitive process as you're working.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, although, I mean, most of us have an affinity toward a certain area. Like Dick [Richard] Notkin treats most of the surfaces of these pieces in a similar way and so and so does, and so and so does. And that's really true of ceramic artists because it's so difficult to marry the surface — the surface/surface with the idea and the general sensibility of an artist's work in ceramics. And if you look at every ceramic artist who's successful, they have found a way of making that final adjustment, or usually, it's an application of something to the surface. It isn't just a surface as a result of touch.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: So Beverly Mayeri has a certain kind of ethereal pastelly kind of quality.

MS. RIEDEL: Watery.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, watery, almost ghostlike, and Richard Shaw, of course, got the trompe-l'oeil thing and, you know, Notkin's got the —

MS. RIEDEL: He does work so much with the surface of the clay.

MR. BRADY: He does, and he doesn't glaze it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: He sort of follows the Yixing tradition with just the right kind of clay that's really beautiful and sensuous and got the right kind of slight sheen to it and all that.

So anyway, back to the ceramic pieces. So those pieces are inspired by the abstraction of language, as we see it in Asian examples. It could be Middle Eastern also, with beautiful calligraphic kind of I mean — like, oh, my god. Those kind of shapes are much more difficult to — if I were to allude to it more directly, it would much more difficult to make, you know, because the Arabesque and sweepy kind of qualities of them, but that's fantastic stuff too. And I don't know what the hell it means, but it's incredible to look at.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] They're beautiful.

MR. BRADY: And there again, you know that there is substance behind whatever symbol, whatever form we're looking at or shape we're looking at. Somebody, a historian or whatever, could tell us what these things mean and how they go back in time and be — I guess. I mean I'm not sure if their idea of pictures entered language like Asia made their symbols. But our alphabet is different.

But anyway, so the other thing I see them relating to is architecture, and even the idea of windows where we're inside and we're looking out, or possibly outside looking in. So we're seeing through, even though we see through these and just see a wall, there's a sense of them being portals or openings.

So those things interest me, and architecture, in its most fundamental sense of separating interior from exterior, and pottery to me is architecture, you know. It's always this container. It's a little different in that it's usually open on the top, so architecture isn't, but it just separates exterior from interior and creates a protective space. And any kind of opening in it is that part that we experience, that division between interior and exterior, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: I mean pots are a little different, because the door is on the top kind of, but anyway, so that's sort of what the ceramic pieces are about.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there any evolution from the Celtic designs that you were using on some of those pieces to the ceramic constructions?

MR. BRADY: I don't know. I've never thought of that consciously, but the other thing that I could say in general is that — and it would be somewhat true of the Celtic designs — is that I like structures. And anytime where there's kind of a complex network of lines and intersecting structures, it just is interesting to me, reticulated, anything even reticulated where it's been opened up, and there's a certain kind of membrane left like lace, for instance, but especially when it's more dimensional.

There's a house up in the Berkeley Hills that I ride past now that they've completely stripped of all the wood, and it's just down to the framing. And this house is probably 80 years old and it's a two story house. And it's so great to drive past and look at it. I'm going to take my camera next time because — I mean and it looks different than a new pristine wooden-framed house to me somehow because it's old and it's blackened wood and all that. But it just convinced me that I just like structure, what holds up railroad trestles. I just — I love that stuff, you know, where you're getting glimmers through to the light on the other side, and as you move across of it, it shifts and changes, if you move past it. And so —

MS. RIEDEL: That makes me think of the early essence of your work, those grid pieces.

MR. BRADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, very structural, very architectural, very abstract — [inaudible].

MR. BRADY: For sure. Back then, I think I was — I wasn't like getting off on Sol LeWitt's work back then, but his work was obviously in the art magazines when I was an art student like that. And his work was so reductive and is so truly minimal, and something besides minimalism that it just — it lacked a kind of a human factor. So it's wasn't a real turn-on to me, but that kind of stuff was in the air. So I always figured, you know, there was that kind of influence.

But another thing that I can think of that's just kind of an odd thing, but when I was a little kid, I would like be laying in the living room bored. My mother would be talking to me or whatever, and I'd be looking around the room and everything that's rectilinear like the TV set or a painting on the wall — which we didn't have paintings, but a cheap print or something — or the coffee table, whatever that's rectilinear, I would go to the — like let's pretend that's a shape there or this is a shape, which it is. I'd go to this corner and by tapping my eyetooth to the tooth below I would tap it twice on the right, which does those two corners there, and then tap it on the left twice to do those two corners and then cancel that form. That form was done.

Then I would go onto another rectangle and do it. It's just dot-dot, dot-dot, like that, the TV done.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: Or maybe I'd do — the other planes receding on the side or whatever, wherever I can find rectangles. And it's just, you know, a funny little thing, and I've never thought of it in any kind of complex way to make any big deal about it. But all those are geometric forms and they interest me in some way, you know. Beyond that, I can't really say and I don't even — I haven't even tried to guess, but somehow, I think it kind of relates.

MS. RIEDEL: It feels like a way of addressing the energy in that shape at a very physical level, as a child, a way of understanding it.

MR. BRADY: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yeah, I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that is interesting.

MR. BRADY: Well, what's strange is that most of my work, like if I make pottery, I even want it to be kind of asymmetrical after I make it. I don't like a bowl that's perfectly — I like other people's bowls that are perfectly round, but not mine. And all of my sculpture, except for the geometric stuff, is more of an organic nature, you know. And the figure, even though we are balanced from right to left or whatever, we're symmetrical, my figuration, I mean asymmetry is usually one of my — not strategies, but it's where my sensibility lays, as opposed to keeping everything normal.

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

MR. BRADY: So anyway, so there's that, and then there's this interest in, for want of better term, structural stuff.

And they both kind of exist, so now we're kind coming back. And so at the present, I'm kind of doing those two things, you know, and I don't really know — I'm not sure where the clay stuff will go at this point, because in a sense, it's kind of — even though it relates back to early work, it's kind of new right now. And I don't know, it's weird.

It's a different kind of experience making it too. I don't know. It's a little bit more of a cerebral experience, you know, not that it triggers greater intellectual thoughts or even it necessitates greater intellectual considerations. It's not that. It's just a little bit more kind of a more rational kind of experience, whereas while I'm making figures and this and that, it's — I identify with each and every part of it in a more — I don't know, a Gestalty kind of way.

MS. RIEDEL: Referential, essential — in some ways, it's abstract, but it's a different kind of abstract. It's getting back to a different kind of essence.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah. There just seems to be more factors in it, you know, because it does portray somebody somehow, and a certain kind of gesture implications and all — it's more loaded, more loaded.

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

MR. BRADY: And so in some ways, it might be a little more fun to do the figuration than the other, but I find myself liking the results of the clay in the end.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And bringing in the color, may be a way of bringing in more emotion or some aspect of it.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, maybe. That's possible. Yeah, I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: All right. Well, let's — we were talking briefly about childhood, so let's just jump back to the beginning.

MR. BRADY: The very beginning?

MS. RIEDEL: The very beginning. So you were born in Reno in Nevada in 1944?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, six.

MS. RIEDEL: Forty-six. What date?

MR. BRADY: October 8.

MS. RIEDEL: October 8. And your father and your mother both worked in the casinos, is that right?

MR. BRADY: Well, you know, I'm not sure what my mother — yeah, yeah, that's pretty much — both of them had a couple of other jobs throughout the years, but for the most part, the casino was the thing. And my father particularly was knowledgeable about casino operations, and that's pretty much — once in a while, he'd get kind of fed up with things and he'd go sell cars for a couple of years and go back, but yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was his name?

MR. BRADY: James Brady.

MS. RIEDEL: James Brady.

MS. RIEDEL: And your mom?

MR. BRADY: Cathryn.

MS. RIEDEL: C-A or K?

MR. BRADY: C-A-T-H-R-Y-N.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you have a brother as well, an older brother?

MR. BRADY: I do. I have a brother named Jim or James — older, four and a half years older.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. You spent a lot of time in the desert, and I remember hearing that stuck with you — the desert around Reno, the dryness of it, the markings on it. What in particular —

MR. BRADY: Well, that's where I grew up. And, you know, Reno is located at the eastern slope of the Sierra

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: So on our backside toward the west is a big mountain range, and —

MS. RIEDEL: Mountains, right.

MR. BRADY: — skiing is 40 minutes away. Snow is part of Reno's landscape, period. That elevation is about 4,600 feet.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: It's almost as high as Denver, for instance, and it's just right over there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: So we grew up with sub-zero temperatures in the wintertime and a certain amount of snow, especially back then. We would get a couple of feet at that time, a good snowfall and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: So high desert.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, high desert, and then of course, the Sierra is on our backsides. So, we have that kind of thing, but looking east and the general feel of Reno was very arid, high desert landscape, and that is what it is. And also, even after I moved to California to go to art school, I spent a fair amount of time camping in the desert like down in Panamint Valley [CA].

MS. RIEDEL: Panamint?

MR. BRADY: Panamint, which runs side-by-side with Death Valley.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: And it's an area that Hal Riegger I mean we'll probably eventually talk more about how — but he would teach these workshops out in the desert and we went down to attend them at least three different years and camped there in the desert. So for lots of other reasons, I've been back to the desert since I left — living in Reno as a young boy. I've gone back to Pyramid Lake a number of times, lots of times. It's almost a — not quite an annual visit, but my son likes to go there now and I take him and friends up there.

And so at a certain point, I began to realize that especially after moving to the Bay Area where I lived right on the bay, and then I had access to the ocean, and like all of us around here, have a reason to go to the ocean, walk the beaches, go to Point Reyes, whatever, experience that. I think the ocean is magnificent, I think the coast is incredible, I think babbling brooks in the high Sierra are fantastic and all that, but there's something rudimentary and essential about the desert that's just so powerful, you know?

To me, it's just — I always liken it to — it's like there's no pretty fluff left there. It's not covered up with little shimmering leaves and nice little deer walking through the meadow over there and squirrels jumping. There is life out in the desert, but it is just like it's been stripped bare and just beat to shit.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: And it's what's left and it's the kind of backbone of the world or it's the underlying structure has been exposed, in a sense, you know. It's just so truthful.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: And that's silly to say because I know the ocean is truthful, the mountains and the trees and all that's part of living stuff, but there, there's not enough nutrients, there's not enough water, there's not enough for these kind of greater superficial life forms to exist. So in any event, it just strikes me as really powerful, like the fundaments of anything, if we begin to look at what's kind of holding something up in the world.

MS. RIEDEL: It was pared down to the essence.

MR. BRADY: It's pared down to the essence. And I just think that that's — it moves me and I've had my most profound kind of nature experiences in and around the desert. But it's a kind of thing that I think for people who have not been around the desert, you have to even — not even. I was going to say, even if I go over there today, for instance, I have to be there for a little bit of time for it to kind of sneak up and begin to unveil itself to one,

unless you happen to hit in a perfect time when a certain kind of storm is happening or the light is incredible or whatever, but like there's nocturnal life. You just don't see that, the animals that live out there until you've been there for a few days camping or whatever, and you begin to notice little things. So some of it can be — it's just so raw that it's off-putting.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you spend a lot of time out in the desert as a kid?

MR. BRADY: Well, not like time in the sense of having a reason to live or camp.

MS. RIEDEL: Not camping trips or anything?

MR. BRADY: Like what?

MS. RIEDEL: Camping trips.

MR. BRADY: Well, I did, but we didn't usually head toward the more arid desert. If we went on camping trips, we went to where there's rivers. It might be bordering on — anyway, I did a lot of fishing when I was a kid, so we went on fishing trips.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that when you first went to Pyramid Lake [NV]?

MR. BRADY: We used to go to Pyramid Lake quite often, just to drive out there. My dad would go to like a bar and drink beer. Someone was screwing around on the beach, and so we made many trips out there in my childhood.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was a really special place and still is. It's held up.

MR. BRADY: Have you even been there?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. BRADY: Pyramid Lake is an unbelievable place. It has geological formations there that without a knowledge of how they occurred, kind of defy your imagination as to why and how they exist.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this like Mono Lake [CA] and the tufas?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. That is extraordinary.

MR. BRADY: Without saying, like if you'd never inquired at all about what tufas are, you just came from Europe or wherever, and just went there, you wouldn't really know what the hell is that stuff from? But there's all this geothermal activity under Nevada, period.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: Nevada is — and the City of Reno, I used to work at a place that — pretty much all you have to do is drill a well in Reno and you can have free hot water, because it's just underlies that whole basin in there, just hot water.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. BRADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I had no idea.

MR. BRADY: It's totally like cool. So out at Pyramid Lake, the primary pyramid structure and those big tufa stones are these geothermal wells that are coming up out of the earth that are so rich in calcium. And this is kind of a layman's example, because I haven't even read about it really, but I know there's a certain truth to it. And as it bubbles out of the ground, it begins to create a crusty, calcified buildup and that gets bigger and bigger and bigger, and oh, my god.

Those tufa stones are — a lot of cases at Pyramid Lake, they're three-stories, four-stories high. They're like giant ice-cream balls on top of ice-cream balls, like a triple-decker and you can climb them because they're rough like a piece of coral.

MS. RIEDEL: But they're not fragile?

MR. BRADY: They're not fragile, no. They're pretty tough.

MS. RIEDEL: Because I remember the tufas in Mono Lake being pretty fragile.

MR. BRADY: Oh, really?

MR. BRADY: They wouldn't have held up to that — so that really is interesting.

MR. BRADY: Yeah. No, these are — they're like cement or something. I mean they don't protect them. You can crawl all over them. Anyway, so there's that and the water's different there because there is a slightly alkaline nature to it because all of this stuff coming out of the ground. And it seems like there's some other aspect of the geology that's kind of queer, interesting there.

Anyway, and then it's an Indian reservation. So when I was a kid, there was always this — we knew we were on the reservation, kind of, wow, Indians, you know? We had a lot of Native Americans in the Reno area. In fact, they were sort of our minority people when I was a kid. There were so few black people. We had more Native Americans. It wasn't like I was highly conscious of that, but in school, there was only a couple of black kids when I graduated from Reno High School, and there were probably quite a few Native Americans.

But anyway, there were certain myths about that lake like one, for instance, that people had drowned there and they've never found their bodies and that was mysterious. And then there was a myth that somebody drowned in Pyramid Lake and their body was found in Lake Tahoe, which is totally impossible, I think. But Pyramid Lake is the result of the runoff of Tahoe.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. BRADY: So Tahoe spills out and creates the Truckee River which runs down to Truckee, California, then all the way down to Reno, then southeast, northeast of Reno, it finishes and creates Pyramid Lake. And so there is a direct connection obviously, but some people think there are these tertiary river beds that connect way deep under the ground, the two. And so things can, or have, disappeared here and ended up here, not by washing down the Truckee River. So anyway, and then there's supposed to be a serpent or a big —

MS. RIEDEL: Loch Ness monster sort of thing?

MR. BRADY: — a kind of monster in that lake that the Indians thought — so we'd be down there playing at nighttime and you'd be going, oh, my god, watch out for the monster. So there was always a kind of mystical kind of quality or magical quality.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. BRADY: And then in the '60s, a lot of people went up there and did drugs because it just was such a trippy environment. It was very free. You could be up there and no one pestering you.

At the north end of the lake are these pinnacles and they're not unlike the pinnacles that are also in Panamint Valley, which when — again, this is all kind of armchair geology, but the ocean used to reach all the way to Colorado, as I understand it. And then the Rockies pushed up, pushed the ocean back to wherever, and then finally the Sierra rose and pushed it back to where we know it now.

And Pyramid Lake and Walker Lake and Mono Lake and Lake Lahontan, those are about four different lakes in Nevada that were all part of that great body of water.

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

MR. BRADY: And the only reason they're there to this day is that they happened to have rivers that fed them and kept them alive everywhere. And there was a basin, I guess, big enough for a catch-pool of water. So Truckee River feeds Pyramid, the Walker River makes Lake Lahontan, and it goes like that. I'm not sure what feeds — the Carson River feed another one. What feeds Mono, I'm not sure exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: I can't remember.

MR. BRADY: Probably just creeks coming down off of that watershed there from the Sierra. So anyway, that's why all those lakes are also — well, that's not why. I was going to say they're alkaline in nature. There's seashells — all those places, if you look — so back to the pinnacles. Sorry to get off track here.

So when the oceans dried up and these massive, massive areas of water were shrinking and drying up, all these microorganisms would gather densely into an area to protect themselves to stay alive and they would all, of course, go to same place and they would calcify into these big structures. I don't know how this happened. Why

aren't they more and why are they so tall and isolated? But when you look at these pinnacles up close, it is an amalgamation of shells and little calcified — what is calcium — bottom-line calcium product of these little organisms. It's crazy.

MS. RIEDEL: There's some kind of little brine shrimp.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah, like little brine shrimp or something. And now it's just a big giant stone thing, you know? And they're huge. They're huge. Some of them you can get on top and they're like just a big — they're not that big, but they're — you can walk all around, like from here out to the street, that distance, and they're just like big plateaus. And those ones at Pyramid Lake now are off-limits because too many people went over there. There's hot springs there, rednecks spraying paint of them and throwing beer cans and whatever, not treating it right. So anyway, that's another kind of cool thing about Pyramid Lake, how fantastic it is.

So I forget where we got — so I spent a fair amount of time in the desert. Besides just growing up there, I have sought or had reason to spent time out in the desert, and I have an affection for it and an affinity for it, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: In school, were there any art classes that caught your attention, or nothing until high school?

MR. BRADY: So you haven't heard that story? Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: The one of the pitcher in the ceramics class?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I have, but it might be interesting to hear you tell it.

MR. BRADY: Okay. I don't ever remember taking an art class up until my senior year of high school. Maybe I had one in fifth grade or something, but it wasn't — I just can't remember doing anything but making a Christmas card or some silly thing like that, but —

MS. RIEDEL: What were your interests up until that point? Anything in particular stick in mind?

MR. BRADY: No. I was just kind of a screw-around guy. I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Just being a kid.

MR. BRADY: Being a kid, but I wasn't involved in sports. I wasn't anti-athletic at all, but I just was never good enough to be — or at least have the confidence to be on a team at school. Once or twice, I went out for a couple of teams and didn't make them. Like Little League, I went out one time for that. I didn't make the team. And then once I did it for basketball in junior high and didn't make the team, and I felt kind of stupid both times. And so basically, I never did that again. [They laugh.] So I wasn't a jock. The funny thing was, I was like part of the popular clique, you know. I was part of the cool — they were all my friends and I was like in that section of people, but I wasn't —

MS. RIEDEL: How did you pull that off? [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: I don't know. I just went to school. I don't know. Maybe it's my personality.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, it must have been.

MR. BRADY: So sports sometimes is partly what gives people prestige, and I don't know. And then there's other people who are — like they're in the speech club or they're in this club or that club. They're good at something, the ski club, whatever. I wasn't part of anything like that. I was just a — I don't know. I was just a kind of a screw-around guy, but I always worked.

I was into — somehow, my parents — maybe more my mother — instilled in me the notion of working, not just a work ethic, not that idea, but that if you work and make some money and save it, then you can have something nice that you want, you know. And you also have a certain kind of control over possibilities, if you have something. There's something about that, you know?

So I always, from the earliest time I can remember, found jobs to get, whether it was mowing lawns or — I used to sell papers, the kind like you see in old-time movies where the boy walks with them under their arm and calls out paper, paper, walking down the street, going into bars, going past every person, say, paper, sir? Paper, sir? Like that. I'd sell papers every day after school and make 90 cents. And I thought that was a good deal because at the end of the week, I had almost $7. And anyway, the jobs kind of got higher and higher level and I worked all through high school. Every day, I would get out and go work three hours or so afterwards.

And why, I'm not sure. My mother didn't have a lot of money. Basics were provided, but if I wanted anything extra-special like a motor scooter — or even after the first bike, she said, I'm going to buy you this bike, take care of it, because after that, you'll have to buy your own or whatever. So there was a little bit of that. If I wanted extra juicy things, I had to make the money myself. And I don't know — what got me off talking about work?

MS. RIEDEL: We were starting to talk about what might have been interesting to you before.

MR. BRADY: Oh, yes. So, I worked all through school. I didn't have as much time by choice. It wasn't like I didn't have a choice, but somehow, I got off on that, and I liked motorcycles. I still have one. And I would buy them and sell them, and then, when I became 16, I bought a car, a really nice car, which I saved for. So I liked doing that, you know.

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

MR. BRADY: I liked having that potential. And my mother couldn't have done that for me, and wouldn't have, but couldn't have. So there was really no choice that way.

But anyway, in my junior year of high school, I got an odd illness that caused me not to be able to go to school for a year. I missed the whole year. And when I went back in my senior year — and I had a homebound teacher that would come to my bed, either in the hospital or at home, and I got two or three classes out of the way. But I couldn't take a full load, because somehow, she couldn't be with me long enough those days to do a full load. So when I went back my senior year, I had to eliminate a study hall and I had to eliminate any electives. I just had no room for pleasure.

MS. RIEDEL: If you were going to graduate on time? Yeah.

MR. BRADY: Yes, so I could graduate on time with my friends. And — so I'm proceeding along, and I'm under more pressure than I'm used to be, because I wasn't a really great student. I was — things that I was interested in, I would get good grades in; other things, I was just scraping by.

But I found out that I could lessen this academic pressure by dropping an algebra class because after about a third of the way through the year, I'm thinking, man, this is a lot of work. I'm doing more homework than I'm used to doing. So somehow I nosed around and figured out I could graduate from high school without algebra; it didn't matter. So I decided drop it and take a crafts class, because I could just go play over there, totally play. I mean, that's all I intended to do. I had no inclination toward anything art or craft-wise at all.

So I went in there. The class is 50 minutes long. I reported after the class was in session, so who knows, maybe it's got 40 minutes left. Teachers in there busy with all these students, and it's a square room. One corner is ceramics, but nobody is working on, and the rest of it is impacted with people doing various leather work and enameling and stuff. So he takes me over there and gives me a bag of clay, a rolling pin, says make a slab-built pitcher and just walked away. I mean, that was it.

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

MR. BRADY: He must have given me a knife or something. I mean, I don't even know how I did it to this day.

MS. RIEDEL: Not a picture or anything? Just —

MR. BRADY: No picture. [Laughs.] It's not easy to roll out a slab and not have it stick to the table, and when you try to pull it out it rips. I just don't remember it because he didn't give me a demonstration. And he goes over to the other part of the room, and by the end of that 40 minutes when the bell rang, I was done. And I had this thing complete. It was like — shaped like a cowboy coffee pot. It had a lid, had a knob that reversed the shape of the pot, reiterated it in reverse, and had one of those side handles like maybe a Scandinavian silver coffee pitcher, some might have. And I made that the same shape as the pot that — and then it had little cowboy-like pitcher, not a style like that, but a —

MS. RIEDEL: Triangular.

MR. BRADY: Coffee spout. And I was like all done with it, the lid, the whole thing. I'm just going, oh, my god. I was so in love with that thing. I was just, god. So I took it, and I didn't want anybody to touch it. And I looked around and there were some shelves way up high. I could climb up on the counter and reach up to the highest top of the shelf system, and I slid it. It was on a bat; I slid it up there and before I did, I put a plastic bag over it. And then I knew no one could get there because they had to get on a chair just to get on the counter and then reach up there.

So I left, and the rest of that day, between each class, I would sprint down to the craft room, jump up on the

counter, pull the bag off and just look at it, and just go, you know, god, I just love this thing. Sometimes I would take a wet sponge up there and I'd stroke it, you know, just kind of pet it. [They laugh.]

Oh, god, it was just like — it was like nothing else had ever connected with me. Music was — I loved music, and I had a really great teacher. I lived in Burbank, California, for two years of my life, or three years actually. And I was in the orchestra there and I really liked that. That was the second most pleasurable thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that when you were still in school?

MR. BRADY: That was when I was in junior high school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: Seventh grade I think it was or sixth grade. No, it was seventh grade and my teacher appreciated me too and I got A's. Anyway, I just connected a lot on that and I still really dig music, and I'm still trying right now. [They laugh.] So, anyway, then I finished that pitcher, put a glaze on it, and somehow, I got the glaze on all nice and evenly, and it turned out really good. And the teacher's going, this is awesome. And he puts it in the showcase in the hallway. And so he obviously was proud that somebody had made such a nice thing, and then I'm going like, yeah man, I got, like, something — I did something special.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. BRADY: And I'm not too sure how I felt about myself. I'm not sure I can remember that well, but I never ever thought I was one of the smart people or — I'm not sure what my self-perception was, but that made me feel really good.

MS. RIEDEL: You found a place where things really clicked.

MR. BRADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And not only for you, but the response was there.

MR. BRADY: Right. So I suppose that there was a lot there for me that I didn't even, you know, consider at the time, but the biggest thing was — so I just began to make things. That's when I began to make things. And I loved doing it, and then I told friends about it. Then they would come over, and I started a club called The Potters Club.

MS. RIEDEL: In your senior year, right?

MR. BRADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And they were all a bunch of football fans? [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: And they were like a bunch of jocks and kind of renegade, just — some of them were some dubious characters, you know. So we had this club and we all made pots, and we had a pot sale, and we just had a good time. The teacher gave us this time. One night a week we would work until about midnight, met him after school, and just jam and make stuff and throw clay at him. He was a really cool guy.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember his name?

MR. BRADY: His name was Thomas T. Tucker.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: He was from Oakland, California, and he went to CCAC [California College of the Arts and Crafts, now California College of Art, Oakland, CA].

MS. RIEDEL: That's right. Had there ever been a pottery class, a pottery club, in the high school before you, or you founded it?

MR. BRADY: No, there was no club. In fact they, he and the other art teacher, Mr. Kline, decided that there needed to be a new award in the awards — what's it called, the awards assembly?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: So they created Craftsman of the Year Award and — just for me. And then forever after that, they had it for somebody too. But — so I got that. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: That was your senior year.

MR. BRADY: Yeah. And then, not too long after he witnessed my interest and passion over this, he began to pester me saying, I think you ought to go to art school. I'm going like, what? I mean, it was just such a foreign idea. My idea at that point was that I'd probably go to the university, but I had this fear that I would — because I didn't have any particular interest in anything.

And I just kind of thought, I might just probably flunk out. I mean, not that I would plan to do it, but it might happen. And then if it did, I would work in the casinos or — my dad was a salesperson, other than working in casinos, and he sold cars. He sold some other things in his life a few times too and he was a good salesperson. And I kind of inherited it, or learned the gift of gab and an ability to do that. And I sold things as a kid like soap to go to camp or whatever. I could always do it just like really fast and be all done with mine while other kids were struggling, and it wasn't scary for me to approach people and try to do that somehow.

So I always thought back then that I might just sort of trickle down to being a cars salesman or real estate, because he always talked about real estate is really a good thing. So that's kind of where I thought — so he's saying, go to art school, and I'm, oh, man, I don't know. And so he had the whole year to work on me and he finally convinced me. And he actually took me and my fellow mates from the ceramics class, put us in his car in Reno, drove us to Oakland with our parents' permission, stayed at his mother's house right over by Arts and Crafts [CCAC].

And we went up to the school, and he talked to the professor and they let us throw pots on the wheels in there for a couple of hours. We were just going, oh, this is big time. And he took us to the De Young Museum [San Francisco, CA] and the San Francisco MoMa [Museum of Modern Art], I think. He took us to see some museums. So this whole big cultural weekend —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: And then he just kind of kept saying, you need to go to art school and you have talent. So off I went to art school, and it changed my life, of course.

MS. RIEDEL: Was your mother supportive? Did you need to —

MR. BRADY: Yes, she was cool.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah?

MR. BRADY: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you need to work to get together tuition? Were you able to get scholarships?

MR. BRADY: I would like work. I worked that whole summer saving money, and then I worked three days a week all the way through college painting houses and —

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have to —

MR. BRADY: And then I got scholarships and I took some loans out, too. But after a certain point, the last two years, I — I don't know if I got for both semesters each time, but about three different times, I got scholarships and that was awesome. And then each year, like I was on probation the first year, because my grades were so bad from high school. I think arts and crafts is kind of — they'll take pretty much anybody who would cross the line to slap the money down.

But at the time they put me on probation, and a semester later, I'm off probation, a semester later my grade, GPA is even up higher; another couple semesters, getting a scholarship. Everything just kept getting better and better. And my awareness of what it all meant to me and my ability — I mean, I had never taken an art class except the ceramic thing, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: So what were you taking? And who was teaching?

MR. BRADY: Well, I was taking life drawing and taking the full spectrum of stuff. And I can remember going into my first drawing class and drawing. I never even tried to draw in my life, and I'm sitting there looking at a naked woman. I'm freaking out. Oh, my God.

[They laugh.]

I was just so — it wasn't just being by a nude model. It was all so foreign to me, and I felt so self-conscious, because I just didn't have any confidence, because I never even tried it before. Most of the kids there were like

hot dogs from their high schools. They were all like the artist from wherever, Turlock, or wherever they'd come from, they were the best.

MS. RIEDEL: You didn't have to put together a portfolio?

MR. BRADY: I'm going like this, you know? [They laugh.] No, no portfolio.

MS. RIEDEL: No portfolio?

MR. BRADY: Not back then. You didn't have to — only if you wanted to be a scholarship student out of high school and get some kind of aid, but — can we stop this, because I have to go to the bathroom.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure, absolutely.

[END CD 01.]

MS. RIEDEL: So what were you working on when you started at CCAC?

MR. BRADY: I was trying to become proficient at using the potter's wheel, making pots on the potter's wheel.

MS. RIEDEL: Functional work?

MR. BRADY: Functional work, although — like in high school, my teacher — this is kind of cool. What happened was he got so excited that I was excited because he was only in his second or third year of college — high school teaching, just out of college. He hadn't even had a student yet who truly responded to the notion of making art or even trying to be an artist. So that was — I know how gratifying that is when you're a teacher it feels really good to connect. So he went back that next summer to arts and crafts. He left Reno, came down here, and took a pottery class from the professor there.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that Viola Frey?

MR. BRADY: No, it was Vernon Coykendall. Viola was a resident potter then. She was not a teacher — not yet to be a teacher for another six, seven years there. But — anyway, so he took the class so he could learn how to teach ceramics. And when he went back to Reno, he created an uninterrupted two-hour ceramics class because he knew you needed more time, getting messy and this and that, and that was unprecedented. They never had such a big focus on ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: In a general public high school.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah. So anyway, when I was there, before I came down here, I was also just using the potter's wheel and we just had one simple little wheel that had a high switch — it went faster or slow. There was no control over it. And he didn't know much about — you just kind of grabbed the clay. Somehow you make it round and make a hole in and you squeeze it and he knew that much. So we were just winging it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: And I guess I was pretty good at it because I made these things that had a space inside of them, but I tended to — after I would make a pot — do things like cut into it and — or beat it with a paddle or do things that bring a kind of a sculptural attitude to these pots.

MS. RIEDEL: And all by yourself, you just decided to do — [inaudible].

MR. BRADY: Well, there were pictures hanging on the wall that he cut out of *Craft Horizons* and maybe *Ceramics Monthly*, so I saw examples of what was going in those days. And that was at the time when the full force of Peter Voulkos's revolution was beginning to be actually — affect people's work.

There was a period of time when they were all like freaked out by what he was doing and none of them bought into it. But little by little, people were starting to loosen up, and so some of that stuff provided that kind of example for me. I can't remember those specifically, but yes, it wasn't my own complete invention or anything like that. I saw pictures.

So when I came to Arts and Crafts, I pursued that interest of whatever — readdressing a pot that's made on the potter's wheel and possibly altering its form or whatever, but I also wanted to learn how to throw straight and improve my technique and make good wholesome pots.

MS. RIEDEL: Functional pots, yeah.

MR. BRADY: Yeah. And I wanted to be able to be expert at everything in ceramics. That's what I remember wanting to — I wanted to know about glazes and clay bodies and firing kilns, just everything. I wanted to be a master.

MS. RIEDEL: And did they have glaze calculation classes back then?

MR. BRADY: I took glaze calculation from Vernon Coykendall. It was kind of an informal — just took me over the side and sat down. And I never completed it with him, but he gave me a taste of it. Then I actually took a glaze calculation class with Hal Riegger at his studio in Mill Valley [CA] many years later.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you firing electric kilns there or gas kilns or a mix of things?

MR. BRADY: At CCAC?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. BRADY: Did we even have electric? I don't think we even had electric kilns there, but all gas kilns.

MS. RIEDEL: All gas kilns.

MR. BRADY: They didn't let any students fire them, but anyway, so that's what I was interested in, is learning everything, making good, sound, straight pot, lidded forms, whatever, tea pots. But I would continue — then I started introducing hand-building into my repertoire and I would mix hand-building and throwing in the same pieces, and little by little, hand-building just started attracting me more and more. And I'd spend more time hand-building and less time throwing. And so that gave way little by little to making objects and completely kind of eliminating the — pretty much eliminating the vessel, not only function, but the vessel as a format.

MS. RIEDEL: So this all happened at CCAC?

MR. BRADY: Well, by the end of CCAC, I was verging on that direction of beginning to — what happened is, I finished at CCAC and then went out to Mills College [Oakland, CA]. It was Vietnam wartime and I was trying to like stay out of the war for both reasons. I didn't want to participate because I didn't believe in it, but I also didn't want to Vietnam and like die in a flash just like — it was happening right and the left. So anyway, I got into school at Mills and I thought — I knew that that wouldn't protect me really, because unless you were trying to be a doctor or something, you just couldn't stay out of it. But — so I did work at Mills College for the better part of a semester before I got drafted and finally had to acquiesce to doing something about going in the military.

And during that time, my work pretty much got to the point of me feeling like I was leaving the pot behind and entering the nature of objects. It was just on that cusp. Then I got drafted. Then I joined the Navy as a way of avoiding being shipped directly to go to Vietnam and having to deal with all that. And I spent — I don't know — about 14 months in the Navy. And basically I was very, very unhappy because I was so, so excited to be in grad school at Mills College. For one thing, it was a whole new school and it had kind of a great past in terms of its ceramic history and —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Who was teaching there then?

MR. BRADY: Well, Tony [Antonio] Prieto had just died and his wife was teaching interim and another man named Ron Hotek, who was teaching a class or two. So Eunice [Prieto] and Ron were teaching there. And anyway, it was all just very exciting to me, a new shift in graduate school, the whole thing and — so to be in the service, it was just kind of tragic as I — all I wanted to do is make stuff all the time. I was just like rabid, you know. That's all I thought about, all I wanted to do.

And so one day — it's a more complex story than what I'll make it seem — but one day, I just basically said, I'm quitting. I'm not going to do this anymore in the Navy. And I was stationed at Treasure Island [San Francisco, CA]out here actually. And that led to several months of being in trouble and a bad boy and this and that, and eventually, getting a discharge and sort of being thrown out of the navy.

And then I was like able to go back to school, but I was sort of dinged from that whole experience. I was just like, whoa, I — emotionally, I wasn't quite ready. So I started painting houses and going back to how I made money. My wife was just finishing up at Arts and Crafts. At the time I was married and she was in school there, in the ceramic department actually. So some time went by and then we bought a piece of property. We were feeling that desire to move to the country. It was back — during the kind of hippie —

MS. RIEDEL: Late '60s?

MR. BRADY: The late '60s and we thought wouldn't that be great, go to the country and have a vegetable garden or whatever. So we bought a little piece of property in Auburn, California, moved up there, and I had built

a studio. There was a barn there that I turned into a studio and I built a gas kiln and I actually tried to make a living. I thought I'd just try to be a potter for a while and make money at doing that, and I got it all set up—

MS. RIEDEL: Go back to functional —

MR. BRADY: Yeah, make functional pots and just sort of put grad school on hold. I just wasn't going to do that for a while. So I did that and I found that after about a year of doing that, and it just didn't fit me. It was just too regimented and, yeah, it just — it was just too confining and —

MS. RIEDEL: Repetitive?

MR. BRADY: Repetitive and also I went to some sales like one has to do when they have their pots. I had them at my studio, but I also went to like a state fair. I had a table or a booth there or whatever. And I just got so annoyed at people. Like I could hear them muttering about, gee, this is expensive for this cup, or something and just thinking how much work I put into that and how I tried to make it the best cup I could ever make, and really, giving it all the integrity I could possibly give it. And these people — I couldn't stand it, you know.

So I said, I can't do this. So I quit doing that, went back to painting houses, and then — the thing about painting houses, I could get like one job and paint a whole house, spend three weeks, maybe four weeks just doing that job, and then make $600-$700, and then not work for a month and a half and then just work in the studio. That's — we were able to just — and back then it was okay just to never have much money in our pockets and just get by.

So I did that and then I just started working the way I wanted to work. And I was just making objects and I'd really decided at that point, pottery — I love pottery, but I don't want that as a jumping-off point of my work. I don't even want to depend on the vessel. I want to approach making things without any connection to vessels for the most part, you know?

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

MR. BRADY: And it was around that time I was painting a house actually in Sacramento that these people owned, and I had to completely take everything out of each room and paint a room. And this job went on for a couple of months. And one room was just full of their library and they had *Art in America* magazines that dated back to 1948. And so I would have lunch and maybe a coffee break a couple of times during the day and I'd go grab about five of those magazines and sit down and just thumb through them while I'm eating. And I was in the house alone.

And one morning, I had just gotten there. I had driven all the way from Auburn, down to Sacramento. And I was having a cup of coffee, trying to warm up because I didn't have a heater in my truck and I was just freezing to death. And I'm thumbing through this magazine and I come on this article of [Isamu] Noguchi and an interview of Noguchi. And I read the interview and I knew about his work some, but I had never looked at it that closely, and between what he said and between images, I was so struck. I was just hit so powerfully by the beauty of his work and the beauty of the things he said.

And I just wrote a note to the people, and said I came, but I had to leave. I'll be back tomorrow. And I drove right back home and I had — and at that point, I hadn't worked for a couple of months in the studio. I was in like some kind of real creative block and I had like two or 300 pounds of clay all mixed up. And I took all that clay in one day and turned it into things, made things with it, really fast, playful things. And —

MS. RIEDEL: Sculptural objects?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah objects.

MS. RIEDEL: Were they figurative?

MR. BRADY: I made some masks back then. I have pictures of them right on my laptop downstairs, actually, that I didn't even remember making. And once I really started making masks many years later, I thought they were the first ones I ever made, but that day I had made some and just kind of forgot. And yes, some figurative things, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] The first ones?

MR. BRADY: Yes, exactly, maybe totally the first ones. And then I went to grad school. So then I kept working and I kept making all these — after that, I just — I was like ignited.

MS. RIEDEL: You were launched, yeah.

MR. BRADY: And I'm working, I'm working. I'm just making stuff. And then I'm thinking, I'm ready to go back to grad school. So I applied to Davis [University of California, Davis].

MS. RIEDEL: And why the switch to Davis from Mills? Focus of [inaudible]?

MR. BRADY: Oh, well, we'd moved down to the Bay Area, so, yes, it just seemed too regressive to — and too much distance also to come back to the Bay Area. I didn't want to come back to Bay Area at the time although I always loved Bay Area. So Davis was a — my wife — her parents lived in Davis and always did since I first knew her. So there's — whatever that means.

There's — I could drive down or stay overnight if I wanted to and I could commute if I wanted to, but we decided to — did we decide? I think we moved down to — we moved down there and just rented our house out and made a big shift. But she went to Sac State [Sacramento State, Sacramento, CA] and got a degree in psychology at the time too. So she was going back to school as well and shifting her career because she had a degree in art. So —

MS. RIEDEL: This is 1973?

MR. BRADY: Nineteen seventy-two. So I just barely got into Davis. They only take — back then, like six people a year I think it was, and I was kind of an alternate choice and they kept holding off in making a decision. And finally they went, okay, we'll take you.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: So I just barely got in there and then I made the best of it for two years and left with a pretty decent bang. My graduate show was well received and all in all, I think I did well there.

MS. RIEDEL: You studied with [Robert] Arneson and with [William] Wiley?

MR. BRADY: I studied with Arneson. Well, you take independent studies from as many people as you want while you're there, and then you take a seminar every semester with somebody. So I had a seminar from Wiley and I had an independent study with Wiley. I had one with [Roy] De Forest, and an independent study with Danny and Bob, both things, and Bob more than one, and a couple of other people too, for sure. And —

MS. RIEDEL: Was Manuel Neri there then?

MR. BRADY: Manuel had a seminar — Manuel and also an independent study — with Manuel. So I tried to kind of march through the faculty. I didn't have one with [Wayne] Thiebaud. He was in too much demand, plus he's a painter, kind of sided with the painters. But — so it was a great experience and —

MS. RIEDEL: Who else was studying there at the time, student-wise? Do you remember anyone in particular?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, well Debbie Butterfield and I overlapped. She was one year ahead of me, so she just — other people who had just departed. Like John Buck overlapped a year with her. That's how they met.

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

MR. BRADY: And Dick Notkin was with John Buck and, oh, who else? When I was there, Nancy Rubins was there. She came in my second year, so we only — is that right or was she there both years? Maybe both years, so maybe we were simultaneous. I can't quite remember, but she is like super-famous right now. Do you know her work?

MS. RIEDEL: I do know here work, yeah.

MR. BRADY: She's incredible. I think she's one of the great things working out there, you know, just whoa, she's such a force, oh my god. Anyway, yeah, who else? I can't think of anybody else right this second, but I'm sure there sure were other students, people that you may know, who went on to be pretty darn well known.

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

MR. BRADY: Anyway, so where were we? So I went to Davis —

MS. RIEDEL: Now, this was a whole different way of working than anything you'd done before. Did it come as kind of a shock or was it a happy place to land?

MR. BRADY: It was a great place to land. There was a lot of pressure at Davis. There was a sense that you couldn't — I mean, you really had to kick ass. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to hold up to the stringent expectations and all the history of great students who had been there. And there was a whole bunch that had

been there in the early days that were like Peter van den Berg and David Gilhooly and — what's his name — one of the most famous artists in the whole world, lives in New Mexico, married to Susan Rothenberg, Bruce Nauman.

Our whole faculty at Sac State, since I've been teaching there — not the whole faculty, but a lot of them came out of Davis during that whole — Gerald Walburg — this kind of hotbed of people. So in any event, everybody felt a lot of pressure to kind of hold up to the expectations. And it's funny. Davis didn't have a lot of academic pressure as — [inaudible] — did. We didn't have graduate esthetics. We didn't have theory and criticism classes that were mandated. We didn't — all it was is we took independent studies and a seminar. And the seminars are usually a joke. Depending — Bob Arneson was the only person that taught a seminar that required any kind of reading or writing.

The rest of them was like I'll bring a case of beer and we'll sit around and we'll go wherever it goes. We were just like — sometimes never talked about art; sometimes talked in a very casual way after a while, would finally start talking about who are — the artists we hated the most or something like that.

And really — and so — but the bottom line was you'd better really work hard and really grow as an artist. And some people didn't. Some people got eliminated from the program or whatever. So that's where the pressure was and that's one of the great things about Davis in those days, I think, is that the people really demanded a lot of themselves and expectations were high.

So when I went there, I said to myself — because I had recognized in my own studio that I was going to put the vessel behind me, and I was involved in object making — and mixed media, all kind of things like that, but it was all very small scale. And so I — what I wanted to do is increase the scale and in shift from the work in objects to possibly sculpture just by size, I guess, would determine that.

So I did that and the whole time I was at Davis, I was taking — I would go to a figure drawing class one night a week and draw from a figure because I loved to do that and I hadn't so much at CCAC. Even though that first class flipped me out, I ended up being affected a lot by the drawing experience. I had seven semesters of drawing at CCAC as an undergraduate and more of them were life drawing than not.

MS. RIEDEL: Who was teaching those, do you remember?

MR. BRADY: Oh, my early teacher was a lady named [Sally] Pfaffenberger. I don't remember her first name, but she was such a passionate teacher. She was almost too much for me back then because I didn't have enough appreciation to process all that she was about, but that probably affected me. There was another man [Mr. Hansen] whose name I'm going to forget right now, who many, many, many years later, I met him through another friend in Santa Cruz, but he was a real special teacher to me. He wasn't a well-known artist, but — and I can't remember his name.

MS. RIEDEL: It may come.

MR. BRADY: Yeah. So I wanted to increase the scale and kind of enter a territory that I — at least didn't think I'd ever even explored or thought of exploring, you know. I just really kind of threw myself out there as I said. And so besides trying to come to grips with where to land in terms of a direction with my ceramics, my ceramics sculpture, I was drawing from the figure for pleasure.

So anytime I did something two-dimensional, if it were abstract, it left me sort of empty and it — and wanting. And it naturally took a form of figuration otherwise. But after about the first year, I just sort of — kind of — I don't know. I think I was feeling so much stress from having to be a great student there that I was trying too hard, and I was trying to find something to really sink my teeth into and it'd be new, you know.

So I'd just flounder. I'd do this and I'd do that and I'd do this and I'd do that and I'd make great — I put so much energy out. I'd make great big floor pieces that took like two weeks and a ton of clay to make, and then I'd make these big vertical monoliths or something, and then it wouldn't go anywhere. It wouldn't sustain me.

And in the summer after my first year, I don't remember how it happened, but one way I liked to produce form, even as an undergraduate, once I started hand-building a lot, was a coil method. So I'd roll clay out into a coil, take the coil, add it to an edge, attach it, pinch it up. It makes sense for vessel making.

MS. RIEDEL: So coiling is — yeah, yeah.

MR. BRADY: Coiling or any kind of volume — most of the time, the clay has to be volumetric, even if we don't call it a vessel. It's space inside, so it is a vessel in a sense. And I decided that these elements of the coil that I always thought were kind of beautiful just as things themselves, and I actually had to let a couple of them harden a couple of years before, and I fired them, so there were these kinds of sticks of clay.

But I decided to take coils and let them be — firm up into sticks of clay and then begin to stick them together into structures. And I had also made some pieces, just before I came to Davis out of a pair of prunings that up in Auburn, they would cut these beautiful straight pair of shoots off and I've got a bunch of them. I made these things. And I would make these structures by using these little metal attachments and — not real complex, but again, this linear element and junctures in the way they intersect.

MS. RIEDEL: More geometric than organic at this point?

MR. BRADY: The wooden things weren't geometric so much, but they were several linear things coming together with joinery of some sort. So I see a connection there. So I started sticking these clay things together like as a little experiment. I'd go, hmm, that's kind of cool and then I'd make another one. And I just kind of went with that and I did —

MS. RIEDEL: How did you join those ceramic coils?

MR. BRADY: You just kind of scratch them on the ends, put some sauce in there, and stick them together. The first ones I made I didn't think would structurally hold up.

MS. RIEDEL: You fired them as individual coils and put them together afterwards?

MR. BRADY: No, no, no, I fired them as like — right down on the wall, there's a couple of ones from way, way back then right now, right there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: They were part of a piece that had many of these egg-crate shapes in it, like say, 50, but each unit was fired separately.

MS. RIEDEL: All right.

MR. BRADY: But when I made the first one, I remember thinking, well, I'm not sure I can do that with clay, but then I did it. Now that it's dry, I'm not sure I can move it into the kiln without breaking it. But when I did it, I did it and I went, wow. Then when I fired it, it had no issues and —

MS. RIEDEL: No warping or —

MR. BRADY: No, basically like it surprised me in all levels.

MS. RIEDEL: It is surprising.

MR. BRADY: So as I amped it up, either in scale or complexity, it just worked. These structures — clay likes to dry evenly. So they were up in the air and they'd dry evenly. And there's low mass, blah, blah, blah, and they just worked. So technically, they're okay, although they kind of pushed the notion of — practical notion of fragility. Clay — certain things of clay that I've tried to do in the past that — I don't know, it has sort of a built-in death potion. There's a certain point it's going to break unless it's awfully carefully — taken carefully, however you say that — taken care of.

So that's what my graduate thesis became is just all the stuff that had to do with this kind of interest in structural. Most of the things — there were a few pieces that actually had a kind of an image in them, but basically, there were most — they were nonobjective.

MS. RIEDEL: And this enormous architectural grid structure was part of that project too, right, your thesis?

MR. BRADY: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How big was that?

MR. BRADY: Well, there's one photograph of where we took it and just stacked it up. We played with it in different ways after it was done just because I just was so happy and it took me three months to make it, to take it out on the lawn and celebrate that it was over. So in one configuration, I think it was 26 feet wide by — I don't know — 11 feet tall or something like that. But all —

MS. RIEDEL: Pretty extraordinary in clay. I mean, it has this sense of the possible in it.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, it raised a few eyebrows, that graduate show and stuff. And then, that summer came, after school, and I went — well, I was asked to vacate my studio, so I had nowhere to work. I actually got involved in golfing with a friend. We both thought we'd try it out and we both got obsessed with golfing. So we golfed all

summer long. And then I also made these trips back to Nevada. I made two trips up to Pyramid Lake and camped there.

MS. RIEDEL: This was ‘75?

MR. BRADY: Seventy-five, the summer of ‘75. And so here I was at a time where I was finished with high school; I was finished with college. All my education was done. My — when I went away to art school, even though it was a bit of a shock that I was even going to art school, my objective was to become a high school teacher like my high school teacher who inspired me. I just wanted to be like Tom Tucker.

And I wanted to make things. I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be able to wear Levis and a sports shirt or whatever. I just thought that was so cool. He’s the coolest guy in the world. But after two years of art school, I had no idea what it even meant to be a serious artist. I knew that I loved making these things, but I still didn’t know — understand the gravity of all that.

But after a couple of years, I began to see that this keeps getting deeper and the trajectory is — or whatever it’s a never-ending experience to try to be the best artist you can or whatever. And I realized that I could never be a high school teacher because I want to be a serious artist. And before, I’d never even thought of it like that.

So I shifted my objective about — after about two years in college to being a college professor because I knew they only worked two days a week for the most part. And so that was — and so after I got out of Davis, I applied for a job in Sacramento at this university and I got that job. And I knew that, at a certain point during the summer, the news was declared — it might have been later on in the summer, but in any event, here I am up at Pyramid Lake camping in the land where I grew up, a land of all these memories. And I’m just in this very reflective time thinking about, gosh, here I am. I’m 25 now or whatever and I finished my education. I’ve accomplished this. I’ve accomplished that. I’ve done everything and I’ve got this job pending. Maybe I knew that I was going to have it. I don’t know.

And so I started — anyway, while I was there, I was doing these sketches and I was doing these autobiographical sketches, like me and memories and sightings there at the lake, like the pyramid and different things and some fantasy notions coming in or memories of my childhood. And I was just filling sketchbooks with all these images, some of them real, some of them imagined or remembered. Then I went back to Auburn in California where — well — and then I did get the job teaching at Sac State. I started in the fall of ‘75, September, 1975.

And for the first few months, I went back up to Auburn on all the days I wasn’t teaching and I just worked on drawings. And I have two or three of them still downstairs here. And they were — they started with taking all these images out of my sketchbooks from Pyramid Lake, which are all figurative and autobiographical in nature, and creating these composites on a larger piece of paper. And they were really, really engaging. I was just like so into it, like all I did for hours upon hours upon hours, day after day, for about six weeks, two months or so. And I did about 14 of these very intense drawings.

And then when I started working again for the first time since the June before, when I was asked to leave my studio after graduate school, I began to work and just one night, I started making these really playful little objects. And they were all figurative.

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

MR. BRADY: And, oh, the other thing I didn’t really say is that in that time of reflection at Pyramid Lake and in that summer in general, when I thought about what I did at Davis, I was pretty proud of myself. I’d accomplished my goals and done things that I never expected, pretty impressive work, dah, dah, dah. But I kind of felt like — I don’t know if it was like a lot of influence from kind of a California Funk mentality or whatever, the kind of people I tended to be around as teachers, or like Arneson or like de Forest, but I began to think of all that work I did which was geometric in nature and in some cases —

MS. RIEDEL: Architectural?

MR. BRADY: What’s the word when it doesn’t refer to being objective in any sense?

MS. RIEDEL: Nonrepresentational?

MR. BRADY: Well, I used the word a while ago — well, anyway, it doesn’t — I just started feeling like it kind of looked like art too much, you know, that it — that I wanted to be more personal somehow. And that’s where I think I was feeling a little bit more — and being influenced by the kind of teachers and kind of people, the milieu I was in and around, which is surely true of Northern California art, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. BRADY: It's all sort of personal. And that's probably why Kenneth Baker has never really cottoned much to those artists here. He likes the abstract artists if they exist around here. He likes to go to New York to talk about them or whatever.

So I was feeling like dubious about all that and then I did all these drawings that were figurative and autobiographical. And when I started working with — again, I started making these little figures and things. And they were just kind of very small playful things, but they unfolded to much more ambitious works, which ended up becoming my identity as a ceramics sculptor once people forgot about the structural and grid stuff, which was sort of short lived. And then the next 15 years or something like that, I established myself as a fairly integral part of Bay Area figuration and whatever — doing sculpture, and in a nationwide way and stuff like that. So —

MS. RIEDEL: One thing we didn't touch on at all was the trip you took to Mexico during your time at CCAC.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, just about the last year at CCAC.

MS. RIEDEL: Did that have any sort of influence in terms of a move to more personal and more figurative works, sort of Day of the Dead — those would be more wooden figures, not a whole lot of ceramics, but some.

MR. BRADY: When I made that small batch of ceramics after the drawings, and I was in a situation up there in Auburn where we had sold part of the property off and I was putting together a small cabin on the other part of the property and I didn't have — it was wintertime and my studio was too cold. And I was working in a little 10-foot square horse stall for a studio. And so I couldn't really make anything large anyway, but these little pieces I made that night conjured the Day of the Dead work a lot.

They seemed to have death — images of death, skeletons and this and that, not completely, but somewhat. And my father also had just been killed about a year before that in a car accident, so death, in a kind of close-up way, really entered my experience, my life. But I definitely felt right then and there that my experience seven years prior in Mexico was surfacing in my work, because for a long time I always thought — I don't know — it hasn't influenced me that much, but indeed, I think it did.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: So we were talking about the influence of Mexico.

MR. BRADY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So it seemed evident to me that my experience seven years or eight years before in Mexico was finally coming to the surface as influence in my work. I don't really remember when I was down there being affected directly by Day of the Dead stuff, but I saw it. And I saw the folk art, whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Where were you in Mexico?

MR. BRADY: I lived in Patzcuaro, Patzcuaro.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] By Janitzio, where that famous Day of the Dead celebration happens. That's one of the most famous in the country.

MR. BRADY: Is it really right there?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: Wow.

MS. RIEDEL: Right in Patzcuaro, yeah, I think so. Did you go out to that little island?

MR. BRADY: No I never went out to Janitzio. I lived in actually a village around the lake called Erongaricuaro, which is about — I don't know. It's a third of way around the lake from Patzcuaro.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So you lived in a little village?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, we lived in this sort of Tarascan Indian village.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, so you weren't going to the university or anything —

MR. BRADY: Well, CCAC here was — there was a wealthy man like from Switzerland or somewhere who built this estate reportedly for the possibility of — if there's a world war or some kind of major calamity, he could run off, and that'd be an escape place. And the house was built pretty much and finished and never used. And he met the president of CCAC — at the time, I guess it was Harry Ford — and mentioned that he had this place and that wouldn't it be kind of cool if they wanted to start a little foreign campus and they could use it.

So CCAC took him up on the offer and they sent a pilot group of 17 students and then two teachers down there, and we were that first pilot group. Nineteen sixty-eight I think that was, yeah. And so this estate was sitting right on the waters' edge in this little town called Erongaricuaro, which was really very small. Patzcuaro is like 20 times bigger, 40 times bigger, and had a colonial sense to it and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So what did you do? Did you have drawing classes and clay classes or —

MR. BRADY: We didn't have any classes. It was all like independent study that we're taking with our teachers back in the States, and we'd get credit that way. So for instance, like there was no facilities and our jobs, in a sense, were for each of our area of interest to help create a studio and set it up for the future.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: And in ceramics, there was nothing there except a place that — okay, you have these two rooms and that yard out back. You can build kilns or whatever, but there was nothing to build the kilns with.

And so I resorted to my knowledge from working with Hal Riegger and how to work in a very fundamental way. And the first day I made a little kiln out of red bricks that were just laying around and fired it with wood. So I could fire these things called pukis, which are just little saucers that Native Americans made to support the pots they built upon them. So I fired some of those and my friends were just going like, wow, you're already making ceramics or whatever. And I'm going, yes.

So then I made those and I started building these pots and then in months — a couple of months later, some bricks were brought from — for a real kiln — from Mexico City, some real, real bricks, but nobody there really knew how to make a real serious sophisticated kiln, including me, but we made a big box with a kind of a corbelled arch. It's a way the Mayans made an arch called corbelling.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: So we made a kiln like that and we didn't leave too much for the next incoming ceramics students — [they laugh] — by way of sophistication, but we kind of set it up.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. BRADY: And other areas got it together a little more, some looms and some sculpture area or whatever, but —

MS. RIEDEL: And what did you see of Mexican art down there? Did you see Day of the Dead — anything in particular that sticks?

MR. BRADY: I don't remember — huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Anything that stuck in your mind?

MR. BRADY: No, I don't really remember. I know that wherever I go, I'm like a sponge. I see stuff and it just — it goes into this storage tank in there and how and when it comes out, sometimes even mystifies me. Sometimes I'll think that — or not even think about where are certain kind of ideas coming from; later on, get the connection that, hey, I saw that thing there and that must have stimulated this and therefore — and sometimes it's obvious to me, very obvious that I'm carrying this influence right in my mind because I can't get it out, something I saw. It may be other art. It may be a container in a grocery store. It might be any form.

Today I was riding my bicycle on the bicycle paved path nearby the water, which I hardly ever do, and there they've done landscaping along there. And they have underwater — little water things to each plant, I guess, a little spray thing. In every place where the water was on in the middle of the night or whatever they cycle on, it bled across the asphalt path in a shape of wetness. By the time I ride across it, it wasn't a puddle. It was just — it changed the color of the asphalt there. It was still damp.

And these shapes were just like so cool. They're so cool. And they're not — well, they're not all the same at all. Even though they're different shapes and sizes, they were — anyway, so I'm thinking, next time I go there, I've got to take a camera because these shapes are so fantastic. So I'll see things like that that turn me on; or another thing I see that turns me on — this is a real deviation here in this conversation — but is on the streets of Berkeley and wherever around here, but wherever cracks develop in the asphalt, the city trucks — the city guys will come along to protect the asphalt from completely eroding.

They'll run along those cracks some wet, very liquid tar. And they just paint along those cracks and that helps seal it from more water going into it to where it finally — cause some real damage until they're ready to repave, I guess. So there ends up being these drawings that are following these happenstance cracks and the most

trippy patterns occur. So I call them road drawings. And they're so cool, so I take pictures of those. I've got them in my computer.

MS. RIEDEL: Sort of like the Nasca lines only the Berkeley versions of them. [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: And they're structures. Once again, they're structures. They're not real rectilinear. They're kind of like this, but they're all divided up. Wow, they're a trip. And then there is — every time the city puts in a new sewer system, I guess, for an old house even, the way they cut open the asphalt is like this and then they cut out a big hole that it's like here's the pipe that they've got to connect with at the curb. And so they cut out this way, and then they widen it where they dig with the big thing down to where that juncture's going to meet the main sewer line, I guess. Then they fill it all back up and they patch it. There's a black line going around like that.

And it looks like kind of dumb bottle like this. It's a bottle shape. But they're so — they're all basically the same, but they're all so different. And they're just cool. They're just cool. They're just — they're kind of goofy. They're kind of cloddy. They're kind of — but I love those and I haven't taken pictures of those bottle things, but — so anyway, I see things like that that may inform me or become part of my shape and form kind of ammunition down in there. And I may not even remember pulling from that kind of thing. But art is part of that too.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. BRADY: Now, why did we get off from there?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we were talking about Mexico, but I wanted to ask, before we move forward, about Hal Riegger because you were talking about the firing techniques that you were using in Mexico that you've learned from him. Did you apprentice with him at one point?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I guess — it wasn't —

MS. RIEDEL: — or studied with him or worked with him?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah, sure.

MS. RIEDEL: When was that and how did that work?

MR. BRADY: I think — to the best of my knowledge in my third year of college, I'm going to guess third year, maybe sometime late in my second year, a student came from Oregon named Robin Rycraft and his parents owned a seed farm in Corvallis, Oregon, outside of town. And Hal Riegger knew them somehow. I don't know how he knew them, but —

MS. RIEDEL: He was teaching at CCAC at the time?

MR. BRADY: No, Hal Riegger — he did teach there at one time.

MS. RIEDEL: But he wasn't teaching there at the time?

MR. BRADY: He wasn't. He and Edith Heath had taught at Arts and Crafts and — here's the way I remember hearing — I don't know if it's — how truthful it is, but Vernon Coykendall, who was my professor there, was there at a certain time. I understand that he got fired or let go, I think because this doesn't even go well beyond — oh, yes, hmm — it might have been because he was gay. I don't know if that was the reason. But — so he left and Viola Frey, who was an undergraduate student there — and he got along socially very well.

And Coykendall, Vernon Coykendall, was hired at Tulane [University] in New Orleans. So he went there. Viola followed him. She got her master's degree at Tulane. And she went up to the Eastern Seaboard and interfaced with ceramics, industrial ceramics, and stuff like in New Jersey. And then he stayed there and in the meantime, after he was fired — if he was indeed fired — they hired Hal Riegger and Edith Heath.

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't know she taught there.

MR. BRADY: Yeah. And that was before she started her thing in Sausalito [CA]. And then they were — either she quit and went over there to do that. I don't know what her thing was, but Hal got fired, I think. Now, I think Hal got fired because he was gay. Back then, if there was any — I don't know — any notice of activities or whatever, it was probably a scorned — looked poorly upon — I don't know.

So Hal Riegger never really taught after that and he didn't really like institutions. And I don't know if that was from that experience or not, but he pretty much set out to make the rest of his life in his own way, in his own resourceful way. So then Vernon Coykendall, the funny thing is that he got hired back to CCAC and he came back.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: And then he was there until he retired. And then after he retired, even though Viola had been — and then she came back because he came back. And then she worked for Macy's and then she would come every day and work at CCAC. He lived — Vernon Coykendall lived in the city and he would drive over here and bring Viola with him because Viola didn't even know how to drive. She didn't have a driver's license. And she would work until noon, from eight o'clock to noon or one o'clock, something like that, four or five hours, go out and get on a bus on Broadway in Oakland, take it back to San Francisco, go out on Geary Street to the Macy's Store at the — there used to be one at the kind of hill, that crest going up out of Chinatown or Japantown there, heading toward the water.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: And she'd work there until like 11 o'clock at night or whatever it was, work a whole shift. I think she worked in accounting or something like that. I don't know. She wasn't in sales. And then she'd go home and then she'd come back with Corky [nickname for Vernon Coykendall] — we called him Corky — in the morning and that was her life.

And I remember being so impressed with — now here's a person with a full-time job that every day came in for four or five hours in the studio. And that's what she did — the whole four years I was there, that's what she did and she was called a resident potter. She was never a teacher, never formally a teacher. However, she would like mingle around and she dropped her opinion here and there, not in any super-zealous way, but it happened that she, by nature, was not only an example to me, a big influence in terms of work ethic and also just the power of her work. She's such a great artist. And she made a comment a little here, a little there. She didn't overstep her boundaries that way, but — so now I'm off track here. Help me get back.

MS. RIEDEL: Hal Riegger and —

MR. BRADY: So Robin Rycraft came to go to school in my second or third year and he had met Hal Riegger on his parents' property up in Oregon because Hal would conduct these outdoor workshops around the Western United States, teaching people how to work with nearly nothing. And he would find people who owned property who were interested in pottery. And his mom was a potter. And so that's how I met Hal.

So one day he says to me — he says, I know this guy, Hal Riegger. I met this guy, Hal Riegger. And we'd go visit him on Mount Tamalpais in Mill Valley. Do you want to come with me? I said, yeah, that sounds good. So we went over there and Hal lived off the Panoramic Highway, which is that ridge road that goes way up, and quite a ways near the top. And he just had this about an acre, an acre and a half in there.

He had two simple structures that were very much the same architecturally that he built — I don't know — maybe in the late '50s or something like that. And one was a studio and one was a house. Everything about the buildings, the interiors, the contents, his lifestyle was really interesting to me and of course, at that time of my life, everything that was artful and everything that was more than Reno, Nevada, and more than what my household was like was tremendously interesting and life-altering for me. Everything was just good stuff. Yeah, I just dug it, you know.

So I go into Hal's house and — or his studio, and everything was — he was kind of like a Quaker or had a mentality of everything being kind of reduced to the essential things necessary, but a goodness and a quality and a certain kind of integrity in and through all that, you know. Simple furniture, but nice furniture, everything was like that, and his work was like that. And he made these big pots that were kind of emulating a Native American pottery, the way they built things, or possibly other peoples of other parts of the world, African pots, just very simple forms.

And you'd pick them up and they were so light. They were so beautifully made that I was just struck that day we went there by the aesthetic and by the kind of directness too. They weren't complicated technologies of ceramics. They were really direct. And they were fired like with cow dung and — or a raku process and stuff like that. So —

MS. RIEDEL: Were they thrown or hand built?

MR. BRADY: Always hand built, always hand built. He knew how to throw, but he never threw. So I — and right around that time, I actually discovered the process of raku. You know what raku is.

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

MR. BARDY: And I was just kind of getting my feet wet around that technique and then we went to meet him. And so he's like kind of Mr. Raku.

MS. RIEDEL: Well now, how did that relate to [Paul] Soldner? Was he already known for raku too?

MR. BRADY: If one looked at evidence, wherever that evidence is exactly, it would show that Hal Riegger did raku before Paul ever did it.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BRADY: But Hal Riegger was first noticed and influenced by the traditional practice of raku in Japan. So when he did it, he wasn't trying to take that technique and kind of westernize it. He was trying to understand the kind of Zen approach to it and the application it was meant for, which is around a tea ceremony and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: So really, he didn't innovate around it, but Paul Soldner totally took it and westernized it and innovated that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, but this was your first experience then of raku?

MR. BRADY: I had — I think I had done it at Arts and Crafts just before I met him, just the kind of miraculous thing of taking a pot, putting it in a red-hot kiln, and taking it out, and all that stuff. And it also was — up to that point, I'd always struggled with how to surface my ware and I was talking about that earlier. And I'd make things and make things and when it came to glazing them, I was like, what? I tried everything, but — and things worked okay, but never could I feel comfortable or real excited about the final conclusion of the surface — as far as my work — but the raku thing seemed absolutely perfectly married to the sense of my pieces and the form of them.

MS. RIEDEL: There was nothing extraneous added?

MR. BRADY: Well, in some cases, there was. It was the glaze, but the charred surface, the open dry clay that was left, but it looked more interesting than normal dry clay because it was affected by the smoke and degrees of values from ashen whites to black blacks and —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, and no glassy, no polish — the rawness was maintained.

MR. BRADY: Yes, exactly, kind of — rugged — quality to it. No matter what, my pots were very organic. So it just — they just looked right. And so then I meet him and he not only does raku, but he builds these little kilns that you build on a little hillside. They're based on these Japanese traditional wood kilns and —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, like a little Anagama?

MR. BRADY: Kind of like a miniature little tunnel kiln, yes. There's — yeah, like that and they worked beautifully. I loved that. And then he was teaching these workshops that would go to sites and we would — if we could, we would emulate the way of the Native Americans. We built things with a consideration toward why the Native Americans built the way they built because of the nature of open fires and the rigors of that kind of fire on the clay. So pieces have to be round and curvilinear. There's never any flat surfaces. And they have to be thin because the fire never gets real, real hot, and so if the clay's thick, it won't penetrate and fire the core of the wall.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: It'll fire the outside edges of it. But if you have a clay that's this thin, the entire structure will get as hard as it can get, given the low temperature of the fire. So we learned how to do that. And I did that in different states down in the desert, in Panamint Valley and —

MS. RIEDEL: Basically pit-firing, right?

MR. BRADY: Pit-firing, but sometimes, we would use whatever was at hand. If we went — there was old junkyard nearby and we got some steel and we found some bricks. Maybe we'd make some kind of crude kiln and we'd fire — and then we found some — I'm just making this up, but if we found some source of wood, we'd use some wood for fuel. If we had cow pies, we'd do it like the Native Americans did with pit firing, with just nothing but cow pies, which is a marvelous way to fire.

Other times, we'd use rubber tires and we'd burn — we did crazy stuff, you know. And I did it in different states and then I also — at a certain point, he asked me to teach for him and he was going to go to Canada for a summer and teach a summer program at a university there, and would I keep his thing going down here? So I taught in two places in Idaho, one in Colorado, Oregon, and we started off together that same spring just before that on an Indian reservation in Arizona doing a two-week workshop there. And we — joint taught it. This was all

like kind of new to me, but —

MS. RIEDEL: And this was while you were still a student at CCAC?

MR. BRADY: I think — no, it's before I went to grad school at Davis. It's that time after I got out of the service.

MS. RIEDEL: So, it's after the navy? Yes, okay, right.

MR. BRADY: Yes, it's about 1971, '70 and — but that was kind of a cool thing because he said, you've got to start thinking of yourself as a teacher, not just a student now. And I'm going, wow, okay. Can I do that? Okay, I'll try. So that summer, I went off and I did — I went for six weeks on the road and camped and I'd drive over to another state and out to Colorado and all this stuff and —

MS. RIEDEL: Just improvising with whatever you found.

MR. BRADY: Wherever we were because he had taught me how to do it and I was teaching other people how to do it.

MS. RIEDEL: And people would come and bring their pots.

MR. BRADY: They wouldn't bring their pots. They just bring themselves and their camping equipment and we would then identify where the clay was. And I showed them how to find the clay and I didn't know until I got the reader. The clay's everywhere.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: And then we would figure out, depending on what the resources are or aren't how we're going to fire them and what we'll fire them with.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you test the clay to know it was a viable body?

MR. BRADY: Well, you just put a little water on it. [They laugh.] You know, you used whatever you have. Like in Panamint Valley, the clay was so bad that these things just barely hung together and even after they were fired, they were kind of dubious, but that's the best we had down there. And it would force people into having to adapt to the limitation of this material or the lack of limitation, in certain cases.

And sometimes, we had to create — you'd make a shape in the earth and somehow let that be a mold just to create a piece because you couldn't build with it or — and that was part of the idea that he had. He said, leave your tools behind. Leave your preconceptions behind and leave your habits behind and just come here and deal with it and have something new and don't have tools. And don't rely on ways of working that work, that always work, and that could be a rut and whatever, just so there was a learning experience.

So, all in all, Hal Riegger was, I would say, as important to my education and my experience as a young art student as my teachers at CCAC were, or even my teachers at Davis, you know; a very different kind of nature, but yeah, I would definitely put him right in there, just equal and more important than a lot of them, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: And you worked with him on and off for about a year, a year and a half?

MR. BRADY: Well, that was —

MS. RIEDEL: Was it just that one summer?

MR. BRADY: I went for probably two or three different summers to one or more workshops as a student. And then later, I taught one whole summer for him and another time I went over and took glaze calculation. Once a week, I'd go over there and take classes with friends who were involved in that too.

MS. RIEDEL: He'd just teach out of his studio?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, that's what he did, is he made a living by teaching the workshops in the summertime and then making — I mean he would do like tiles for people's bathrooms or kitchens and teach some classes in his studio there.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. Did he and Edith Heath ever work together? At CCAC, you said they overlapped. That's interesting.

MR. BRADY: That's all I know of. But you know, Hal was —

MS. RIEDEL: He worked at Heath Ceramics, I think maybe briefly.

MR. BRADY: He might have.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I think he might have briefly.

MR. BRADY: I don't know that, but —

MS. RIEDEL: I think that's right.

MR. BRADY: You know, he's from that era where education in ceramic art, especially a master's degree, required some serious learning. I mean, it's not required anymore, but they learned glaze technology. They learned clay body stuff. They learned — because back then, say — what years were they? The '30s, the '40s, people were being trained not to be artists back then. That was probably — not very many people were being trained academically to be artists. It was — they were being trained for industry. So when he got out, he went to work for a company in Kansas City and designed pottery that was made on a production scale.

MS. RIEDEL: Like the fellow from — I can't remember his name right now — it'll come to me — in the Pasadena area — Harrison McIntosh, I think, did a lot of that too.

MR. BRADY: We had a retrospective right here at the Trax Gallery for Hal about three years ago, or maybe it's been four years now. I think it kept him alive for one more year. He was so excited about doing it and he was very demanding and very crotchety too about it — it was tough actually — but we had an interesting spectrum of work.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: We had some of those early castings from Kansas City that were made by some company. And they're really quite nice, pitchers and creamers and this and that. So I don't know why I was telling you that exactly — how he would have maybe been able to help Edith Heath. Yes, because he totally knew how to — in fact, during the war, he was a conscientious objector and I think Hal was a Quaker, raised as a Quaker, or some such religion that it was in the nature of them to be nonviolent and not believe in war.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

Mr. BRADY: So he was a conscientious objector and he was sent to North Dakota to a piece of land that they were going to develop for what, I don't really know, whether it was going to be for housing for a small town, or whatever. And to this land went engineers, earth machine drivers, and whatever it would take to develop this land. And Hal was there to actually create a workshop, to create the ceramics that would be used in the serving of food at this makeshift town that was being developed or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BRADY: This camp.

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

MR. BRADY: It was a camp. So he set up and taught men how to make ceramics and all that. And they built kilns and they fired — all the stuff they ate off in the kitchen and the canteen was the pottery that he made by setting up a ceramic facility there.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was all hand done? No molds?

MR. BRADY: I think they used — they might have — oh, no molds. I think they might have used jiggers or something like that —

MS. RIEDEL: Jiggers, right. That does sound a lot like Edith Heath. I know there was some —

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I think hers was all jiggers, the early stuff. So anyway, so he's kind of an interesting background.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I'm going to pause this.

[END CD 02.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing Robert Brady at the artist's studio in Berkeley, California, on March 10, 2008, for the Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art. This is disc number two.

MR. BRADY: So we talked about the summer after grad school, and found me golfing, taking up golf, and making

trips back to Nevada and reflecting on my life and my accomplishments as an artist up to that point. That resulted in a very intense period where I drew — I made drawings and that was followed by a rather playful, a kind of eruption of three-dimensional work for the first time since graduate school, which was — we're only talking about five months, four or five months, but — and all those sort of playful small scale things were figurative. They seemed to suggest that my experience seven or eight years prior to that in Mexico was finally having its influence in an obvious way.

It also seemed as though those works were being influenced by the death of my father, and maybe somebody else had died in my life around that time — I'm not sure — but not too long after that, a lot of people died and there was very much of a death aspect of my work being obviously addressed and sometimes unconsciously there.

But those little pieces that I made, I saw them either right away, or soon after that, as somewhat prophetic as to the nature of my work to come. And first of all, it was figurative work that for the first time in ceramics, not drawing, but in ceramics, that felt right for me. When I had — we didn't talk much about it, but I had dabbled with it a little here a little there before graduate school, and even during graduate school I dabbled a little bit at figuration now and then, but it never, ever felt right. There was something wrong with it every time, but this time, it felt so right for me.

And so I went ahead and began to make much more ambitious pieces like life-size figures and I — again, to reiterate it — I look back at those little figures as being rather prophetic in that they basically suggested a path that I would be on for some time to come, a long time, a good decade, 15, 20 years, something like that.

So I proceeded to explore figuration and most of the time, at least the ambitious work was life-size, five to six feet in scale, although I will say that in general, through my whole experience of making things, I worked on all sizes and all scales and I like all scales. And I'm always challenged by a large scale, but — and know that bigger is sort of better, but it's oftentimes the very small things that give me the greatest pleasure or I feel are just as good as anything large. So I love all scales.

So I proceeded to make figures and —

MS. RIEDEL: Did they all start with the fairly large pot-heads or were there pieces that preceded even those?

MR. BRADY: You know, they didn't have heads necessarily like the ones you're probably referring to, the ones that —

MS. RIEDEL: Like *San Simone* [1980] —

MR. BRADY: Oh, yeah, like that. They didn't start like that, but they had other solutions for heads that — and I'm thinking of some fairly obscure pieces that you wouldn't know about, but that did have kind of vessel-like or unusual heads. Some had these cylinders, basically a cylinder, and then there'd be holes cut. It'd be like a tin can that you can see through into the interior, maybe a little bit like a Kachina doll form.

Some were kind of a flared vessel head, just a few pieces, but — so there were indications of other sort of abstract possibilities for the solution of a head or the indication of a head form and being large also. Some I made that had the heads that were great big kind of pod forms like that on fairly thin figuration or attenuated figuration.

Yeah, so — and you know, in general, I don't know — like the idea of — well, I don't really know what to say about the ideals about the figures. I think — in general, I always tried to create a figure that had some kind of emotive power and emotional kind of quality, the exact emotion. There were times when I made things that portrayed anger. I made a piece called *Rage* one time. So there is obvious kinds of emotions being expressed at times, but other times, it was very intuitive — can't think of the word — well, an intuitive approach, but I don't know — I'm blacking out on the word I want to use.

MS. RIEDEL: Exploratory.

MR. BRADY: It's a journey, a journey, in the making of a piece, really very intuitive. I had — I always have an idea when I start of the general gesture of the piece and how it's going to exist in space roughly speaking, the scale, blah, blah, blah, but as to exactly what it is that's going to express, I don't that I can really pinpoint that. And if in the end, they didn't seem to emote anything, or have any kind of presence, I would be disappointed, but most of the time, I guess I felt like something fairly engaging was happening. So — that's a good thing.

MS. RIEDEL: And structurally, they got more complex. There was more and more tension in terms of balance and weight and volume, and in constantly stretching the clay as far as it would go technically. And there was that kind of emotion in there, too, that brought tension to them.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I guess so. I always tried to — avoid the obvious way of presenting figures by connecting them with their feet to a base of clay as a sort of pedestrian way to solve that issue of standing something up and I began to explore using other materials or kind of context for the figures to be. Like *San Simone* had stone, a quarry piece of stone, at the base of it. I don't know if you can remember that.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't remember that.

MR. BRADY: And below the stone was a wood structure and then the stone sat upon the wood structure. At the rear of that wood structure, there was a vertical piece of wood that went up and keyed in the back of the head of the ceramic. It was literally made for that in every which way. And so now we have a way to present the figure in space, to stand it up, hold it up, but instead of it being just simply a base in the most obvious sense, it was a quarry piece of stone which had a certain kind of history. It had a kind of archeological kind of suggestion to it. It had an architectural — it was a stone from some architectural remains I found in Tennessee, a foundation or something like that.

So it placed the figure in somewhat of a context, both in terms of a time sense, but also in terms of a time and place, or a place. And I did that in a lot of different ways and eventually, I also made clay bases that had structures and whatever, that permitted me to create more tension in the way the figure existed in space, physical tension, as you were talking about it.

MS. RIEDEL: There was a piece that was completely upside down, and it had antlers.

MR. BRADY: Oh, yeah, yeah, that was called —

MS. RIEDEL: *Healer*, maybe?

MR. BRADY: No, *Astronomer* [1984].

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

MR. BRADY: Yeah, well I made all those figures upside-down when I made them, but they were ultimately meant to turn right-side-up — [laugh] — and then affixed them to some sort of situation that would hold them up, and that's where there non-clay bases came in. That piece — most of the time, when I was building those upside-down, I saw the potential of leaving some upside-down because they were interesting upside-down.

And everybody always loved them upside-down. They go, oh, make them upside-down, but I'm not making them upside-down. So I actually did make some upside-down and *Astronomer* was one of them. There is only two or three — some fell over in an earthquake we had in my studio and there's only two or three that I made and that survived that way. *Astronomer* is one of them. I like that piece.

MS. RIEDEL: I like that piece a lot. You went back-and-forth from the full figures to the mask pieces during the late seventies —

MR. BRADY: Well, what happened was I was making these figures that — and well into it that are, roughly speaking, six feet tall. And the way I would do them is — with ceramics, you need to be working on more than one thing at a time because you have to wait for the clay to stiffen up and you just need to have a series going; otherwise, there's too much downtime.

So I had three or four others, serious ambitious figures that I'm building, and even then, I would reach a point, after working for a couple of hours, where I couldn't work for a while. I didn't have anything to do. So I would find smaller formats, something interesting to work on, on a smaller scale, so I'd be making some of those over there while this is stiffening up. And that took — that kind of idea took many forms. I did things that I'm not sure I could — that you've seen or even remind you of right now or remind myself of actually, but always being very prolific and making all kinds of things, all different scales.

So one day, I'm a little bit in question as to how to use my time and I'm waiting on my more ambitious work to stiffen up and my — I glanced down under a workbench and I saw this mold laying under there. And it was a mold that a student of mine forced me to take one day. You know. And I said, I don't want mold. I don't want your mold. I don't use molds. I'm kind of a purist. I didn't like molds. But this was just simply what we call a press mold and she had made it out of a Tupperware bowl which further creeped me out.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: It was just simply an oval about 12 inches tall, about six-and-a-half inches wide, seven inches wide, and symmetrical from top to bottom. And I said, I don't want that thing; I don't want that thing. It ended up in my studio.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BARDY: And also a jug of casting slip with it because she would pour and make these bowls out of them.

And so I pulled that mold out and I was looking at it. So I rolled out a piece of clay, pounded it out with my hand, and I slapped it down hard into that, and I trimmed off the edges. And I inverted it, flipped it over, and there was this inverted bowl form. And I looked at it, and I go, it looks like a mask to me or it looks potentially like a mask, so I made a face on it. And I went, ooh, that's kind of fun. And it was just like that.

And I started making those masks and every day, while I was doing my serious work, I'd be making about five of those a day because as soon as you put that clay in and you flip it over, there is a structure there. It's not going to fall and sag. And I was having so much fun with them. And the funny thing is, they were just a little sideline deal, but I made them and I made them and I made them. And I had so much fun.

And I would put ceramic slips and this and that on and then fire them. Then, in some cases, they seemed like they needed a little more, so then I resorted to using paint on them. And I'd have this hotplate with a couple of bricks and I'd put the mask over it and like rush dry the paint. And I was just on this — I'd just make them. I was having so much fun. And they were one of the most fun, fun, fun series of works that I've ever done to this day. And it went and went and went. I would say I made about 100 of them before I got exhausted on them.

And out of 100, I would say about 50 or 60 maybe were good ones that were keepers and the rest were thrown away. But I had an entire wall in my studio covered with them. Later, I had a show at the Proctor Art Museum [Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, NY], where the best of those were — and I had still a wall of them with about 30 or 40 of them up there.

And at that point, there was also a lot of interest, in the craft world anyway, of having shows about masks in the Folk Art Museum [Craft and folk Art Museum, CA] in LA — I don't know — this place, that place and people were getting my masks and putting in — pretty soon I was being called a mask maker. And I'm thinking, I don't like this. They mean something to me, of course, and I like them, but they're just one aspect of my work.

But — so anyway, they were just a product of — again, I was just — I kind of stumbled on it. Now, it wasn't — and at the time, I thought that it was the first time I'd made masks, but as I mentioned earlier — I don't know if it was on tape or not — but about the [Isamu] Noguchi experience. I had made three or four masks that day that in retrospective, were the first masks, I think. I have to think really hard. Maybe I made something before that. I can't even remember it. But — so there was always an interest there, I guess, but when I made these ones that I'm talking about right now, I also saw the correlation of Mexico.

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

MR. BRADY: Mexico, the State of Guerrero, is traditionally a mask-making area. So no doubt about it.

And in general, I guess, at some point I need to say it and I might as well say it now — that in general, I have been influenced by all — at least possibly influenced — by the arts of indigenous peoples on the world and art made by untrained artists and folk artists, naïve artists, art brute, insane people. All that kind of stuff, all that non-Western, non-academic kind of sources, just naturally interest me. They've always been a source of inspiration to me and I just tune into it.

I think sometimes that the Native American work that I saw in our local museum in Reno, Nevada, which was from the state of Nevada, moccasins and papooses, and decoys and all these things that were made by Indians of Nevada were my first inspirations, or things that I was drawing from or interested in, and they're all craft-based. There's such beauty and integrity in the way they use materials and — so I love that and somehow — anyway, that's what turns me on in general, more so than — I don't look at Renaissance art and get excited. I don't go to the Louvre [Paris, France] and get excited. I've been to the Louvre. I didn't get excited.

And one of my favorite artists, not [Marcel] Duchamp, but who's the guy who did — [Jean] Dubuffet. He's quoted at one point on saying, I wouldn't cross the street to go to the Louvre.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: And when I heard that, I had already been to the Louvre and got worn out by looking at all that stuff. I'm even looking at the Raft of the Medusa or things that I'd learned in art history that were some of the greatest paintings of all time, and certainly, it's an impressive thing. It is, but in terms of it stirring my emotions, very little happened.

So I had gone through the Louvre and had this sort of dead experience. And then I heard this quote and I thought this is awesome because he's an artist I admire, and of course, he was part of the COBRA group, and all

of them were trying to tap into their unconscious and their sort of child side and their non — and they were absolutely against academic art. And so reading or — that's okay. If the sound bothers you, okay.

MS. RIEDEL: That's fine.

MR. BRADY: One think I like about the philosophy they have is that it helped support or underscore my approach to making art, I guess, which is less cerebral and more intuitive and just kind of trusting and responding to impulse. But anyway, so —

MS. RIEDEL: A strong material response to some degree too. No?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, for sure. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So where did we get to — I said I need to say something else —

MS. RIEDEL: Acknowledge the tribal cultures —

MR. BRADY: Oh, my general influences, yeah. However, that being said, I don't know anything about African art. I don't know anything, really, about New Guinea art. I don't know anything about oceanic art. I couldn't tell you thing, except I know those terms. And I think I would recognize that something was oceanic maybe, as opposed to New Guinea maybe, as opposed to African maybe, you know?

So I don't know about anything about any of that stuff. I don't study it. I don't look at it and in any kind of systematic way, proceed to be influenced by it. It's just what turns me on. And like I was saying earlier, it could be a shadow from a form on the ground that is a shape or a feel —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: — that turns me on, any source. And it goes into my hopper and it comes out, and I just always hope that it goes through my filtration system and my own experience, and comes out in a way that is enough of its own, and not, quote, "African art" or whatever. Even though people, when they look at my work, they always bring up that subject. And it used to always irritate me a lot because it's like they weren't recognizing that it's about me or it's about now or whatever.

And I'm also sensitive about — now I'm getting off the subject — but I'm sensitive about that whole issue of art should be about the maker, of course, and the maker's time and the maker's culture, so about me, about here and now, this country, whatever. And I understand that and it totally makes sense. If we look back at art through the ages, art has always reflected society. It's reflected the immediate culture or the times in general, whatever.

And so how does my work do that? I'm not sure how it does it and since it even conjures to me the associations of non-academic art sources, I feel a little sensitive about that because how does it reflect this culture here and now? And ultimately, I don't know really how to answer that and I also don't know — what was I going to say? I lost my train of thought. Oh, I know, that I can only speak of my own experience, but — and I'll leak over into other people's, my guessed perception of their experience.

And that is that to be an artist is a difficult task to do it on an ongoing — in an ongoing way, and especially once you get into — a public arena where people see the work and then they see it again. And then people are making judgments, and all that sort of thing. The stakes kind of get higher and higher and the stress could get greater. It doesn't have to be — it depends on how a person handles all that, but — so there're a lot of reasons why one might stop making art and one might question why they make it, what the value of it is, or whatever.

So ultimately, there's a point where each of us have to kind of accept aspects of our work for what it is and that's the way it is. So like for me, the fact that my work doesn't speak about American culture here and now in any kind of grand way, what am I going to do about that? I don't know. I'm conscious of that, but I'm not going to like change my work so that it does do that. I do what's sort of natural for me and I go, okay, well, whatever. I'm just — I can't help that. It is what it is and that's what I do. And I don't — I just think it'd be too contrived for me to try to change it and become something else, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: And so then on the side of support of whatever it's about is that I consciously and unconsciously tap into a more universal spirit of art and the universal — I mean, nowadays especially, this world has been made very small, and we are so knowledgeable about — at least superficially, about things going on all over this planet. Just *National Geographic* magazine brings stuff to us that's so amazing.

So I just see my work as a by-product of everything that I experience, from contemporary art to any other art from any other age, to any other aspect of a man and nature. And it isn't super-time specific and I'd like to think also that it doesn't have a kind of popularity quotient in terms of time relevancy. I think in 10 years from now,

it'll be what it is now, or 20 years. It's not going to make much difference because it's not really dependent on fashion. And that's not a conscious choice either, but I think that is somewhat truthful about it. But anyway, so got off the subject, bring me back.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think about it in terms of tradition — along the lines of [Alberto] Giacometti, and more locally, in the sense of Steven DeStabler? There is a Bay Area figurative quality, that going on, and then there's an archetypal quality going on.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, well, I don't know how I could be not influenced by Bay Area figuration.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, absolutely.

MR. BRADY: Yeah. It just seems — it seems natural. I don't know if my work — yeah, for sure. Manuel Neri, I think is a fantastic artist and I know he has influenced me. I don't think it's really obvious in any sense — or David Park. He's my favorite of the older guard of Bay Area figurative painters. The guy's stuff is so great. And in some ways, sometimes you look at a David Park and it's not very far off from like a — from like an African mask, or it's so direct and fundamental that it's a few steps off from that. But, yes, and Giacometti, that guy, I adore that guy.

I was just on a bicycle ride the other day thinking of his drawings and just thinking how I would love to have one of his drawings and just thinking how incredible his drawings are, and that in his sculpture, we didn't see any real degree of realism, even though at the basis of how he did the head on a very attenuated figure that was very abstracted, the head had these little markings of realism compared to the rest of the body in a way. And then those drawings were so realistic. They were really about the subject. And he really could do that. If he wanted to have been a portrait artist, he probably could have done that, but anyway, whatever, just a remarkable artist.

And there also is something about like — when I was a little kid I loved the things in Pompeii that were a result of the lava flow and a figure that's pulled up and contorted and frozen in that moment of pain and panic or whatever, and kind of fossilized at the same time. There's something really powerful about that to me. And that was almost like a figure being reduced to the bones or a skeleton in a sense, a little bit like the desert. A rudimentary kind of quality.

MS. RIEDEL: I was just thinking of the same thing from Pyramid Lake.

MR. BRADY: Stripped, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, like fossils.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, and so when I was a little kid, I used to want to be an archeologist and I would go up to Virginia City in Nevada, which is an old, old silver mining town. It was huge back in — whenever was huge, back in the 1800s. And we were digging the dumps up there trying to find old bottles and old glass objects. And I would find something like a 20-year-old screwdriver or whatever was thrown out there, and it would be a plastic handle that's discolored and 10 percent of the steel shaft all rusted and just kind of gnarly. And like I would think that would be so beautiful. I'd be so attracted to these things that are a semblance of their former selves, former state. There is just something real beautiful about that to me.

So I love things that are ravaged by time and affected by these layers and layers of time and weathering and altered. That history in something just really interests me and that's part of the problem with my work, is that I always make something and I give it — I don't try to make it look old. I don't think to myself, I'm going to make this look old, but I'm interested in textures and layers of paint, whatever, and some kind of handling of the surface that creates a rich information on that surface that can only happen by address, readdressesal, readdressal, readdressal, to some extent, as opposed to trying to have it all clean and — it's just so unlike me to do that. Like a John McCracken, for instance, LA artist, oh, I mean my god, you know, someone like that — I can look at work like that and actually like it, but I could just never do that. So —

So that childhood desire of being an archeologist causes me to be inspired by certain kinds of artwork. And when you think of someone like Giacometti, it's not that far from the figures of Pompeii or whatever. They're reduced down to this kind of elemental vision, and there's also — it's like — Giacometti's work was about the singularity or loneliness — I'm just making this up; I don't think I've ever read this — but of man and that we all have that to deal with.

It doesn't matter how many friends we have, how many people love us, or whatever. In a certain way, were alone. Psychically or in our own head, we have perceptions, fears. We have, no matter what, the responsibility or it all boils down to we are alone. And everybody who loves us, as soon as they're gone or as soon as they're too busy, they're dealing with their own life or whatever — do you know what I mean?

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

MR. BRADY: Of course they love us, but when it comes right down to it, everybody's trying to survive and ultimately, there are certain things that we have to carry and no one else can do it. And in that experience can be the sense of — it depends. I'm speaking from my own experience, I guess, but it's my guess also that we all bear that, that we are alone, and that we are ultimately responsible for certain — for a big part of our life, you know, and that no one else can do it for us. And in the very end, we will die and we might die with somebody by our side, but it's our singular experience. So Giacometti's work is like, to me, such a big statement about that. And again, I don't even know if that's what he was doing, but that's how I see it.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think of the way you were describing working on your pieces in layers, and just going over them and readdressing each one over and over again — almost marking that soul with thoughts or experiences over time, marking these figures in a very physical way.

MR. BRADY: Yeah. — I was trying to think what that — conjured, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: There's a certain kind of a — love is a funny word to use in terms of that, but there's a certain kind of intimacy I'm giving to the piece —

MS. RIEDEL: Think of it as Eros as a process almost, yeah?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, maybe so. And like that first piece I made, I was so in love with that things and I was like stroking it with a sponging way. So I'm coddling and I'm loving and I'm caring for my piece. Well, I kind of do that with my pieces like — well, I don't know. When we get back to the ideas — let's just swing around. Like when I was talking about my works being very intuitive, so they're figures. I'm hoping that in the end, there will be a sense of content there or something that — they're doing something. People look at them and they get affected by them. So evidently, there must be value; there must be content there. Sometimes for me — not sometimes, but when I make something, like there's a little piece right there, a lot of different things going on in that piece right there.

MS. RIEDEL: What's this called?

MR. BRADY: I think it's called *Pendulum* [2006].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And when is this from? Is it —

MR. BRADY: Oh, it's probably a year and a half old or something like that. It's part of a series of pieces I've made smaller and larger than that where just simply a female figure standing or possibly walking — in this case, playing with the notion of her carrying something supported by a shoulder board, and in this case, it's kind of a pendulum-like weight. And part of the opportunity there is to have the string creating linear dimension and complexity to the overall figure that adds interest and all that.

But in any event, other than — it's basically a very simple thing. It's like a portrait of someone standing with a bucket in their hand, whatever. It's real pedestrian; it's really pedantic. And now I'll just swing back to like David Park. I remember one of his manifestos, it was in a way of those — some of those artists was to paint everyday situations, paint the un-profound or the non-profound.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. BRADY: Man holding bucket, whatever, really, and not trying to be so intellectual about the approach. And when you think about art like, say, someone like his, it could be a person standing at the seashore. It's Elmer Bischoff; it's David Park or whatever. So the subject matter is so simple and the idea is reduced to a very, very simple situation. So what's going to make it work? What's going to make it work, or make it interesting, is what the artist can give the possibilities within that simple idea, framework, figure on beach, figure ground relationship or whatever.

So when I make a piece, everything about it matters to me. It matters — it — more than the fact — like the fact that it's a figure standing in there is just a convenience to try to express other things about form and about shape that are independent of the fact that it's even a figure.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. BRADY: And I want to set up all kinds of contrasts and pitting this form against that form, and this texture against that texture, and — to where I hope in the end, there's that certain kind of poetry and non-literal sort of experience or story that affects the viewer. And so it's all that stuff, along with the — the figure again, it's just

kind of like — and I tell my students sometimes that ideas are only as necessary — are only as important as they are interesting to the artist, to the particular artist.

So we could take 10 artists out, stand them in front of a palm tree, have nothing but the palm tree and whatever the ground looks like around, and say, okay, we're going to draw that. We're all going to draw that. Some people could really tune into that and just give it a whole lot of juice. And some people can't because they're just not interested. They want to draw a house. They want to do architecture or something like that. So — but — so it doesn't really matter. One idea that's as good as another idea; it's really what the artist has to give and they have to be interested enough in the idea, of course.

Sometimes, art is more conceptually based. The idea has a different kind of gravity in the whole thing. It is kind of different, but [Vincent] van Gogh, he painted landscape and people siding grain or whatever. It wasn't that woman cutting with a scythe the grain. It was how he painted her, right? And how the energy or the way he painted foliage like in the stuff. It was all about something beyond the simple subject matter there. And — well, anyway, so I just think that my work is —attempts to operate on all these little levels that aren't just about what the overall confrontation is.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And there really are very clear connections between this small figurative piece and the abstract ceramic works that you're working on right now, I think, in terms of form and line and weight and contrast.

MR. BRADY: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: And this figure brings in a whole other metaphorical level that feels very different from the more abstract cases. The metaphors feel different, but at the same time, I can see the connection — the back-and-forth — between those pieces and this figurative one.

MR. BRADY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes, I can even see — now that you've mentioned that —

MS. RIEDEL: Balance. And the thing, that very thin string, the whole concept of weight, that half- lifted foot, the step, the balance, the balancing on multiple levels. I think your work does that, whether it's the more abstract, formal compositions, or these, which seem even more given to that, but I think once you begin to see that in your work, it can go on — [laughs] — for quite some time in a really compelling way because there're all those different layers, the formal ones as well as the metaphoric ones.

MR. BRADY: I hope that is perceived and —

MS. RIEDEL: And the narrative. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. BRADY: Yeah. So for me there're just all these little conversations that I'm having with the making of this thing that they're like little microcosms within the big picture. And so like a lot of times, when I look at something that I really love that I made, let's say it is a figure, I'm not just looking at the whole thing for one big hit. I'll be like looking at the innuendo of profile that I created, sometimes surprising even to myself. I go like, oh, I don't even know how I did that. But I'm like really digging certain relationships that are probably buried to the eyes of somebody else. They're not buried, but they're — someone else is going to see something else, you know.

And those things matter to me a lot and they're like all these little voices that in time, if a person — and that's what happens with most art that we're around. When we look at it over a period of time, it takes you places new, right? You wake up. You're looking and laying in your bed looking at something and you go, wow. And you start seeing something new about it that you haven't seen before. And I would like to think that there are those little voices, those little poems, within the bigger story of my work and separate from the general subject matter of it. But that — I don't know. We got off the subject there, but —

MS. RIEDEL: Clay seems really well suited to that too as a material, I mean wood certainly, as well, but clay metaphorically, is so loaded and charged with a sense of narrative, a sense of both added and subtractive, a sense of malleability. It's just all the metaphorical content of clay, as an elemental material, seems like it would have been a wonderful place to take it from.

MR. BRADY: Clay is — yeah, I mean there's nothing better in terms of it receiving information in surface and the effect of being touched and whatever, nurtured in terms of surface. Wood is pretty good and I think that's why I like wood in terms of surface.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. BRADY: I mean it receives every impulse that's been foisted on it or against it.

MS. RIEDEL: And what it can do structurally, compared to ceramics, is —

MR. BRADY: That's what I like about it. It allowed me to do things and — ceramics is really hard to do on a large scale. You can do it; you can make anything really big. I mean it's not a problem. But making something big that is as good as something small or medium size is very difficult. And something like Jun Kaneko's pieces, they're pretty static forms, so to make one — to take it from four feet tall to eight feet tall, it's just a matter of making it bigger.

And I admire Jun Kaneko. He's a friend of mine. He's one of the most amazing artists on this planet, but the making of these pieces — not to say they're easy to make, but they're just labor and sometimes, they pose technological challenge just because of the sheer scale of them because they start having some problems on that scale.

But certain other kinds of work, though, made by ceramic artists when it's attempted to make large, made large, it's very difficult to have the spontaneity and the gestural strength and character of it.

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

MR. BRADY: Even someone like Peter Voulkos, if he were to try to make those things he was making 10 times as big, I don't know if it would be impossible. It would be near impossible.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that's why he went to try some in bronze and I was — I know we're way off topic here, but we'll come back — because you tried some in bronze too, you made some work in bronze. Was that —

MR. BRADY: My work in bronze though is not a — Peter's work in bronze was so different. He was really getting on a whole scale that was way, way, way beyond ceramics and he was even dropping the whole love affair with surface and exploiting clay as a natural material. All of a sudden he's using tubes and slick volumes and geometric shapes. You've seen those works.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah. Did you overlap with him at all here in Berkeley? Not at all?

MR. BRADY: No, but I overlapped as an observer of his work. And I was at CCAC while he's at Cal, and he had — they had the abstract expressionist ceramics show at MoMA, the old MoMA. When I was in my second year of college, I went to see that and I was just going, oh, my god. That was big. And his work was the most powerful in that show, even though all of it was cool. And I can pretty much remember everybody who was in that show, but — so he was major in terms of — yeah —

MS. RIEDEL: The energy and emotion and gesture and —

MR. BRADY: Yeah, and just the authority in his work. There's nobody else to this day who did what he did, and could do what he did, and I'll never be able to do what he did, and dah, dah, dah. The guy's like — like Jun Kaneko is a whole different kind of artist. And he's amazing in his ambitious — just on the level of ambition, it's off the charts; even makes Peter Voulkos look like kind of an average artist in terms of amping it up. Jun's an industry. It's wow — but anyway.

So ceramics is really, really, really hard to shift, to make it really large. If it is about gesture and nuance and this and that, it's very difficult. But wood, it's still harder to make a six-foot piece than it is a 15-inch piece and have the same kind of spontaneity because everything gets a little harder when it's bigger, but it's not nearly as hard. It's not nearly as hard as clay and just technically, it's not. It's just making it bigger, you know, and the attachment points and all — that figure right there could be seven feet tall and you could be doing almost the same exact thing. Maybe it wouldn't have that foot floating right there, but maybe — yes, why not? Maybe.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] What was teaching like at the beginning? You've been teaching for — or you taught for close to 30 years?

MR. BRADY: I taught — well, I'm still teaching. I'm teaching one semester a year and the next year will be my 33rd year, I think, or 34th — 33rd I think.

MS. RIEDEL: How has your philosophy of teaching changed over that time?

MR. BRADY: Not a bit.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all. [They laugh.]

MR. BRADY: I'll tell you — well, let me just also mention that when I was an undergraduate student at CCAC, I actually was hired to teach ceramics at Studio One and Studio Two. That's part of the Oakland Recreational and Arts Program and next to Oakland Technical High School [CA]. Do you know where Oakland Tech is?

MS. RIEDEL: Is it over by the museum?

MR. BRADY: No, it's right on Broadway, two blocks down Broadway from Arts and Crafts, or three blocks or so.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MR. BRADY: Right behind Oakland Tech is a nice old cottage, a big two-story, shingled house on some land there, and it's called Studio One and it's an art center. And they teach all phases of art, the painting and jewelry and ceramics and I don't know what else, print-making maybe. And then there's one way out like by High Street or somewhere out that way and that part of Oakland was called Studio Two. And they're City of Oakland programs and traditionally, the one by Arts and Crafts always tapped into graduate students from CCAC to teach ceramics there.

Well, they came to a point where they needed a teacher and I don't know why they called me up, or — I know there was a professor who said, you might want to talk to Bob. I think he could handle it. And I was an undergrad. So that was kind of a little feather in my cap or a pat on my back from the professor there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. BRADY: So I taught there. And I taught there for a couple of years before and then I did the thing with Hal Riegger before I got the job at the university. So I would say, by that time, I had a couple of years of teaching experience of, at least on some level, non-academic, no grading and all that, but —

MS. RIEDEL: And purely functional, sculptural, a mix?

MR. BRADY: More functional, yeah.

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

MR. BRADY: So when I went to teach at Cal State University [California State University] in Sacramento, I guess I had about — and also I was a TA at Davis. I was TA for Bob Arneson and also Roy De Forest. So — and Bob's classes, I basically taught them; I did most of it. And he would just sort of oversee once in a while, come out, and then he'd go back in his studio and I'd deal with all the everyday issues.

So — but in general I had an enthusiasm for teaching that was high and I loved, always loved, and I still like it when students who really want to learn are asking questions and trying to get as much as they can. I love that and I'll give them everything I have. So I was like that. I'd put out a lot of energy, but I also had a distinct idea that when I teach, I'll teach and I'll give it everything I have, but when the hour is over, I'm out of here.

I'm in my own studio and I'm not going to forget that I'm an artist because I know a lot of people who got inundated with all the responsibilities or the possibilities of taking on greater responsibilities as teachers, and building departments and serving on committees, or whatever, and later on, either will lament about their career lost or gripe in the meantime or whatever.

And so I kept it really clear. I taught and then I didn't teach. And I didn't — when I first taught there for the first two years, I had a studio at the school, and they didn't even — they didn't offer me one, but I took a room and made it into my studio. And Peter van den Berg, who was a colleague of mine, had been teaching there for seven years before me and didn't have a studio there. And when I cleared this room out and turned it into my studio, I said, why don't you share it with me? And that's the first time he had a studio there.

And he maintained that studio for 20, 25 years or whatever, but after two years, I knew that I had to get away from campus because if you are on campus you get pestered by students. So I bought a building, bought an old grocery store with an apartment above, and moved to my own studio. And when I was done teaching, I went there. And all the days I wasn't teaching, I was there. I didn't go back to the school. I just didn't do that.

So in some ways, I wasn't — I have a lot of friends who've developed departments all across the country and they've been part of the big plans where they build a whole new facility and they're helping design them or whatever. They're morphing them little by little and it takes a lot of energy to do all that. And that's cool. I think it's great when people want to do that, but I never did that.

And there also was — there was a great limitation at Sac State. This is 32 years later and almost nothing physically has changed about our art department there, almost zero, because there is no room to grow. There is no room to add on to anything and there's — and money, there's never any extra money. So it kind of is what it is and it is what it always was. And I didn't make any attempt to change that and to create a kind of my own ego in that department beyond whatever it was.

We had an M.A. [Master of Arts], we didn't have an M.F.A. [Master of Fine Arts]. That means that we can't attract

the very finest students in the country. If we had an M.F.A., we would have had a really powerful program in ceramics because Peter van den Berg, myself, and Ruth Rippon, I think constituted as a threesome, a strong enough profile to really attract good students. But we didn't because people — why should they waste their time getting an M.A. when they really need an M.F.A.?

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

MR. BRADY: So our graduate students tended to be people who were not ready for M.F.A. programs and by the time we got done with them, they were, or — yeah, in a way what we ended up doing is finishing them off for a good M.F.A. program, or maybe they weren't really even destined for that. But — so that had a limitation too. And so anyway, I accepted all that. That was fine and I just kept my teaching and my art stuff balanced.

And so in general, I taught for 30-some-years and I would say that 70, 80 percent of that time, before I started to kind of tiring, I brought enthusiasm and integrity to that responsibility. And I also got a lot out of it. But we teach three classes a semester there and we teach nine hours per day that we teach two days a week, and at this point — and also we teach a lot of non-art majors.

And I used to really resent that. When I first taught there, I thought, wait a minute now. I've got a master's degree. I've accomplished this or that with my artwork. I'm trying to be the best artist I can be. Now, I'm at the university and I'm teaching non-art majors how to make a piece of pottery. And they struggled all semester just to learn how to make a crude dog dish, and then they're gone. And that's what I'm doing. I'm thinking, what the hell? This is a waste of my talent, you know? And after a while, I just went, whatever; it's a job. And so I tried to teach that with as much enthusiasm and then we do have our majors. We do have grad students and there was more — good stuff dealing with them than non-art majors.

But anyway, you asked me at first how has my philosophy changed and I kind of chuckled. And that is that after 32 years, I never, ever learned anything about teaching. Like the day I went in there, some classes I'd give assignments to. If it was an advanced class, maybe sometimes I'd experiment with not having assignments and let them generate their program and talk to me individually. And I would say, well, I think this; I think that. And then they would go and I would work with them on kind of a more independent — in a more independent way within the classroom structure.

Other times, I would definitely have, like for beginning classes, assignments, more structure because I realized that those kids need structure. But in general, other than varying assignments here and there just to keep me from going nuts doing the same old thing all the time, I don't know if I've ever learned anything about how to teach better than the day I walked in there.

And right now, people say [Barack] Obama can't be our president because he hasn't had enough experience. I say, that's bullshit. He will learn on the job and he'll surround himself with good enough people to figure out how to deal with this or that. Certainly, experience is good here and there, but in college professorship, I think that younger teachers are always the best teachers because they're enthusiastic and giving so much.

And that enthusiasm is worth more than some aspect of structure that looks impressive in a syllabus because basically, we're models for people. And you can't really make a good artist — none of us are responsible for making an artist a good artist. They are. Their inquisitiveness, their own passion, all those things lead to them getting better and evolving as artists. And we can't take responsibility for the people who fail or aren't very inspired either because you can try like hell to inspire people and you can't do it.

So one of the things we can do is just provide a really, really substantial model for them as — in the classroom, you do everything you can to kind of excite them, energize them, and create shortcuts to save them time, I think, and expand awareness obviously, through critique, all this stuff, but — what was I going to say? God, I lost my train of thought there. Where was I — let's see.

MS. RIEDEL: About what you can teach, what you can't.

MR. BRADY: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, somehow, you can teach technique and, oh, you can do the things I just was trying to mention, and expand awareness. There's lots of things that we can do, but you really can't think for them and — you can give the best ideas as a concept for an assignment to a class, and most people won't do anything interesting with it at all. So — but somebody will do something really interesting. But that person who did something interesting, would have done something interesting with a very different assignment from that, whatever.

So all I've done is try to reach people on an individual basis and on a collective basis, and be enthusiastic and be genuine and be honest with them in terms of criticism and kind of share who I am, share who I am, share what I know, and respond to what they do. And it hasn't changed from the beginning to the end. It's just no different. I don't have the energy for it like I used to. I'm kind of tired out from it all.

I like teaching about — when I go up there now, after my first class, I'm all like, yeah, that was great, you know. About midway through my second class, I'm going like, I'm about to ready quit for the day.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: About my third class, I'm going, oh, geez. Nine hours later, I'm like all beat up from talking, talking, talking, talking. And I teach a lot of pottery classes and they just burn me out. And I have like 30 people in them and no TAs.

MS. RIEDEL: Functional pottery?

MR. BRADY: Functional, on the wheel; it's just a room full of wheels, oh, yeah. And that's like teaching like 30 people how to ride a bicycle for the first time in their life. And they're all falling down. You go along trying to work through 30 people and bring them along. By the time you finally do, the semester is starting — [laughs] — to wane. But anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there sculptural classes too or is the —

MR. BRADY: Well, we have what we call hand-building. So yeah, I teach that sometimes, right. And I work wit the grad students and that's good. And sometimes I teach grad seminars and I always like that. So —

MS. RIEDEL: Which would, I think, be a much better use of your skills and experience.

MR. BRADY: It is, it is. There is a flipside to that though where dialogue about art can get kind of old after a while, everybody trying to — like a typical graduate seminar situation. They bring their work. They put it there and we all talk about it. I like doing that actually and I'm pretty good at that, but sometimes, in the very final analysis, an awful lot of what is said is meaningless because the artist is going to do what they're going to do anyway. They're going to do what they have to do.

They're operating with certain limitations, and everybody else has got some voice about how it could go here, how it could there, how they would do it differently, how they would like to suggest. And when it boils right down to it, some of that information is valuable to the maker, to the artist, and most of it isn't very valuable because it just doesn't — it doesn't fit.

And a lot of it is — a lot of art — [Pablo] Picasso once just said — what did he say? I'm not sure if I can remember it now, but something to the effect that making art is what it's about, not talking about it because you can talk and talk and talk, and it just doesn't get you anywhere in a way. And some of it's opinion and sensibility, and another expert over here has kind of a different opinion. There are a lot of constants and a lot of professionals that agree on, I think, at least up to a certain point with certain kinds of work that recognize weakness or strength, but — anyway.

So sometimes — and also in the process of dialogue — and this relates a little to our conversation on the phone the other day — the process of dialoguing about art because we ask people to explain themselves. In that process of they're trying to explain themselves, they manufacture sometimes, I think, information not to be devious, but they're trying to figure out. So they're trying to put a story together. And it's not easy to put a story together about the mystery of how exactly and why we make art the way we do and how we got to a certain point and all the layers and all. It's not easy. So after a while, sometimes that can get old listening to that stuff that is neither here nor there.

And so also like when you teach pottery, even if you're teaching advanced students, or even, say, graduate-level students with pottery, the dialogue around a functional pot is very different than dialogue around a sculpture over here, an installation piece, a site specific, or whatever. Over here, we've got people talking about how their grandmother used to wet the bed and that caused them to have these dreams and this and that and like all the psychodrama and all this shit.

And you're going like, are you serious? And over here, it's a pot. And they're having trouble with the proportions from the foot to the rim to the whatever. It's — and so sometimes, teaching a beginning ceramics student how to make a piece of pottery is so free from all that intellectual hubris — or however to say that word — that it's kind of nice.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: There's not all that bullshit.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: Or at least some of it that isn't bullshit, but you've heard it 1,000 times. I've spoken it 1,000 times

and whatever. So there's something kind of refreshing about that.

MS. RIEDEL: This is, I think, the perfect time to ask. You took a break from Sacramento State to go to Tennessee to help found a crafts school.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was in 1980?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, 1980.

MS. RIEDEL: Who was behind that and how did that come about?

MR. BRADY: There was a lady named Susan Peterson, who's an author — you know who she is?

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

MR. BRADY: Okay. Susan taught at USC [University of Southern California, Los Angles, CA] for a long time. Then she was hired to go teach at Hunter College in [New York City] New York.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: She brought John — a great sculptor, ceramics sculpture, made the big crosses, John —

MS. RIEDEL: Mason?

MR. BRADY: — Mason out there also, so the two of them were in that department. She continued to write books. She wrote one on [Shoji] Hamada; she wrote one on Maria Martinez, one on Lucy Lewis. And when the school was being built in Tennessee, they were trying to find somebody to help create a curriculum and give advice and direction. And so, someone mentioned Susan Peterson. So they hired her.

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

MR. BRADY: Well, she was asked to suggest faculty, or at least to suggest people who would then be screened by a school that was the overseer, an existing institution called Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee. They were kind of the mother school that oversaw and this crafts school was like an arm or an extension of them. It was 20 miles from — physically from them.

So Susan brought us all together and even though they ultimately had the decision on who to hire and she also created the curriculum. And so we got to be good friends with her. And we had to interface in that first year quite a bit when we were kind of airing out a lot of the details and all that. And then, that's how it happened.

MS. RIEDEL: And how was that different than teaching at Sacramento State?

MR. BRADY: Well, it was so different in that — this was a — most of the time, at least we hoped that things that come into existence, come into existence out of a need, whatever it is, right? That's why we build a building over there, not because we just want to build it and then figure out some use for it. We want to build it designed around the idea of a specific use and desire or whatever it is, dig a hole.

So this place, though, was built out of the opposite reason, out of an idea that if we create the school, it will become this force or this center of interest or whatever. And it was actually built by a lot of just politicians who wanted to create it. There's one guy, named Joe L. Evans, who was a congressman, and he'd lived in the nearby town of Smithville. He said to Congress — and he liked the indigenous crafts of Tennessee or the traditional crafts of Tennessee like broom-makers and Cherokee basket-makers and things like that. And some of that stuff is really beautiful, wonderful stuff, chair-makers.

And so his idea was to create a place that would preserve and perpetuate the crafts of Appalachia, which is a really nice idea. And so he went to Congress and said, I have this idea. And they said, hey, that sounds good. And we'll call it the Appalachian Craft Center. And Appalachia is 13 states; it's huge. It reaches all the way up to New York, all around. So when it came to where it's going to go, he said, well, I know where it's going to go. Let's put it in my backyard. Hello, it was my idea. So they did. They put it right in his backyard and they called it the Joe L. Evans Crafts Center.

Now, they hired Susan Peterson though because they realized that this is kind of a bigger thing than a little country homespun idea or whatever. So let's get professional in here. And of course, her idea went way beyond brooms and baskets. That's cool; we can have those kind of people come here and interface with the school, but let's create a contemporary, worldwide possibility of a center of art and craft or craft. So the door's open.

Well, no one really needed or wanted the damn place, so we're sitting there with this multi, multi million-dollar facility, state-of-the-art of everything for all the traditional crafts, metals, glassblowing, fibers, woodworking, and ceramics. So how it differed was that my two classes had a total of about seven people in both classes. Like one class maybe had three, I don't even remember.

MS. RIEDEL: Was this an undergraduate program?

MR. BRADY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: Although we had some grad students and we didn't have the M.F.A. bestowed upon the institution yet, but it was just a matter of time when the state was going to do that, some paperwork. So we had grad students there, a few, who were told that by the end of the year, the degree would be conferred upon the institution and their credits would be retroactively, you know — they'd all be working toward their M.F.A.

So everybody believed that and so we had certain people from like Kansas City Art Institute sending some students out in various places. So each area had a few grad students and each area had a few undergraduates. And some of those undergraduates went from area to area and took — we might have had 20 undergraduates who all took ceramics once. They'd go around taking different classes.

I don't remember — it was really — so the next semester, we get a few more students and we'd just have these piddly little classes. So it wasn't like — it was more like just jamming together. We would just work and it was just less formal, less formal, that's all.

MS. RIEDEL: And did that finally get going or did it just sort of fizzle out?

[END CD 03.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: So by the end of that first year, we learned that at least up to that point, that the M.F.A. hadn't happened, and maybe it wasn't going to happen. And that was really difficult for the people who invested that year of time and tuition and expectation. So some of them held on into the next fall semester, or maybe they were even strung along longer than that.

Maybe it went into the second year where, yeah, it hasn't happened, but it will happen then, and of course all of your credits will work toward a degree. I think that's what happened. And also I had gone there just for one year. I got a leave of absence without pay, and I'd only taught — I was actually tenured, but I'd only been just — I don't know how I got tenured in five years, but I think I'd only been at Sac State for five years. I can't remember now.

In any event, I was tenured in Sacramento, so I got a year off, and I had such a good time that first year, such a good time because it was amazing. There was this new situation. We're out in the middle of kind of nowhere, but in this fantastic facility with everything we needed to work, and we all were given little cabins that are contemporary little cabins built in the woods right there at the school for free.

We were being paid — I'm being paid like — I'm getting free housing. I might have gotten some of my food for free — I don't know, like lunches. I can't really remember now, but I was being paid about $7,000 more a year than I was at Sacramento, which in Sacramento, I was only making $12,000 or $13,000 a year, and I was making like $18,000 a year in Tennessee and getting free housing and free materials and all this stuff.

And then, the energy around all of us getting to know each other and having to kind of be part of kicking this school off, and opening the doors, and be part of policy too — we were like making — we'd get together and have all these crazy meetings and we'd actually accomplish things, but we'd drink and party at the same time. And we partied a lot. We just had a great time.

MS. RIEDEL: Who else was there?

MR. BRADY: Well, that's where I met Sandy.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: And so she was the other part of the Ceramic Department. In each area, we had — some of the people took pride in this distinction I'm gong to tell you about, and some of us just, whatever, but they hired what they called a master craftsman and a secondary person in every area. So I was the master craftsman in ceramics. And Sandy was interviewed for the same job, but I was lucky to get it. And I'd had five years teaching

college, whatever. Maybe that helped. But she was my counterpart and in wood —

MS. RIEDEL: Just sort of like a TA position?

MR. BRADY: No. Well, I don't really — TA maybe. I'm not sure what the —

MS. RIEDEL: An assistant or something like that?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, like an assistant, kind of on all levels —

MS. RIEDEL: Would the assistant teach as well?

MR. BRADY: I guess. What I told her is that I don't want this higher-lower kind of trip like that. We'll just do this together; not to have her teach and bear a greater responsibility than she's being paid for, or something like that, but I think we kind of just did it all. I just said, let's just do it together. If she didn't want to be in there when class is on, I didn't care. I don't really remember right now, but that's how I approached it.

In wood, there was a guy named Tom Hucker, who was a nationally known woodworker, and his counterpart — I forget what the title of that secondary person was now, but is a person named Wendy Maruyama, and she is very well known nationally as a furniture maker. She heads a program as San Diego State University [CA] and has for a long time, and before that, she was at CCAC here in Oakland. And Tom was — I don't know, he was New York or Boston.

He's an incredible furniture maker. Both of them are a part of that upper echelon of furniture makers in the country. In glass blowing, a guy named David Hutchhausen who lives in Seattle now, taught there, and he had a young man named David White, who was his studio assistant. In metals, there was a guy named Phil [Philip] Fike, who came from Wayne State in [Detroit] Michigan, and was known in the metal circles.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. BRADY: I didn't know about him. You know about him?

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

MR. BRADY: That's cool. And he had a young man named Bob Coogan, who's there to this day, and I'll get around to what happened to the school. And then what else? Oh, in fibers, there was Jim [James] Bassler —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. BRADY: — from UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], and we're still close with the Basslers. And we made good friends with all those people. Is there one area I'm leaving out?

MS. RIEDEL: Who was Jim's assistant?

MR. BRADY: Jim's assistant was somebody who I won't be able to remember the name of, and a person who I don't think ever made a statement with their own work that you might even know of.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: So somewhere in that second — oh, so I applied for another year, a leave of absence, and they granted me one, and so I stayed for another year. And by the end of that year though, two things had happened. Sandy and our relationship became — it became — the first year — it became more solid and serious in the second year, and it also became totally apparent that we were not going to get the MFA. So some of the grad students just like up and left and they were pissed. And there was a spirit in the whole schools that just kind of sagged there, and anger and it's was just getting kind of messy.

And all the party and all the kind of social glue that was so powerful in that first year was beginning to get fractured some, and people were — like Sandy and I would spend more time just together and hanging out on our own. And it's not saying we didn't have some kind of major — the winter ball or something. We did things to have fun, but things started changing.

So graduate students left, and other undergraduates though were — the school was increasing a little bit in size, I guess. And also, the school up the road, Tennessee Technological University, was using us as part of their art department. So they would send some students down too, who weren't necessarily bound to be artists at all.

But in any event, the school was — it just wasn't going along in any kind of powerful way, and by the end of that second year, a number of things happened. I had to come back to Sacramento or lose my tenure. Sandy's job

was going to be eliminated. Now, I could have stayed there and maintained my job, and I probably would have it to this day if I could have ever stood to do that. Sandy was losing her job, and I think that might have been true of other areas, but almost to a person, every other area that the master craftsperson wanted to go back to wherever they were from, because they didn't want to live in the South forever.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: So Jim Bassler wanted to go back teach at UCLA; he did. I forget who took his position, whether that person who was his helper — it was more than a helper — counterpart became the teacher and I can't remember that. Tom Hucker went back to Boston or New York. Wendy Maruyama became the head of that department, and it went like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: I asked Sandy if she wanted to move to California with me. She did. So that's when she moved out here and about a year after that, we got married. And the school has been through — like the Ceramics Department has been through a couple of different — Tom Rippon taught there after I left there, and there's been a couple of people. And now the present person's probably been there for, gee, I don't know, 10, 12, 14, 15 years, somebody, Gil somebody. I can't remember. But the school does exist. It's — I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: The accreditation never came through.

MR. BRADY: Not for the M.F.A. and I don't know. I don't see it on a daily basis. We went back for a big reunion — was it the 25-year reunion? I guess it was, a couple of years ago. And it looks just like it was. It seems viable, but it's nothing big kick-ass going on about it. But it's surviving.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there any back-and-forth between the school and Penland [School of Crafts, Penland, NC]? It's too far?

MR. BRADY: Not in any official way. Oh, yes, some of us traveled back and forth and did things over there. So it's still going on. And it just never really became an international hotspot like wherever — some other place that we can mention. And it has summer classes and all that. And the cool thing is that while we were there, because of all the faculty, a lot of interesting artists came. [Dale] Chihuly came for glass, and a lot of people came into glass and —

MS. RIEDEL: To do workshops or that sort of thing?

MR. BRADY: Yeah. And so it was kind of neat, because I met people who — it also broadened my scope of who furniture makers were and who glass blowers were. I already knew some of that being part of the craft world, but now, I'd met them first hand, and I gained a greater appreciation of all those people and their work. And so that was pretty neat. It was a very energetic couple of years.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you exhibiting at all during this time?

MR. BRADY: I was. Before I went out there — see, that was 1980. I'd already had a couple of solo shows at Ruth [Braunstein], the first of which was at the Quay Ceramics Gallery. I don't know how long you go back, but that's a little history in itself there, but to make a real long story short, this collector from the East Coast bought my entire first solo show, lock, stock and barrel out.

And the pieces of that already sold, one of which was a big grid piece that the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art bought, and still owns somewhere down in their basement, the things that had already sold, he asked me to recreate, so that he had everything that that show had. And then I had a show or two after that, then moved to Tennessee. While I was in Tennessee, I had a show at the Madison Art Center [Madison, WI], because a guy who used to be a curator here in San Francisco, Tom Garver — do you know Tom Garver?

MS. RIEDEL: I don't know him.

MR. BRADY: I think he worked at the de Young. I'm not sure what museum he worked at, and then while he and his wife lived in San Francisco, they saw that first solo show of mine. In fact, they bought a piece out of it. And then they moved back to Southern California, and he became the director of the Newport Harbor Museum [Newport Beach, CA], which is a very, very good contemporary art museum for a long period of time.

It might be still be, but when he was there, they had no permanent collection. It wasn't anything like that, but it was a very, very good contemporary art museum venue with, let's say, cutting edge, whatever. It was an up-to-date, snappy kind of place and Tom ran that. So he called me up one day. This is before I went back to Tennessee and said, would you like to have a show at the Newport Harbor Museum? I'm like, are you kidding? So that was my first museum show, so I had a really big show there and that was cool. And that happened because

he appreciated my work from having lived in San Francisco and saw it.

Then, he got down there, went and started — ran the Madison Art Center in Madison, Wisconsin, and his wife, Natasha is an artist and they moved there. And so I'm in Tennessee and I've got all this work building up, and I knew he was up there, and Sandy lived in Minnesota and we were on our way up there one time. So I called him up and I said, you know, Tom, it's Bob Brady calling. I felt like I knew him just enough to be able to do this. And I said, I've got a whole lot of work piling up down here. Before I take it back to California, it would be nice to exhibit it out here somewhere.

So he said, well, we've just built this whole new space on a museum. Why don't we do a show? So I had a show there. And that was cool. And then I had a show in Boston also at a gallery that existed back then that was run by Maria Friedrich, whose husband, Michael McTwigen used to be a coauthor of *American Ceramics*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, *American Ceramics*, yes.

MR. BRADY: And her partner at the time — whose name I'm going to forget right now — has a gallery to this day in Boston right on Newberry Street. In fact, I was just there a few months back. So I had a solo show there, and then between that first year and second year, I had a show with Ruth. I hauled it out in the summer and had it that fall of the second year in 1981 or so. Then I had a show with Mira Morgan in the Morgan Gallery in Kansas City, or Shawnee Mission, Kansas, it was.

That was kind of weird because her husband rode a motorcycle, and they had already offered me a show, but he was literally going to ride his motorcycle. He left Kansas City, he was going to ride to Tennessee and select the work for the show, and then go on down to Alabama and select the work from another artist, a ceramic artist whose name I don't think I remember right now.

And on that trip, he had a heart attack on his motorcycle, fell off and got killed coming to see me. Oh, my God, so she calls me up and tells me, and of course, she's flipped out and, oh, my god. This is probably like a month and a half out, two months out or something like that. And then she just said, we will go on, and if you want to have this show, it's up to you. And I said, okay, yeah, let's do it. So it was kind of a — it was a rough time for her, but I had a show there at the time. I was in some group shows around and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Where did you exhibit *Our Fathers* [1979]? That seemed so different than anything else you were doing at the time. Did that show anywhere?

MR. BRADY: I made that just before I left for Tennessee, that summer before I left for Tennessee. I made it in Sacramento and I left it in storage, and I guess I put it in that — a year from that fall, in other words, the second year in Tennessee —

MS. RIEDEL: Eighty-two or '81?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, it would be '81 maybe. It depends on — yeah, it was still '81, I think, yeah, the fall of '81. At the end of the first year, I drove a whole truckload of art out, and I had still had my place at Sacramento. I stored it there. And I went back, and I flew out for my opening and I had that *Our Fathers*. I added to that all the pieces I made in Tennessee.

And that was a show that had *San Simone* [1980] in that show and some other pieces of that ilk and *Our Fathers*, yeah. And then that's been living in Marin County all this time. I think it was owned by the people who just had that show at the Oakland Museum. They showed this ceramic collection, or a portion of it, at the Oakland Museum. I know their name well, but I'm forgetting it right now.

Anyway, *Our Fathers*, that was a thing where I brought a potter's wheel home from school that summer in 1980, I guess it was, because I had this idea of making some figures. I had been making some figures with these big elongated heads on them but hand-building them. I thought, I could throw those so much faster on a potter's wheel, so I brought a potter's wheel home and I was throwing these forms like big cylinders.

I'm closing them off into a shape like this, and I made one and put it down, and I just got into my pottery mode. I'm going, oh, that's nice, form, I like that. So I made another one and pretty soon, I forgot about making tall figures, and I started taking these heads and piling them up and making piles of heads and stuff. And then that led to the *Our Fathers* thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: And that was about the death of my father and the death of my father-in-law. And that's what it was called *Our Fathers*. Then I went out to Tennessee and continued making that form on the potter's wheel, but making one for a figure to be attached. And there were these kinds of mysterious heads.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That piece strikes me as unique — it's certainly one of the few installation pieces I can think of.

MR. BRADY: *Our Fathers*?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And that sense of fragmentation is so pronounced in that piece.

MR. BRADY: Because it's cut up in sections, you mean?

MS. RIEDEL: And just —

MR. BRADY: Oh, the whole thing?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I can't think of another piece really that's similar to it.

MR. BRADY: Not really. I made some others with piles of heads, but all the heads kept rolling away from each other. [They laugh.] They just failed miserably, but that one on that boat form held together, because it was like a big boat. It was like a death ship is what it was.

And then, speaking of death, those two deaths happened, and then I remember my wife, at the time, her father just died then, and her great aunt died, and I was very much part of that family. So it was just one more kind of death experience and observation. And then I went to — I had a really good friend who was older than me. I would say he was a good 15 years older than me named Ray Van Fleet [ph], and he — do you know about that? Oh, you've read about it?

MS. RIEDEL: He went to Guatemala with you. Is that right?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, he and I went to Guatemala. You knew more about me than almost I do, but that's great. So Ray and I traveled together. When we got back from Guatemala, he said, I want to go to Thailand or that part of the world next. He said, why don't you come with me? And I said, well, it sounds good, but I don't know. And then I got offered to got out to Tennessee, and for sure, I wouldn't be able to even considerate it.

So I went out there, and I was actually watching the news about this airplane that landed in Seoul, Korea, to gas up or whatever. They just landed there and it was foggy that night and in taxiing in, or maybe it was going a little faster than that, they got off target and the wing hit a building, and a fire started, and Ray got killed.

At the time, I saw that on the news in Tennessee. I didn't know. Then I hear, and then I realized that moment I was watching on TV, I'm watching like — you know. So that was a big jolt, so I made pieces of — I made them kind of about that, about him. One was called Ray, and they were blackened, and they were — but some of the pieces were already — had a feeling like those figures also, figures without features, figures that are kind of cloaked or submerged somehow, or not mummified in a traditional sense.

But then I made some — thinking of him, and so they were conscious of his death and death itself, but I wasn't expressing it in any more specific way about him or even about death, if you know what I mean.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, absolutely.

MR. BRADY: So anyway, there was a period there for quite a while where there was — either you call it a fascination with death or a bit of an obsession — obsession might be too strong a word — but an interest in something that implies death. And there's a lot of ways to look at that. It was happening to my life, so it made some sense, I guess. As opposed to ignoring it, I addressed it in my work and let it emerge, or at least say I let it emerge.

Another thing that is true of my life since I was a little boy is that I've always been afraid of dying. I've had this great fear of what death represents. When I was little, I would cry over it. And I don't know that I've ever come to grips with it to this moment. I've been able to ignore it for longer periods of time — [they laugh] — but in general, I think of dying almost every day of my life on multiple levels, from whatever, from a fear standpoint, from how it affects my life in other ways. It's this kind of an issue in my psyche. So I think that even though it's been a source of fear — oh, my god — and anxiety in my life, I think it's been a source of interest of mine. It's an odd interest, and it's not a positive interest.

And I'm just hoping for the day when I can become okay with the whole idea.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: I need to go get the Tibetan Book of Dead or something, and read that; I never have — or whatever. I talk to people about that issue once in a while, especially older people, and it's interesting to hear what they

say, because I want to be at peace with that at some point, or maybe I never will be.

But I know that that has informed my work with that quotient also. So there was a certain point in my life when I was kind of trying to rid myself of that darkness or that heaviness that was in my work, and that kind of level of emotional import. And so I literally tried to force myself away from that and discipline myself away from that. It was kind of hard because one thing about that work is it was —

MS. RIEDEL: It had content — [laughs] — it had —

MR. BRADY: Yeah, it affected people.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: And maybe that was a sort of a kind of a reliance that I needed to get away from too, but I really, really — I'm always afraid of making things that are too pretty. And even though I didn't do the death thing to make stuff that was tough and gnarly and challenging to people's senses, it is, and it was. And there's a degree of people out there — if you make anything, there will be some who like it, and a lot of people who hate it, or whatever, and some people indifferent. And there are some people who like that kind of work and some people who couldn't tolerate it.

But it was associated somewhat with my work. If you read a little piece here and a little piece there, if you read Garth Clark's little inclusion in the back of his thing, you'll say maybe these very powerful, psychological, blah, blah figures. And that's what distinguishes my work amongst many ceramic sculptures back then, apparently.

So anyway, I was trying to get away from that, and at the same time, not make fluffy work. And when I started working with wood, it's like — I still once in a while resort to doing death or skeletal images, I think. I think there's a basis of that in some works, whether it's real obvious to someone else or not, I don't know. But for the most part, I began to explore other possibilities and for the most part, that kind of went away.

And then even angels entered my work, which was like, oh, my god, talk about terrifying. I don't want to make pretty things, but I'm making angels.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: Sweet angels. The first one I made, I towed to the top of my studio at the warehouse. This was 22 feet in the air and it hung there in the air. It was about a six foot long angel, because it just bugged me. I'd look up and go, why the fuck did I make this thing?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: And I just thought it meant that I was some kind of a Christian of some sort, that it implied that I had certain religious beliefs — which I don't — around that. And a few months later though, while it's hanging up there and kind of irritating me and interesting me, I began to find out that angels are part of many cultures.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: And I do remember that [Marc] Chagall did angels and Chagall was Jewish. And so angels are not specific to certain cultures or certain religions.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: And also that's cool, that frees me up. And so I started making angels.

MS. RIEDEL: That was after the trip to Guatemala too, yeah?

MR. BRADY: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And after the [inaudible]?

MR. BRADY: And that's another kind of weird thing is that — and this is another subject area, but my mother was raised as a super — I don't know what she was, but it was a fundamentalist kind of religious attitude and religion, so repressive that she never saw a movie until she was 18. She could never carry a comb on her person until she fled and left home, because it represented vanity. They were like little black-collar kind of — these were heavy-duty people that my migrated up from Indiana.

And I met some distant relatives when I was a kid and they scared me when they got out of the car, because they looked like Mennonites off a carriage. I think Mennonites are cool, but when you're a kid, and you see

women in long gowns with a little doily cap on or whatever, and a guy that looks like a cross between a farmer and a preacher with a black jacket on and a black undershirt, I was like, my God. So when she raised us, she said, I'm not bringing any of this bullshit to my kids.

And so there was no religion; unfortunately, there was no religion. So I grew up kind of wondering what's it all about? And I had some neighbors who would once in a while take me to church, and said, hey, you want to come out and go with them. And once I was in a foster home for a while and we went to church. We were forced to go to church every Sunday, and it was a Christian Science church. And I didn't pay any attention, but maybe something seeped into me. I experienced something or whatever. But when I was in college, I was a thinking adult by that time, and I had no real sense of religious belief at all.

And then I took pre-Columbian art history in Mexico. It was a class I had to take and wanted to take down there taught by some Americans who were now living in that area in Mexico and somehow got connected up with the school. And I loved the animism and philosophy of the people's religion back then, and the lack of dogma and all that structure and all that stricture and all that stuff, which always just sort of seemed weird to me, and so full of symbolism. And like where is the truth to all this stuff to me? It's more pomp and ceremony than something I can get my teeth into, you know?

But these people believed in the spirit of the world. And rocks had spirits, and trees had spirits and all this stuff, and when a rock hit them in the head as it tumbled down the erupting hillside because of the earthquake, it had a spirit and a force about it. And it was very pragmatic and kind of elemental, but I thought this stuff makes more sense to me than what I can glean from my superficial notice of Christianity. And then Zen Buddhism was — I had enough awareness of it to be interested in thinking that if I had to be something, I'd be Buddhist or a Zen Buddhist and so forth. Now, I've lost track. Why did I start talking about religion?

MS. RIEDEL: Guatemala, angels.

MR. BRADY: Oh, I know. So even though I felt out of the loop or lacking an identity in terms of religion in my life, I'm attracted by it in kind of an odd way, like the crucifix. When I'd go into someone's house when I was a kid, and they'd have a crucifix hanging on the wall, it just weirded me out. I just felt like I was out of place in someone's private space and it's just weird. I don't know why I had made those associations, but at the same time, the power of that image affects me.

And I've made a lot of figures that appear gesticulating, where kind of the knees are sort of bent and the head is kind of hung and arms are like this and whatever. And there's this sort of portrayal of — you can see it as many things, as burden, emotional weight being carried that's burden, sadness, fatigue. Fatigue would just be tiredness or, yeah, you know, legs that are about strong enough to hold one up in a more structural way, just all those possibilities. And that vulnerability, fundamental vulnerability of it all, I'm attracted to.

And so these religious overtones — I just mentioned the crucifix there, but like the cross is such a powerful symbol and I wouldn't wear a cross. I wouldn't even have it in my house, a real thing that came for religious purposes, but at the same time, it intrigues me and I find it powerful. And other aspects to other religions that are their symbols, I find powerful also.

So in a funny way, there are motifs in my work that if we were to sit down and look at a slide lecture with a lot of work where I see my alluding to a quality of religion or an aspect of religion without being specific to denomination or sect or anything like that. And in a certain way, I feel as though I'm religious in regards to what I consider more pure aspects of any religion is about; and also, what I think all religions are about, and should be about, which is a connection to the world and nature and this kind of undercurrent of energy and magical quality in the universe, so on and so forth.

I think that's part of what religion is about, an observance of that and our part of that — our being a part of that system and so forth and all that. I know I'm just kind of — I'm kind of rambling here. I'm getting more —

MS. RIEDEL: Finding a way to tap into that and then in themes.

MR. BRADY: Being tapped into that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. BRADY: To me, somebody who is — like just think of a Native-American person. If we could back 300 years, and somehow get the full sense of what one single Native-American person is, and what they were about, in terms of their connection to their reality and their world, we would know somebody who had great respect for nature, had great knowledge of nature, had probably an acceptance of not only the mystical, but the magical aspect of nature that is indescribable, unknowable, the power of all that, and that person's place in that whole big spectrum, and just down to everything like understanding how to make a fire, for instance.

So you have to really understand the materials involved and so connected with the world. And probably, other than whenever they had to war with somebody else, their whole lives were in concert with nature, right, and in concert with all that was positive, I would guess. And to me, that is religion; that is religion. It's not formalized religion that begins to have structure that I'm guessing that has to do with affecting masses of people and controlling people. I've never been able to understand that.

I don't really want to get off into this, because people can speak so much more profoundly about their philosophies about religion or whatever, but the idea of praying to God, I feel like we are part of that whole thing. And there's almost like this thing that we don't take responsibility for, and that we are part of that Godness, and we are part of that whole thing. Anyway, that can all kind of get to be another conversation.

MS. RIEDEL: But it ties in perfectly with the whole conversation about angels.

MR. BRADY: Well, specifically with angels, and like I said, lots of other times, I see this thread that's going through the work that has to do with qualities of religion as I see it. And again, they're not specific; sometimes they are kind of specific. And sometimes, there's a big airplane hanging on the wall right out here. I knew when I hung that airplane on the wall, and when I made it — I didn't want it to be hanging in space — that it would be a cross. So I had to think about that. Is that okay? I'm going, well, I didn't make an airplane. If an airplane goes over in the sky and we look up, it is a cross, and we can observe that, and it's kind of curious.

But — I wasn't taking any more responsibility for the fact that some people have perceived this as a cross and some people wouldn't, and I see that too and that's okay. That's not why I did it. But it's kind of interesting at the same time, or whatever. That's just one little acquiescence to the fact that it connects to something religious there, even though it wasn't super-intentional. And that theme just happens in my work and I'm not sure right now. I'd almost have to look at picture of my own work to remind myself of how this happens and reoccurs in my work. It surprises me sometimes.

MS. RIEDEL: It's the sense of, the sense of the presence of the wheel. There are all sorts of ways that — [inaudible].

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I guess all kinds of ways, yeah. Anyway, I don't know why I brought that up, but these little spurs just coming off conversation, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: But that's good.

MR. BRADY: So Tennessee, finally, that's where we're going to end today. So Sandy and I came back here, it went on. It does exist to this day, and I guess I already said all that. So shall we conclude for the day?

MS. RIEDEL: All right. To be continued tomorrow or Wednesday.

MR. BRADY: Okay.

[END CD 04.]

MR BRADY: [In progress] — yeah, I'm a little dispirited after yesterday's lesson.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you want to talk about that?

MR. BRADY: I don't care. No, we can shift from that. You wanted to erase it some — go ahead, sure.

MS. RIEDEL: No, it's fine. This is Mija Riedel interviewing Robert Brady at the artist's studio in Berkeley, California, on March 12, 2008, for the Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art, disc number 3.

MR. BRADY: Phew.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] We were talking about ideas.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah. So we've talked about ideas more than once. Did we talk about it the other day some? We did, somehow.

MS. RIEDEL: In passing, I think. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. BRADY: We talked on the phone informally, though, before you came because you asked me what about my ideas.

MS. RIEDEL: Where do you find your ideas?

MR. BRADY: Yeah. So I don't remember what I said that day but I've thought about it a few times since and today I thought about it on my bicycle ride, which is what I do when I ride a bicycle is think about things, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: And clearly you find ideas when you're riding your bike. Certain ideas.

MR. BRADY: Well, yeah, I do. I find them, I see them — [they laugh] — or whatever. But today I started thinking, you know, what is an idea? I've never really thought about what is the definition of an idea. So I was going to come home, look it up, so that when we talked we could start from that paradigm or whatever, you know. But it just led me to think about how ideas are — we use that word, we throw it around and for me it's always sort of represented a fairly profound level. I mean, it's like an idea is like, whoa, in art. It means something pretty pithy, something with some meat to it, you know?

But of course I know that after thinking about it more — and I've probably thought about this before in the past. It's not like I just finally thought about it. But the ideas aren't necessarily so earth-shattering all the time. Sometimes they're complex enough, or of such a fundamental nature — not so much complex to understand, but they're very powerful because they are. Like an archetype. An archetype could be, I suppose something in nature, but it also — archetypes are man constructions or man inventions, manmade inventions. For instance, like the arch. Or a particular kind of implement, I think, is an archetype. Or maybe a bucket isn't the original vessel, but it is an evolution of a container to simply contain water or fluid and transport it from here to there, and now it's a simple bucket form. But anyway, all those kinds of forms can't be improved upon. They're so fundamentally sound, they do what they're intended to do without any extraneous stuff. Most of the time they don't need decoration. They just don't need anything but what they are, and they perform admirably that way, and they can't be re-invented.

You just can't make a better shovel. People try to. They make a handle out of a little different material. Once in a while you see something that — like a broom. It's supposed to be the new best broom, and maybe they've made a few improvements in the last 100 years in brooms now and then, get under the kick space in counters, under counters, something, but basically you can't make an improved broom or re-invent the broom. So an archetype is so powerful, and yet it's not a complicated kind of idea. When you look at a bucket, a shovel, or whatever constitutes the archetype in your mind or my mind at any moment.

And anyway, I think art ideas sometimes are very powerful but not hard to comprehend. They're not intellectually difficult, but they're very packed in terms of association to their origin and their significance to us in this world. And some ideas are rather simple. They're rather simple. It's like, I don't know if it's an idea to place green next to red, if that's an idea or not, or if that is just a reality that somebody recognizes as an opposite in the color spectrum. And because they're opposites, they do a certain kind of — there's a certain kind of energy contrast between them, a dynamic that happens. There's actually — if you get the right green and the right red that are perfectly the opposite, there is a retinal shift back and forth that stimulates the eye and the way we see it that shimmers.

You know, an artist might be utilizing that idea, which is not their invention. It's not even their discovery. But somebody informed them about it and now they're playing with that idea of opposites in color spectrum. So it might be Joseph Albers, you know, one square of color within another square of color, and playing with the result of juxtaposing those two colors. Sean Scully might be doing some of that with cadence and rhythm of thickness of line and particular color relationships in a different way.

And I think that a lot of times that an idea can be as complex as one wants to give credence to that complexity. Or it can be seen as not so complex, you know what I'm saying? Let's just say people make a big distinction between art and craft, and one of the distinctions that separates the two is that one's functional and one is non-functional. And the one that's functional, of course, is the craft, and that forever attaches kind of an anchor to it and keeps it from rising into the more ethereal, intellectual possibility of being transported because it's functional. It will always be functional. And it can't be more philosophical because of that. But you could also —

MS. RIEDEL: In this culture, too. Yeah, yeah.

MR. BRADY: In this culture. But I would disagree and say that something as simple as a cup, let's just even say a white paper cup with no pattern on the outside, that we could buy by the hundreds in the store, whatever, that we see sometimes some places any more, that we don't see that nice pure white cup with the rolled edge at the top. So that would be the archetypal kind of consumer cup, throw-away cup. There's probably a philosopher somewhere in this world who could write a damn book on that cup, at least a good 20 pages on what that's all about. And it would be amazing to hear that kind of perspective. How complex and how rooted in archetype that is, and da, da, da.

For another person it's a cup, and about the most they could say is this particular cup rises from a certain diameter to a wider diameter at the top, in a straight line. Therefore, it is kind of a flared form distinguished by a

thickened edge at the top, giving some structure, blah, blah, blah. You know, it's four inches by three inches by two inches, and its primary purpose is to hold and transport liquid, for whatever purpose. That's about it for one person, but another — you know, like I said, a philosopher could just write not just poetically and not just artistic license, but say some incredible things about it.

So anyway, ideas. When people ask me about my ideas, I almost feel this kind of great demand of them wanting to hear a profound kind of complex and hidden things that they wouldn't have thought of and that are unique to my process and my sensibility. And so sometimes I can go, oh, god, you know, I get kind of freaked out. And it's strange but usually there of course is some sort of idea going on with my work. Sometimes it's quite simple. Sometimes it is more thoughtful or at least reflective in how I nurture that idea up to the point of wanting to begin to try to express it in three dimensions for the most part.

So you can run that full spectrum from very simple, which I give it almost no credit as idea, but of course there's some sort of idea.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. More of an impulse or an inspiration.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I guess so. I mean, I was just thinking, as you were getting your tape recorder ready there, that a typical way to use the word idea would be for if you and I were friends and, you know, we woke up and called each other in the morning and said, hey, one of us said to the other, I have an idea. Let's go to Stinson Beach today, make some sandwiches, take the dogs and a Frisbee and just screw around and have fun, maybe have lunch on the way back in, wherever, Sausalito. Well, is that an idea? That's — I guess it is. It places this in front of that and this, and you know, it has some sort of little beginning, mid and end, and maybe that's a kind of intellectual construct that gives us some sort of — some handles in regards to a beginning and a destination and an experience, whatever. I don't know, you know.

But — now I'm done. [They laugh.] Now I don't know what else to say. I have no more ideas about ideas.

MS. RIEDEL: Well — something you just said — some ideas you think perhaps you'll nurture along, or you'll wait to see if they develop on their own. Is that a conscious process?

MR. BRADY: Well, I guess —

MS. RIEDEL: Or do you just wait to see if they just recur?

MR. BRADY: I guess I know what you're asking me. I mean, I think what I was saying is that sometimes — and I'm not sure I can summons one of those to my mind right now, just like I can't remember one of the meals that Sandy cooks that you asked me about. But I'm just guessing that — and I know that sometimes I will see something or experience something that will give me an idea about something, and then I'll think about it for a while.

MS. RIEDEL: It could be a form or a connection, a color, something related to that?

MR. BRADY: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] An approach, a feeling. Sometimes my — I don't want to get off track here but sometimes I have a sort of a feeling sense that I want the thing to have, or I kind of hope that I could imbue it with that, or have it carry that. Have it carry that and express that. And that's a really, really hard thing to make happen, you know. And it's like if you try too hard it won't happen, and it's elusive as hell. And it oftentimes has something to do with myth that might not be able to have happen, you know. It's some sort of body sensation that's actually connected in a real feeling level in my physical body.

And along with the idea I want it to be there and manifest it somehow into the final piece, and most of the time I can't quite. You know, that's always where it falls short. But sometimes it actually happens almost by accident, you know, and that's a trick, of course, is to not try too hard, and be in some kind of place where I'm very concentrated while making things, but very free and very uncontrolling, and very, you know, ready to — pounce is the wrong word. It sounds aggressive. But ready to pay attention, be able to — be ready to seize an opportunity that comes up that one could not have foreseen. And that happens from a dialogue with the material and as a form is beginning to emerge. Something you could have never thought about. Usually little things, subtle things present themselves, and it happens because of a relationship.

So in this case it's not a person, it's a thing and it's an activity but it has — it has something to teach the maker all the time. Of course, the maker can have the opposite attitude. They can just sort of beat it into submission and say, I'm taking you here, don't fuck with me, you know. I mean, this is what I want and we're going to do it, and I can do that and we can do that. We can do that. Sometimes there will of course be resistance but we know how to overcome that resistance with our sheer willpower and our technical ability and our tools and all that, but the important thing is, of course, not to do that.

You're kind of there in a very, very keen observant way, and just sort of hovering. And you know, and going toward your destination which is the idea, the path that you've set, but of course when you see something better — I mean, gosh, I guess it could be like, you know, a million other examples. You could be a prizefighter going into the fight with a whole strategy, knowing that person's weaknesses and strengths, so I'm going to do this and that, but all of a sudden there's an opportunity that shouldn't be there according to previous thought, you know, and plans. And can the person take advantage of that, you know? Of course they should and not stay rigidly to the plan.

So anyway, I don't know if that's — I got off the subject, got off the track. You're good at getting back on the track. That's good.

MS. RIEDEL: That ties in specifically to something we once talked about — a ritualistic quality to building that's important.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, you know, I had a friend say one time early in college that process was not important and that outcome was the only thing that was important. The product was important.

MS. RIEDEL: An art student?

MR. BRADY: Yeah. And somebody I respect, respected then. She was an older student than I was and tended to kind of lay words of wisdom on me as a friend and as a younger student that she sort of took under her wing. She said things that to this day I think are really valuable all this time and still are. I use them on my students.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you want to mention her name?

MR. BRADY: Sure. Ruth Tamura.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh sure.

MR. BRADY: Ruth Tamura. And but anyway, she said that one time, and I've thought about that a lot over the years. I immediately argued with it back then and I still would argue to some extent with it. And I do understand that, you know, it's a little bit like saying technique is only a tool; it's part of a means to get to an end. But it is the end that matters. We don't need to worry — I mean, people are always interested, especially — well, everybody is, even laypeople — but artists are interested in how other artists did something because they want to glean anything they can that could help or influence their potential.

But for the most part we would like everybody, including our fellow artists, to go in and look at our work, or when we go to look at someone else's work, and see it for what it is in terms of its content, not for how it was made. So technique is super-important, we all need it, but it should be secondary to the overall product. And process is kind of like that too. I'm starting to almost lose track of my thoughts here, but anyway, I think that it's impossible to make something that is highly integrated, where it utilizes the material, it utilizes technique and/or craft. Some of that is one and the same. And those two things are merged with an idea. And then there's the sensibility of the artist there that always makes a difference. And all that coalesces or is coalesced and integrated into this final product.

And if the artist hates the process or doesn't like the materials he or she is using, then how can that final process be really integrated? It can't be. I don't think it can be. So I understand the difference between a young, a really young artist who could be likened to a young child in that everything is kind of novel, everything is kind of fun, and later on some of this stuff, like part of the process that wasn't really fun is beginning to just be work. Like there was a point — I like mixing clay, just mixing clay turned me on. Put it in the mixer, you're looking in there and there's like three, 400 pounds going around and you stop the mixture and you tear it out and you've got this big pile of material. It's such a cool feeling, you know. And especially if all you ever did was get it in some plastic bags before that someone else made, and it's more expensive because of that, and all of a sudden you have all this raw product and you're just digging it out and, you know, I like — that was just fun.

But I don't really like mixing clay any more. That's hard work, you know. So that's an aspect of process that I could do without. And so I think as we get older and we've done art an awfully long time, there's aspects to the process that are laborious and aren't a lot of fun, but there still has to be something inherent in the general process that feels good. And of course that's why people are painters or people are potters or people are print-makers or whatever.

So I think process is — so getting back to the idea of ritual there is, I think, a ritual that, or it is a ritual to handle and regard material and use certain techniques that — I mean, techniques, I'm going to get off a little side here too, but techniques ought to be used because they are appropriate to the idea that wants to be expressed. That's what should happen always. Some people use techniques — because they're so attracted to that technique and they'll try to force that technique to make every idea. And usually the ideas aren't as distinct —

[laughs] — as the technique is, and therefore — in fact, that oftentimes is what also relegates something to the craft kind of idiom, where it really is more about technique than craft, and less about the idea.

Anyway, I just think that — I would like to guess that maybe Philip Guston, that there was a kind of a ritual about the way he mixed the paint and had a feeling for its viscosity and the amount of oil balance in it, and when you put it on, you know, besides the images that he's creating that there's — it's kind of a ritual of that building process that, again, is part of that awareness and penetration into all that's happening and the integration of everything, the idea, the technique, the materials, and the conversation that's happening.

Anyway, so I likened that to kind of a ritual experience. And I think a lot of artists are loners. At least when they're making the artwork they need to be alone, they want to be alone and there's a ritualistic kind of quality to it. At least I feel that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Are there specifics — certain things that you do that allow you to enter that space on a more regular basis, or does it change all the time?

MR. BRADY: Enter that space, that space being, you mean, more heavily ritualistic character to it?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. BRADY: Well, I would say that any time one is at work, in a sense that ritual is happening. However, being at work and calling it a ritual, there's degrees of how deeply connected you are to that ritual or that moment or that — and moment might mean that day of work in the studio, week or days or whatever, or months. And being able to get to the place, wherever that — that best place, which is highly concentrated but balanced, in terms of not being over-controlling.

And you know, I don't know if someone else came up with this term or it's my own words or whatever, but there's a kind of a need to suspend the ego during that process there because the ego is what causes us to think that what we think is more important than anything else. And that creates control, or controls an outcome of that. And the more we try to control, the less we allow for the universe, in a sense, or that before us, which is our material, and the form it's developing and this conversation, this whole thing that we call an art-making process, we will miss what it has to teach us.

And you know, I could see how one could be almost so pompous to think that, hello, I'm the one who went to school here; I'm — you know, this is like some clay and this is a knife and this is a table, and I have this notion and it's all about me, and I'm going to take this stuff and make this thing. That's what it is. It is a very highly conscious, human effort, activity, and you know, it's a decision to proceed forward with a certain kind of idea.

I don't know if some people realize or think that of course there's something bigger here operating. And so I think that, you know, for me when I get to that kind of place — and that kind of place happens from working a lot in the studio. You can't work every once in a while because it's — another word for it would be for that inability to get to that place where the best things can happen. I mean, I hate to keep reiterating, but it's such a weird thing because it's highly concentrated — or concentration is great but there is a freedom about participating in that moment that, you know, seems contradictory in a sense.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. BRADY: And I've heard — this is kind of a different thing, I think, but I know Warren MacKenzie, who is this very well-known functional potter, says that sometimes he'll have a phone pinched in his neck while he's working on the wheel, or another person in the studio he's talking to while he's making pots, and he's made some really good pots doing that because he's not over-thinking.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah-ha. Yeah.

MR. BRADY: But he must have a capacity to be able to stay concentrated. So there's that kind of funny balance, you know. It's the kind of thing, too, that a lot of times people who finally become masters are able to do, or their technical ability is so sound that they don't even have to think about that, so they're not making decisions. That's just natural, and they can be really concentrated but sort of be aloof at the same time.

You know, it's almost like an out-of-body experience, like when you hover back up over and you're watching — you know, part of your consciousness is just sort of observing and you're like — you're almost like gas. You're free to be reshaped or formed. So I just find that it's like being self-conscious in the studio about — overly self-conscious, and you have to be working constantly for that to — to get to that place.

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

MR. BRADY: I can remember sometimes when I was younger where I would get way into a place like that. It was

almost like a drug experience. My gosh, it really was. And when I was in that space I would reflect on it afterwards, and I was even conscious of it during the time too, where I absolutely felt like I could do no wrong. I mean, there was never even a question about if I do it this way, it will be such and such. If I do it that way, it will probably be a mistake or something like that. It didn't come to thoughts like that. I just did. I just did. And I believed in everything I did.

I don't know if that was always, you know, held up in the long run in reflection on the work, but that's the kind of space I was in, where I was just so — god, it was like I was disconnected from everything beyond me a few feet out there or something. I was in this sort of — this ball of whatever. I was insulated into this art-making experience and it was like being stoned, sort of, being high. But those are real extreme and those didn't happen very often, and I used to want those back. And you can only get there — and people have this happen all the time. All of a sudden they go, gosh, I can't believe three hours have passed. Might be doing a crossword puzzle, I don't know what they were doing, but you know, I mean, you just get lost in it. And to get lost in it is not so easy, to cut out all the distractions, and it comes from being very concentrated, right?

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

MR. BRADY: Being able to really concentrate.

And then you know, maybe it has something to do with personalities. Maybe some people can get lost but they still are fairly controlling as people, and so they're going to create very concentrated but a controlled kind of effect. And maybe for the kind of art they make that's a good thing. I wouldn't make a judgment about it, but for me it's — the discoveries happened there. And it always surprises me because when I decide whether I'm going to go with that opportunity that I become aware of, I mirror that with what I thought I was going to do. And again, I'm still on the basic track with this idea. It's not like I'm not going to make what I set out to make, but all of a sudden it's going to be different. It's going to be different than I thought, and I'll mirror it against that and it's always better. It's almost — you know, it really is. It's like more complicated than I would have thought of, and it's less obvious. It's just better. Whew, I just slide over there, and that's really cool. I don't know, I'm kind of losing my track right now.

MS. RIEDEL: It's so interesting to hear you talk about this. I was looking at a long line of your work before I came over, and I've just now been listening to you talk about your process in the studio, it makes me think about balance, about weight, and about orientation. And I see those qualites in the pieces as well. The way you were describing having an idea, or something that you wanted to infuse in the piece — the process sounds like a process itself — a balance between concentration and looseness, freedom and focus.

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

MS. RIEDEL: And orientation — things can get turned around in a completely different direction than we originally imagined. I feel that in a number — especially in your moving pieces. It's interesting that some of those ideas that are part of the working process are actually things that I thought about this morning when I was looking at the work over a long period of years. Well, those shown in Palo Alto [CA] in particular.

MR. BRADY: You know, another thing I thought about today, this might tie into what you just said, on my bicycle ride, was that — and this is something — I've thought about this a lot of times, but it reoccurred to me. Most of the time we, as teachers in academic situations — and my teachers, I hear this from every which way. It usually comes from the academic circles, but the way that the art-making process, the conscious academically trained person would proceed is to have an idea, make that, and then look at it and analyze it, and then build on that and build on that and build on that. That might go on for some time. It might go into a long series for several months; it might go for several years depending on the artist, whatever.

And it makes sense. It makes sense. Oftentimes our ability to penetrate a possibility or an idea deeply with the first encounter is difficult — most of the time. But I think with my work, oftentimes there's a lot of change in my work and I've been criticized for changing too much, and there's a lot of variety in my work. To this day, and ever since I can remember, it has been a cross that I bear or a burden that I carry kind of, and consider and always kind of think, it's a weakness of mine. Once in a while I see it as a strength.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: But I have — you know, rarely have I ever made one piece and that would be unlike anything else I made, but sometimes I'd make two or three and that was the series.

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

MR. BRADY: And other times it's 12, other times it's 18, whatever. But oftentimes my series are very short compared to other artists.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. BRADY: But I really think that part of what my work's about is not mining an idea and trying to evolve it and stretch it and mutate it and all that because once I start doing that I get contrived. It just doesn't — it's not where my pleasure lays. But where my pleasure and passion is, is the birthing of something.

The notion, as we were talking about a little earlier, I can have the notion and idea for a while, and it can even get kind of embellished or fattened in my mind and developed in a sense before I act on it, or I can have — it could happen at the last minute before I went to bed, in the middle of the night, this morning on a bike ride, brush my teeth or whatever, two hours later, six hours later I pounce on the material and make that thing. I react and I'll trust it enough. So it has almost no history in my mind. And a lot of times I look back and it's the first two or three of those things, maybe one, that are the best things.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BRADY: And it wouldn't do any good to make them — you know what I mean? It's like this gestalt of a notion, which is another word for an idea, and the material and this passionate little love affair for the time it takes to make it and experience. And that's it.

And that's what it has in there. It has all those — that excitement and that energy and that, you know, that discovery and my own open eyes about watching it come to life, you know. And that's a big portion of it, and that's left in that piece, and people will sense that. And then if I try to milk it for all it's worth and make another one and another one — I mean, sometimes it depends on — I have made long series of pieces and the twentieth one is as good as the first one or better than the first, whatever, you know. But I have never seen it go from this is pretty good, this is better, this is better, this is brilliant. It's never worked that way. No, it doesn't work that way.

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

MR. BRADY: In fact, it gets no better. It just gets different, you know, because I don't want to make the same thing over again, so — you know, and I can clearly see oftentimes when I make something, while we're making it, even though I am open to being coerced — not coerced, but into suggestion, hey, let's go here, let's go there a little bit. I'm open to that and I do that. But one thing I don't want to do is completely make a right-hand turn, a left-hand turn and forget where I wanted to go with this idea.

So what I'll do is, if it pushes me too far out of the realm of my path or off my path, I say to myself, okay, that's a cool idea but I'll do that next time. So let me finish this one and then the next one I'll explore that one because it's almost a this and a that. It's a two different thing.

Now I lost my train of thought there.

[END CD 05.]

MR. BRADY: So just that idea that to assume that making, evolving this idea will be better — now a lot of people work that way and that is what made their work richer and more powerful. I mean, it really did. It took a — and I think — I have a friend that I talked to many, many years ago, a person I met in Tennessee, a painter there named David LeDoux, and he said that he thought it was more difficult for the artist or an artist to stay with an idea and keep that idea vital. He didn't mean forever, but whatever; you know, maybe two years, three years, something like that. And I would agree with that. I would agree with that.

MS. RIEDEL: So spontaneity is really an important part of your process.

MR. BRADY: Well, yeah, I mean, he was saying that somebody — who can we think of. You know, Richard Shaw or somebody whose work is always sort of the signature — you know, what they make and — so he just thinks that that is a more difficult challenge for the artist to work that way. And in a sense I think he was suggesting that most of the time their work has more depth, maybe, you know. But — and in other words, to — you know, in a relationship, if it gets a little rough, to say I'm out of here and you walk away, you know, that would be a similar kind of thing. Equivalent, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like there are periods in your work which are dense with diverse types of work. I'm thinking of the early '80s when there were masks, and I think the meteor pieces and some of the first beautiful, very articulated figures — *Sherpa* [1985], which was so brightly red. That's the one, yes. Color just would surface from time to time. Does it feel like there are some periods that just really are full of all sorts of different ideas evolving at once?

MR. BRADY: Well, you know, your memory reflecting way back to some actual experience maybe you actually

saw those shows, or what your memory pulls from looking at pictures here and there and all that, and even an exhibition from a certain year, that might have been a work that was pulled from a two-year period that there was one piece in there — there might have been 12 other pieces that I made that wasn't in that exhibit. So sometimes the variety suggests that it really is like everything I do is different from the thing I did before, and it's never that fractured in my studio.

MS. RIEDEL: No. No, not at all.

MR. BRADY: You know, usually I kind of go on these pulses for a while. But in the course of 18 months, compared to most people I've got about two or three or four different things happening. And it's true. And sometimes probably it was more varied like that than other times.

The meteor things, for instance, when I made those I had a show which had nothing but those, at Ruth Braunstein's, nothing but, and people were going, what the hell? Where are the figures?

MS. RIEDEL: So different. Yeah.

MR. BRADY: So different. That was a very unpopular — I mean, you know, my artist friends liked it — [laugh] — but nobody bought a piece. They didn't like those things. Those things were still like in backyards and wherever. [They laugh.] There's a couple in collections.

But anyway, for me that idea of evolving and readdressing an idea to see how — and milking it is a poor word. That sounds like you're trying to stretch something, and we don't want to stretch art. We want to deepen it and we want to layer it, right, and have it have more history, more complexity.

But for me, you know, it just doesn't work that way. Maybe it's partly because I make it for a different reason than someone else, a slightly different reason, and part of that reason I would guess is a little bit like a child's delight in discovery. So that's partly what my work's about, really; it's that excitement around the idea of bringing something to life. And I have an idea, always have an idea. I had a little bit more to say about that just one moment ago, just left my mind.

MS. RIEDEL: Discovery?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, discovery and —

MS. RIEDEL: Reason for making things, coming out of the "Meteor" [1982] show.

MR. BRADY: Well, then I just said something about children, how —

MS. RIEDEL: Sense of discovery.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I don't know. I can't — it doesn't matter, really. I just think that almost all of my best work, if I look at that, there's an aspect of it that — well, it happened because of just the sort of sheer excitement and love of bringing this thing kind of into the world. When I went on to try to elongate that idea or make many more — and it would usually work for a ways, it worked for a while, but I just realized that I didn't want that. I wanted a new discovery, a new hike, you know, a new — I wanted to be blasted somewhere new. I don't know, you know. That's for me.

So that sort of spontaneity and — I think I have a fair amount of ability around that idea of spontaneity and extemporaneous decision-making and so on and so forth. And just that moment kind of thing, you know. I remember Bob Arneson one time saying — I don't know if it was really true about his work because his work was very — he was very academic in his approach. He would do first a sketch, and then — and maybe even a full-size drawing, and then he would do a maquette. And then he'd take the maquette down and put it in a kiln, bring it back. And he would glaze it. Pretty much make it look like he would want the final piece, and fire that, and bring it back and evaluate that. Then he'd finally set out making the piece. And it might be a six-foot piece or four-foot piece or whatever, but he always had these maquettes, you know.

And I've tried that but I don't know. I trust my mind's eye and maybe some simple little quick sketches, little doodles, just to have some sense of what it looks like from this angle or that angle or whatever. And that kind of methodical process like that would cut too much into that more spontaneous, that gestalt, you know, kind of experience, of it all kind of — whoosh — happening.

I had an idea that the thread seemed longer, and now I'm at the end of that thread there. But anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: I was just visiting with Adela Akers a couple of days ago, a fiber artist up in Graton [CA]. She was saying that for most of her career she's worked in a very methodical way — it's all been worked out ahead of time, and she's pretty much stuck to that plan as she's made her piece. But since she's retired and had more

time to experiment, she finds that her pieces do evolve more in the process. So it's interesting to see somebody actually changing their process.

MR. BRADY: Does she work on a loom?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But she's painting sometimes, like in the style of ikat, painting the fibers as she's working. Sometimes she paints once the piece is completed and off the loom. Sometimes she's adding horsehair as she's weaving.

MR. BRADY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah, I mean, you can see why it would be a little more difficult to be free-wheeling with a loom and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I was reading about Anish Kapoor, who I know — whose work you like. I can't remember if it was something he said, or something that somebody said about his work, but the comment was that artists don't make objects, they make mythologies. Do you have any thoughts about that? You were talking earlier about archetypes and ritualistic process.

MR. BRADY: He said they don't make object —

MS. RIEDEL: Objects. They make mythologies.

MR. BRADY: Well, I'd like to hear him say more about that. I read an interview not too long ago that he had, and maybe it was *Sculpture* magazine, I forget where, and his answers to these questions were very, very smart, very thoughtful and deep and — yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Something about language, too — the object has a language of its own and its primary purpose isn't interpretive. That strikes me as in line with your work.

MR. BRADY: Huh. That's interesting. And that kind of suggests the notion that — people almost have to be taught, or reminded of how to look at things. Most people are looking at things wanting an understanding right off, you know. They want to know what it's about and want to be led somewhere, want to be done with it quick, or entertained quickly, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: And because of all those considerations, oftentimes it's hard to look at the thing and sink into and be available to what it is, to experience what it is you're looking at, for what it is. And to allow its voice to kind of come into a neutral place of consideration, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. BRADY: Because we're carrying so many attitudes about it, you know. First of all, we don't like realism or we don't like minimalism or whatever. So before we hardly even get in the room we decide whether we like it or not, you know, because it ain't our cup of tea. Or all kinds of other things, you know; the coloring, palette. Ew, god, I hate paintings like this or — you know, it just goes on.

And I mean, I think I'm guilty of that too but I think sometimes the lesser and lesser sophisticated person who doesn't understand, of course, certain genres of art, contemporary art, they really have — they lack capacity to experience something for what it is, or try to learn from it. At least allow it — allow its voice. So I don't know, in a sense that's what you just said, you know. He said it's not to be interpreted; it has its own — language, its own voice.

MS. RIEDEL: It has its own language also. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

I'm thinking of what you said just a few minutes ago about not wanting to milk an idea in the way you work. But there are few forms, it seems, you've come back to repeatedly.

MR. BRADY: [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking of angels, and then there's the play off on chairs. What is it about that angel form — or the ideas behind them, or the relationships in them — that brings you back to them over the years?

MR. BRADY: The kind of things that I have repeated, you mean?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: Like for instance the thing that I think is the longest standing revisiting — thing that I revisit, are the

masks that have the black and white — black lines painted on the white masks.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Almost like topo [topography] maps or fingerprints.

MR. BRADY: I made the first one of those in 1980 when I was living in Tennessee, and I made about five of them, I think. They're very intense to make because all the lines are painted on with a little brush. They're very carefully done. And I have a funny kind of constitution in that I'm not real patient in certain ways as an individual, but in other ways I can sustain certain kinds of activity that would drive a lot of people nuts and be very patient. So like I can paint those lines on those things, and someone like Sandy, my wife, of course, I don't think she could stand — she couldn't stand to get halfway through one. I mean, she just would never go there again and just said, the hell with this.

But in any event, I can do about five of those before I'm saturated, and so I did some in 1980. And then I was saturated for the time being, and I forget how many years it was but we moved from Tennessee back up to here, and a traveling show was moving around the country called "Poetry of the Physical" [1987]. They made a nice big book on that, Marcia Manhart from Oklahoma put that together. And that show traveled. It was work collected from all over the country, and it traveled to Oakland Museum. So we went to the opening and there was a piece — one of those masks in the show. And it was one of those early ones that I did, and I still don't take pictures of everything I make, and I didn't have a slide of that particular piece. I had slides of the others. So I was still reminded of the form and qualities, the exact qualities of the others from slide lectures I was doing, but this one I hadn't seen in several years.

I was like, I found my own piece to be so beautiful. I just went, whoa, you know. And it was a surprise to me because I didn't even really remember making it. And it had certain — there were always kind of a roundish top to the head, and then this blade form that came out where the chin and the face was. And there were certain angles of this blade form, and shape to it from the side that I just don't remember making, but it just blew my mind at how beautiful and how kind of odd they were, you know, kind of inventive in terms of shape.

So I went home and I think we were living in Benecia at the time and I was laying in bed just thinking, goddamn, that thing was so beautiful, and it just made me want to make some more. So I made another batch of them. And again, that was a small — you know, sometimes what I do is I make about — I can build about seven of them, and then when I go to surface them I get petered out after about four or five of them. And I usually pick the best ones that I build, and then a couple of others that I never got to — I have one down in the studio that I've had for years now and I should just throw out because there's a reason why I didn't get to it. Partly because I didn't have the energy, but also it was the homeliest one there, or one of the weak ones.

So anyway, I did some more and then some years went by, I can't count how many, and all of a sudden I get a catalog in the mail one day from the New Museum in New York City that Marcia Manhart started. And they had a show, something about objects of love and ritual or something like that. And one of my masks was in that show that they borrowed from a collector in New York. And it was one that I had a slide of — I don't know that I'd looked at it in a while, but it wasn't so much it was a great discovery for me to see it again, but I was laying in bed looking at this catalog and there's a picture of the piece. I just went, god, that's pretty nice. I mean, sometimes I forget about mining my own past work for new things to do, or that wouldn't be really new but I can try doing them in a new way. I'm trying to think of new ideas when I've got actually many ideas in my arsenal already that I can readdress.

So I just said to myself, gosh, you know, I feel like doing some more of those. So I did some more of them, and it's gone like that. It's the weirdest thing. And I just did some more about four or five months ago, or six months ago I finished them.

MS. RIEDEL: There's one at Braunstein now too. Is that a new one?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I think so. Does it have some color on it or something?

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think so. I thought it was all black and white. It wasn't part of the show.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I took several pieces in there recently and then I brought a couple back. But there's a couple — they're around. So that is a thing that I've done and readdressed, and every time I do it, I try to — evolve always sounds like a word that implies benefit or moving toward a better place, evolution.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: But I see it as just change, you know. I'm not sure if evolution of the species is a better thing or not.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: I don't know. But in any case I either evolve them or I try to change them; at a certain point I finally introduced a little color. And you know, the whole confirmation of the piece I've explored in so many different ways, where the top is pronounced and the bottom diminished, and blades, and gosh, all kinds of things.

I could spend the rest of my life, if I have the capacity to do it, just working with that notion and trying to alter the form and rediscover the form constantly. I really could. And I guess I'll go on, if history says anything about the future, I will go on making them from time to time.

So anyway — and then the seated form, the seated chair-like figure form which came out of my ceramics actually, there's one piece I made before I quit doing ceramics, which is one of my favorite pieces of all time, and it was sort of a figure that it was hard to distinguish whether it was a figure or a chair, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. A very thick piece. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. BRADY: Yeah. And so when I started working with wood, I wanted to take that same idea but it became so different because it was linear and not volumetric in a sense; I didn't have — so that — there's just something about it that I just loved, you know. I can't really say — I guess I'm just really attracted to it, so I find myself repeating it. I haven't done it a lot for a few years, but I did it for a long time when I first did it. God, I loved making those things. I made it big. There's one right there in side that shadowbox up there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, exactly.

MR. BRADY: It's two inches, three inches tall.

And I'm thinking about it more right now actually. I mean, actually it's hard to — I don't know. I mean, I could get really tricky about it, but it's a little hard to know how to make it significantly different. I could figure out how to make it significantly different but I want it to be — to feel right and be a reason to do it, not just to be different. So I don't know. I think that there is something for me a bit magical and wonderful. I don't know what else to say, except some things I've made I'm attracted to over a long period of time and they beckon me back, you know.

I guess it's just we — you know, the idea of style. That's always an interesting thing to talk about what's style? I remember a teacher once telling some students, and the student told me this, that their teacher said, okay, here's what you do — and this is in ceramics, the medium of ceramics. He said, you know, you come up with an idea and then you just — you just work that idea and that will become your style.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: You know, and that will become who you are, and I just thought, no. That's like — that's wrong, that's contrived, that's like marketing, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. BRADY: I said no, what you do is you work and you try things out and you do anything you feel you need to do. You go here, you go there, you're realistic, you're expressionistic, you try everything possible and in that process, little by little, you'll find the things that don't fit at all. You keep throwing them out, and it's like a big circle you're traveling on like this. And that circle will get smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller because you find out — it's almost like we find out more — at least this is how it's been for me. To get closer to Nirvana, or who we are, and who we honestly are as individuals, at least for me it's a process of getting rid of the things that I know don't fit because I don't really know — I don't know the most pure sense of myself in terms of my creations, what I should create that would be more Bob Brady than anything else. I mean, I don't know what that is. I don't know what — I wish I did. That's part of this kind of elusive thing too. I mean, every artist dreams of getting as close to some incredible magical place that fits them like no one else.

I'm guessing. I mean, I just make this stuff up. I don't ask other artists if that's true, but I'm sure everybody wants to, you know, find that most unique spot that is really true to them, true to their hearts.

So as we try these things out we find out, no, that doesn't fit at all, you know, and that doesn't fit, and gee whiz. And pretty soon you start noticing that, gee, I have a tendency to like — strong color. I'm a painter; I like strong color, I like—you know, I like forms and shapes better than I like images. So pretty soon that person is becoming an abstract painter with color being a big aspect of the work. And, you know, someone else is like a realist or they're a photo-realist or whatever. You know, you begin to notice things and repeat things because it feels good. Something about it, it feels like home.

Of course — well, anyway, that's what developed style, but it just happens as a matter of course. I mean, it develops sensibility, a sensibility, and people lay that word style on. Style is kind of weird because style — I

don’t know, that’s a whole discussion in itself.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds more superficial, without depth or sensibility or sensitivity.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, and kind of transitory and temporary, you know, something that has to do with consumption and marketing and all that. But so I guess there are certain things that I’ve done that just speak to me and they still have a way of pulling me back, you know. I don’t know what else to say about it exactly, what it is about that. No, I don’t know what to say about that really. I don’t know how to evaluate it, as to whether those things have more meaning in terms of something that’s uniquely me. I don’t know.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, the way you’re describing making that circle smaller and smaller sounds like simplifying, paring down, until you get to more of an essence — there’s nothing extraneous.

MR. BRADY: At least you’re not wasting your time doing things that you really know don’t kind of fit. I mean, I guess that would be questioned too. That would be like saying, well, I’m not going to waste my energy traveling any part of this globe that would be a waste of my time. Well, how the hell do you know? And if I haven’t been to Mongolia and I don’t want — maybe I ought to go there. Maybe Mongolia would have something to teach me.

Sometimes the things we think we don’t like have something there for us, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. BRADY: And that happens to artists a lot, you know. It does, and that could be just — you know, that’s the thing. How — that term of just be yourself, that kind of psychological attitude of be yourself, know yourself, be who you are. I find that to be a very complex and convoluted thing to think about because we are so screwed up and layered from the day we started, and with protective layering, defensive layering, and psychological dings and dents, and it’s all rolled up in one big thing. That’s partly who we are, but part of that idea to me always is, who is really the essence of that child in you, that unadulterated person before we had all that messed up stuff, along with the good stuff too.

I mean, how many people — I don’t really even know exactly who I am, you know. I probably deceive myself as to who I am, just as a means of protecting myself even. I mean, if I really — yeah. I don’t want to get really — [laughs] — you know, start bawling here or something — [they laugh] — but you know. So then if we regard that like to who we are and how it manifests itself in terms of our creation as artists, my gosh, you know, how do we really know who the hell we are?

And sometimes — and it’s kind of proven, like if you grew up in a certain area, like say northern California 35 years ago, you’re apt to be part of the Bay Area figuration movement. If you’re Elmer Bischoff, Joan Brown, Ben O’Leary [ph], you know, David Park and our friend at Stanford, Nathan Oliveira, all these kind of people. So does that mean that they were born and destined to become Bay Area — to deal with a figure in a quasi or in a certain kind of expressionistic kind of mode? No. I mean, what if they’d been born in New York or New Orleans, those same people? Well, they’d be doing different kind of art completely. Probably. I mean, there might be an essence in their work, a certain quality of work that we would recognize if we could even put that to test, but if they’d grown up in New York City, they would have been probably influenced to the point they’d be abstract painters.

MS. RIEDEL: Unless they just really — that’s not who they were and they had to find some other —

MR. BRADY: No, I know.

MS. RIEDEL: — way of working.

MR. BRADY: I know, that’s true. It’s just that behavioral — you know, the idea of behavioral attitudes or form, being formed by behavioral things is really, really powerful.

MS. RIEDEL: That’s a lot of the issue about grad school, and if somebody is in a program that really is not aligned with their own way of working. I remember Richard Notkin talking about being at Davis and everybody said his work was too tight and too small and too precious, and it took him awhile to figure out that, no, it wasn’t tight or small or precious enough. And he had to go further in that direction — [they laugh] — and he just probably wasn’t going to do it at Davis.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah. That’s funny. Bob Arneson said to him, this is like years after he was out of Davis and Richard stopped by, or they saw each other at NC [University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC] or somewhere like that and Bob said to him, Richard, when are you going to start making some art? He still kind of laid on him like he’s tucking around with this little crafty stuff, you know, dental tools and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: And when he — was making the heart, no he wasn’t making the heart pieces. He had a —

MR. BRADY: Probably a small sort of, you know, Yixing-influenced things and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. BRADY: But you know, kind of — more of at least a craft process always with him, say, than what Bob thinks as a more fine art attitude or whatever. And he was just — still prodding him, you know, like that's what Bob did as a teacher.

Well, yeah, there were people who grew up in New York, painters who did do the whatever was in the air at the time; Abstract Expressionism, or Non-Objective Color Field or whatever, whatever was the prevailing energy going on, and whatever Clement Greenberg would have liked. And then they found out after 15 or 20 years that, you know what? This doesn't fit. And then they all of a sudden they're painting imagery and they're painting landscapes, or they're painting, you know, something else, magical realism or something like that. That happened to a lot of people, for sure.

There was a Japanese artist whose name I won't be able to remember right now, but he came from Japan. He went to New York City to — let's see. He was a cabinet-maker and he was sent by a company and they were going to work in New York City, and it's one of those things that you work for that company the rest of your life, and they were making cabinets. I don't even remember why it was, but he was going to be in New York City, stationed there sort of, for that company for a few years.

While he was there he'd go down to the village and he just got so interested in art and stuff like that. So he started making art, and he knew how to work with wood and he was making — well, first he started making abstract expressionist sculpture out of wood. And then he's still trying to do his job. And finally he just quit and he got in trouble with his family and company, you know. Just like a big, heavy duty thing for him to turn his back on the Japanese process. And so he used to be an AE [Abstract Expressionism] sculptor, and he's got friends who are really in the art circles and has gotten to be a part of all that. And as time went on, he shifted from that because it didn't quite fit. He did pretty good at it and all that for a while, and then he became kind of a more surreal artist, influenced by surrealism. And he made all these things out of wood that look like they're melting, like telephones melting and you know, incredibly crafted things. Wendell Castle would be — Wendell Castle knows his work, I'm sure.

Anyway, so then he goes from abstract expressionism to that, and then to conceptualism, a whole period of conceptualism, where he put everything you can imagine, including his 1962 40-Z car in Plexiglas, hermetically sealed boxes, where he's compartmentalizing everything in his life. And he even has a compartment for his body when he's going to be dead, you know. So then he went through — and that's when I met him, out in Tennessee, at that school. He was a visitor to the woodshop there, furniture program. And at that time he finally — he finally started recognizing that, you know, in all of its depth, his Japaneseness, and that Japan did matter, and his being Japanese mattered, and his culture and his family and his everything mattered to him a lot. He began to pay attention to it instead of rebelling against it. He kind of Westernized.

And then he started making — his art became kind of portions of or facsimiles of Japanese traditional architecture and tearooms and things like that. He built a whole corner of what would be — I mean, full scale — a teahouse and this and that. I can't remember him very well, and they were just portions of — and so he kind of went full circle, you know, all the way back to kind of traditional position and appreciation. His facility was being put toward some very beautiful values that traditionally are held in Japan.

And I've seen that happen with artists a lot. They're bad boys, they're bad boys, and they finally come around and they're kind of like, oh, my God, they're almost like pretty straight, you know? And so you're right that way, but on the other hand I just think that this whole thing was just talking a little bit about the idea of how we find ourselves, you know, and I think that it's kind of hard. It's kind of hard to know if we've ever found ourselves really. I mean, to me it's very — yeah. That's what I think when I think about my own self.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Absolutely.

MR. BRADY: Do you know who you are? Do you think you —

MS. RIEDEL: It changes, doesn't it?

MR. BRADY: Yeah. It can change, too, sure.

MS. RIEDEL: There are all sorts of different personalities vying for — voice or attention. It's odd to think we're just all one.

MR. BRADY: Well, maybe I have an unrealistic idea, that there is a sort of definable, pure essence that's there, if one could clear the clutter away and see it.

MS. REIDEL: That makes sense.

MR. BRADY: Or if one could — you know, if I became a Buddhist, a practicing Buddhist and I could, little by little, you know, enter there — and find out who that is, you know, that it's there. But I'm not sure.

And I mean, what I see are insecurities and feel and all these other things. And of course that's part of who I am too, but I like to think — anyway. So to me it's a messy thing to try to think about.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it does make sense, and I do think there is that singular essence, but it makes me think of Rilke talking about things that can only be glimpsed. You never can stare at it or study it. It can be glimpsed and then it's gone. It feels more like that.

MR. BRADY: That's the kind of thing sometimes that — that's a good way to put it — that I want this thing I'm making to have because it's a feeling that's like a glimpse, you know. I can have this. It isn't even there — it can be in my body, that feeling sensed for longer than a glimpse, but as soon as I try to get a handle on it, it's elusive. [Laughs.] Yeah. Rilke?

MS. RIEDEL: Rilke, Rainer Maria Rilke, yes.

MR. BRADY: Is that a psychologist or —

MS. RIEDEL: No, the poet, Rainer Maria Rilke.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah. I know the name but for some reason I was trying to decide whether they were a psychologist or philosopher or — okay, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: He's got wonderful collected letters, a couple of volumes that are pretty interesting.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I haven't heard that name in so long.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Shifting gears a little bit, but not totally, how then was the transition for you from clay to wood. I've heard the story of the medicine cabinet and you might want to summarize that, but that must have been a pretty interesting, exciting, huge transitional time.

MR. BRADY: Can we stop one moment here?

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

[END CD 06.]

MS. RIEDEL: So the transition was in the mid-'80s?

MR. BRADY: I think I started working with wood in 1987 or '88. I think that's true. Is it working?

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

MR. BRADY: In 1985-ish, we lived in Benecia [CA] that year and the two years preceding that. And around that time I was growing somewhat tired of the process of ceramics and the difficult factors of ceramics and surface. Ceramics is a very demanding medium, especially to make large-scale things. And — I don't know, it was just tiring me out, and I was — my expectations of certain qualities of surface were getting more picky.

And oftentimes, I'd make a really big thing that filled a whole kiln up, a big kiln, like a five-foot-tall, a six-foot-tall piece. And I'd open the kiln up and I would be disappointed, so I'd take it out, put something else on the surface, put it back in and fire it again. Sometimes it'd take two or three firings to get it the way I wanted. And it —

It did two things. It made for a very inefficient — like, if I were paying for the gas for those kilns — it was at school I was using them for these large-scale objects — it would have cost me a lot of money. And so it just rubbed me the wrong way. Even if it was the school's gas or it was the state's gas or whatever, that it's just inefficient, and I ought to be able to be more direct. And in the past, it seemed like I was happier with a more direct kind of result or way of dealing with the surface.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you painting on the clay at all, or was it strictly —

MR. BRADY: Well, not with paint. But I used ceramic materials.

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

MR. BRADY: I mean, I had a painterly attitude on the surface, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: So that was part of the problem. But just in general, too, it was just — I don't know. It was just tiring me out. And everything about ceramics is kind of hard.

Like when you first start making something, especially if it's going to be large, when you leave the studio that day, you can't just leave it. You have to cover it up with plastic. And when you come back the next day, it's not going to have dried out any if you covered it up with plastic, so you probably can't proceed. So then if you leave it uncovered with intentions of coming back but forget to come back, then you're in trouble. [Laughs.] So you're constantly babying the stuff along. And sometimes you have it covered, you think, but on the backside you didn't notice, and one part of it got hard while the other part's soft. Now you have a new problem in the morning. The problems go on and on and on like that.

And even when you've done all the best work you can, you open up the kiln and there's a big crack up through the thing. It's just stuff like that.

So around that time, in Benicia, I remember thinking a little bit about another medium, another material to use. And Roy De Forest was a good friend of ours, and he had a wood shop over there, because he made the frames for his drawings. And he was also, I think, maybe making some wood sculpture back then — these zany constructions. And so it occurred to me, eh, maybe wood could be interesting.

Well, one day I want into the backyard, and I found some boards that were excess boards, fence boards that never got used. And they were redwood one-by-sixes. And I remember taking my little jigsaw and just cutting out a figurative shape and painting the information of the figure within that flat board with the contour of the figure, and put them on some bases. And they were kind of fun things, and I liked doing that.

And so that little idea was sort of planted there that maybe wood could be in my future, or it could be now. But I remember another part of me kind of going, oh, no, no, no. That's like whole new territory. I couldn't do that. I mean, I didn't think about it very much, but that was there, too. So it was a little bit of push and pull thing.

So a couple of years went by. We went out to Indiana and taught at Indiana University for a year.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: Before we left, we sold our house in Benicia. Well, before we left, I talked Pete Voulkos into selling me his warehouse here in Berkeley because I found out from him that he needed some money for a certain situation, and he had moved to a bigger place and, you know, what's he going to do with the old one? I said I'll buy it. I've got some money that'll bail you out of this problem. So he said okay, so we bought the building.

Then we sold our house in Benicia, moved to Indiana for a year, came back — that was 1986, summer of, I think. Spent the next six, eight months kind of developing the building, cleaning it up, and building a living space in there. And then I made one large body of work with ceramics in that building, had show at Ruth's. That was my last ceramic show for the next 18 years; I mean, a sole ceramics show.

A while after that, Sandy asked me to make a medicine chest as you mentioned awhile ago, for the new bathroom in the loft. So I kind of dragged my feet and dragged my feet. I finally made that thing one day, and that became, for me, similar to the first pot I ever made. It was just this glorious new discovery for me, and it was just so nice working with some other material.

And I had no idea that this was going to happen, and in one day's time I fell in love with the material wood. And the next day, I went to my friend's house, Stan Welsh. He lived in — actually, he rented space from Peter Voulkos in Oakland. And I had coffee with him, and I said Stan, I'm done with clay. I'm going to work with wood now. And that's how excited I was, to be so definitive in this declaration.

So I go back to the studio, and I'm like, God, I'd get a piece of wood that they put over doorways. They call it header stock. These great big hunks of wood; it's usually Douglas fir, which is not something to carve. And I don't even have any tools. I had, like, really just carpenter tools, basically. And I'm trying to hack away at this thing and do something with it. And it just — nothing's working. It's just too hard. Wood is splintering.

So I got on the phone and I called a friend who — I mentioned her yesterday, Wendy Maruyama — and she said you need the right wood and you need a few tools. So I said, what kind of wood? She said get some jelutong, and then go get yourself a couple of gouges and a mallet and something like that.

So I went out and bought a few tools, bought some wood here at Macbeath [Wood Products/Supply] in Berkeley. And I came home and I started working, and each day I realized that because I was such a novice, I had no idea what kind of tools I would really need. And every day I discovered that I couldn't take the next step without

another tool. And so I'd go back to the — and there happened to be a really good tool store here in Berkeley. I mean, a woodworking tool store. I'd go back over and buy a couple more tools.

And so now I have a few hundred dollars worth of the wood I bought, which, compared to clay, is a lot. You can buy a lot of clay for a few hundred dollars. You spend three or four hundred dollars — and this was 20 years ago, too — you could have an awful lot of clay.

So already the wood cost me a lot of money. I'm going, whoa, and I — probably only about 3 or $400-worth, but enough so that I didn't have to be precious about every little piece of it. And now I've got maybe 2 or $300-worth of chisels and stuff like that. Maybe that much, maybe not.

And so I'm just sitting there trying to work at the workbench and thinking oh, my gosh. What am I doing? Probably in a month or two months this little brief silly affair, this diversion from reality will vanish, and I'll come to a dead end with it and I'll be back with clay, and I'll have wasted my time and all this money. And so I really was struggling with this. What do I do? What a dilemma.

So I kind of — when I have a really big dilemma, sometimes I close my eyes and I ask myself the question of what I'm considering, and just have a yes or no answer. And so I asked myself, I said, Bob, do you want to work with wood, yes or no? And the answer was yes. And then I just opened my eyes, I said okay, I'm going to support this as long as it goes — as far as it goes.

So every day, if it was daily, or every week or whatever, I would acquire another tool or two. And it kept going that way. And then I happened to get a National Endowment for the Arts grant right around that time. So I got $12,500, and then I really went shopping. [They laugh.] And even then I knew that I might be wasting my time and my money, but I'm going to go with it.

So I bought myself a table saw, I bought myself a band saw, I bought myself the big power tools that I needed — which are not very many, and they're not industrial-strength ones. But I spent probably 4 or 5, $6,000 on getting kind of a lot of that stuff I needed. And so now I'm just working.

And 20 years later, I basically made wood sculpture for all that time. So it wasn't a brief affair. In fact, it was such a powerful time because — gee, it just was. I just needed some kind of big shift, and it allowed for a little bit of that kind of beginner's mind that [D.T.] Suzuki talked about. All of a sudden everything is new; everything is fresh. It's a fresh discovery and I just — god, I just had the best time because of that.

But the actual transition to a new material, and what it would afford me or what kind of resistance it would create because of my lack of understanding and skill and craft with the material, didn't seem to be an issue. I could kind of — I don't remember having — I didn't spend eight months or a year just experimenting, trying to figure out how to make things work or anything like that. I just started working with it, and it worked with me. It worked for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Had you ever worked in wood at all before? I mean, sort of carpentry or anything?

MR. BRADY: Not really. Not at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BRADY: I mean, I'd been around some — like in Tennessee, they had this furniture program, and I would go down there and very casually look at the things they make. And I knew enough to know when you need to use a table saw or a band saw or something like that, and to this day, the technical — the craft that I employ in the making of my things is really simplistic. There is no —

I think there's craft in my work in terms of the kind of ritual or process and the way I care for and revere the material and all that. And that's part of a craft, I think. It isn't just a dovetail joint.

But in terms of resolving joinery, how to hook things together, I use very, very simple means to do that with. And I try to de-emphasize — well, I don't want it to be more complicated than the way I do it, because I don't want it to call attention to itself.

And I have this sort of basic attitude about crafters, that you should never make something more crafted than it needs to be. It shouldn't be more highly crafted than is necessary, because then the craft is outweighing the idea, or beginning to overshadow the idea and call attention to itself.

And so there just wasn't really anything hard to learn. I mean, it's just — it's pretty straightforward, and it's all carving wood. So I'm not learning difficult joinery; I'm not steam bending wood, I'm not putting laminates over surfaces or whatever, all those fancy things furniture makers do.

MS. RIEDEL: What was it at the beginning? Was it the surface primarily?

MR. BRADY: That I liked, you mean?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BRADY: Well, I think one part of it was it wasn't clay, you know? [They laugh.] It wasn't clay. I could just drop my tools to go pick up my son or something like that, at school, and never think about the work again until I was ready to think about it. It could be six months, three years, 20 minutes. That was so liberating. I loved that.

And scale. If I wanted to make it bigger, I got a bigger board.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BRADY: I put a little more time into it. And the solution as to how to stand a piece up, I just figured out. It's just not that hard.

If you work with metal, it's even easier that way. You can make anything happen, just about. Not that it's the most compliant material, but structurally you can just do everything you want to do with it. So wood is a little more like that. So I think that was one of the biggest things is it was so liberating.

And then I do think it, as a material has a vulnerability that's not unlike clay. When I think of clay, especially clay that isn't highly glossed over and glazed in the end, that even when it's fired, it's kind of vulnerable material. If you look at it, it kind of — there's a sense of porosity to it. Or, again, if it's not glazed, you could put something on that's going to stain the clay or it'll suck something in.

Wood will do that. Put anything on it, it's going to make a mark on it, like a different color fluid. If you — fired clay is not susceptible to touch any more, but of course, it is when it's soft and it records all that information. And wood records. It doesn't record touch, but it records modest aggressions to the surface, right? Modest to great.

So everything that we do to it to reshape it or to form it leaves its mark, and so it's really receptive for texture, and texture matters to me. And I mean, clay is actually cold to the touch. But it's kind of warm to the touch; it has a human quality to it, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. BRADY: And I think clay does, too. It's just that when it's fired, it still has a human — it has a — it reflects its plastic state and its more vulnerable, unfired state when it's fired. So it always has that kind of — I don't know if "human" is the right word, but organic, anyway.

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

MR. BRADY: Whereas I think of something like steel as being just — it's more off-putting. I mean, it's there and it doesn't need you and it doesn't care. It's the difference between a cat and dog. [They laugh.] No, it's more than that, but anyway. So I don't know.

I just liked the wood. It was great. Everything about it just felt right, and there was no great learning curve. That's what was cool about it. I just started making these things. And my work, I think there are certain things in my work that probably continued from the sensibilities from the clay. But in other ways —

MS. RIEDEL: Balance, for sure.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah. There's definitely some things. And even some qualities, the imagery and stuff like that.

But otherwise, it spawned all kinds of new stuff. It was just — it was pretty amazing. I could kind of use something like that again. I mean, I wouldn't mind that. I think about it sometimes with that material. I mean I would love to have another 20-year traipse. That would take me right up to retirement. [They laugh.] About 80, I'd just start golfing again.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Well, it's interesting that you are revisiting clay, but in a different way, more geometric —

MR. BRADY: Yeah, and I don't know if I'll ever use it for the figure again. Ever since I started working with wood, I've thought about clay. And of course for a while I thought I'll be back to it soon, I'll be back to it soon.

And all those years I did do clay, but I used it for modest-sized works, not my most ambitious work. I did small

figures. I did seated figures. Speaking of themes that I go back to, that piece that inspired the wooden-seated figures, which was entitled *Piedmont* [1987], now is in the collection at the Crocker Art Museum [Sacramento, CA] because it was given to them by a David Bromwell, who lived —

Did you ever know David Bromwell from Susan Cummins?

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't.

MR. BRADY: Well, he and his wife lived in Bolinas. A really sweet man and he bought a number of my pieces. And when he died, his wife gave one or two of them to the Crocker Museum.

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

MR. BRADY: Anyway, that ceramic piece I have re-explored, or explored over and over again over the years in a myriad of ways. Pretty abstract, more specifically figurative, color, no color. I mean, I can't tell you how many times I've made them. So that happened all the time I made wood stuff also.

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

MR. BRADY: So it's not true I didn't do the figure. But in general, when I thought about clay while I was working with the wood — and it was also I was reflecting on what I missed about it because it's incredible stuff, just to grab a piece and squeeze it in your hands — and there's just nothing like that — and begin to put that into some form. That's pretty neat. I mean, I love clay.

But I didn't want to make figures anymore, at least large kind of figures.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: It just didn't feel right. And actually, I started thinking I want to make pots with it. And it's like I wanted to go all the way back to where I started. And that happened —

I also think that I was influenced by — Sandy is not only a really great potter, but she is so committed as a potter. I mean, there's no doubt she would never vary from that path and become something else. And so her diligent and constant nature as a potter is always in my life, and I see it; I'm influenced by it. And then she has so many great friends and now she shows a lot of these people in her gallery who are just fabulous potters. And I've met them over the years, and I've been to their workshops and seen them work or been to their homes, and blah, blah, blah. So I —

There has been that kind of constant reminder of great pots and highly integrated pots, and it reminds me, I guess, of my beginnings of my first love. And that caused me to, when I'd think of clay, of wanting to go back and make pots. And I actually wanted to go back and try to make really good pots, better pots than I could —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh. Functional pots.

MR. BRADY: And better ones than I had made when I quit making pots way back then because I'm more evolved at this point, even though I wasn't practicing the technique. So I've been doing that for the last 15 years or so.

MS. RIEDEL: Pots as well?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I make a lot of pots.

MS. RIEDEL: Functional pots?

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

MS. RIEDEL: Are they altered?

MR. BRADY: Most of the time they're not. I never make a symmetrical pot, just leave it perfectly round. I just don't do that. I like them a little bit gestural. But they're always meant to be used. I don't make any pots that can't be used.

And for the most — about 80 percent of what I make are bowls of some sort, or shallow plates, because I like to draw on them and they're a nice surface to work on. But I make vases; I make all kinds — I mean, I can make everything, but I —

So pots are part of my thing, and —

MS. RIEDEL: Do you show those?

MR. BRADY: I do, but mostly I just show them with Sandy here because when I put a price tag on them, if I even — I can't price them like I would if they were an object that I made because they would never, ever, ever sell. And so it becomes kind of problematic.

So if I — and actually, people know I make these pots now, so over the years, they invite me to be in shows here and there, and now once in a while I do it. And sometimes I'll sell pieces wherever these places are, and if I have a price — the same prices the Trax Gallery has on them, which is in-house money, right? All goes in our pocket. If it's a bowl that's $350 and it goes somewhere else, then I'm going to get half of that, 175. And then there's the shipping, and — it's just like, it's hardly even worth it.

So other than enjoying being kind of part of some things and being invited to be in some pottery shows, I just do them and she sells them here.

But anyway, the point is that when I was working with wood and I would think of clay and reflect on missing it or how I felt about it, I didn't want to do a figurative sculpture with it, but I wanted to do pots. Although I did some figurative sculpture with it.

And then another format that I've gone back to many, many times is this kind of red clay, terra cotta — these simple little — I don't want to call them stick figures. I hate that. People call my work stick figures all the time, but — well, there's one, like, on the corner of that desk way over in —

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Okay. The seated figure?

MR. BRADY: And there are seated figures, too. Those are fun to do and I've done probably seven different series of those over a 15-, 18-year period. But —

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because there's often an object or a burden somehow involved.

MR. BRADY: A burden?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, a burden — something being held or carried or —

MR. BRADY: Oh —

MS. RIEDEL: Born or dragged. [They laugh.]

MR. BRADY: That's my life, man. [They laugh.] God. That's probably true, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Or balanced, like the one that was there yesterday —

MR. BRADY: Oh, yeah. I took that downstairs then. I made my studio, and I put work in there for them to see because all my recent work is at Braunstein or went over there. There's only one piece downstairs that was even in Ruth's show, so I had to kind of make it look like — I told them I'd just sent it —

MS. RIEDEL: You just had a collectors group here, yeah.

MR. BRADY: Yeah.

So anyway, that's the thing about the wood. And it's sustained me for the longest time. And of course I'm not done with it. I have reached a point where it doesn't hold that incredible discovery anymore. I mean, I've done so much carving — oh my gosh — that the process, aspects of the process have become more about labor and so —

I don't know how other artists feel after working for a good portion of their life in a certain way, if they feel the same way that — oh, I'm sure they do. Whatever they do, that — it just can't be a constant source of joy for them, like that sort of childlike discovery all the time.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned Indiana. What was the reason — or was there a reason — to take a break from teaching in Sacramento and go to Indiana?

MR. BRADY: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] When I met Sandy in Tennessee, she — the year before she taught at Tennessee, was hired there, she taught at Purdue [Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN] for a year. And the year before that, she taught at the Chicago Art Institute [IL] for a year. And before that, she was a studio potter in Georgia. She and her husband were, from the point of college to that age which — I don't know, for seven or eight years she'd just been a potter, completely making a living at making pots.

And she and her former husband, Michael Simon, are really good potters. And they came out of that Minnesota

tradition, and — anyway. She had a chance to — she was kind of getting tired of the cloistered nature of this living in the country and this little group of friends they had, and it was great for the better part of a decade, but she had an opportunity to go to Chicago.

And she and Michael, their relationship was getting a little bit fragile, so she took it as an opportunity to kind of get away and get some distance on the relationship and get into an urban setting. And she just loved it, had a great time.

So when we came out here, she had just worked for the previous three years in an institution, had responsibilities, been a teacher, all these things. And all of a sudden, now I'm back to work, but she's just being in the studio all the time. And she's also in a whole part of the country she's not from and never been to or never lived in, and trying to get a friendship base going and all that sort of thing. It was hard for her to adapt, really hard for her.

And somebody called from Indiana, and they had two full-time positions for one year, and actually they wanted us to stay and permanently, and they could have guaranteed one of those positions, possibly two positions, for the future.

So what they were looking for is a potter and a sculptor, both ceramic artists, and a male and a female. And so we both went out there. We both had a full-time job, and it was great.

MS. RIEDEL: Where in Indiana?

MR. BRADY: Indiana University in Bloomington.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BRADY: So we got to know some people there that are still friends. We don't see them too often, but that was a good experience. And — yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Is there a community of people that have been significant to you as an artist, to your way of working, to your process, to —

MR. BRADY: Well, the first thing that comes to mind when you say that is the —

Since I started off as a potter, I've always been connected to the world of craft. I mean, first of all, I was connected to it just in the sense that that's what I looked to for inspiration. The spectrum of work that came from other potters — I mean, I was a student. I wasn't a potter at all.

Everything that I looked at as inspirational and for inspiration and for knowledge came from the world of craft.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] What in particular?

MR. BRADY: What?

MS. RIEDEL: What in particular?

MR. BRADY: Well, pottery. I mean, I fell in love with ceramics, and pottery is — I don't remember — the pictures on my high school wall that my teacher stuck up there, I don't remember anything being truly, truly sculpture. I mean, there might have been something there, but I think it was all vessels of a sort, even if there were some of Peter Voulkos's torn and ravaged — I don't remember what was up there.

MS. RIEDEL: A range of things from different cultures and different time periods?

MR. BRADY: I think it was kind of more like some American contemporary ceramics at the time. It was taken out of a couple of magazines. I mean, there wasn't more than six or eight photographs for something on the wall. It wasn't like a whole wall. No, it wasn't like Nigerian pottery and this and that and the Navajo or something.

So it was definitely contemporary ceramics and definitely connected to what we would call pottery, as opposed to sculpture.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: So I go away to school to study ceramics, and I'm equally interested in learning and mastering, at least to a point, the skills around pottery making, straight pottery making, functional pottery making. And then learning how to hand build and make things that are vessel-based, but maybe not super, super functional.

So everything that I'm looking at is like *Craft Horizon*, *Ceramics Monthly*, those kinds of sources. And any books and they'd have pictures. It's all about pottery. It's all about pottery.

And sure, it's being punctuated now and then by maybe a Peter Voulkos piece that is purely sculpture; it doesn't have a hole in the top anywhere or anything like that, something shaped like that. But he was part of it. 'Til the day he died, he never had a show in — well, in New York City, where does he have a show? American Craft Museum [New York, NY], when it was a retrospective, traveling.

So — we know, and a lot of people regard him as fit for any museum — and he has been in plenty of plain old-fashioned museums. But still, he was kind of, 'til the day he died, relegated somewhat more toward the craft side of it, even though he's supposed to have pioneered our way out of that. And so anyway, those are my sources.

And that was my world, and I was part of that world. Little by little, I became part of that world, and more a part of that world, and always engaged in looking out to that. And those were my friends; everything, everything, and it expands, expands, gets bigger, at a certain point my work stops being pottery. Like when I'm at Davis, I would say that that's pretty much when we could conclusively say he's not a potter anymore. And anybody who didn't know me before would not even know I could make a pot, or throw a pot on a potter's wheel.

So now all of a sudden I have — at least I'm in that genre of makers who are not functional potters, who are not for sure part of the craft world. I might even be bridging over into that kind of ill-defined area that's starting to be considered fine art, you know? In some people's mind, yes. In some people's mind, well, it's clay, still part of the craft world, whatever. I'm getting invited to shows, but they're still from a craft-based appreciation, like that. But little by little, it's bridging.

And so I would say that now, in the last 25, 30 years, 35 years, that I've had a wonderful — I'm grateful that my work has been appreciated in both those worlds. Now, how far deeply, how deeply penetrating into the, quote, "fine art" world, I don't know. I don't really know. Surely, I think I'm probably in some collections that might have as much non-craft-based art in their collection as my work, or someone else's work. Do you know what I'm saying by that?

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

MR. BRADY: Yeah. But more often my work, even when it's in some people's collections, they would say this is a fine art collection. It's probably kind of media-specific stuff, you know? They like wood sculpture or they like figurative sculpture and it's okay if it's wood, but it might be clay, it might be glass. They don't have a whole lot of hardcore fine art — you know?

MS. RIEDEL: More traditional, blue-chip —

MR. BRADY: Yeah, they probably don't have that. They're not going to have the [Robert] Rauschenberg and this and that or whoever more contemporary people are. So —

But whatever. I think definitely compared to some people who will always be part of and considered and collected within the more craft idiom, my work has been able to be supported by both those worlds.

But I feel a debt and an appreciation from the craft world as a community, like I don't feel — there is no community on the other side. There's no sense of community. It's like a sea that's so big, and there's different kind of plateaus within that that distinguish it.

Like I was just starting to say, there are some people who would say well, I'm a fine art collector. It all has to do with economics, but they're kind of collecting them down here and within certain safe parameters of aesthetic in this and that. And then there's other collectors who are notched up. Now, they're collecting in the 30, 40, $50,000-dollar range, and they're willing to bite into more adventuresome kind of work or more challenging work. And then we go up. And finally we get up here and there's the Saatchis [Charles and Maurice Saatchi]. And they'll spend millions on whatever. Damien Hirst's skull with the diamonds on it [*For the Love of God*, 2007]; they might be the ones who own that, I don't know. [Laughs.]

But anyway, the community of craft people are — I don't know what it is, but they're a community. Even all the collectors. There's kind of a sentimental side to that, I don't know if that's the right word, but there's a bit of a schmaltzy side to that where it goes all the way back down to why certain things remain craft. And they're trapped in that world because the people who make them put too much sentiment into the works because they care about things that have more to do with sentiment and decoration and things like that have to do with just pleasing the senses, and in some cases it holds back the objects from being more profound or being more — to be interpreted in a bigger way, or to carry the viewers in — you know what I'm saying?

MS. RIEDEL: Someplace else.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, I think. So sometimes the very people who collect the work, you know, that could be part of what they're about, too. So they spend more energy interacting and this and that.

But there's a beautiful side to all that, too, that they care more about their everything in that. The artists and the collectors and the institutions, and there's a greater community. There's greater outreach; there's greater energy spent —

MS. RIEDEL: Involvement.

MR. BRADY: Yeah. Yeah. So anyway, I feel that. Tomorrow I'm supposed to get something typed up right now to send in to *American Craft* because they've made me a fellow. I probably mentioned this already. And that's a nice thing, you know? That's coming from the craft world again.

So the NEAs [National Endowment for the Arts] I've got are not from the fine arts division. I could have applied in that, but I applied within the craft realm, frankly, because I knew that I had a better chance of getting a National Endowment for the Arts competing with the best of my contemporaries in the, quote, "craft" world, from even Peter Voulkos to Jun Kaneko to Akio Takamori to whoever we can mention, as opposed to Nancy Rubins and — whoever. The heaviest hitters in — John Chamberlain and — I mean, people like that still applied for NEAs before they closed them down. Didn't matter how famous they got. So a person would be a fool not to take the easier road. [Laughs.] But anyway, so that's where I've got a couple of grants and I —

So anyway, I think your question was about community, or what was the question?

MS. RIEDEL: Community. That, then the support. It sounds like that has also been supportive of your work.

MR. BRADY: I think so. Absolutely. Yeah, yeah. And like I said, I think that even though my work has bridged over, I think there's a lot of people who like my work who aren't at all — they wouldn't be put into the category of craft collectors.

MR. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: And they may not even have a category for those people. They're just people who decide to buy some art, like art, and they buy whatever they like. And it's going to be — I have no idea; I've never been to their homes, but —

More often than not, if we went and found a work of mine in people's collections, you'd see other things that support the general sensibility that they have toward things that have more to do with craft, or something to do with craft, I should say, than just hardcore fine art. I don't know.

Did you ask about the community of the craft world or the community —

MS. RIEDEL: No, just community in general.

MR. BRADY: Community.

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

MR. BRADY: I mean, I've never noticed. I guess there's always community, but people like — are there organizations where people get together, all the painters in the country get together — [laughs] — and they have a convention?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I don't think so.

MR. BRADY: They don't do that. Some sculpture — there is a little bit of that around sculpture.

I know *Sculpture Magazine* helps generate kind of a big thing every once in a while somewhere, and — but it's —

And that's always been — like Bob Arneson used to kind of put that down. He'd put down the idea of — ceramic artists love to give workshops and go to them. Hey, so-and-so's going to do a workshop! And so you go watch someone work. And he'd go, like, what the hell?

And I totally understand where he's coming from, and the average person who wants to go to a workshop who's not an equal to the artist giving the workshop. Like I just did one in Sonoma [CA], so I have these people there, and a good portion of them are older women who are taking ceramics, and they want to learn things. They want to learn how to do it better.

A lot of them suffer from a misconception that they can somehow streamline all this by learning the tricks and — learn the magic or learn the ways. And it always has to do with technique, so they're asking these questions from the audience, and they're writing them down and all this stuff. Like that's going to solve this thing, and they totally miss the point that it's all self-discovery. [Laughs.]

And that there's certain things, sure, if you want to make up this slip or that engobe, you needed this ingredient and these proportions. Yeah, those things work with a pencil and paper. But painters don't do that. And so that —

So it goes back to everybody's technique-oriented in the craft world. Tend to be technique-oriented. And even the makers, too often they take such pride in their technique and they're such great technicians that what they make suffers because of that. And in fact it doesn't just suffer, but they never had any ideas or — *wabi sabi* in themselves to bring to the work anyway, so they're all about technique. And in any event, the work is kind of vacuous. It's great craft, but there's not much happening there in terms of content. So that gives craft — it helps continue the idea of what craft is and gives craft a bad name. [They laugh.]

But painters don't do that, right? Painters don't go and have a workshop and say, now this is how we build a painting because they would never do that; they're smarter than that and they don't buy into that baloney.

But there's something kind of nice about the fact that people get together and do that, too. And if they're there for the good reasons, which is to experience a sharing of —

Usually, when I go these workshops, we have them here sometimes as part of a show that Sandy has. She used to always have — when she has a solo show, the artist does a workshop. In the old warehouse we have a huge scenario, a place we'd be able to do it there. We'd have 50 to 100 people in these workshops.

And so what you get when you're not caring about — and of course even a little trick or a little technique here and there, even for us wily veterans, is kind of cool. You go, oho! Yeah, I'll remember that. So there's a place for that, but mostly it's to see how they — what their sensibility is in actual performance. And then to hear their stories. They always have stories about their education, so you'd learn about history. And depending where they're from, the country that they studied with — their mentor studied with, and it's interesting.

And in the very end, it's a community-kind of sharing and it's a nice thing. It's a nice thing, I think. It's a very human kind of thing. And crafts people tend to be more — well, they're just more earthy. They're not as — I'm sure they're just as intelligent as painters, but they're not — I don't know. Whatever. Their heads aren't in the clouds or something. They don't take themselves as seriously. I have no idea, but anyway, there is a kind of a nice community thing.

And I definitely feel that from the crafts side, and I like being part of both those worlds. I'm grateful for being connected with that craft side.

MS. RIEDEL: Over the — you've shown with Ruth Braunstein for —

MR. BRADY: Thirty-two. Since 1975 was the first year I had a show there.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MR. BRADY: Actually, I had work in there even before that, in little group shows in the Quay Ceramics Gallery. But my solo show was in '75.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] How have you seen the market for craft change over the past 30 years, or have you seen it change at all?

MR. BRADY: I don't think I've seen it change at all, really. I think that —

The idea that craft was escaping from — the prevailing attitude about it and beginning to — or certain aspects of the craft idiom beginning to be considered in the fine art arena started a long time ago. And so Peter, Voulkos, of course, is the seminal figure in helping make that happen and break that distinction down, and beginning to, by using craft media and craft techniques, produce something that is certainly fine art.

Other pioneers in other areas would be someone like Ed Rossbach, I guess, in basketry and — I don't know. It'd be interesting to kind of go through the different craft mediums and try to imagine who that was.

So we were told and led to believe that this was unfolding and it was happening. And I think it has. I mean, I think it certainly has. There are a few examples, but not many. If we go to New York City right today and —

Betty Woodman shows at — I'm forgetting the gallery right this second. I'll think of it in a little bit. But she's

been showing at that gallery for a long time. And she is an exception to the rule, especially having been a potter, primarily, in her background. And all through her career, pottery is the motif and the idea, even though she's doing something more conceptual and kind of installation-like most of the time with her work.

I also think that — well, I think that politically she was savvy enough, and her husband George, who is a painter and a writer — somehow, politically, she found her way to them, and they to her, and it worked out.

But what I'm saying by that is without her aggressive nature — and I say that in no mean spirit. I don't want to be mean-spirited about it because I'm not. But she certainly made that happen somehow and worked hard at that because a lot of other people could work hard at it and never have it happen also. But in any event, that's a rarity.

Kathy Butterly, right now, who is a pretty hot young ceramic artist who went to Davis, is showing with a gallery in New York and being appreciated a lot. And her work has gone from — whatever, a more mild appreciation a few years back, to greater and greater appreciation now. And it's also of a very idiosyncratic kind of style that would seem to have a more West Coast base to it, a more funk kind of quality. I can show you a catalog a little later, if you're curious. I have them right downstairs.

So she has a gallery there and there's probably a couple of people I'm forgetting right now. But Michael Lucero had a gallery there for quite a while, and showed at the Charles Cowles Gallery [New York, NY]. Initially showed in the East Village, when there were some kind of start-up galleries back in the day the East Village started. But he showed there; I don't think he does any longer.

So there's a few examples, but in general, it's not like an amazing change has occurred. And I still think even when Voulkos died, it wasn't like the most major museums were opening their doors to him. So I don't see a great deal of change, and I think the people who appreciate craft have always been there, and they're still there now.

And some people just — I was talking to this group at the workshop a couple of weeks ago. There are some people who, for instance, just love pottery.

[END CD 07.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel interviewing the artist Robert Brady in the artist's studio and gallery in Berkeley, California, on March 12, 2008, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number four.

So we were talking about pottery aficionados.

MR. BRADY: Yes. Okay. I think I was drawing a distinction about how there has always been people who gravitate toward objects that are more from the craft world and some people, of course, who are distinctly interested in painting and sculpture or just painting or, possibly, sculpture.

But I've also noticed that there are people in this world, both makers and appreciators, who seem to love pottery. And why is that? I've observed that and, of course, I am that. I fell in love with pottery myself. And there's something fundamental about the nature of a pot — I guess that it is a container, and a container is a container. It holds things.

But even metaphorically, it holds — for us, right? It holds something for us, and it stores something for us, and it has something to offer us. It's an aspect of nurturing and et cetera, et cetera. And maybe if you blow that up in scale, it becomes even architecture, and it protects us and houses us and so forth.

But so pottery — it has a fundamental kind of beauty about it and capacity. And I suppose it could also be, I'm not arguing it at all, but pointed out that pottery is very much like our body.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly — the vessel metaphor.

MR. BRADY: Yeah, yeah. The pot has a foot, the pot has a belly, the pot has a shoulder, the pot has a neck, the pot has a lip. And we give it all those terms that we take from our own body, but obviously people make these pots, and so there is a sort of a fundamental figuration there as well. And we are vessels.

Anyway, some people just love pots, and it's just strange. And I think it's kind of fantastic, though. You could look at collectors who love pots and say, well, that's kind of single-minded, and that's kind of not open to the myriad — [offside conversation] — of possibilities in terms of form and expression in the world. But it comes down to a pot and really turns them on. They get so much joy. And people who make them, of course; that's why they make them.

And most of us who wanted to quit making pots — partially for the reason to be taken more seriously as an

artist, we knew that we had to leave the pot, in a sense, to be hey, I'm going to be an artist now. I don't want to be relegated to this craft form and be called a potter or a craftsman — somehow think that a piece of pottery is not very complicated as an idea and conceptually very powerful. And so we need to kind of move more over in that our genre, where ideas are more complicated and are more profound and all that, and all that, and there's more intellectual stuff there.

And people who make the pottery believe in — I've started to lose my train of thought there. But something, I guess, about they believe in the kind of wholesome quality and that simple beauty that a pot has, in being plenty and all that and don't have to make any excuses for it.

Anyway, so I think that there's always been people who gravitate toward the crafts, and there always will be and there still is, and it hasn't changed a hell of a lot that I can see. There might be some inroads made for the people who generally considered coming from the craft world who'd made some inroads into the fine art world, some acquiescence by the fine art world galleries, museums, et cetera, to open their doors to some of the people. Certainly Chihuly has been embraced in a pretty universal way, and he's from the craft world, without a doubt.

And I don't know how to exactly quantify all that, or qualify all that, but all the crafts have something to do with a material, a love for materials and an appreciation for the magic of craft and process. That is amazing. I mean, I love that too.

I go to a museum and see some — [offside conversation] — and so I go to museums and will marvel at a basket made by a California Indian — I don't remember. Some digger Indians or whoever made a basket. And you look at the craft involved, and I can't even believe people figured systems out like that that long ago because I can't even figure that stuff out now, even — I'm looking at my guitar book trying to understand these concepts about music and stuff, and I swear to god I don't know if I'm dense or kind of dyslexic or what the hell the problem is, but —

We're looking at these things that people hundreds and sometimes thousands of years ago figured out, and I just can't hardly believe it. And it's remarkable. And it isn't just being impressed with the craft, but the integration of materials and the systems that have been put together are so incredible and balanced and integrated that these objects are amazing things.

And I just — I think some of us like that degree of — or we just respond to craft more than some other people. I don't know what that's about, you know? Some people like rough, some people like smooth. Some people like shiny, some people like dry or matte. I don't know. But I'm one of those craft appreciators, for sure. I like all things. I mean, I like a good painting as well as a good pot or whatever. But the most stirring thing I've ever seen — the most stirring things I've ever seen, for me, are pretty much pots, though. It's weird.

I have this little story where I was out in Philadelphia and I was going to do a lecture at the Philadelphia Museum [Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA] that evening for the Clay Studio, it's called there. And they had me at the museum, which was, like, really kind of wonderful. A great big room and it was very — a big honor to do a lecture there, and a lot of people came, so it turned out great.

But that day I had nothing to do and I went to the museum, and started at the ground level and worked my way through the museum at my pace with no one else with me, which was rare. Went through the whole thing. I love this; I love that. I got to the room of Shaker stuff; I love Shaker sensibility, kind of reductive environment that they created. The little stoves that they made are so beautiful. Have you ever looked at those iron stoves?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-mmm. [Negative.]

MR. BRADY: I think they're fabricated; they're not cast iron. But just take a look in some book, sometime when you get a chance, of Shaker stuff.

The form of the stoves are so beautiful, and then there's a little apron out front, or a projection that would catch the ash when you open the door to stoke it, so ashes can't fall on the floor or even on the brick surround or whatever. There's a little thing to catch that debris, and that's always — not always the same shape, but it's a beautiful shape, like a tongue shape, and they're always a little different, but they're just so beautiful.

Well, anyway, so I just marveled at — they've got a whole room that's Shaker stuff, so I stood there and loved that. And I looked at some [Constantin] Brancusis I liked, and I got to another floor and started to get into modernism, and I'm liking the [Jean] Arps and some things here and there, and I'm digging on a Martin Puryear piece, and —

Finally, I'm up in the very top, and it's all the Asian wing, and I'm looking through that with a certain amount of appreciation. And I don't get — my heart doesn't flutter over that many things, really flutter over things. But I

see things I like, and I see things I like quite a bit, and then I see some things I respect and I appreciate but I'm not getting any big hit off of them. And for the most part, that's how it felt through the museum, and some strong likes in a handful of cases.

So I'm all done with the Asian part up there with no particular jolts. And I'm walking to the elevator, the last few feet from the last exhibit wall or whatever, around a corner to the elevator. And there's a pedestal with vitrine on the top. There's a pot about eight, nine inches tall inside. I can't even tell what period — not that I know my Japanese periods very well. Momoyama [1575-1615] or whatever, I don't know. I really don't know.

But I didn't even recognize this. I mean, it doesn't look like Shigaraki; it doesn't look like Bizen, it doesn't look like Iga, it doesn't look like Seto, it doesn't look like — I know different types of pottery like that. But all I know is that this pot just stops me cold. And I stand there and look at it. It's about the size of this bottle, maybe a little bigger.

And I'm on the outside of the glass just looking at it, and it's just sucking me in and filling me up in such a powerful way that it just — you know, it was perplexing because I couldn't figure it out. And I would then begin to look at the form and try to figure out how can this thing have that power?

And then I'm thinking, how can these people from 2,000 years ago, or whatever I learned from reading the label how old it is, what century — how can they know about form? I mean, how did that all happen? How did man have this ability to refine their observation of nature in some way to finally get to certain proportions of form that are just amazing? I mean, Greek pots would fall in that category, of course.

But anyway, so this little pot had that capacity. And I left there just dumbfounded by the ability for this simple little pot — of course, it wasn't simple.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it a wood-fired cylinder, basically?

MR. BRADY: Yeah, it was kind of a bottley shape, I think, but I don't think it was real closed off at the top. Not too far off from a cylinder. Fairly cylindrical. It was just so beautiful.

And all the while, though, I'm just, like, having a hard time processing how can it touch me so deeply?

MS. RIEDEL: Have you been to Japan?

MR. BRADY: I have. I've been to Japan three times, and I've seen lots of Japanese pots. And, I mean, I've seen — I don't know if — I think time and place matter a lot with a lot of things. Just our receptivity. I think that with books and movies and lots of experiences in the arts and nature, also, for sure.

But anyways, and you had mentioned the other day that — I think it was some other pots, Byron Temple pots I saw at one time astounded me after seeing a whole big exhibition of contemporary ceramics. Huge. The Johnson's Wax collection that traveled around the country that Lee Nordness put together. Everybody was in that show from coast to coast. And Don Reitz, Verne Funk, you name them. The most obscure people to — not obscure people, but all the well-known people. Huge. Arneson.

I turn around to go to the stairway in that place after looking at all kinds of ambitious things and all kinds of — whatever. Humor and funk and everything. And I turn around, and there's two little covered jars on a pedestal as I'm approaching the stairway. And these two little covered jars do the same thing.

They weren't as powerful as that Japanese pot. But here I was confronted with, number one, functional pots. And by that time, I was beginning to — I wasn't done with pottery, but I was evolving away from it and thinking object-making and was right on that precipice of knowing and wanting and starting to try to go on from pottery.

But here it was. A couple of pots with a couple of little lids on them struck me in their beauty and in their unaffected way. In their kind of quiet, humble way. And it was more than that. All the parts and pieces of them were beautiful considered, but they weren't fussy pots. And so that was cool.

And the other — I would say one of the other big things was when the abstract expressionist clay show was at the museum that was part of the Otis School [Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA].

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

MR. BRADY: And Voulkos was the primary character, and we had people like [James] Melchert in there, and [Ron] Nagle and Harrison McIntosh, and John Mason and Henry Takemoto and Paul Soldner, Billy Al Bengston, Kenny Price. That's just about the whole show right there.

And the majority of the work in that show had a pottery basis to it. But that show was a big, big, big jolt to my

system, and that was before these other experiences. And I think it was just because it was clay and it was — an example of a fairly rebellious attitude and a very contemporary attitude about how clay can be used. And I don't think it mattered that most of the things had a pottery basis, but they simply did.

Melchert's piece was not a pot; I remember that. But most of the other people, it was a pot. Even some like Billy Al Bengston, who's a painter now and has been for the last 40 years, it was like a plate or something like that. It looked like it had been used as a Frisbee in the studio for about a month before they put in the kiln. All the edges were — I mean, it was chipped and then glazed and then fired, so the chips were under — it was just so casual. I just loved that. But anyway, that was great, too. Anyway, so —

MS. RIEDEL: We talked a little bit about Mexico and then Guatemala in passing. I know you've traveled a fair amount. You mentioned, I think, certain things in Italy that made an impression. Are there any travels or places that have had an impact on your work?

MR. BRADY: I don't really think so. I don't know. I mean, I've traveled places and then come back and made some things that I know were distinctly inspired by experiences there. So I've done works subsequent to being in Italy that — like, there's a piece out in the studio right now, a figure with a cathedral on the head. I made a series of those after spending the summer in Italy about 10, 12 years ago. And it had something to do with — I have a hard time even remembering how to articulate it now.

But the church in Italy is so important. The duomo. Every town has got a duomo, and it's there. Oh, my God, is it there. And it's fun to go in them because they're such marvelous edifices. And, my god, they're crazy. And everybody's going through this little door into this great big chamber and doing whatever they do in there. And I guess I just started thinking about what it represented to them on a few levels.

And so I did this series of pieces where — in a funny way, it's their sanctuary and it's where they go for praying and healing and hopefulness and all those things. But it's also kind of this burden that they have, an anchor, and all that. And somehow I reversed the situation with a little person going into to the big church and then actually wearing it — I can't quite — I used to have a better explanation for it. Frankly, I've kind of forgotten, but that's where those pieces generated from.

And then I went to Nepal and trekked over there. I made some pieces, not too many, but I made some pieces that had a feeling of the spirit and the people and something about it. It wasn't very specific, but I was thinking about Nepal and these very rugged landscape they have and it's very up and down and —

So, that kind of thing happens, but I've traveled to other parts of Europe — France and England, and I've been to Italy about three times. I like Italy a lot, but I can't really say — the arts there have caused me to think some. I responded to going to Padua — I guess it was Padua where all the mosaics are, the Byzantine mosaics. I like those things, and I like that pre-Renaissance quality, when the work was early Christian iconography, because that's kind of more like naïve art or it's — what do we call — it's not academic.

Then they create the academies and then everything starts beginning to — this is the way art is made, and then these inventions to create greater illusion and realism were invented. And perspective and all that artificial stuff that makes it more believable and for some people, maybe more magical, but to me, in a funny way, it lost — I don't care for that.

That's why I tend to like the work of non-academic sources and find it that it's kind of morbid direct expression and unencumbered by this intellectualism that is usually given greater credence, but it — over kind of a feeling level. Ideas are more important than feelings. And that's kind the difference between craft and art, too, is that art always emphasizes we're about ideas and craft is not about ideas.

But one thing craft is about is this incredible feeling for materials and a certain kind of generosity, and also a less ego involved in the whole thing. Even after it's all made and taken responsibility for its making, those people aren't as egotistical. So — and they don't feel as self-important, in general. And I just think that we tap into a more feeling kind of expression when we're looking at craftwork, people have — because they have to be so sensitive to all these materials and processes and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: What differences do you see between artists trained in university and self-taught or who've learned through another —

MR. BRADY: Well, I alluded to or mentioned that I tend to, among other sources, respond to the kind of work that comes from non-academic situations — indigenous peoples, naïve artists, untrained artists for sure; sometimes people from institutions, crazy people, disturbed people; children's art, blah, blah, blah.

However, I think that — and I would always respond to things like that, and I think it's possible in this day and age for somebody somewhere to — [phone rings].

I think I was saying that sources of untrained artists, non-academic backgrounds will always be interesting to me. And I think it's still possible in this day and age, anywhere in this world for a person to come to the arts without any training and do remarkable, insightful personal work. If they are insulated from the world, either physically they live on top a mountain somewhere or deep in the jungles of wherever, somehow they're insulated and they are unknowing. They do not know about the world at large. Or they've never paid attention. Any which way, somehow they are truly naïve, and when they begin to make art, it is coming from a very pure kind of possibility and place. I think that's possible. It'd be hard to find that situation much, but — so discounting that or aside from those possibilities, I think it is — [phone rings].

So the idea or possibility of being naïve and insulated from the world as we know it is very slim. And so all the rest of the people who would be interested in art are already corrupted. They're so corrupted by what they think art is and — but what general society thinks and what your mom thinks and my dad thinks and my mom thinks that there's only one way to go, and that is to go through academic channels and begin to understand what art is about and have an informed position about art history and about all the different genres.

And also I think since art — since 1900 or the late 1800s when art shifted into modernism, art became a different kind of thing. And the average layperson, at this point and for 100 years, has not been able to understand much of what's been made. And so there's a lot of misconceptions about — because art is made for art's sake now most of the time, and it has been for an awfully long time.

And art that's made for art's sake needs to be understood. It's like something else that's — it's like new music. No one's going to listen to new music and naturally — very often gravitate toward it without understanding a lot about music. And someone like John Cage, revolutionary to music.

Anyway, so I just think that people have to be taught — [laughs] — about all the wrong things that they assume and think and know, and they have to do that through some sort of academic way or through a studied way. They could do it on their own, for sure. They can read books, they can read magazines, they can read criticism, they can read philosophy of art.

But once — I mean it happens all the time to our children. I watch my own two children, who are incredible artists, up to a point, as all children seem to be. Some are a little more amazing than others. But there is a certain point where all of a sudden they start noticing, becoming conscious of what they think art is about and they start becoming conscious about certain people in their schools who they think are better artists than them. And that self-consciousness all of a sudden invades their work and they're no longer — fresh; they're no longer free, and their work just loses everything that it had — the spirit, the spontaneity, the inventiveness, the fearlessness, the adventure.

And then they go along, and they go along, and they go along, and then when they start making art, if they're even doing it again, like in high school or whatever, they have some very odd ideas about what art is about. It's because there's no one to really tell them or teach them — and, in fact, I'm not sure they'd believe a person anyway.

So — and almost everybody thinks if it looks like the thing that's — if it's drawing or painting and it looks somewhat realistic, that that is the target. That's the target, realism, to make it look believable and all that. And it should be convincing or believable, but that has nothing to do with realism. So anyway, they get really messed up.

Then they come to college and they're still messed up, and then we have to try to unravel that. And some people, you can't even — you can't get them to stop doing the mallard duck on the pond, because they got a prize for it in high school up in Chico, California or Medford, Oregon or something like that. And everybody loves that mallard; their mom loves it, and their aunt loves it, and everybody loves it and someone bought it and all that. Oh my god. And it's like really schlocky realism, too. But it looks pretty good to the untrained eye.

Well, anyway, so these are — these cases of — almost all of us are like that, that we have to be thoroughly educated in and through that and become as sophisticated as we possibly can about knowing what exists and what — all the different little aspects of history and all these different genres of art and different attitudes and schools and philosophical positions about art. We have to know all that stuff to find ourselves within that and to make good decisions that aren't based on poor information or attitudes that are ignorant come by way of ignorance.

So there is only one way to do that and that is to become educated. So you either do it through a school or you could do it on your own. I thoroughly think a person can. It's harder to do that, though, isn't it?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Are there any books or magazines, specifically craft magazines that have been helpful to you or helpful in general, from *Craft Horizons* through *American Ceramics* and *Ceramics Monthly*?

MR. BRADY: Well, yeah. They've been helpful —

MS. RIEDEL: Writers?

MR. BRADY: From the time I — what?

MS. RIEDEL: Writers also that have been — critics?

MR. BRADY: Oh, specific writers? Gee, I'm not sure I'd be able — maybe be able to think about that. But from the time I can remember going to college, I loved to go to the library, and I was trying to sop it up in every direction. Do it, talk to my teachers, question them. And I'm still talking about — I'm in this very narrow field of ceramic interest.

As time went on, that field opened up wider and wider. At the time, in 1970, finally I'm starting to look at everything, painting and sculpture, that I kind of ignored even while I did it and even while I was in art school. But eventually, everything is my source, and everything could be my inspiration, and in my area of appreciation also.

But back then, I'm just, like, a ceramic nerd, period. So I go to the library, I look at every *Craft Horizon* that's ever been printed that they have in their library. And I sit down and thoroughly digest it and read about the old-timers and all that.

I read every *Ceramics Monthly*. Now, *Ceramics Monthly* is a how-to kind of show-and-tell book, so it's kind of boring. And there's no criticism in it and there's no thoughtful essays even in it, period. It's just informative. But it has its place, still to this day.

American Craft had more in-depth articles, usually avoided criticism or any kind of real critical examination of issues, but was richer and more densely layered in a sense. And so I always enjoyed that magazine.

Then *American Ceramics* came along, and I would say *American Ceramics* is the first magazine of those three that had critical articles about either someone's work or an idea or position. Critical writing, instead of just descriptive writing. And so that's good.

And I actually like to read the criticism in art magazines also for what I can learn from that because obviously, when we read criticism, we learn — we then can consider how another person perceives a given artwork. And if we've seen that exact same artwork, we can compare that to how — not only how we responded to it, but how we would talk about it.

So it gives us two things. It gives us the nomenclature or the jargon, the ability to converse in a way that we all understand or, hopefully, all understand. And then it also challenges our own perception of things. And, of course, has a chance of building our ability to perceive — make that become kind of bigger, a wider scope. So I like that.

And I think sometimes, obviously, some criticism doesn't fit. You read Kenneth Baker certain times and you've seen the show and you go, like, I don't know. I don't get that — I totally don't feel that way. Whatever. That kind of thing happens.

And also, I think sometime the esoteric nature of criticism can get so extreme and convoluted that at least I have a hard time understanding it. Or it just seems so postured or something that that's kind of a hassle. So I find that *Art Forum* in general, say in the last 20 years, I'd prefer to read some art criticism or articles in *Art America* than *Art Forum* because *Art Forum* always tended to be kind of more esoteric in general.

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

MR. BRADY: But I find stuff like just reading that interesting because it's interesting to see — and also how people express themselves as writers. So — but in the craft circles, there's not a whole lot of critical writing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BRADY: Sometimes I do appreciate just descriptive, good descriptive reviews, though, about work. That has its place too, to richly describe what they saw.

MS. RIEDEL: But it sounds like you think there's a lack of criticism, and that more might be helpful.

MR. BRADY: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I think so. I mean, does *Craft Horizons* ever — no, they don't do anything that's critical, do they? No, I don't think so. They call it *Craft* now, but in that magazine — I don't know. That magazine's kind of — it's about half gift-buyer's guide. Is this — yeah, it's going to get back to them, isn't it? Oh,

well. [Laughs.]

But I dislike that part of it. In the old days, it wasn't like that. Of course, they always have to have ads, but now, gosh, it's just kind of compartmentalized with all these little schlocky ads. And sometimes they're page after page devoted to just this little farty gallery and that little farty gallery or whatever. It's gross. It's gross. I hate that.

And now art magazines have ads, too, ad nauseam. You finally get two-thirds of the way back through them and start hitting some real several-page articles. But their ads are a little bit more mainstream and not quite so schmaltzy. It's not like the Blowing Leaf Gallery in Tucson, Arizona; it's some kind of funny little design motif or something like that there. It's Absolut Vodka or whatever. It's really no better than, but it's hardcore advertising for the most part. It comes off a little better just because it's cooler and more efficient or something. But anyway, that's what bugs me about *Craft*.

As just an expose of visual information, the *Arts and Perception* from —

MS. RIEDEL: Australia.

MR. BRADY: — Australia's a pretty nice magazine, I think, visually.

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

MR. BRADY: It's a visual treat to go through, and there are so many different people they expose in every magazine that it's pretty nice.

You know what's a really nice, thoughtful magazine, though, is *Studio Potter*.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That magazine that Gerry Williams started in —

MR. BRADY: And responsible for — that's a real asset, that magazine. And it came from a complete position of love and — love. And labor and love. And the articles are thoughtful. I don't know that they're critical per se, but there's a lot of kind of philosophical positions that are considered or treated or expressed as an article, and it's so — you just never know what you're going to get with that magazine. So that's a cool magazine. It's good. It's good.

MS. RIEDEL: When you think about your work, do you think about it in terms of a particular tradition, an American tradition or an international tradition?

MR. BRADY: No, I don't. I don't know what to think about that. Going back to that idea we broached in the earlier part of the conversation — we more than broached it, but I think it's on tape — that we talked some about art being about our time, our culture, our place, and how that has always been said to me by — I've heard that in art school and from teachers, and it all makes sense to me. It makes perfect sense. And it seems like, how could it be anything else anyway?

But my work has never quite aligned itself with those requisites or expectations, and so I don't know if, like Bob Arenson once said that his work is distinctly American. He's American and his work is American. I don't know, what the hell — I mean, I'm an American, aren't I? But I don't have any, kind of pride or — gee whiz, I don't know that I see that in my work.

I see an affinity with a more universal experience and response to universal things from this entire universe, and so my work — I don't try to make it universal; I just see it being kind of connected to more universal stuff. And a myriad of sources and inspirations that go beyond, definitely go beyond our shores.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]