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Oral history interview with Mary Lee Hu, 2009 March 18-19

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mary Lee Hu on March 18 and 19, 2009. The interview took place in Seattle, Washington, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Mary Lee Hu has reviewed the transcript and has made heavy corrections and emendations. 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 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, at the home of Mary Lee Hu in Seattle, Washington, on March 18, 2009.

We are sitting here surrounded by the most extraordinary collection of books having to do with body adornment. I thought we would just briefly discuss that library as one dimension of your career, which isn't necessarily always so well known.

As a maker, you have been engaged for 50 years?

MARY LEE HU: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And as a teacher and really as a researcher and a traveler, a documenter of all types of jewelry from many different parts of the world?

MS. HU: Yes. I started making jewelry when I was 16. I started traveling when I was, what? 27, 28, and started researching the history of body adornment when I was, what? around 50. So I'm adding things, I guess. I haven't dropped anything out. [They laugh.] I still travel; I still make; I still read; I still collect stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: You have assembled—do you have any idea how many volumes are here?

MS. HU: I haven't counted lately—over 2,500 books, plus magazines; I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: And they focus on—what was the breakdown again of the categories?

MS. HU: Body adornment and metalsmithing. The back bookcase wall is Western jewelry, chronologically, books on the major fine jewelry houses, artists' monographs, alphabetically, and then the general history of jewelry books at the bottom—the history of jewelry, story of jewelry, et cetera. Then behind the couch here is a row of European exhibition catalogues and a row of American exhibition catalogues, all jewelry. Then over on the other wall are non-Western ethnic jewelry and body adornment. A lot of those books are just on the jewelry, but some of them are more anthropological texts on the tribes, so that you get the jewelry in context. Then under the window are the books on costume jewelry, and ironwork and armor.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you say the primary focus of the non-Western is Asia? Is it primarily China, Japan, Korea, or—

MS. HU: Well, I have a lot of Asian books because that is where I've been. But it goes sort of general tribal/ethnic style/body decoration books, then by areas to Africa, the Middle East and Islamic, Central Asia, India, Nepal, Tibet, and China and the Chinese minorities, Southeast Asian, Pacific Island, North American, contemporary Native American, South American, and a small section on European traditional jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] There is, I've noticed, a thread that runs through your way of doing things, which is very organized.

MS. HU: I like to categorize things, yes.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Your father was an engineer, right? Is this something you learned early on?

MS. HU: Yes, he was. I don't know. I do like to categorize things; that's true.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And then there is your whole collection of lectures down on the bottom.

MS. HU: Yes, all the slides from the body adornment lectures plus my collection of slides of fellow metalsmiths. And then the runs of magazines, collection of show announcement cards, and all the textbooks are in the basement. You haven't seen the basement yet. Textbooks—you know I collected 20th-century metalsmithing texts because I thought if students look at some of the old work, they'll think, Eh, how dated. And it would be interesting to see what those people were looking at; what kind of how-to books did they have then?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] It seems like there's a very scientific way of documenting and researching that permeates your way of working, and it reminds me of when I was reading some of the material about your early life, just the interest in science and art that was part of your world from early on.

MS. HU: Yes, well, with my father being an engineer, his father being a geologist, my brother being an electrical engineer—my father was a mechanical engineer and worked for NASA. So I like to joke to my students that he was a rocket scientist. My brother became an electrical engineer, and he works for the Air Force, specializing in laser optics and avionics.

MS. RIEDEL: I know you were interested in art, and particularly metals, early on. Did you ever contemplate anything more scientific?

MS. HU: No. My brother was the scientist and I was the artist. When we were kids, we had our hobby room. I had an art bench on one side, and he had a science bench on the other side.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were both experimenting?

MS. HU: Yes. We knew exactly what we were going to be when we were very young.

MS. RIEDEL: I was struck by that. You seemed to know from very early on.

MS. HU: Yes. I find it odd that people don't.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. With that preamble, let's go full circle back. You were born in—

MS. HU: Nineteen forty-three.

MS. RIEDEL: Nineteen forty-three. In Ohio?

MS. HU: In northern Ohio, Lakewood, Ohio, outside of Cleveland. My parents lived in the city of Cleveland on Valleyview Avenue, near Kamm's Corner.

MS. RIEDEL: What were your parents' names?

MS. HU: Dana Willis Lee, for my father, and Virginia Bennett Lee. And now everyone knows my mother's maiden name and they can access my credit card.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: We'll bear that in mind. And you have one brother, a little brother?

MS. HU: Right. I have one brother, two years younger. His name is Richard Dana Lee.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you describe your early childhood?

MS. HU: Well, I lived until I was seven in the house in Cleveland. It was across the street from the grade school, literally right across the street. And there was a family next door in a house that looked just like ours, with a big front porch. They had a couple of kids and one was a year older, so I ran around with them. I'm not really good at early, early memories, but we had a little backyard and probably a swing set or something. I remember I went to kindergarten and first grade at that school before we moved. I remember being in the band and playing the triangle—[they laugh]—and learning about money: this is a nickel and this is a penny.

But we moved when I was seven. My brother was still four. We moved to River Road in Olmsted Falls, Ohio, which was 18 miles southwest of Cleveland. My dad worked at Lewis Flight Research Center, and so it was on the other side, but Olmsted Falls was close enough for him to go to work, and it was outside of Cleveland. It was a little town. It was not exactly a suburb. It had been built as a little town, and Greater Cleveland was growing out around it, so it was becoming a suburb. But there were houses on the street that were Civil War era.

[Audio break.]

My parents thought that would be a good place for kids to grow up. I had to take a school bus to school; it wasn't right across the street. But I went to the Olmsted Falls public school, and it was small enough that I was in the exact same building from second to 12th grade. As the town was growing, they built a separate elementary school next door, but they kept the high school kids in that same old building. There were 111 or 112 in my graduating class.

MS. RIEDEL: And you described your childhood experiences along the lines of a tomboy. Would you spend a lot of time outside?

MS. HU: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you very athletic? Talk about that.

MS. HU: Yes, I spent a lot of time outside. In the wintertime we built snow forts. There was a river down in back of the house, and at the end of the street, there was just a big swampy area, so there was a lot of woodsy area, not built up, where we could run around, play cowboys and Indians, or explore. So I ran around mostly with the kids on the street, the boys. I was mostly playing with the boys, actually, and some girls, but a group of kids that would play games, run around, kick the can, tag, and build forts.

MS. RIEDEL: So not a lot of dolls and jewelry?

MS. HU: No. My mother, poor thing, she got a doll for me one Christmas. It came with a large trunk and she made clothes for it. I looked at it once and never played with it. I was much more interested in the cap pistol.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] And do you remember taking art classes early on?

MS. HU: I did. When I started first grade—no, let's go back. Every summer, we would take our vacation in Pennsylvania, in a house that my great-grandmother on my mother's side had bought to keep the grandkids together. It was an old cabin on 40 acres near Wysox in Bradford County. Towanda is the nearest larger town and county seat. It is a log cabin and still in the family. It was, in those days, maybe about 150 to 200 years old, so I guess we can say well over 200 now. It had been a post office at one time. I don't know what all it had been.

But it's one room downstairs and has two little bedrooms upstairs. Then they built on a kitchen sometime later. The logs are hand-hewn, and they are 18 to 20 inches wide and put together with wooden pegs, no nails. So that was a real interesting experience, because it had no electricity, no running water. We would usually stay for two or three weeks every August with my grandmother, an aunt, and an uncle. My mom's other brother and his wife and kids, my cousins, rarely came because that aunt had grown up on a farm, and going to a farm did not seem like a vacation to her.

When I was six and going into the first grade, we moved the cabin across a field to a new location to get away from the dusty dirt road and onto a nicer spot under a beautiful big elm tree. They put the cabin up on greased logs, and a tractor drove in a circle, slowly winching it across the field. So that year my mother and we kids stayed for three months. I started school in the little two-room schoolhouse next door at the end of our driveway lane. There was one teacher, and she would alternate between first, second, and third grade in one room, and fourth, fifth, and sixth grade in the other room. She would give us assignments, and as soon as we were done, we could run out and play in the playground on the merry-go-round until she would call us back in again. I do not know what they were going to do when it turned cold and it was winter. But for a few weeks that fall, I had that kind of experience, which was, I think, really good.

Every year, I also played with the farmer kids of the family next door. They had 12 kids. He kept his cows pregnant, kept his wife pregnant. But there were kids close to our ages. We played cow and farmer. We rode all the farm equipment—the hay baler, et cetera. I remember one day we rode the tractor out to the field with the farmer, and then he let us jump into the manure spreader on the way back after it was "empty." And when we got back home, I couldn't understand why Granny wouldn't let me in the house until I stripped naked and took a bath. [They laugh.]

So at any rate, I started first grade in that little schoolhouse. We had both art and music, and my mother kept the drawings that I did. The teacher had one of those wire things that hold five pieces of chalk, and she drew on the blackboard to teach us music. During art lesson we drew pictures. I cannot remember if there was an assignment. I drew horses because I liked horses. I still have those drawings. Crayon pictures of horses with a little sun and little tulips and a cowboy riding a horse with his coil of rope hanging on a peg in the middle of the horse's shoulder.

When I was in grade school and/or maybe junior high school, I went to a pastel class, and watercolor classes. I

didn't take ballet and was not on a sports team. I went to art classes.

MS. RIEDEL: And those were available in the community center or in someone's house?

MS. HU: A woman would teach in her house.

MS. RIEDEL: And is that something you decided you wanted to do, or somebody suggested it to you?

MS. HU: I wanted to. I never had to fight to be an artist. It was okay in the family because my dad's sister [Elizabeth Lee Hopkins] was an artist. She painted. She had studied art in college at Syracuse University. She had gotten a degree in art, married a fellow who was also an artist [John Hopkins], and actually used to go out and paint in Taos [NM] in the summers. She was one of the women in the '20s or '30s who did that.

MS. RIEDEL: And so you remember watching her paint or being intrigued by—

MS. HU: No, I didn't see her paint. She lived about a half an hour away. But I think the fact that there was someone in the family who did art made it not seem radical. And so it was okay. I knew I didn't have to fight my parents to be an artist.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you interested in music at all?

MS. HU: I sang in the chorus. My parents gave me piano lessons in the sixth grade, but they didn't take very well.

MS. RIEDEL: And then when you took classes in junior high, they were painting? They were pastel?

MS. HU: I remember a pastel class, and I remember a watercolor class outside of school. And I was a Camp Fire Girl. It was not Girl Scouts in our village; it was Camp Fire. So I was a Brownie first and then a Camp Fire Girl, and I went to a Camp Fire Girl camp every summer. I took art there, as much as I could get. Crafts actually, braiding with the plastic gimp, sinking little aluminum trays into a depression in a stump, making a beaded Indian headband.

In grade school we did not have art on a regular basis. I remember somebody came in for one hour in the third grade and let us draw. I remember I did a drawing of an African with a bone through his nose. But other than that one hour, it wasn't until seventh grade that I could start taking art.

And I did. My mother supported me in that. I wanted art every year. It was taught at the same time as some of the college preparatory classes like Latin, so I never took Latin. And I would always enter the Scholastic Art Awards competitions and often get Golden Key awards. My pieces would be put up in a downtown department store in Cleveland, and we'd go downtown and see my things hanging there amongst all the others.

MS. RIEDEL: Was this all two-dimensional work?

MS. HU: Yes, it was all two-dimensional. And so the year I was 16, people came through from the music and art camp [Lawrence Art Center] for high school students held on the campus of the University of Kansas [Lawrence] and gave scholarships to some of the Golden Key winners to try to attract more kids to go to the camp. So my mother thought, Hm, I was wondering what I was going to do with her this summer because she is too old for the Camp Fire Girls camp now. I thought it would be fun. I think I remember my mom saying, "Well, this will be a good test. You think you want to go to college and study art. If you can stand it for five days a week, six hours a day, for six weeks during the summer, then maybe it is worth sending you to college for it."

So Mom drove me out to Kansas that summer, 1959. I had to sign up for six subjects because we went to six classes each day. I registered for figure drawing, watercolor, sculpture, ceramics, and, I think, design. I needed one more, but thought I had everything I wanted. The registrar suggested silversmithing. I did not know what it was, but I did not care. I had what I wanted, so, sure, why not? That's where I was introduced to it, and I fell in love with it. After six weeks of working with torches in a Quonset hut in the middle of Kansas in the hot summer, I came home and said this is what I wanted to do.

MS. RIEDEL: What was it about it?

MS. HU: I made a linked bracelet. It wasn't that I wanted to make jewelry, because I was a tomboy. I did not really wear the bracelet. But I loved working with the tools. Now, my dad had a workbench in the basement. He could fix almost everything in the house, except for the TV set. He would help me make science projects and Christmas presents with his basic woodworking hand tools, so I just liked working with tools and making things. That's what I wanted to do.

So after I came back, I entered my junior year in high school. We found a silversmithing class taught about a

half-an-hour drive away by a group called the Baycrafters, in Bay Village, Ohio. My aunt belonged to that group. I took that one evening a week. In my senior year, we found that there was a high school class available at the Cleveland Institute of Art on Saturday mornings. It was taught in the regular shop but for high school students.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Do you remember who taught?

MS. HU: Somehow the name Hunsiker comes to mind, but I'm not sure. It was not Fred or John Paul Miller, but it was an older man, not one of the students. I loved it. I took the Rapid Transit in on Saturday mornings. I knew I wanted to major in it in college.

MS. RIEDEL: At this point, what was it that you were interested in making, Mary? Were you focused on jewelry? Were you focused on sculpture?

MS. HU: Well, I was making jewelry. I was making jewelry because that's what the courses were. At the Baycrafters class, I made a silver brooch and a pair of cufflinks. I was just making things. It wasn't that I was making them for myself as much as I just was making things.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, I'm really curious. Were you drawn to jewelry? Do you remember? Because you didn't want to wear it.

MS. HU: I was drawn to metals, and jewelry was what was being taught.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so you might have done hollowware if it was offered.

MS. HU: And as soon as I got to Cranbrook, I did.

MS. RIEDEL: So I just am trying to understand what it was that you were making then and what it was that was drawing you to working metals.

MS. HU: It was the process. It was working with the tools and the materials.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so the hammers, the torches, the metal itself.

MS. HU: Sawing, filing, soldering, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's interesting that you were drawn to the process itself from very early on, because that is something that has been significant to you and held your attention for decades.

MS. HU: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was it from the beginning. And did you work pretty much exclusively in silver?

MS. HU: Yes, silver.

MS. RIEDEL: All silver, okay. So this was all through high school, and then it came time to think about college. How did you decide where to go and who to study with?

MS. HU: My aunt knew about Cranbrook. So my mother packed me up along with my high school portfolio of projects I had been doing. In high school we'd had a pretty good teacher the last two years—Gary Turner. He had just come from Miami University [Oxford, OH], so it was his first teaching job. He basically gave us what he remembered taking at Miami. So we had his college design course, basic design, and in drawing I had to learn all the major bones and muscles. He would give us a ditto outline of the body, and for a test, I had to draw in and name all the major bones and muscles. I knew them all then; can't do that now.

Before he came, in junior high school and the first two years of high school, there was another teacher. I don't remember his name. I had lettering and perspective so many times—every year. Newsprint pads and Speedball pens and India ink—the pens with the big round nibs on them. I would stand up and draw from the shoulder. I made rows of straight lines and curved lines. We also had to learn perspective. I remember getting pictures out of magazines, pasting them to a larger piece of paper, and finding the two- and three-point perspective, and drawing in the perspective lines. I did that time after time.

Then when Turner came, he started giving us much more interesting assignments. I did record album covers, designs for fabric or wallpaper, and illustrations for magazine articles. I remember that they did get a little enameling kiln, so I did a bit of enameling. I cut out my shapes from copper. Enameling was big in the Cleveland area in the '50s.

MS. RIEDEL: Pretty extensive art.

MS. HU: For a little town, yes. I was lucky.

MS. RIEDEL: You're right.

MS. HU: I was president of the art club in high school. We would silk-screen all of the dance programs and play programs, the cover for the concert programs that the school put on. I'd paint the theater scenery for all the plays that they did. I only acted in one of them, I think. But I was there painting the scenery.

At Christmas one year for the chorale concert in the gym/auditorium, Turner got the idea that we could make the tall windows on either side look like cathedral stained glass windows if we took colored construction paper and painted it with linseed oil to make it translucent, so that light from the outside would shine through. So we made the designs for the windows with black strips in between the colors and broke it down into the small sections to fit the small panes of glass, then climbed up ladders and Scotch-taped them in the windows. They shined spotlights on from the outside.

I remember I was putting up the last of those, and it was just an hour before the concert started, and I was also in the choir. So I had to run home, change clothes really fast, then run back and march in with the choir. Then they turned on the spotlight, and all the audience said, "Oooooh." So that's what I did in high school. I did study, too, sort of, but I was doing everything I could in art. I knew it was art for me.

So my mother took me to Cranbrook with my portfolio, and Richard Thomas was very nice. He said, "Well this is really a grad school. You've got to go to college first. [They laugh.] Oh, we had missed that point.

And so we went back home, and I thought, Well, he did say that they took a few undergrads, but I had to have at least two years of college first, because Cranbrook was only art. So I went to Miami of Ohio, because that's where Turner had gone, and it was at the other end of the state. I certainly wanted to go away from home; I didn't want to go to the Cleveland Institute of Art and live at home. I wanted to get out and be on my own, so I went down to Miami.

I don't believe they taught jewelry/metals at Miami then. They do have a fine program now, but I don't think it was there then, because I was not aware of it. So I was taking basic academics and also art. I took figure drawing and design both years there. And then after two years, I applied to get into Cranbrook and was accepted.

MS. RIEDEL: And then were you taking summer classes at RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology]?

MS. HU: Because there was no metals at Miami and I knew I wanted to study metals, we found out that there was a six-week summer program at RIT, so I went there for the two summers in between my years at Miami. The first summer, I had to go home early because I got mono, so a summer and a half I studied there. I studied with Hans Christensen for hollowware and then with two people the two different years for jewelry. One was Axel Sand and the other was Martha somebody the first year. I can't remember her last name.

It was very structured, eight o'clock to five o'clock. Ten to 10:15 was a coffee break; 12 to one was lunch; three to 3:15 was coffee break. I came in at 8:05 one time, and Hans came rushing over and said, "Oh, Mary. I'm glad to see you're all right. We thought maybe you were sick." I thought, Oops, I'm not going to be late anymore. [Laughs.] Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday until noon was, I think, hollowware, and then Wednesday afternoon, Thursday, and Friday was the jewelry. We could not go back in the evenings or on weekends, as it was still in their old space in a rough part of town.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was your first experience with hollowware? Would you describe that?

MS. HU: Hans started us off slowly with copper. We sank a six-inch disk and soldered on—with soft solder—a straight-sided ring base. Then we learned crimp-raising and raised a slightly larger shallow, open bowl and soldered on an angled, truncated cone base. Then we were to design, on paper, a bowl form with a fluted base that we would raise in silver. It had to be first designed on paper, and we made templates from the design—cardboard templates—for its profile. I raised my silver bowl and planished it right to that template. I planished it as perfectly as I could get it, filed out the planish marks, and sanded out the file marks, and polished off the sanding marks.

For the inside, we bought a pumice stone at the drugstore and actually just pumiced the inside until we got all the hammer marks out. So the darn thing looks spun. I seamed a little cone and hammered it out to the fluted shape and hard-soldered it on.

MS. RIEDEL: This was all very technique oriented. Was there any exposure to what was going on in contemporary metal at the time or the history?

MS. HU: No. We went to Hans's house one time, and I saw some of his work, or what I thought was his work, in his wife's china cabinet, and I was just blown away—a square teapot—I didn't know you could raise a square. But I really loved it.

In the jewelry section I did a brooch that was pretty much just cut out, flat-on-flat, and I did a pendant that was actually woven wire, and then we were assigned a hollow-constructed ring that I put a little enamel on.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that first woven piece come about?

MS. HU: You know, I don't know. It's really very strange, but that was in 1963, and it was a little hanging basket-like thing. I put wire through the rolling mill and got strips. I soldered one end of the strips to a wire to be a warp, and was trying to weave them down and around and back up. I was having trouble because you can't bend strips sideways. It was in 1973 that I made the hanging basket piece with the boar's tusks [*Neckpiece #8*], so I tell myself it took 10 years to learn how to make that piece. Somehow that piece had to be made.

MS. RIEDEL: Where did your initial idea even for working with wire and weaving it come from? Do you know if that was something that occurred to you or—

MS. HU: I have no idea, don't know. The first little brooch was organic, seaweed-looking with puzzle-piece-like projections on one side of this sheet shape coming down and around in a U. And then in the middle, it had some wire that was soldered in, not woven, just wire pieces soldered, soldered, soldered. So line maybe? I was doing a lot of drawing. I was always drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So the wire sounds like it really came about as an idea of drawing, rather than weaving, per se.

MS. HU: For line, Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So you took those classes for two summers, and then you transferred to Cranbrook? What was that transition like?

[They laugh.]

MS. HU: I loved it, but looking back, I guess—how to put it? I worked hard. I did the projects that were assigned. I'd always done pretty well at school, but I felt that I wasn't doing well enough for Thomas. I felt like I wasn't getting very good critique. He really didn't critique. I had the feeling I needed to do more.

I remember going home at Christmas the first year and making two neckpieces. At school I was working on hollowware and forging and things that he would assign, but I did jewelry at home because that is what I could do in my home studio. I brought these pieces back to our final critique. We were still on that strange semester system where you have your final right after Christmas break. I laid all my things out that I'd been doing in class, and then I had the two extra pieces. And I thought, Ha-ha. I'll surprise him and he'll be pleased. He came around and he said, "Oh, is that all?" And he went to the next person. I was crushed; I wanted more feedback.

My first semester there, they still gave grades. Then they stopped giving grades and it was just a pass-fail system. This was a little strange to me, because I'd always been graded. I remember asking, "Well, how do we know how we're doing?" And the answer was, "We'll tell you if you're not doing well enough. We'll ask you to leave." Oops, so I've got to work harder. [Laughs.]

There were a few of us babies [undergraduates]. I wasn't the only one. There were four, I think, of the 10-12 metals students. We were all together with the graduate students. We each had our own bench in one room. The grads would take their major subject for four days a week and a minor subject for one day. I believe the second year a minor was optional. The undergrads would take their major three days a week and minor for two days.

MS. RIEDEL: And what does that mean?

MS. HU: A minor was another subject, other than our major. Class lasted all day. The first semester I had to take what they called "matrix study," a 3-D design class, as my minor. After that I could take electives. My first minor elective was printmaking—etching and engraving. Then ceramics, and the final semester was lithography, so back to drawing.

When Thomas gave an assignment to the class, it was to all of us—grads and undergrads. I remember he wanted to have us do some hot-forging. He got half-inch, stainless steel round stock, set the firebricks up as a muffle, and set up the annealing torch so that it made a forge to heat our metal. I forget how much of a demo he gave, or whether he just gave a chalk talk on forging, the aspects of it.

I also don't remember if he assigned a knife, but I made a carving set. I made a knife-and-fork carving set with ebony handles. But to give beginners stainless, I mean, that's tough stuff! Mild steel would have been so much easier. For forging hammers, we had these sledge hammers with short handles. I could barely lift it, and I remember trying to get it all the way around above my head and down again. [Laughs.] But we were all there together, grads and undergrads, doing the same project.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there many women in the metals classes?

MS. HU: Yes, maybe half, or almost half. We were allowed to do jewelry. It wasn't stressed. His assignments were all on hollowware and forging. I had heard that a few years before, jewelry wasn't allowed, and people would have to sneak around and do it. But when we were there, sculpture wasn't allowed.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, what was the thinking behind that? Do you know?

MS. HU: I don't know. We would all do it when he wasn't there. We would cast little whimsical, nonfunctional things.

I had to write a thesis at the end. In those days, they were all to be original research into something technically based. Mine is never going to go anywhere because it was using mercury amalgam as an inlay in semi-precious stones that I would etch into with hydrofluoric acid. So, yeah, he told me, "Be careful because it's dangerous." [Laughs.] But I don't remember him telling me how dangerous it was. And I was just pouring this hydrofluoric acid on my stones.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MS. HU: I had found out that the science institute [Cranbrook Institute of Science] there taught lapidary. So I started taking the lapidary classes on Saturday mornings.

I would cut the stones and polish them, then I would etch into them with the acid and inlay the silver amalgam. So it was inlaying line into these stones. I made both smaller stones for jewelry along with several larger polished and beveled slabs for box tops. So that was my thesis.

And, with all those dangerous things, nobody is ever going to pursue it. But it was a technical thesis. I first researched historical inlay and damascene work. I was an undergrad, and I kept thinking—and I know it's not fair because Thomas probably let me get away with a lot simpler thesis than the grads. But I'm thinking, I only have three days a week to do mine because I still have to do my minor, but the grads have four to five days a week for theirs.

MS. RIEDEL: And were there any of the grad students that were helpful?

MS. HU: Oh, they were great. They were wonderful.

I think in those days there weren't as many metals programs in the country. Thomas would have so many applicants, he could pick and choose his shop mix. We learned from each other, almost more than we did from him. Everybody had come from different areas, knew different things.

We had Otto Dingeldein there my second year. I remember Thomas coming in the end of the first year and telling us that next year we would have [Al] Ching, [Chunghi] Choo, and Dingeldein. Otto was a European-trained metalsmith. He was there to get a degree, like Heikki Seppa had gone to Cranbrook a few years earlier to get a degree.

And when I was at RIT, Hero Kielman, a Dutch-trained goldsmith, was there to get a degree because he wanted to teach, and so he had to have a master's degree. I heard that Hero went to RIT and said, "What do I have to do to get my degree, a teapot?" "Okay," hammer, hammer, hammer, "here's your teapot." [Laughs.] They already knew how to do so much. A bishop's ring? I watched him saw out a little eagle to put onto the side of this ring—sawing out each wing feather—gosh, how can one saw that tiny?

It was great to watch the other students. Bernie Bernstein was finishing his master's the summer I was at RIT, making a torah crown—I learned so much from them all.

MS. RIEDEL: And they were fairly generous with their information?

MS. HU: Oh, absolutely, yes. They were always so sharing.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was a strong community, very helpful and supportive.

MS. HU: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Then why did you decide to go to Carbondale [Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL]?

MS. HU: At first I wasn't going to go back to grad school immediately. I was going to go out and work. I actually went to New York City and thought that, since I have a degree in metals and jewelry and have made jewelry, I can get a job designing for a jewelry company. [They laugh.] I mean, I knew so little, I didn't even know I didn't know enough. So I was sort of laughed out of a lot of places. A few guys were nice and gave me a little time. One of them actually said, "Your designs are nice, but can you render?" "What's rendering?" "This is how we work here." "Oh." [They laugh.]

So I came back to my parents' house in midsummer thinking maybe I should work in a jewelry store for a while. We were investigating that, as a friend of a friend of my father's had a jewelry store. Then suddenly I got a call from Thomas, "Would you like to go to grad school?" And I thought, Well, at this point it sounds pretty good. "What do you have in mind?"

Brent Kington at Carbondale, one of Thomas's former students, had a TA position. He went to Thomas to get a student. So Thomas offered it to the only male undergrad, who was Norman Thomas [no relation]. Norm then decided that he didn't want to go to grad school. He was going to stay in Detroit and open up a supply company—which he did and had for many years. So then Thomas offered the TA to the oldest female undergrad, Peg Wansettler. Halfway through the summer, Peg decided she didn't want to go, so now it was my turn. I was third choice. I went to Carbondale to look the situation over. I did not know who Brent Kington was. I was getting him confused with Earl Krentzin, a K name and little cast, whimsical things. But I liked him. He was personable. The situation seemed good. I would be able to earn my way with the TA-ship. So it sounded good and I decided to go.

MS. RIEDEL: And would you just describe your time there, what you focused on and how things evolved? I know at one point you worked on a series of earrings.

MS. HU: I started in the fall of 1965. In those days Brent was casting little silver toys, and he was also taking copper water pipe, hammering a texture into it, fluting it, and crunching it down and making candlestick holders. So my first semester [or quarter, I can't remember], I made a candlestick holder out of a crunched pipe. I also did a lot of cast silver jewelry. In the spring, I did more casting.

I had done some casting at Cranbrook, but doing a lot more at Carbondale. There, I worked more organic and free with brown sculptor's wax like Brent, rather than using the Cavex wax. I also started to raise a silver piece, which was to be a teapot, and I started forging a pair of salad servers—leftover ideas from Cranbrook—forging and raising.

That winter I met and fell in love with a fellow, so I was doing a lot of playing and not doing as much work as I should. Brent actually gave me an incomplete in the spring because he said he did not want to give me the bad grade I deserved. [Laughs.]

I went off that summer and took a round-the-country, six-week trip with my roommate who was a painter, Carol Mecagni—Carol Flaherty in those days. We camped in the back of my Greenbrier. It was like a Volkswagen bus, but it was a Chevy Greenbrier. We camped inside of it and cooked our own meals. This was my first trip out west.

We went south from Carbondale to Carlsbad Caverns [NM]. I had to go there since my geologist grandfather [Willis Thomas Lee], father, and aunt had explored it in the early '20s for the National Geographic Society and I had grown up hearing about it. Then to Grand Canyon [AZ], Bryce [Canyon, UT], Zion [National Park, UT], down to Los Angeles, over to Sequoia [CA], back to San Francisco, and up the California and Oregon coasts to the Olympic Rainforest, and back through the Rockies, Yellowstone, et cetera. Then I came back to my second year at Carbondale.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, when did you finish the work?

MS. HU: I finished the salad servers at the beginning of the second year. The teapot never got worked on again. That fall I took a weaving class as a minor subject. I can't remember if I had a minor the first year. My weaving to teacher was Ruth Ginsberg-Place, and she assigned us to string up the loom and do color and texture samples. Near the end of the term she assigned us all to do an off-loom project.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did you make the decision to choose weaving?

MS. HU: I hadn't done it yet. I'd taken ceramics. The big three were fiber, clay, and metal, so I had done clay and metal; I hadn't done fibers.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was a general initial research, exploration into weaving and how it worked? I mean, is there a reason in particular you chose to not go back to ceramics?

MS. HU: Well, I didn't like ceramics. It was dirty. If it's too wet, it just falls over. I like the resistance of metal. So, no, I didn't want to do any more—

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And was there something about weaving that drew you, or were you just being methodical about completing research into what was happening in weaving?

MS. HU: I just hadn't done it yet, and [thought] I ought to know more about it.

MS. RIEDEL: And did the loom work appeal to you at all?

MS. HU: Not that much. It was during that class, after I did my color sample, Ruth said, "You really don't know color, do you?" I said, "I guess I don't." I was not able to use color very well. I never learned it. I thought back over my design courses, and when the teacher would ask us to paint a picture in color that, if you took a black-and-white photo of it, it would turn out all one gray. I couldn't do it. That escaped me. I couldn't figure that out, so I just did a very dark scene. [They laugh.]

So I learned that about myself. Ruth asked us to choose an off-loom process and make a project using it. I went to a little encyclopedia of needlework and flipped through it until I found macramé. When I give lectures, I say, "In my defense, it was 1966, and macramé had not yet become—you know." [Laughs.] So it was esoteric in those days. It was tying knots. It was pattern. So I'm sure that's why I chose it.

I was doing thread macramé because I liked little things. And it was around Thanksgiving time, and I thought, Oh, I'd better hurry up here. I have to get work done in metals and I have to get work done in fibers. And so I literally thought, Let's see, it's line. Maybe if I used wire and tie knots in wire and make a piece of jewelry—because it just had to be a macramé off-loom project. So I tried that and it worked. I got credit for both classes with the one piece [*Neckpiece #1*]. And Brent told me that he thought that was something I should pursue: "I think it's answering some things that you've been looking for."

MS. RIEDEL: Were you excited?

MS. HU: Well, yes. I was pretty interested in it. And Brent says, "You need a thesis project. You seem to have a knack for that. I can't help you. I don't know any books. You're going to have to explore it on your own." So he said, "I don't want to see a bunch of test squiggles at the end of the quarter. I want to see finished pieces." I had a problem with finishing pieces, right? So, "I want to see finished pieces. I want you to do two pairs of earrings a week. And you can test out your ways of working wire that way."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] And they were all silver wire?

MS. HU: I started out with brass on my first experiment and got blisters on the ends of my fingers. So I ordered fine silver, knowing from reading that it was softer then sterling, but I hadn't used it before. So I ordered some fine silver and did the first piece in it.

MS. RIEDEL: And so every week for—

MS. HU: From about Thanksgiving until August, when I graduated, I did two pairs of earrings each week.

MS. RIEDEL: And where did those ideas come from?

MS. HU: Well, Sunday night after I had a lot of fun all weekend as a college kid, I went [gasp], "Tomorrow's Monday and I've got to come up with two ideas." [Laughs.] So I would draw and think. I would just go through processes. Well, I can weave it. I can braid it. What else can I do? There's netting. I was looking at structure, fiber structures. So the first three or four pairs of earrings were macramé. But they took forever—six hours a pair. Then I had to be really careful because I had to anneal it often. I was tying so many knots where I had to bend the entire length of the wire. It would harden, and I'd have to anneal it and hope I didn't melt it.

When I wanted to use the wires as line, wanted to carry some of the wires unknotted, I found they were all crumpled because they had been bent so much. I wanted them more controlled looking. So I thought, This is not right; it's taking too long. I'm fighting the natural inclination of wire. Threads will tie knots; wire doesn't like to. Next I thought, Well, what do I like about this? It's the play of light off the surface—that sparkle and the pattern. And I really like those half-hitch knots up on edge and wires coming out from in between them. Well, all I have to do is take a bunch of wires and wrap another wire around them all, then bring one out and wrap around the remaining ones again, bring another one out, et cetera. I will get very much the same look but I'm not tying knots.

So that was a real breakthrough moment. From six hours, it only took an hour to do a pair of earrings. They were

more controlled—I'm a control freak. They were crisp; they were just like my drawings.

So it was easy to run with different ways of doing that for a few weeks. Then I added some braiding to it, or I added some fringe to it. I had a lot of little clipped ends, so I made some fringe designs to use up all the little short pieces. So that was how I worked out a lot of ideas.

MS. RIEDEL: And these were very pattern oriented?

MS. HU: Well, they were flattish at first—drawn out on the sketchbook and then just made.

MS. RIEDEL: Always drawn first?

MS. HU: I can't remember. I'd have to go back to those sketchbooks. I think most of them were. And then at some point I decided that I wasn't interested in finishing up the raising that I had started. I had finished the salad servers to get the grade for spring. But I just wanted to do wire all the time, not just Mondays, so I started working on neckpieces, which would become my major involvement.

My first [*Neckpiece #2*] was just a wrapped neck wire with a big earring hanging down the front—[laughs]—a pendant-like thing. I just scaled up an earring. But then I got into neckpieces where the design went all the way around. And for whatever reason, it was usually tapered in the back—graduated. That was my design sense.

I remember looking at a book from the library on Peruvian gold pieces. But I don't know where I got the ideas for the neckpieces. Mostly it was process. When I made a pair of earrings, I would wrap wire around a whole group of wires and then just keep taking one out and wrapping around the ones that were left, and I'd get this taper. So I thought, Tapers are nice; I'll do a whole neckpiece that has a bunch of tapers on it [*Neckpiece #3*]. So that's how the ideas came. Then at some point I decided to challenge myself more. I was thinking about when I taught myself to draw.

MS. RIEDEL: This was when you were very young?

MS. HU: Well, over all the years. I was trying to sit in on a grad drawing seminar at Carbondale with the painters. The teacher [Herbert Fink] was the head of the department. He was a printmaker, and he couldn't figure out why this metalsmith wanted to sit in on drawing. He suggested I look up some very decorative scrollwork, but I wanted to do life drawing. Even at Cranbrook, I'd always gone Wednesday nights where they just had a model. It wasn't a course; they just had a model and anyone could go to draw. I'd go because I thought it was important as an artist to know how to draw.

MS. RIEDEL: Always focusing on the line?

MS. HU: I was doing a lot of figure drawing, but yes, a lot with line. So I thought when I taught myself to draw, I was trying to draw things. I wasn't just spreading pigment around. I was trying to make the lines look like something. So I should do that with my wire.

I tried insects. I thought that they would be a good thing to translate into wire. They were linear. So I went to the library and got books with drawings of insects, chose one, and then tried to translate it into the vocabulary of wire that I had at that time, wrapping one around others with tapers and lines coming out. I started doing a series of little insects that weren't brooches—just insects.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were still in grad school at this time?

MS. HU: Yes. The insects grew into animals. So when I did a taper, it gave me the idea of an octopus, of course, and a squid.

I was at Carbondale four years, because I got married after two years when I got my degree and my husband got his degree for his master's. He was in mathematics. So I stayed there for two more years while he got his Ph.D. A lot of the animals came that second two years. I wasn't enrolled in the program; I was working there. The first year I was assisting in an art appreciation course. The second year I was teaching part-time in metals. So I was able to keep a bench and work at school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And I just want to talk briefly about Brent Kington, because you have said that that was an extraordinary experience, and you mentioned that he was really a strong influence. The opportunity to watch him work made quite an impression on you?

MS. HU: Yes, because in those days, there weren't a lot of grads. I think I was his only one when I first started. And then there were some undergrad majors. We all had little benches—it seemed about 18 by 24 inches, with a piece of pegboard sticking up at the back—all in one room. They were double benches, and so Brent and I faced each other on the same bench with the pegboard in between us—if we ducked down, we didn't see each other.

[They laugh.]

He would go home, and he would work the wax and come back every day with new waxes to cast. I saw the rate at which he worked. I mean, he was really producing. He was working! So I was always feeling guilty that I didn't work enough.

Thomas would never let us watch him work. He'd close the door to his studio and do it privately, so one was not really aware of how much work was being produced or how long it took. But with Brent you were. I could see the things develop. I thought that was a really good thing to let students see.

Then the other thing I thought was so good—I think he was really good with the grads. I don't know how good a demo person he was with beginners, but he was very good at helping someone find a path of his own that wasn't like his. He took a look at my wire work and said, "Pursue it." He gave me an assignment that made me really dig into it.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's become influential in your own teaching, trying to help people find their own ways rather than trying—

MS. HU: Yes. I say that the two people that I'm most indebted to are John Paul Miller and Brent Kington.

For John Paul, it's because I grew up near Cleveland, where he was. Every year he would enter and get a piece into the Cleveland May Show, a countywide, all-media art competition, which was shown at the [Cleveland] Museum [of Art], I believe. I would go. After I got interested in jewelry the last couple of years of high school, I'd go and see his incredible pieces and know that a living person made them. They were in a museum, so living people could make beautiful things that were just as good as anything else in the museum. It sort of gave me the idea that maybe I could too.

And then Brent because I saw him work. And I saw him contribute to the field. He started sitting on organizational boards; he was entering competitions. So I copied that. I entered competitions. He was one of the founding members of SNAG [Society of North American Goldsmiths], and then I got involved in it. The idea of contributing to your field came from Brent.

Whereas Thomas purposely didn't want us to know there was a field. He wanted to isolate us. Here I was at Cranbrook for two years and I didn't know that Phil Fike was in Detroit. I didn't know that there was a field. We never had visiting artists, except maybe once or twice a former student would come and give a demo.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the reasoning behind that?

MS. HU: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So this was the complete opposite?

MS. HU: It was very different, yes. My last two years at Carbondale, Brent had Heikki Seppa and Phil Fike in for workshops. Heikki was doing reticulation and all this different kind of raising, and Phil was talking about niello, fibulas, and jewelry history. And that was pretty cool. We all [Brent and students] went up to Springfield [IL] for a conference. I think it was an ACC [American Craft Council] regional conference. There were lectures and an exhibition. I remember there were some ceramics—Patti Bauer, now Warashina—it was so exciting. We were meeting other students—realizing there was a field, a community.

So I am really thankful that I chose Carbondale. It was a small school in the middle of nowhere, but it had a great program. It was just becoming great. Brent had only been there four years when I got there, and you don't have students out doing things to get a reputation that quickly.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And there were some other interesting students there when you were there, too. You've mentioned, I think, right after you graduated, while you were still working there, there was a little community of you that were working together? Who am I thinking of? Gary Noffke was there and—

MS. HU: My second two years there, Brent and the graduate students took over a small seminar room next door to the room we had had the two years before. We had bigger benches by then, facing a real wall instead of each other. [Laughs.] I was sitting between Gary Noffke and Elliott Pujol. So they became lifelong friends.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] And you took this work that you started in grad school, the insects, and that really became the basis for your first series. No? I mean, you developed that for the next two or three years?

MS. HU: I don't say that I worked in series until '75. What I was doing were neckpieces until '75, and then I started the chokers.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, the very early work, though, there was, if not a series, at least a group of different insects and animals?

MS. HU: I did a few insects, lots of lizards, and then started on the animals. There was *Octopus* [1967], because I liked the tapers; *Crab* [1967] was to explore joining the woven sections for articulation; *Turtle* [1968] did the same; *Squid* [1968] was a further use of tentacles. *Bird* [1969] came about because a tentacle can look like a feather before melting down the short wire ends that have been taken out of the wrapped taper. *Dragon #1* [1969] was to use the overlapping loops I had done in a pair of earrings, and it was a development from all the lizards. *Dragon #2* [1971] was a further exploration, and *Aquatic Insect Larva* [1971] used planned color changes in the overlapping loops to create a pattern down its back.

MS. RIEDEL: They really were technical experiments?

MS. HU: Yes, they were all technical experiments.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, but through them, it seems you really explored the variations you could get in quality of line and also a sense of form.

MS. HU: Well, in form, yes. The Dragons were line, but once I started weaving, that allowed hollow form.

MS. RIEDEL: And the necklaces and the chokers, they really started then in the late '60s?

MS. HU: The neckpieces did. *Neckpiece #1* [1966] was the first piece I did in wire, right? And I just started naming them by numbers. I still do that.

MS. RIEDEL: And you made a distinction between neckpieces and chokers?

MS. HU: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And they were, at the beginning, very flowing, curvilinear forms?

MS. HU: Yes, they were very organic.

MS. RIEDEL: I think in 1970 was one of the first tessellated, the checkered pieces?

MS. HU: The plaid piece [*Neckpiece #7*, 1970—71]. It is not what I call a tessellated piece; that series came in 1985.

MS. RIEDEL: How did it come about?

MS. HU: Well, my brother, the electrical engineer, gave me some magnet wire. He said, "Here, you use wire; can you use this?" It was a spool with the end broken off. They couldn't use it, so they were throwing it away. It was maroon, the first color I got. I thought, Ooh, cool. So I used maroon and silver and a little bit of gold, and wove myself a plaid piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] That was the first time I had seen—and not that it lingered that long. But that was very different. It was very flat, as opposed to so fluid in 3-D. And very, very interesting pattern.

MS. HU: I wove it, plaited it. I think I started with some nails in a board, winding some of the wires onto the nails to stabilize them. But once you have some of it woven, it holds itself together, and I just kept adding. It goes up and over the shoulders, but it was pretty flat, that is true.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, it was dramatic because it was so different.

MS. HU: I did that shortly before I went to Taiwan. [*Neck Piece #8*, 1973] is the basket piece with the boar's tusks I did there, so I was back to form.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was actually made in Taiwan?

MS. HU: Yes. *Neckpiece #8*, *#9* [1973], and *#10* [1973] were all made in Taiwan.

MS. RIEDEL: And then in the mid-'70s, there began this transition from the very organic—

MS. HU: Right. I came back from Taiwan after my husband passed away. I was there two years, then I took the big trip with my dad and came back to the U.S.

MS. RIEDEL: Shall we talk about that now?

MS. HU: Well, I got married [to Tah-Kai Hu, called TK, on September 7, 1967], stayed two more years in Carbondale. Then my husband got a job teaching at Western Washington State College [now Western Washington University] in Bellingham, Washington. So we came out to the West Coast in '69. He taught there for two years. It was a great program.

We had made good friends there, but he wanted to travel. He wanted to go back to Taiwan. He had left when he was in high school when his family moved to Argentina. His father was in the foreign service, diplomatic service. So he had gone to high school in Buenos Aires and college in the U.S., and he hadn't been back. His mother was there; his father had passed away the year before. So he wanted to go back and let me experience China. He got a visiting professorship at the National Taiwan University in Taipei.

MS. RIEDEL: And in Bellingham, briefly, you were focused completely on your work?

MS. HU: I was a wife, a faculty wife who did jewelry, yes—[laughs]—and he earned the living. So we went over for a year. He had planned on taking another visiting position the next year at the University of Florida in Gainesville, then go back to Bellingham, but he passed away suddenly at the end of the school year in Taiwan.

So I stayed another year with my mother-in-law, learned a lot more Chinese, because my mother-in-law was off playing Mahjong all day and I was home alone with the maid. So I learned Chinese really fast. If I wanted to say anything to another human being, it had to be in Chinese.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Had you learned any before?

MS. HU: I was trying desperately. I had taken it in college for two or three years. And I had had a tutor the first year in Taiwan. But basically, when my husband would come home, we'd speak in English. He would not speak Chinese with me because he didn't want our conversations limited to baby talk. So I didn't learn much of it. I was learning some, but it got a lot more fluent when I had to use it.

So I stayed there a second year. And then my dad came over, and we came home to the U.S. by going the rest of the way around the world.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And when were you based in Taiwan? Were you continuing to work and to develop the wire pieces while there?

MS. HU: I was there from June 1971 to June 1973. I had started *Neckpiece #8* the first year, and then TK passed away. I didn't do anything for a while, but then I got back to it. I finished up *Neckpiece #8* and made *Neckpiece #9* and *#10*; *#8* was a hanging bird's nest with lizards, and *#9* was the large phoenix piece that Boston [Museum of Fine Arts] now has.

These two were still very representational; *#10* is one that is not published very much. It has two red magnet wire forms in front, and then uses the process like the phoenix wings as a cowl around the back of the neck.

When I got back to the U.S. in the fall of 1973, I lived with my dad in Olmsted Falls again.

[END OF CD 1.]

Neckpiece #11 was the first piece I did after coming home. That is a woven piece where I was learning to draft the pattern on graph paper and figuring out how to do twills and diamond patterns as well as turning corners controlling the pattern while doing so.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you teaching at all then?

MS. HU: No. I was working full-time in my dad's basement, back in that same little room where my brother and I had had our hobby room—that was my studio.

Neckpiece #13 is the flat phoenix. I took the process I used on the large phoenix wing feathers and drew the flat phoenix with it. I also taught myself how to do knitted wire for this one. I figured it out by looking at a piece I had gotten on a trip to Bhutan.

It is a Tibetan Khamspa neckpiece that has knitted wire on it, and I decided I wanted to try to do it. When I first saw the piece, I thought it was done using the loop-in-loop process the Greeks used, but when I began to closely analyze it, I found that it was a tubular knit structure. So first I tried to use the spool with pegs in the end, because I remembered using that as a kid. But it did not work for me because the wire is not springy like knitting yarns, so the structure was too open. Then I tried to pre-bend the wire into loops and roll it up, slipping loops through loops—thinking that is what happens in a knit structure—but that was not working either.

I needed to get in there so I could pull the loops through, because I couldn't push them through. So I thought, Hm, I think my grandmother's sewing box upstairs has a crochet hook in it. Maybe I can just push it through a loop and hook onto the new loop and pull it back through. It worked! So I started knitting with a crochet hook, not with knitting needles. I found that I did not have to pre-bend the wire, but could just work off of a spool of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Okay, and this is just a great example, I think, of the power of the technical process to help you develop your work, and that has kept you engaged in it all this time. It's a continual experimentation.

MS. HU: Looking at a thing, analyzing what's happening, and then, How can I do it? So *Neckpiece #14* was a completely knitted piece that rarely sees the light of day. It's still in the basement. [They laugh]

Neckpiece #15 is that red piece that looks like chair caning a bit. My dad was legally blind and caned chairs. Watching him do that, I decided I would try a variation. Mine is a three-way instead of a four-way design, but that's where it came from.

I had just emptied out my savings account, saying to myself that if I am really serious about doing this, I needed to buy a lot of wire. So I bought a 100-ounce spool of fine silver wire. I loved the look of the light glinting off of all the wire on the spool, so that is what I was trying to achieve, where all the single wires go up and over the shoulders.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And you were experimenting with color at this point.

MS. HU: Well, I had these magnet wires. The maroon came first and then red. For years I'd go to every Radio Shack or Lafayette Radio I could find and try to find different colors. But it was a limited palette.

In July 1975, I think it was, I was invited to exhibit at a street fair in Akron [OH]. It was going to be their sesquicentennial. The Akron Art Museum was going to have a tent, and they invited several artists to have tables to sell their work there. I thought I would try it out and participate. It was coming up pretty quickly, and I needed a lot of jewelry. I had some lizards and I had some earrings, but I thought I needed some more neckpieces. But I didn't have much time. This is where the choker series started.

I remember talking to my dad about it at lunch one day and saying, "Well, I suppose I could just do one earring as a pendant and hang it on a neck ring." By dinner I had that first piece done. It took four hours. By the end of the week, I had 13 small necklaces. They weren't these big, one-of-a-kind technical experiments; they were smaller. So I changed the name from "neckpieces" to "chokers." I was doing both neckpieces and chokers together for a while, but after *Neckpiece #26*, I dropped the neckpiece name, because I was by then working in series.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And these initial chokers were all primarily rings with pendants dangling?

MS. HU: They were never just rings. I had a limited range of wire sizes. I had 26-gauge fine silver, 20-gauge sterling, and 14-gauge sterling. My 20 gauge would be my warp. My 26 gauge, the weft when weaving. The 14 gauge was what I would use for strength, or a heavier line.

I didn't want just a round neck ring, so I devised a design where the 14-gauge wire went up over each shoulder and behind the neck, bent back on itself, and came back over the shoulder to the front again. I would solder these two wires together where they went over the shoulders for strength. This gave me the option of having two wires in front, or one wire and two wire ends in the front, to use in different designs. Soon, I decided to have two wires running up and over the shoulders and back front, giving me eight ends to play with. I wanted more strength, and more possibilities for design variations.

They were rigid and just laid on the shoulders, but the first ones could fall off too easily, so I came up with a little catch for the back—a little double-hook U-shaped wire that went between the two loops in the back. I used this idea for a long time—until around '79.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did that street fair go?

MS. HU: It told me that I did not want to do retail fairs. [Laughs.]

I had a few headpieces. I had done them when I was still in Bellingham, because the American Craft Museum [Museum of Arts & Design] had a headpiece show back then [*Face Coverings*, 1971]. Two of them had gotten into that show. I had them displayed on Styrofoam wig stands on my table along with my other jewelry.

I was sitting behind the table, and, of course, I was always working. So I would be weaving when nobody was there and I didn't have to answer questions. The headpieces were not something I thought I'd sell, but they drew people over. "Mildred, look at that! Can you imagine anyone ever wearing a thing like that?" But I just couldn't

take the questions. I just wasn't good with people. I'm sitting there weaving away, and someone will ask, "Is all this stuff made in this country?" I just couldn't deal with it. [Laughs.]

I sold a few things, not too many. But I didn't want to make a bunch of little things. I wanted to make the really wonderful things that stretched me. I was trying to make things to send to galleries to let other people answer the questions, or to send to exhibitions to try to build back my resume, because I wanted to teach and I had a two-year blank on the resume. It had to be built up before I could have any possibility of getting a teaching job.

MS. RIEDEL: And it also seems like an unusually broad spectrum, from the Akron street fair to the American Craft Museum exhibition. Was that normal back in those days that you would do such a range of exhibition spaces?

MS. HU: Well, yes, I guess. It's what presented itself.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there other galleries that you were exhibiting with at that point?

MS. HU: I was selling things at America House.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you work that? Did you send slides?

MS. HU: I must have. I can't remember. I was in the Young Americans show [*Young Americans 1969*], so they were aware of me. I was always entering competitions, every one I could find.

MS. RIEDEL: And you'd learned that from Brent?

MS. HU: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But that did not preclude street fairs at this point? You were looking for ways to sell the work?

MS. HU: I was looking for ways—you know, I'm trying to rebuild my life. I was trying to rebuild my life. What was I going to be? What was I going to do? I'd like to teach. Well, I might not get a job. I had been turned down a couple of times, so I better look at options.

I came back to the country in the fall of '73, which was too late to get a job that year. And in '74, it was the oil boycott. Jobs shut down. So I wasn't sure what I was going to do. My dad was happy to have me live with him for a while, because he really could use someone to clean the house and drive to the grocery store—because he was blind. He had gotten glaucoma when I was in seventh grade, and the operation was not a success

I was doing the choker series and they were getting bigger. I was sending them out to galleries myself. I had some pieces at Cranberry East, run by a Cranbrook graduate for Cranbrook alumni on Nantucket. At some point there was The Silver Element, also on Nantucket. Otherwise, I sold several pieces—to relatives, friends of my dad's, et cetera.

MS. RIEDEL: But America House, that's interesting. And you probably showed your work with them until they closed?

MS. HU: I can't remember when they closed. I do remember when I was in Taiwan, I sold earrings for $15, and I was thrilled because that allowed me to go out and buy another something weird in the bazaars. This is when I got my collection of Taiwan Aborigine jewelry.

Anyway, so I wanted to enter competitions. I was building the big *Form #1*; that took me for ages—

MS. RIEDEL: You were looking for teaching jobs, and you began to do some substitute teaching.

MS. HU: I got my first sabbatical replacement position in the fall of '75. I taught for Chunghi Choo in Iowa [University of Iowa, Iowa City]. I remember that year I had also entered the Ohio Designer/Craftsmen Beaux Arts show [*Beaux Arts Designer/Craftsmen '75*, Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, 1974; now Columbus Museum of Art] in Columbus, and won their best in show and purchase award.

So I had a little cash, and I used it to go to England. It was January 1976. Richard Thomas was taking a group of Cranbrook students to London, and he invited any former alums to go along. When I was planning to go, Brent told me about Electrum Gallery. So I armed myself with my slides and as much courage as I had, and I walked in and showed the director, Barbara Cartlidge, my slides. She said that she had been thinking of having a show of Americans and had a number of people in mind and asked if I could come back in the spring and bring all the work. So that's what I did.

I went twice in that year. I remember I showed some of my neckpieces—*#7,* the plaid one, for sure—and some of the chokers. Goldsmith Hall bought a choker and a bracelet from that show [*6 Contemporary American*

Jewelers]. It was an exciting adventure currying over the work. I even had Richard Mawdsley's *Feast Bracelet* in my suitcase.

MS. RIEDEL: And these were very elaborate curvilinear forms that were increasingly pattern focused, not representational?

MS. HU: Yes. The purchase one at the Beaux Arts Designer/Craftsmen show in Columbus was *Neckpiece #18*. It was like the phoenix, but just the wings, without the bird. I was getting less literal.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] And that must have been a fairly heady experience to have that exhibition.

MS. HU: Yes, it was [referring to the Columbus show]. But I did not go back to the opening, because I was in Iowa and I did not know I had won. I have missed out on so much by not going to openings. I didn't think I could afford to go back. Of course, I should have. I should have driven back. And the other mistake was not going to the opening of the *Silver in American Life* show, the Yale collection that opened at Carnegie in Pittsburgh in '78. I was just in Michigan, but I did not think I should take the time off from school to go. Duh. [They laugh.]

But I didn't. How did I know it was going to be shown in so many major museums all around the country and get in all those newspapers? The people I could have met. But, no, I stayed in Michigan.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: By this point, the work is becoming more and more an exploration of pattern, and that's what's really driving the development, is it not? And there is still color happening at this point too?

MS. HU: Yes, I was exploring pattern, but mostly form. The color was just coming in. The *Form #1* [1974] had that maroon wire and silver. *Form #2* [1976] was just silver; *Form #3* had some color changes in it, and *#4* [1977] has a lot of color. *Choker #35—48* [1977—79] were the most colorful ones.

MS. RIEDEL: And the imagery is transitioning. It's no longer representational, but there's definitely a reference to flowers and to underwater life—sea anemone, octopus, and—

MS. HU: Skates—when they swim, I call them flying. They sort of turn themselves inside out [*Choker #41*]. I love the sinuous line of the edge of their bodies when that's happening.

MS. RIEDEL: Then in the late '70s there's a transition, and you really come to that first Celtic torque.

MS. HU: Yes, in '78. I had been going to the blockbuster exhibitions touring the country—Thracian gold, Scythian gold, Irish gold—and I loved the gold torques the most. So at some point, I decided I was going to make my own torques. So from the chokers getting bigger and bigger and more and more curvilinear, I changed to making a textured or patterned line around the neck.

MS. RIEDEL: And so I think of the significant transitions as the one from that very curvilinear, flowing line, to the much more angular studies of pattern, and then from very elaborate pieces to very contained, very—

MS. HU: But there was some overlap. *Choker #48* was the last colorful one, but I think it was *#45* that was the first torque piece. I kept them all in the choker series—just numbering them as they came. I did a whole series in the late '70s—'79—'80. They are woven from one end to the other, or sometimes started in the middle and worked out to both ends. The first ones didn't have catches, but then I learned how to build the snap catches.

MS. RIEDEL: So one of the more significant inspirations was ethnic jewelry?

MS. HU: Well, ancient jewelry, torques.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, maybe "ethnic" is not the right word, but you've looked at Etruscan, Greek. Certainly international and historical jewelry had been an influence, yes?

MS. HU: Historical Western jewelry, yes, it has been a definite influence, especially Celtic.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think we can talk about your work without mentioning that your experiences traveling, especially those 15 countries in the early '70s, had a huge influence on how you began to think about space and pattern. I'm thinking about the interaction between negative and positive space.

MS. HU: Yes, I don't know where I got that, but it's really important for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it not the Islamic architecture that you talked about?

MS. HU: Well, I noticed it there, but I've come to believe that the world presents you with so much that you can't notice everything. You notice the things that you're interested in. Where does that interest come from? I think it comes earlier from somewhere, but I don't know where.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, certainly there were always, even in the representational work, but increasingly—I think especially of that piece with the wings [*Neckpiece #18*]—that are becoming more of an abstract shape rather than representational. There's a very strong examination of positive and negative space in it. So it seems that becomes more and more of a focus, maybe through your own experimentation.

MS. HU: I know it's very important to me. Consciously, I do know that. But where it came from and when it started, I'm not sure. I know I was taught it in my many design courses. I had Miami [University]'s design course in high school, and then I had it again when I was at Miami. [Laughs.] So it was drilled into me.

MS. RIEDEL: At what point did you start drawing down your own wire?

MS. HU: At first I bought it and used the size I bought. Then I bought some draw plates. I still draw wire down; I don't want to store in inventory all the different sizes. I buy three gauges, and I draw down anything I need in between. For a long time I used 29 gauge. I liked that because you couldn't buy it; you only buy it in even number gauges. So I thought it was fun to use something usually not available.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And what necessitated working with thinner wire? Was there something in particular you were trying to do that it needed to be thinner? Or were you just experimenting?

MS. HU: Well, you get more pattern possibilities per square inch. I started out with 26 gauge because that's the finest Hauser Miller sold in fine silver. I also used 22 gauge. So the first insects were just all 22- and 26-gauge fine silver. Two sizes, because I found that it's easier to work if I'm wrapping a thinner wire around a thicker one.

Soon I felt a four-gauge difference wasn't enough. So I went to 20-gauge sterling with the 26-gauge fine silver, and at some point, I can't remember when, to 28-gauge fine silver. That gave me the stiffness in the warp or for the core in wrapping, and I could really pull the weft or wrapping wire tight to pack it in. It was my desire to get precision and get it neat that drove that decision.

It was later, when I was doing one of the gold pieces [*Choker #78*] that I went to a 32-gauge weft, because I was doing a very tight graduation, and it would give too much a stair step if I was using bigger wire. I still use around 30- to 31-gauge weft. When I switched to using gold, my warp had dropped from 20 to 24 gauge, because I didn't want to pay for 20 gauge if I did not need it for strength. Everything got smaller, except for the 14 gauge. I still run 14 gauge through the middle just to have a strong line.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there a conscious decision to abandon color in favor of light and pattern?

MS. HU: Yes. I was getting more and more colors of magnet wire, but I knew that I wasn't using color like a painter. I was just blending it. I was letting it blend from a light green to a dark green, et cetera. I was more interested in the form and patterns and the line than I was in color. When I started doing the torques, I pretty much dropped the color. There's one colored torque [*Choker #56*], but just one.

MS. RIEDEL: So in 1980, there was again a drastic change of this flat collar format. You'd done a couple of them earlier, I think in '78, but it felt like a very drastic change.

MS. HU: The torques were of two types from the start—tubular and flat, as were the gold torques in ancient times.

In 1980, I moved out to Seattle from Michigan State [University, East Lansing], '77 to '80. We didn't talk about that, but after teaching in Iowa for the fall of 1975, I taught at Kansas State in Manhattan, Kansas, for Elliott Pujol, in the summer of 1976, and at the University of Wisconsin [Madison] for Eleanor Moty for the 1976—77 school year. Then, finally, I got my own job at Michigan State here, in the fall of 1977. I left there to come teach here at the University of Washington in Seattle in the fall of 1980.

I was still making the tubular and flat torques, but in about '81 or '82, friend Phil Baldwin, who is a blacksmith, wanted to trade bracelets. He makes wonderful mokume gane bracelets. My favorite choker at that point was [*Choker*] *#55* [1980], which the American Craft Museum owns. There is a curved flowing to the warp in that piece. So I took that idea and beefed up the warp to 10 gauge, because Phil is big and I didn't want my little delicate wires to be crushed. So his [*Bracelet #3*] was the first of the bracelet series. I had made two bracelets previously, so I named Phil's *#3*, but they were not really part of the series.

The bracelets were the first asymmetrical pieces, except some of the animals. I was looking at the bracelets on

my wrist near my hand, and the hand is asymmetrical. I could play with the line around the thumb and over the back of the hand and around the wrist; so there was an early series of flattish bracelets that were very flowing.

I also wanted to make tubular ones [starting with *Bracelet #6*] like the torques, wanting to get a tube bent around my wrist. But you can't bend a tube too far without collapsing it. So in order to get it around my wrist, I sawed it into three sections and positioned them into a triangle. Then I had to solder them back together, but the ends weren't really matching, not lining up exactly. So I slid a thick piece of sheet in between the ends so you couldn't tell they weren't matching.

I really liked that look, so I started a whole series of bracelets. They were more geometric—soft geometry I call it. The warp wire came in a coil, so it was slightly bent. I would cut it to length and leave it bent and weave a slightly curved tube, then saw that into sections, which gave a form that is a little softer against our rounded body parts. So it was roundish squares and roundish triangles.

MS. RIEDEL: I was going to say that was the first triangle form I really remember as a from, not as a pattern. Also that *Choker #59* in 1980 is the first one that has a very ribbon quality, and that seems like another significant change.

MS. HU: *Choker #55* was waving up and down, and *#59* just did a loop-the-loop. That is what I have come back to now.

MS. RIEDEL: Then 1985 was the first gold choker? How did that come about?

MS. HU: I had done one gold choker before 1985 [*Choker #66*]. I wanted to work in gold, but it was small and timid, and I later made it into another piece [*Choker #72*]. I was afraid of the cost.

Nineteen eighty-five was when I really made the switch. In those days I was showing at Byzantium Gallery in New York City. Stephen Adler, the director, had the idea of talking the Metropolitan Opera Guild into displaying a group of pieces that would be made specifically in honor of their 50th anniversary. He assigned each of us in the gallery a diva and her role. I was assigned Elisabeth Rethberg in *Aida*. So I was trying to research Egyptian broad collars and wondering how I could do that with my wire.

I should preface this by saying that about a year earlier I had a solo show at The Hand and the Spirit Gallery down in Scottsdale, Arizona. I had run short of time to get enough pieces finished, so I had gone back to making some earrings—something I had not made in quite a while. I wove small pieces and framed them off to make little woven pieces for the ears. I had woven two X-shaped pieces, and as I was sanding them down on the edges to solder on the frames, they got pushed together on my bench, and I really liked the diamond negative that was formed between them as they were edge to edge.

I had the idea that if I were to weave about 20 of these Xs and solder them side by side in a row, I could make a pretty nice geometric torque. However, I'd have to really weave them just the right size, because I couldn't put that sheet piece in between and still get my diamond negative. This was a challenge that I was not sure I could meet, so the idea just sat on my bench for a year.

Then Adler sent me a picture of Elisabeth Rethberg wearing her stage jewelry, and there she was, wearing a collar made from glass tube beads strung together like mummy beads—with all those diamond negatives. I felt that here was my answer. The challenge was worth taking on if I did it in gold. I first made two sections of four Xs each in silver to see if I could actually do it. And then I used them to figure out how much gold I would need to order. I made that piece in the fall of 1985. I had gotten an NEA fellowship, so I had taken the year 1985—86 off of school. So I was able to just work. It took me about four months to do the piece.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that the first piece that was also so specifically fitted to the body?

MS. HU: All of the chokers are rigid and curved to fit over the shoulders.

MS. RIEDEL: You have talked repeatedly about the importance of the functionality of jewelry. Some of the more experimental work is difficult to wear. Your work can be extremely large and extremely dramatic, but there still is a strong functionality to it.

MS. HU: I don't know how many of our contemporary jewelers make brooches and rings and earrings and bracelets and necklaces. A lot of people specialize. But I'm making jewelry. Mine is a little more conservative, in that it's closer to fine jewelry, because it's gold and it's worn in the conservative normal places. I know that as I get older, I'm really liking fine jewelry more. I mean, I'm buying all the books on Art Deco, for instance. It's so beautiful. I look at jewelry more than I look at periods of painting, whether historical or ethnic.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Let's talk briefly about the exhibitions up to this point, because you were in a

lot of extraordinary exhibitions really very early on. We mentioned the *Silver in American Life* at Yale University. You were in quite a number of traveling exhibitions, the *Modern American Jewelry Exhibition* in Tokyo [1978], and then there was another exhibition at Vatican City, *American Crafts* [1978].

MS. HU: Well, in 1976, there were a lot of shows because of the Bicentennial, and I was entering everything I was eligible for. And early on in the '70s, I believe, a lot of them were contemporary American jewelry shows. They were surveys; they wanted to show what was going on. I fell into a category, the wire category, and so I got into a lot of them. I used to tell my students: "Enter shows; they won't remember your name the first couple of times, but if you are persistent, finally they'll start remembering you, and then they'll start inviting you to shows." That seems to be what happened to me. I can't remember who put together the Vatican show, but I was included.

MS. RIEDEL: And so that's interesting because at the beginning, the shows were huge blockbuster shows. It seems a pretty extraordinary beginning to one's career to be participating in those sorts of exhibitions.

MS. HU: Well, yes, I was really lucky to get into *Young Americans* '*69*. Well, of course that is for the beginning of your career, I guess, but that one toured the country. And then I got into the early SNAG shows that also toured the country [*Goldsmith* '*70* and *Goldsmith* '*74*]. I was lucky.

MS. RIEDEL: Then there was *Good as Gold* in '81 at the Renwick, and then in the mid-'80s, there was *Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical* [American Craft Museum, 1986]. That was significant, definitely. And then there was also at the V&A, *Masterworks of Contemporary American Jewelry*. That was in '85, right? And *Eloquent Objects* [Philbrook Museum, Tulsa, OK, 1987—90.]

MS. HU: There was a SNAG show [1979—81], and there was an ACC show [*Craft Today USA*, 1989—93] that traveled extensively in Europe. They were shown everywhere, even Moscow. So, yes, I was lucky. Just one piece amongst lots and lots, but it was pretty neat.

MS. RIEDEL: So from '85 and then on through the '90s was just an incredible ongoing exploration of the potential of patterning and the intricacies of pattern and of form. Can you elaborate a little bit about that, the development of the work over that time? How the patterning and the form evolved?

MS. HU: Okay, from the switch to gold, when I did that first segmented piece where I soldered little X pieces together—I had done one gold necklace a few years before, but I really liked what was happening with this X piece, the patterns, the negatives that were formed. So I started a series. I was worried about how much gold it was going to take, because that first one was 10 ounces. I did that one in the fall, and then the next winter, I did some rings because I didn't have much gold left. I wove a short tube and cut it up into four rings. So those are the first four gold rings [*Ring #3—6*].

Then I went traveling in the spring and summer to New Zealand, Australia, New Guinea, China, and Tibet, and when I got back late summer, I made a bracelet, the bracelet with lapis in it [*Bracelet #37*]. I ordered some gold and did a bracelet that was not unlike my silver ones, but a little thinner. Instead of having a hammered sheet piece for that fluted piece in between the woven sections, I had a piece of lapis cut by a friend into that shape.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's the first you'd really used a stone in your work; is that correct?

M. HU: I had set some stones in the neckpieces and early chokers [*Neckpiece #9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 24, 25* had pearls, stones, or beads, as did *Choker #11, 15, 16, 17, 20, 31, 33, 36, 37*], but that was the first for a while.

MS. RIEDEL: But it was an introduction of color, too, which was different.

MS. HU: Except for all the magnet wire.

MS. RIEDEL: When I think about your work, the later work is exclusively gold. The only color or stone I ever associate with your work now is lapis.

MS. HU: Yes, I've just used it occasionally [*Bracelet #37, 38, Choker #82,* and *Earrings #156, 157, 158*]. I think that color combination is gorgeous.

Anyway, so that next fall the first piece sold [*Choker #70*], and it gave me an answer to the question of if it was worth working in gold: Yes, it will be, because there will be an audience—they will sell. I couldn't afford to make them and put them in a closet, not at $4,000 each for just the material.

So I ordered more gold and did another choker [*#71*]. In *Choker #73*, I was exploring how precisely I could weave the pieces and solder them together. It is all about the negatives that are graduating circles as they go around—I call it my "string of beads" necklace. My challenge was, could I get them to be circular? If I sanded those pieces down too far before soldering them together, they won't make a circle anymore. So I have to weave them a little oversized and sand them down just right. Then, are they perfectly graduated? It was all about the

empty spaces. And there have been others that were just to test out process, to see whether I could do the challenge I gave myself.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems that once you started working with gold, you never went back.

MS. HU: No, except for some pieces I gave away.

MS. RIEDEL: And what about the gold was so compelling?

MS. HU: I love the color. A number of people had been trying to get me to switch to gold—Brent and John Paul—because, well, after all, I was making torques based on the old gold ones. It just seemed like mine should be in gold. I hadn't for so long because I was afraid of the cost. So when I finally made that switch, I found that it was physically easier to work in gold. It certainly didn't take any more time to weave, and I could sell the piece for a lot more. So that was nice. It was more satisfying because now it was what it should be.

And I was always exhibiting. Pieces would come back and be tarnished and need to be cleaned up to be sent out again. Gold doesn't change; it's just fine, perfect, no tarnishing. And I like the whole idea that it's going to last unless it's melted down—it's not going to corrode away. I am working with high karat. I'm not doing granulation, but it makes people think of granulation because of all the little sparkle and all the fine detail. So what I'm doing is really referencing those wonderful ancient pieces that people see in the museums, without actually copying them. It pulls on the same feeling of awe that one has for all that great Etruscan work.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you ever do any longer neckpieces in gold? I can't think of any.

MS. HU: There is one [*Choker #86*] that was sold directly to someone, so it's only been published once.

MS. RIEDEL: And did the gold then enable you technically to do all sorts of things that the silver did not?

MS. HU: A little bit. The copper in it doesn't oxidize as much, so that the flux stays active longer. I heat it up and put a little ball of solder in place, heat it up again, putting another ball of solder in place, heating, solder, heating, solder, and then finally, heating it up so all of the solder flows all at once. I don't think I could do that with silver because the flux would get exhausted and stop working. So my soldering process has been developed from working with gold. But I use the same flux I used with silver. I use the same torch I used for silver.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems the brooches have come about more recently.

MS. HU: I had a show at Facèré [Jewelry Art Gallery; *Exuberance*] in 2002. That's where I did my first brooches.

MS. RIEDEL: And what inspired the brooches?

MS. HU: I didn't do brooches for a long time. And I made a lot of rude comments about brooches. [They laugh.]

I thought that they didn't deal with the body. They just dealt with a piece of cloth. And all my colleagues who couldn't deal with 3-D would just do a brooch because it was a picture. However, I was doing earrings, and I would be deciding how I wanted to have them when I'd photograph them.

MS. RIEDEL: But never too many earrings, right? A few dozen—nowhere near the number of neckpiece you've done?

MS. HU: Oh, I'm up to about earring number 200. Anyway, when I was photographing them, I would be wondering if I should put them side by side so they made a nice symmetrical shape, or some other way, and sometimes they would make an interesting pattern and I thought to myself, I could do that for a brooch. I was getting ready for another show and needed more work in a limited amount of time. With earrings I have to make two things, but with a brooch, only one—[laughs]—so maybe I should try some brooches. I tried it and it was fun.

MS: RIEDEL: What's the difference? I mean other than the obvious, what about them has compelled you to keep making them?

MS. HU: Well, what I am dong now, as opposed to earlier, is that I don't draw my designs out anymore. The later neckpieces, *#19 to #26,* and the first series in '75 of flatter chokers were totally drawn out before making them. I was focusing on line—a dull pencil point was a 20-gauge line. I could know how many would fill an inch; I knew exactly where I was going. Now, I weave a section of material. Then I decide what it is going to be. How much do I use—how long a piece should I cut off to use? Then I need to solder a heavier wire edge to the cut ends so that it can't unravel, then I twist it, or crunch or sort of crumple it. Then I look at it and decide that if I elongate the heavier edge wires, I can bring lines around and play them off of the twined form. I often take a piece of brass wire and quickly bend it around the woven gold form to make a model instead of drawing things out as before.

So I am weaving it first flat, with no idea where it's going to go. Then I crunch it. I get it all sort of flowing as a plane. And then I'm taking a wire and making it almost like all of this is really soft and in water, and if the currents are making the plane react this way, they probably would have pulled that wire into that little crevice as well. And then it swells out. I'm thinking of all the lines and forms that I see in tide pools when you get the currents back and forth, that kind of calligraphy.

MS. RIEDEL: So there's a little reference to some of the earlier work too.

MS. HU: Yes, there really is.

MS. RIEDEL: It's all the same sensibility, those curvilinear forms. It's interesting.

MS. HU: I'm coming back to that. I'm comfortable with that. And so that was the title of my show at the Susan Cummins Gallery—*Curves Revisited* [2000]. And then at Facèré two years later was *Exuberance,* because I felt so free; I didn't know what a piece was going to be. It was a little edgy because I had spent a lot of time and money weaving this piece, committing X number of dollars to this piece of gold. And then crunch-crunch-crunch and it could hit the scrap pile. And some have. So it was sort of a daring kind of thing

MS. RIEDEL: And that also is a significant change for you to take that risk, be willing to take that risk.

MS. HU: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Then the most recent pieces—I'm thinking of those large gold collars, the very large ones—seem like a complete change in scale.

MS. HU: Okay. So, yes they are much bigger. You asked me before if I had ever done commissions. I said there was one; I'll tell you about it.

I had a call from a man in New York. I did not know him, but he had seen my work at the Museum [of Arts & Design]. His fourth child was going to get married and he wanted to get a very special piece for his wife. I thought, Oh, that's nice. How many divorces are there these days? But now they've lived their whole life together and they have four kids.

So we talked, and he wanted a wonderful piece. He thought of a necklace. I asked, "Okay, what is your lifestyle like? Do you go to the opera a lot?" Well, no, he wants her to be able to wear it every day. And I said, "Well, my necklaces really aren't that. So what about a bracelet?" So we settled on a bracelet. A little while later I said to him, "Okay, now tell me if I'm getting too personal here, but how long after you got married did you have your kids? How far apart were they?" He said not too long after they were married they had their first one, then a couple of years later they had their second, and then they had twins.

So I started making a broad cuff. I had all the regular 24-gauge warp wires, but there were also two of my 14-gauge wires running through along with them. They represented the two of them, husband and wife, in the milieu of their household. And then up sprung another thicker wire that started moving around, like a kid running around. And a little while later [as I wove the cuff from one end to the other], a second thick wire comes up from the plane, and then two come up together. So all four wires represent the kids running around. Then I asked him, "Now that your fourth child is getting married, where do they all live? Did they move far away from home?" He said no: one lives upstairs in the same building, one around the corner. So I had all four wires join back in a line with the two parents at the other end of the cuff as it circled around. So within the space of the wrist is the—

MS. RIEDEL: —family story.

MS. HU: Yes. It was a surprise for his wife. I told him the story over the phone and he asked me to write it down. In the meantime, he had decided that he was going to get bracelets for the three daughters and daughter-in-law too. These were going to be more simple bangles to go along with the cuff. He wanted to present them all at the rehearsal dinner before the wedding, so I had a deadline. I sent them all off with the story.

He gave his family the bracelets and read the story, and I heard that it was an emotional time. I later heard from the wife and several of the daughters. I loved that commission because it did what I want my jewelry to do—really become involved with a family.

So then that's where the necklace that's in Boston came from. I really like the look of the wide band with the heavier warps running through it and the smaller lines shooting off curving around over it. This one has no narrative, but the idea came from this bracelet.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's the only piece—this bracelet is the only piece I can think of in your work, before and following, that has a quality of narrative.

MS. HU: Well, except for possibly the flag brooches. You may not have seen those. Donna Schneier asked me to send some pieces to the American Craft Museum sale that they had in the fall. It was 2002, a year after 9/ll, and in New York, so I did an American flag. It's got all 50 stars and 13 stripes.

MS. RIEDEL: In Gold?

MS. HU: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I haven't seen this.

MS. HU: She ended up buying it and wore it. A friend saw it and wanted to buy it from her, and she sold it after the friend pestered her enough. So then she asked me to make her another, along with one for another friend who wanted one. I do not redo designs, but I thought that since I did not design the flag, it would be okay in this case. So I did another one for Donna—that furls differently as if in the wind—and I did a Betsy Ross flag for the other friend who is a flag collector. [They laugh.] So those three flags are the first representational work since the early insects and animals and phoenix neckpieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there any—or is there any interest or inspiration in pursuing that narrative more directly? Or does it just come up as it comes up?

MS. HU: If it comes up, I'm interested. Now I'm just interested in form again, I think, although I don't know what I'm going to do now. I've been away from it for a year, right?

I did two other big chokers [*#89* and *#90*] coming from that big one [Mobilia Gallery] in Boston. Other people saw it and wanted ones similar.

MS. RIEDEL: There's an image I saw of you wearing three very large neck rings.

MS. HU: Oh, that was the series I did for Susan's show. The big tube that I sliced up. I just put on the rings to show how big they were before bending or crushing them down into chokers.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I thought, Boy, that is a completely different look.

MS. HU: No. But, yes, now I've done two other big gold necklaces, after that one that's in Boston. And the second one has to be sent off before Friday to Mobilia. But I don't know that I'm going to be doing these large pieces now, with gold at $1,000 an ounce.

That last piece was 8.5 ounces of gold. So I don't know that I should be working this heavy with it, or want to work this heavy again. I just don't know. I still do love beads; I bought a lot of little, teeny, teeny pearls, and I'm trying to figure out how to use those with my fine wires. So I don't know where my work is going to go. Right now, I'm going back and redoing some of the old ideas.

MS. RIEDEL: Like which ones?

MS. HU: Twining a thing, twisting it, getting the lines to move.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, those wonderful ribbony pieces.

MS. HU: Yes, and seeing where that leads me. But in the back of my mind, I'm also thinking about whether I want to incorporate some of these little stones that I've been getting, little beads—tiny, like two millimeters. The pearls are .8 millimeter. They're a little crazy.

MS. RIEDEL: That would be completely new.

MS. HU: For me, yes. So we'll see. Maybe. I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: I've been thinking, too, how those ribboned pieces seemed like such a deviation from any of the work before. But in many ways, they seem—now when I think about it—an evolution of those early, early curvilinear pieces, but going more abstract and more form-based, not at all representational. But they're just exquisite. How many of those did you do?

MS. HU: Well, that whole idea came after I took some time out from making in the '90s and did all the reading on body adornment. Then when I got back to working, I finished up a piece that had been on my bench, all those tubes and the lapis beads [*Choker #82*]. Well, that's done. Now, what am I going to do? And I thought, I've just spent years looking at the finest work that's in every museum in the world. Surely I have plenty of things that I can draw from. But no. So I think, Well, I've done a lot of rings over the years by weaving a tube and cutting it up, so what if I weave a tube big enough for a bangle bracelet and start slicing?

So I did, and took a couple of slices and made two bangles [*Bracelet #52* and *#53*]. I thought, Okay, well, that's not an interesting form. Nice patterns on the surface, but—I had a bit left. I wove a middle-sized tube and cut that into three segments of arcs, then cut the last of the bracelet tube and inset the smaller arcs as concave pieces between the three sections of convex bracelet [*Bracelet #54*]. I thought, Okay, that's a little more interesting, breaking into that circle and getting a nicer silhouette. I had a little of this middle-sized tube left over. It was big enough for a napkin ring, but I really didn't need a gold napkin ring. So it sat for a while.

And one day—I don't know why I thought of doing it—I slid it on the ring mandrel and mashed it with the mallet until it fit my finger. Just crunched it all down—and I loved doing that! Ooh, that was nice. Cathartic. [They laugh.]

So I thought, Okay—[laughs]—if I weave a tube too big for a bracelet and take a slice off and crunch—so I wove it. It was about eight inches long and six inches or so in diameter. I committed a lot of gold to it. But that was in the days when gold was $275 an ounce. I took off a slice. I saw through the tube and then have to solder the edge frames on before I do any moving or everything will fall apart—

MS. RIEDEL: Now let me be clear. We're talking about soldering how many little layers?

MS. HU: Well, every warp end. You have to make sure they're all attached. I check that with a 10-power loupe, because if they're not attached, they're going to pull away from the edge, the frame, as the piece is being stressed and bent. The bracelets have maybe 500 soldered joints, the rings about 100—two for each warp—each end of the warp wire.

So I took the first slice off, but I was too timid, so I just sort of bent it a little with my fingers. It looks like a puzzle piece [*Bracelet #55*]. I took off another slice, and I squashed it down sort of flat but so the two sides passed each other, and then pulled them until it left little loops. I did that again at 90 degrees until I had four loops, and it got a little more sculptural [*Bracelet #57*]. I got braver and a little braver with each one until I had one slice left. I said to myself, Here I am; I've run out of my tube and nothing looks as squashed and spontaneous as my ring that I really like. So that last one I really started squashing, gently, so that it got more crunched looking. And of course, that was my favorite one [*Bracelet #60*].

So then I said, Okay, now it's time for necklaces. I wove a tube that was a foot in diameter that fits right over my head, and I cut the slices off, that you saw a picture of me wearing, and made a short series of chokers [*#83—86*]. It was fun.

MS. RIEDEL: They're so beautiful, and there was just such a fluid, loose quality to them. [They laugh.] All those solder points—it's mind-boggling.

MS. HU: Those are all sold now.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm not surprised. Let's take a break.

[END OF CD 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Mary Lee Hu at the artist's home and studio in Seattle, Washington, on March 18, 2009. This is disc number three.

We're going to go back to your exhibition at the Merrin Gallery [*Mary Lee Hu: Goldsmith*]—1989?

MS. HU: Yes, it was in '89. I forget when we planned it. But I had been going to New York fairly frequently as an ACC board member from '80 to '84. And then I would go to New York off and on a few times after that, going back to some of their ACC functions. As a board member, I had met and gotten to know Jack Lenor Larsen. I think it was Jack who introduced me to Ed Merrin, and I was pretty impressed with the Merrin Gallery because they had some of the real stuff—actual Greek and Pre-Columbian gold pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Do you remember anything in particular that struck you?

MS. HU: Well, I remember that he had some life-sized figurative bronzes. And I just assumed they were genuine. He had the real estate, you know, right there on Fifth Avenue across from Tiffany's. And when they finally set my show up, you had to walk through a room with some beautiful geometric-style Greek bracelets to get into my room. So I thought, That's a nice lead-in.

[They Laugh.]

But how I met him—I think it was Jack who introduced us. Merrin was saying, "Well, I don't usually handle living artists; they're just so much trouble. [Laughs.] But you live way out in Seattle." And I said I would be good. So he told some stories about working with temperamental artists. But he seemed like a laid-back fellow. He seemed

pretty nice. He said that every once in a while he liked to show contemporary work. His father was still living. Ed was probably in his 60s then, and his father still had his jewelry company a couple of floors higher in the building.

Ed said that his dad had always wanted him to go into the jewelry business. So as a young man he had gotten married and had gone to Mexico or somewhere in Latin America for his honeymoon and had bought some terra cotta ceramic pots. Later when he was setting up a jewelry window display in his dad's store, he used some of these pots to help display the jewelry, and people came in asking if they could buy the pots. He thought that he was really more interested in these old pieces, so that is how he got into selling antiquities.

At first he said to me, "Why don't you think about working for Tiffany's?" and he gestured out the window across the street. And I said, "Tiffany's, hasn't that just been bought by Avon?" And he said, "Well, okay, yeah." He was just checking. And I said, "I don't think so." We scheduled a show, I went home and worked really hard for it, and it was just beautifully set up.

MS. RIEDEL: And he really did not show very many contemporary artists at all?

MS. HU: No, very few. But he sold quite well out of it.

[Audio break.]

They set it up absolutely beautifully. I went for the opening and had a wonderful time and was really impressed with myself.

MS. RIEDEL: What about collectors, Mary? Did you meet them at all?

MS. HU: No, I didn't meet his collectors.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, never met them at all, because it would be interesting to know how that group would respond to your work.

MS. HU: Yes. I thought that the show announcement card that he made was so strange. He took four of my gold bracelets and piled them on top of each other and took one picture. I thought, Why on earth is he doing that? It was beautifully photographed, absolutely incredible. I don't know how big a format this camera was. A friend of his did the photography. And then it was only later that I thought, Of course, a hoard. That's how they find the old stuff. I can't remember if I actually said it to him, but I think I did. If he would ever say, "Is that all you have?" I'd say "Come on, I don't just dig it up; I have to make the stuff." [They laugh.]

But I was so impressed. He was very gracious, and after the opening, he took me to his country house outside the city where he and his wife, Vivian, were relaxed and informal. His wife showed me around the garden, trooping around in her big gardening boots, and rowed me around the lake in their little boat. And I thought, Gosh, here's this wealthy person that has a car and a driver and house staff, and when he gets home, he kicks back and he's just really pretty nice.

But yes, I've always been afraid to contact them much because I didn't want to be that difficult living artist. [They laugh.]

But that show, I thought, was one of the highlights of my career because it was right there across from Tiffany's, and you had to go through the Greek jewelry to get to mine. Pretty cool.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it just really literally frames your work in a completely different context from, say, a SOFA [Sculpture Objects & Functional Art] exhibition or a contemporary craft gallery.

MS. HU: And that really is what I would like. I've got an ego like everyone. That place knew where I wanted to be—timeless, forever considered wonderful and valuable and—it was great.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's sort of not too different from describing when you were a child and seeing the John Paul Millers in the contemporary museum. Can you think of other venues that would be along those lines, where you would like to see your work?

MS. HU: I haven't actually seen it yet, but I got a charge out of hearing that a piece of mine was in the Met now [*Choker #70*—they also have *Choker #35*]. The Met is a really huge museum. It's got all kinds of the ancient work—[laughs]—and I've got a piece in there now. So that is pretty cool.

MS. RIEDEL: Is it part of that exhibition of the 50 contemporary works?

MS. HU: I don't know. I just have heard that it was on exhibition. Some of my friends and former students said

that they saw it. Donna Schneier donated it two years—no, a year and a half—ago. They accepted it. And then sometime this last year it was on exhibition. But I don't know what exhibition it was.

MS. RIEDEL: And which piece was that?

MS. HU: The *Aida* piece [*Choker #70*]. It's back in New York, right where it should be. That was the perfect piece to go there.

And Boston—the Daphne Farago Collection. Daphne has been very good to me over the years, although I never met her until I was introduced to her at the opening in Boston. She always dealt through galleries, but she bought quite a few pieces. I did not know early on that she was getting them; I only found out later that she was the one who had bought them. But then she donated so many to the Boston Museum—I think six or seven pieces went there. She bought good pieces—the one with the lapis beads [*Choker #82*] and the three flat bracelets [*Bracelet #43—45*]. She bought all three, and so they are all together there in Boston. And the big choker that has been well pictured [*Choker #88*]—that one that came directly from ideas in the bracelet commission—the one that flows.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, the ribbony one?

MS. HU: Yes, and then a colored one [*Choker #48*]

MS. RIEDEL: So a nice range.

MS. HU: Yes, and it was really pretty heady when I went to the opening [*Jewelry By Artists: The Daphne Farago Collection*, 2007]. I finally learned my lesson—you go to the openings, Mary. [Laughs.] I went because they said that they were using a piece of mine on the cover of the brochure, so I thought, Oh, I think this is an opening I am going to. The brochure is just beautiful, with *Choker #88* on the cover. The room that the show was in had two doors. You walk into one, and on a panel facing you was an Art Smith piece. If you walked in the other door, you see my work. So that experience was pretty good too.

MS. RIEDEL: Certainly one of the other major exhibitions besides Merrin was your retrospective at the National Ornamental Metal Museum in 1993 [*Mary Lee Hu: Master Metalsmith*, 1994]. And that was a retrospective exhibition?

MS. HU: Yes, so I had to borrow back work.

MS. RIEDEL: And did they handle all of that? Did they arrange all of that? You didn't have to do any of it, did you?

MS. HU: No, they did it all. I chose which pieces; they arranged the loans and mounted the exhibition. I had had a mini retrospective at the Seattle Art Museum just the year before [*Documents Northwest: 6 Northwest Jewelers*, 1993]. I remember Vicki Halper, the curator at the museum, came over to my studio and went through all of my work with me, all of the slides on my light table, and she made the decision as to which ones to borrow for that show. So when the Ornamental Metal Museum one came the next year, it may have been in my mind which pieces were highlights. I also had my favorites—ones I always pictured when giving slide shows of my work. I sent the museum the owners' contacts and they contacted them.

MS. RIEDEL: And was there a catalogue for that exhibition?

MS. HU: No, they didn't have money for catalogues, and I didn't. There was an announcement card.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] How long was it up for?

MS. HU: About six weeks. They always have one in the fall. The Master Metalsmith exhibition goes along with Repair Days. The master metalsmith is there for the weekend to talk to the students who come from schools all over to help repair metal things that are brought in by people all over Memphis. The master helps repair too; it is a fun event.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think we've done a fairly good job with the major exhibitions. And I'd like to discuss travel, because I think as we start to discuss that, it's going to lead back in through the work, and probably through the exhibitions too.

The travel certainly has been a big part of your life, and it's had a huge impact, I think, on your work and certainly on your teaching, on your research. We were laughing when we initially started to talk about how we were going to discuss your career because you have at least three separate careers—as a maker, as a teacher, and then really as a researcher and scholar and jewelry historian. The information that you have gathered about body adornment over the ages and across the world is extraordinary. And it has impacted your work and certainly affected your teaching in a huge way.

MS. HU: Yes, it has really affected the teaching.

MS. RIEDEL: When did you start teaching the class on body adornment?

MS. HU: Mid-'90s, maybe 1996. I taught it every other year, a one-quarter, 10-week course in 20 lectures.

MS. RIEDEL: And just to be clear, you came to the University of Washington in what year?

MS. HU: In 1980, after having taught three years at Michigan State University, in East Lansing, Michigan.

MS. RIEDEL: You described how you began researching body adornment when we talked briefly on the phone. Maybe you can describe that too.

MS. HU: Yes, I had always had a few books on the history of jewelry. Major ones—*The Story of Jewelry, The History of Jewelry, Jewelry Through the Ages*—that kind of book. And I would look at the pictures and read the captions, but had not read the texts. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Why? Why would you not read the text?

MS. HU: Well, I used to joke and say, "I'm an artist. I look at pictures." [They laugh.] I may have glanced through bits of them, but not seriously read them cover to cover. And for whatever reason, I can't remember now why, but I started reading in the early '90s. I got really interested. I've always thought that people get more interested in their history as they get older. So rather than being a product of the '90s, I think this interest was a product of my 50s.

I've always thought of us—my fellow metalsmiths—as a family, who studied from whom as a family tree, and all my contemporaries as my—I would almost say siblings or cousins. So, where did we all come from? What did studio metals come out of? I just wanted to know more about that, and started reading. I went to art school, and so I don't feel that educated in history. In my old age I made the discovery that history depends upon who writes it. It is not just one story. It was fascinating to me to read.

The first two books I read were by British authors and they showed everything in the British Museum and the V&A, and so those two books were pretty much the same story. But then the third one was translated from the Italian. That was a little different story and they had different pictures, but in all three there was little on the Dark Ages. Then I read a book translated from the German. That chapter on the Migration Period was very involved and very long, because those were Germanic tribes and a lot happened as far as the Germans were concerned. And I loved the work! The garnet inlay was beautiful!

So I started reading more and more and discovered how little I know about history, because I hadn't taken much history in college. I had gone to Cranbrook, where I had a lot of studio work and no academics. The books would make assumptions—like I knew who Maximillian was and what century and what country. So I had to stop and get books that gave me a little bit more of that. And then when I read about Nordic jewelry, I needed to know more about the Norse religion and history—more on the Vikings and so on.

So I found myself going to the library and taking out armloads full of books. As a faculty member, I could do that, and they were not due until the end of the school year. That was great. I had stacks of books in my living room, and they started stacking up in categories, as I love to categorize things. I would read every morning from after I got up with my coffee or tea until whenever I had to get going, whether it was to school or whether it was to the studio on a weekend. So I would, in the quiet of the morning time, before email, read and take notes.

I felt guilty because I wanted to read more than I wanted to make jewelry. I didn't make jewelry for a few years, so of course, I felt guilty. Then I told myself, Well, reading books is what professors do, so maybe if I promise to teach a course on all this, then that would be an excuse for doing all this reading. So that is sort of how it all came about. And all those stacks of books became the 20 lectures. I taught it every other year for about 10 years.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's jump back and talk about the initial trip in 1973, and also while you were in Taiwan. Did you see any jewelry when you were in Taiwan in 1973?

MS. HU: Okay. I met my husband in Carbondale, and we got married, moved to Bellingham, Washington, where he taught at Western Washington State College. After two years, he got a visiting professorship at the National Taiwan University in Taipei. We went over there in the spring of 1971 for a year.

After he passed away at the end of that year, I stayed for another year with my mother-in-law. The first year I was learning to play a musical instrument, the *guqin*, which is like the Japanese koto, the long stringed instrument. I was also learning how to cook and how to speak, haltingly. So then the second year, I made friends with my mother-in-law's maid and learned a lot more Chinese, because I had to learn it in order to speak with

her. I was interested in the local customs, so Shu Shang, the maid, would take me out to temples, to some of the parks, back to her home village, and I would learn more and more about local Chinese customs that way. I would also haunt the local antique shops.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you looking at jewelry in particular, or everything across the broader styles as well?

MS. HU: Well, everything. I'd go to temples and see all the carved wood and carved stone and all the fancy colored-glass dragons on the roof—and the tile work. I was trying to absorb as much as I could of the culture. At the antique shops I got some Chinese jewelry—hairpins, filigree, lightweight, with a lot of movement in them. But I was also seeing some stronger Pacific-looking things with shells and beads. Those were the Taiwan Aborigine pieces. So I was buying some of these as well.

Well, after a year, two years total in Taiwan, but a year living with my mother-in-law, my dad came over. The two of us came back to the U.S. together. I had the return ticket, as we had gotten round-trip tickets as part of my husband's appointment. So I had the other half, and I asked the travel agent if I had to use it to fly back across the Pacific or whether I could go the rest of the way around the world, because China is, as I was always told as a kid, halfway around the world from the U.S. They said yes, I could. But I was given a maximum zigzag. I could not go as far south as I wanted, to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, but I could go as far south as Bali. So within that zigzag, we took three months and visited 15 countries to come back.

MS. RIEDEL: And where did you go?

MS. HU: First to Hong Kong, then down to Singapore, Bali, and Kuching, Sarawak, Borneo. Then to Kuala Lumpur, up to Calcutta, to Kathmandu in Nepal, back to India to Agra and New Delhi, then up to Lahore, over to Peshawar and up the Swat Valley in Pakistan, through the Kyber Pass and Jalalabad to Kabul, Afghanistan, over to Tehran and Isfahan, to Istanbul and the Bosphorous to Athens and some of the Greek islands, to Rome, Florence, and Venice, Madrid and Toledo, then down to Casablanca and Marrakesh in Morocco and finally Lisbon, before flying back to New York and Cleveland.

MS. RIEDEL: And you did all of that in three months?

MS. HU: Three months and just the two of us. I had an open ticket, and we would just land and find a hotel and hire a car and driver or maybe just a rickshaw or just walk.

MS. RIEDEL: What inspired this? Had you been interested in doing that before?

MS. HU: I don't remember exactly; I just wanted to travel.

MS. RIEDEL: Seems pretty drastic.

MS. HU: The only way I could plan for it was the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. It was the only thing I could find written in English at the nearby library. So I just looked up cities and thought, Well, this has got some interesting things in it. So let's go there. I got out a map and planned my route from one city to the next. It had to be someplace not too far off because of that zigzag.

Because my father would not experiment with food, we had to find places with American-type food. We did not stay at fancy hotels; we stayed at the cheapest hotel I could find that would have something that he could eat. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the criteria for choices? Was it museums or architecture? How did you choose the countries and the places you would visit?

MS. HU: Pretty much major monuments. Agra, of course, for the Taj Mahal, then major cities or places that sounded exotic. I wanted to go through the Kyber Pass. I had heard of that. So that is why we flew to Peshawar and drove up through the Pass to Kabul. We sort of—[laughs]—went from capital to capital, jumping across. I am curious now that I did not choose to go further up into Europe. I didn't get to Germany and the Netherlands—maybe it was also because of that zigzag. There were places we wanted to go to that were closed, like Burma and Bhutan.

MS. RIEDEL: This is 1973?

MS. HU: The summer of 1973—about mid-June to mid-September.

MS. RIEDEL: That was pretty adventurous for back then. Those were not common places for one to be traveling.

MS. HU: I don't know. We had no problem with English until we hit Europe. They all knew English in Asia. And I didn't get food poisoning until Europe either—[laughs]. So it was a great trip. I had to learn about women in

Muslim countries covering up. It was a little rude that nobody had told me. I had a sleeveless dress with a short skirt. So, oops, into slacks I went.

But, yes, it was wonderful. I was looking at architecture; I was looking at people. I was taking pictures of architecture, because I couldn't stick a camera in a person's face. My dad could, but he was so blind that he could tell a person was there, but he could not see that they were scowling at him, and he'd just happily snap pictures that were mostly out of focus. [They laugh.]

Every once in a while he'd get a good one. He loved the trip with me because he hated organized tours, but he couldn't travel by himself because he couldn't hear the train or plane announcements. But once he was in a city and he knew where the hotel was, he could walk all around the city.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, Mary, what were you looking at?

MS: HU: I'd go to every museum. In these places, it's the museum of their local culture. So I would see the clothing styles and the jewelry of the local areas. I was also looking at architecture. I thought it was fascinating the way we all have certain problems to solve. You've got to sweep the floor, so you make your broom out of things that are available locally. And so the brooms were really very different. Some had short handles and people were leaning way over to sweep.

You have to carry your burdens, so sometimes it's on top of the head. Sometimes it's slung from the forehead; sometimes it's down the back; sometimes it's over the shoulder with the pole and two baskets. I was finding this really fascinating, the way people solved their problems in differing ways, depending on their environment and what they have to build things out of and what they need to carry.

But I was also looking at a lot of architecture. I was blown away by Nepal. I knew there were the Himalayan Mountains up there. And we couldn't get into Tibet, so Nepal was the closest. I'm American; I have the Shangri La complex—I want to go to Tibet, right? So that was the closest we could get. But I didn't know the architecture there. I had no idea. It was a total surprise, and I loved it.

MS. RIEDEL: What about it? What about the architecture spoke to you?

MS. HU: The stupas. I don't think I knew that there were those. They are pretty amazing with the all-seeing eyes of Buddha on the top. But then the Nuwari palaces—they have carved wooden windows, window frames shaped like big Hs on their side, and very elaborately carved, and arched doorways that have gold-plated repoussé work and pattern all over the place. There was a lot of jewelry in the marketplace there, and I bought a lot of pieces.

And I found a lot of jewelry in Pakistan, too, but when I got over to Afghanistan, suddenly the price was about 10 times as high—$60 instead of six dollars for a neckpiece. So I passed up some absolutely fantastic Turkoman pieces, which now would be thousands, right? But $60! I was buying very inexpensive local tribal jewelry all the way through the trip, along with some other things, for instance, a sun hat from Sarawak with a beaded center and patchwork cloth around the sides. I got some beaded things and textiles, a strangely shaped fan that the Pakistanis fan their fire with, so it is shaped so much differently from ours. I tried getting one small piece of pottery, and it was broken by the time we got to the next stop even though I wrapped it very carefully. So I decided no ceramics; I can buy metal and cloth.

MS. RIEDEL: And you said that trip really was the beginning of your love for ethnic jewelry?

MS. HU: I think so, that whole stay in Taiwan and the trip back.

MS. RIEDEL: Had you seen much before?

MS. HU: When I lived in Bellingham, Ramona Solberg had a show of her collection. Hers and a friend's collections were exhibited at the Whatcom county museum [Whatcom Museum]. That was probably the first really extensive collection of ethnic jewelry I had seen. It was amazing. Then I started seeing the work wherever I went; it really spoke to me.

MS. RIEDEL: What about it?

MS. HU: It's hard to say. I don't want to get weird here. It's just that a piece that has been worn, made for an honest purpose, and then used in that culture, somehow there is a genuineness to it. There is a spirit to it that I am really drawn to. I like old pieces. I like used pieces. I don't want to have beads restrung. I don't want to have the piece cleaned up. I like the fact that there's that grunge in there, and maybe a little hair sticking in between the beads from the last time she took it off.

I know how it's made. I can see the tool marks of the maker. Then there's that overlaying patina of use by the owner—like when you have two glass beads that are so smooth in between them because they have rubbed

against each other. That doesn't happen right away; that happens after a very long time. So there's so much age. And you wonder how many generations have used that piece? It's something pretty neat. There is something that really attracts me to it; whereas a lot of contemporary work just leaves me cold—mass-market stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: So there is something about the essence of a piece and the maker and the sense of time in which it's been worn? So as a maker, you have an immediate connection with this other maker from another time and place.

MS. HU: Yes, there's a direct link. I'll look at a piece and I'll see all those hammer marks, and I know exactly how he held his tool, even though centuries ago.

MS. RIEDEL: You have a fairly extraordinary collection of jewelry.

MS. HU: Well, there is a lot of it. I don't know how extraordinary it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Gotten from all over, over the past four decades.

MS. HU: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You tell that wonderful story about living in Taiwan and going to visit the family in the middle of the island.

MS. HU: Oh, yes, the Aborigine family. After my husband passed away, I was tutoring some Chinese young people in English. What I would do is just ask them about what they did on certain holidays, because I wanted to find out about the folk customs. So then every time I used an idiom that they wanted to learn about, they would stop me and ask me to use it in other ways. I am not an English teacher, but this would help them in conversational English.

I would not take any payment for this, so they felt they owed me. At Christmas, some of their school buddies who had gone off to the army were home. They had an army buddy who was an Aboriginal fellow. He invited them to visit his house and they asked me to go along. We took a bus down to the middle of the island and then took a taxi into the mountains in the center, where he lived.

We stopped at a store and bought a big fish head and some pig's feet to contribute to the dinner pot. We got to a point in a little village and the taxi fellow said, "We can't go any further because around the corner there's a checkpoint, and the government won't let you in because you are a foreigner." They were still technically at war with the mainland, and so there were a lot of sensitive parts of the island. So he said, "Now if you guys get out here, there's a trail in behind that store. It goes up over the hill and it comes back down to the road around the corner. I'll go through the checkpoint because I live up here and am just going home for the night." So he went through, and then we came down to the road, and he picked us up and we went on to visit this army buddy's house. There were actually three houses: his father's, his grandfather's, and an uncle's—three houses along a ridge.

They welcomed us warmly. They made a big pot of soup. There was one little light bulb hanging in the middle of the room and lots and lots of people in the one room—a whole extended family. After dinner, their custom is for someone to sing a song, and then everyone takes a drink. The next person sings a song and then everyone takes another drink. A third person sings a song and everyone takes drink—[they laugh]—et cetera, around the room. I believe it was a rice wine we were drinking.

We were doing a lot of drinking, and the singing was getting loud and raucous, and I couldn't understand much of what was being said. Songs were being sung in Mandarin, one or two local dialects of Chinese, and their own language, and I contributed one in English. The old grandfather could only speak their own language, but our friend's father was a merchant in the area. He would buy shiitake mushrooms, which they all grew and sell them to the Chinese, so he knew Mandarin. My Mandarin was sort of okay in those days.

After the singing, he came up to me and said, "I want to shake your hand. You're the first foreigner who has ever been in my house." So we shook hands. Then he said, "Hmm. I always heard that if you ever touched a white person, they would feel really cold. But you feel just like we do." I thought, "Ooh, I'm glad I didn't have cold hands that day." [They laugh.]

It was a lot of fun. We all slept there, all on tatami mats. And then the next day we walked around the neighborhood. They killed a duck and we had duck for lunch, and then we took off to return home.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you see any craftwork at all up there?

MS. HU: No, no one was weaving. The women traditionally do weaving. The grandmother was sitting on a little

stool in the corner smoking her pipe. They had a bamboo pipe coming down from the hill, and that was their water supply, draining into a little brick catchment. They had a huge wok over a brick oven to heat water. Pretty cool.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because you have just come back from China. You were just there a couple of months ago, yes?

MS. HU: In October.

MS. RIEDEL: And a lot of the research you've been doing recently about body adornment has had to do with the minority cultures within China?

MS. HU: Oh, yes, this trip—well, let's see. I retired from teaching in December 2006, so as a present to myself, in February 2007, I took a trip with Ron Ho to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. After the organized tour, I stayed a bit longer and went up into Chang Mai, Thailand, and bought some hill tribe jewelry in shops. Then I stopped through Hong Kong, where one of my sisters-in-law, YoYo Hu [Hu Yiu Yu], lives, and showed her and her daughter, Edith Cheung, a textile designer, the pieces of jewelry that I'd bought. They sent pictures of my jewelry to a friend of theirs who researches the minority tribes. This friend said, "Oh, dear, I think Auntie Mary got taken. Those aren't real Miao pieces. They are reproductions for the tourist trade. Maybe she needs to come on our next research trip." So he put together a trip just for us.

He is a photographer, Fong Shao-Nengbut; we call him Rames. He is a Hong Kong man who lives in Taiwan, and he publishes books on Miao and other minority costumes through the National Museum of Prehistory in Taitung, Taiwan. On the trip were my sister-in-law, YoYo, a friend of hers, my nieces Edith and Donna, and a number of Edith's friends from Hong Kong, plus me. We went to Guizhou to the small city of Kaili and then took bus trips each day out to different villages.

The first village we went to was in the Shidong area, where we visited an older master Liu, a metalsmith who was designated as one of 10 top provincial craftsmen. He used the traditional tools, pure silver, and made the traditional designs that the local women would use for their major ceremonies. It is mostly unmarried girls that wear much of the silver—amazing headpieces, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, plaques that were sewn all over their clothing—pretty amazing. They will wear pounds of silver if they can afford it. There were a lot of repoussé pieces.

The next day we went to Kongbai, a village way up a dirt road, that happened to be the village that Professor Yang Wenbin, who was one of our guides, came from. He had grown up there, but then went to Beijing to study and was now back teaching in a college in Kaili on local minority customs. His nephew, Yang Guangbin, who is a silversmith, gave us a demonstration.

In the first village they would only train their sons to be silversmiths, so there were a limited number and they can all work fulfilling the needs of the village. In the second village, they will take apprentices, train anyone, so there are too many silversmiths for the local needs. They have become itinerant. They will travel around to other villages that do not have silversmiths and make whatever styles are needed. So their toolbox is different because they have to be carrying it around. He gave us an all-afternoon demonstration, from melting down ingots to pounding out a sheet to drawing down wire to casting molds to soldering filigree.

MS. RIEDEL: So they are incredibly adept, technically?

MS. HU: Oh, yes, he can do everything. And he had a few really good tools. His drawplate is exactly the same one I use—exactly, bought from the same company, I think. But when he solders, he has a pot of oil and a rag sticking out of it and a blowpipe. He is able to solder this wonderful filigree. It was great to see him working. Then his wife cooked us lunch.

Then we went to an area in Kaili City where a lot of the younger fellows from Kongbai have moved because there are still too many silversmiths. They were making work from nickel silver and having it silver-plated and then antiqued—making it dark, making it look like it's old, because foreigners like it that way. The Miao like it bright, white silver. They are wholesaling this work out to Beijing and Thailand, and it is now hitting the market under the trademark "Miao Silver." It's not silver, and they are in many cases not traditional Miao designs, but they are made by Miao craftsmen. This is what Rames wanted me to understand.

That part of the trip was eight days, and then I continued on with my sister-in-law and two nieces. We went to Hangzhou to the [China Academy of Fine Arts], one of two main art academies in China. One of the professors at UW, Zhi Lin, is a friend. He graduated from there and arranged for me to give a lecture. I lectured on my work and gave a demonstration the next day to the students. They are trying to get a jewelry program started. They have been teaching it for two years. They're going to be building a facility, but for now they're using the glass facility. They have 15 students.

I was surprised that the auditorium was packed—standing room only. I was thinking that I could not get my students to go to a lecture in another medium, but here, my lecture was advertised and they just were packing the room. The next day so many students wanted to see my demo—nearly a hundred I think. I was trying to do the best I could with the wire they had gotten for me. I had been warned not to take any wire there because they did not know if the authorities would confiscate it from me. So they had tried to get some for me, but it really was not as soft and flexible as I needed. But we tried, and I think I did an okay demo.

My niece knows Zhao Feng, the director of the National Silk Museum there in Hangzhou. They had a show opening that same weekend, so we were invited to a luncheon by the director. At this luncheon was a professor and some students from the Fashion Institute of Technology at Donghua University in Shanghai. He heard about my lecture and said, "Oh, why don't you come and lecture at our university?" So we went to Shanghai and I lectured there too.

I also lucked into the opening of an exhibition of contemporary jewelry in Hangzhou done by all the professors that teach at the programs around China. It was held around the corner from where we were staying, and through going to it, I met several of the other metals professors from Beijing and other cities who were in town for the opening.

As I was looking at this exhibition, a woman comes up to me and asked, "Are you Mary Hu?" I thought maybe she was one of the students from the day before. "Yes," I said. So she tells me that she used to live in Seattle several years ago and wanted to get into graduate school to study with me, but she did not have an undergraduate degree or enough experience in jewelry so I did not accept her into the program. She was now back and studying at Shanghai University. I said, "Oh, I am going to Shanghai tomorrow to give a lecture at Donghua University." She asked if people from her program could come, and I said that as far as I was concerned, they could. So she and her teacher, Shannon Guo, and fellow students came to the lecture. Shannon had studied in the U.S., at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

MS. RIEDEL: It is a small world.

MS. HU: The whole trip was like that—just because of my relatives. So we decided to go to Shanghai. My niece, Edith, as a child, had a grade-school buddy. They used to play together as kids. Then when Edith was in New York working in the fashion industry, this girl was also in New York, at Christies or Sotheby's, as one of their Chinese art specialists. Her name is Bing How Mui and she now lives in Shanghai.

Edith called her up and told her we were coming to Shanghai. She welcomed us with open arms and we stayed at her place. She had married quite well and lived in a beautiful house in a gated community. She picked us up at the train station, she and her driver in her seven-passenger Mercedes van. She let the driver be at our disposal all one day taking us to book stores. I could buy as many books as I wanted because I could just put them in the van and go back and get more books. At the end she said, "Oh, don't bother about them. I'll have the staff pack them up and mail them for you." [Laughs.] There were two large boxes of them.

And so it went on and on and on like that.

MS. RIEDEL: And this is just this recent trip?

MS. HU: Yes, this last October. The next morning after we arrived, we were sitting at breakfast and I was talking to her husband. He is dressed in traditional Chinese style—with the little frogs for fastenings. She is dressed in traditional style too. He says, "We are very concerned with not losing our heritage." Shanghai has 17 million people. I am sure it's like New York—kids drink milk, but they don't know what a cow looks like.

So this couple is on a mission. They have bought a piece of property in Jinze, outside of Shanghai, and are building a whole village compound. There will be several rooms to stay. They are hiring the best traditional craftsmen for woodwork, for stonework, for tile. And they are building in the old Chinese style. There is a teahouse, a bar, a theater, a grand hall where people can get married. Bing How has been buying antiques for the last 10 years—with her artistic eye and unlimited pocketbook. They have warehouses full of furniture, trunks full of clothing and jewelry—ceramics, incredible crafted objects of stone, bamboo, et cetera. They will furnish the place with the antiques. Some of the things are being catalogued for a museum to be located nearby.

Across the street they are developing a craft village. Bing How is identifying craftsmen that she's really enamored with. She will offer them a chance to move there. They will have a place to live and a shop to work in and then a place where they will be able to sell their things to the visitors.

They also actually have another block-sized area of shops being developed in another part of Shanghai. They bought it from the government. It had been started to be developed, and then the government stopped work on it for some reason, and it was empty for some time. It is shop after shop along a narrow street, all two-storied wood construction with every window a different lattice pattern—all in the old traditional Chinese style. I was

taking pictures all over the place. They are going to turn that into an art gallery and art and craft shops.

They had also just broken ground on a conference center for the study of old ways. I was only there for three days, so that is all I heard about. They may have other projects. After I had gotten taken to these places, I asked if they had government help. He answered, "We tried to get people to go in with us, but most people want a return on their investment. We just hope it breaks even someday." And I'm thinking, That's commitment.

MS. RIEDEL: When do they anticipate it being ready?

MS. HU: The Jinze compound seemed almost ready to open, because it looked just about finished. They were putting finishing touches on it. The furniture wasn't in there yet, but it was all functioning. It looks out over a canal, too, with real Sung Dynasty moon bridges and a little village beyond.

The place is going to have all this beautiful old furniture, but you go into the bathroom—well, it is the only time I have seen a toilet where, when you enter, the lid lifts up. [Laughs.] When you sit down, a very discreet fan starts, and when you leave, the lid goes back down. Of course, it flushes itself; we are used to that. New Japanese design. Absolutely the latest of comfort with the most exquisite craftsmanship of the old. Bing How brought out five trunks that had minority textiles that she had been collecting. I couldn't believe it.

Then we went back to Hong Kong for a few days, and my sister-in-law and I flew to Taiwan. Rames had invited us to Taiwan. We went to Taitung in the south of the island, where the National Museum of Prehistory is located. That is the place that Rames works with to publish his books of photographs on the minority costumes. I gave my lecture again for the museum staff and local artists and craftsmen that they invited.

MS. RIEDEL: And his books are specifically about the minority tribes?

MS. HU: Yes, he does the photographs, his wife writes the text, and my sister-in-law has done some translation into English when needed. They are old family friends from years back.

After my lecture, the next day, Fang Chun Wei, an anthropologist who is there at the museum, took us in his car up the coast and we visited craftsmen. We went to a family's backyard where they make tapa cloth. We saw some basket weavers, went to see a glass bead-making shop. There was another area where they have taken an old sugar factory left over from when the Japanese were there and turned it into an art gallery/tourist center housing installations by artists and craftsmen.

I kept seeing this. Taitung is way far down in the south of the island. It is not a big tourist center. A lot of tourists don't get down there. There are a lot of indigenous tribes down there. But all up and down the coast, they have public art on the beaches, overlooking the coast. They have beautiful driftwood sculptures, and they have a sculpture park that we turned into at dusk and walked around—sculpture after sculpture after sculpture. I think, Wow, this is so cool. There is just a lot of art happening.

MS. RIEDEL: And just as a way of bringing this all full circle, this is something—these sorts of trips, though this is by far one of the most elaborate and the most detailed—that you've been doing since really the early '70s.

MS. HU: Yes. I went on the big trip with my dad in 1973.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. You're using this to research and develop courses.

MS. HU: Well, to come to some conclusions, I guess, when I first was studying at school in the '60s, people were marching and protesting. I was studying jewelry-making. I admit I thought, Should I really be doing this when we might be bombed? But then when I traveled and I saw the beautiful jewelry that the Pakistani gypsies had when they had so little else—living in tents and owning a few animals, they don't have many material goods, but boy, they have jewelry! Jewelry is important to them—even their camels have jewelry. The camel harnesses are beautiful. All the yaks in Tibet have earrings. Jewelry means something. When I started doing the body adornment studies, I started finding out how important it is in so many cultures and has been for so long—it's their identity.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you say a little bit more about that?

MS. HU: Gosh, I have it so nicely written in one of my artist statements, and I can't remember exactly how the words flow. But basically, it's status. It's for protection. It's for fertility. It's for sentiment, for remembering people or places, to commemorate achievement. So you can read someone by what they're wearing. I can show pictures of Dayak tribesmen in Borneo, and the tattoos they have—he has to earn those. Only if he's done such-and-such can he have that one. It's an announcement to everybody, just like military awards. Karl Bodmer painted a Native American warrior—you can tell that he's been shot by an arrow and by a bullet; you can tell he's taken prisoners, all by the different feathers he has or body paintings or tattoos or jewelry he's wearing.

This is so common. There is one hairstyle of a tribe in Africa that a woman can only wear once she has weaned her first male child—it really pegs you. It's sociology and history, and I just find it fascinating, what humans do.

And then in the body adornment class, for the last day I go into all the tattooing and the body modification that people are doing these days, because that is not that different from what any tribe will do. They will do the max of what they're able to. So the young people these days are pushing some edges. But they are doing it for a little different reason. They're becoming a member, not of the general community but of their own tribe. It's not really sanctioned by their parents in most cases, whereas in the traditional tribal groups, it is.

We don't have a coming-out, a coming-of-age ceremony, when a person reaches puberty, which almost every other tribe does. In many tribes there's a time when young people go into seclusion, and they're taught all the things an adult will need, and then they're reborn; they're readmitted to the tribe as an adult. This is celebrated. The parents are celebrated as the parents of a new tribal member. There are certain things they can no longer do and other things that they can do. That is when a woman will get her first scarifications in some tribes. That's when a fellow will be circumcised in some tribes. That's when he will have his hair cut short or when he is allowed to grow it long. There will be different things that happen when you're an adult versus when you are a child.

Our main society doesn't have that celebration as such, so young people are making their own with their gangs and their initiations within them. This is what I was thinking when I did this study. So that whole section down there in my library is the weird stuff—some pretty X-rated—that people are doing to their bodies these days. But I've stopped buying those books now that I am not teaching the class.

MS. RIEDEL: And so the course you would teach, this history of body adornment, in many ways is an anthropological course?

MS. HU: Well, it's a history of the human race.

MS. RIEDEL: As seen through body adornment.

MS. HU: Yes. And so as I was saying earlier, the art history courses I took would start with the cave paintings. To me, those are pretty sophisticated paintings. They had to learn somewhere else. They didn't start learning on those caves, at any rate. And so what surface do they have to learn on? As far as I'm concerned, it was their skin. There have been bone burials found. They have bones buried in caves with little pecked-stone bowls nearby with pigment in them.

And so I'm sitting here thinking—and I have not read this, but I'm thinking that animals will spread clay on their bodies to keep away insects or to protect from the sun, whatever the reason is. And so as we came down from the trees and lost our hair—if that is what we did—we might think of spreading clay on our bodies. And if we spread a nice colored clay that contrasts with our skin color, then, because we're spreading it with our fingers, we're going to get swirl patterns, or we can make lines, or we can make dots. And I can just imagine how groups of people will say, "Well, we're going to be the dotted people and you can be the stripey people."

And so pattern has meaning then. Fast forward and we've got writing. It is my belief, my nonscientific belief, that body adornment was the precursor for an awful lot of important stuff that came later. And so body adornment is the first art form, if you don't count weapons, tools, toolmaking.

MS. RIEDEL: Jewelry is the first art form?

MS. HU: Well, yes, jewelry and body adornment. It all merges in my mind, including hairstyles and body painting, because it's all done for the same reasons.

MS. RIEDEL: You had some interesting statistic about the first cave paintings going back roughly 25,000 years, but the first beads you talk about go back 100,000 years.

MS. HU: The cave paintings go back some 30,000 years, but when I started doing the body adornment research, the oldest beads found were about 75,000 years old. Now they're over 100,000 years old. Mostly shells with holes in them from the southern Mediterranean areas of North Africa, found a distance from the coast.

[END OF CD 3.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Mary Lee Hu in the artist's home and studio [in Seattle, WA] on March 19, 2009. This is disc number four.

So we're picking up in the mid-'70s. You've just come back to the States. You are based still in Ohio, is that right? And you're interested in starting to teach at the university level?

MS. HU: Yes. When my husband passed away, I immediately knew that I wanted to teach. In those days we naively thought he could teach for a while, and then he could quit to do his research while I taught. Teaching jobs were easier to get back in the '60s. But it was now in the '70s, and with the oil boycott of '74, things closed down radically. There were still a lot of positions in '72 and '73, but by the time I got back in the country and started looking in '74, there were very few. So I lived with my dad after I came back in the fall of '73. I did start doing workshops, so traveled around the country that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Were these at universities, or were they at Penland and Arrowmont?

MS. HU: At colleges and universities. Then I got a sabbatical replacement position for Chunghi Choo at University of Iowa, fall semester of '75.

Okay, so we have to back up. I came back in the fall of 1973, so fall of '73 and all of '74, I was working in my studio and making a number of pieces that really advanced my work.

In the fall of '74, I started twining. I had been doing a lot of wrapping and looping with the animal forms and the bird wings. After I got back from the big trip, I went through my dad's house and looked at baskets that I'd grown up with—my Easter basket, my mother's clothes basket, plus a basket I'd bought years before on the Northwest Coast. I translated their processes to my wire and made miniatures. I looked at how they were made, and I tried to make them as close as possible, using my round wire. When trying to copy the Northwest Coast basket, I discovered it was a twined structure, and it really intrigued me. I have been twining ever since.

MS. RIEDEL: And with that came the whole transition in focus to pattern and to form?

MS. HU: I had been weaving before, which is over one warp, under one warp with the weft. In twining, you've got two wefts, and they twist around each other as they go over and under the warps. So it is related to weaving, and I often talk about weaving this or that, but since '74 I have only been twining, not weaving. I had been doing some weaving so I had been able to get hollow form, but with the twining, I really started exploring different basketry forms and started a series of larger objects that I called *Form #1, 2, 3*—

My dad had such a good time on our big trip back to the U.S. together in '73. My mother had passed away in 1969, and my dad couldn't travel without someone with him because of his bad eyesight and hearing. Since my brother wasn't yet married and had enough time off work, my dad decided the three of us should take a trip together, so we started looking through options.

I wanted to go to Bhutan, but had not been able to on our big trip. One could not get a visa to go there then. But we found a company called Mountain Travel that was leading a tour into Bhutan in January of 1975, so we signed up. It was about a three-week trip and a pretty fantastic one. We were only the eighth group of tourists into the country. They had coronated their king the summer before. They had built a few guesthouses and bought some minivans and trained some fellows in India to be hosts and guides—speaking English, setting the tables, and cooking food that Westerners would eat. So they decided to let in a limited number of groups. They would not let in individuals—single-entry visas—so to get in, you had to be in a group in those days. The people in the trip were from all over the country, with very different interests.

MS. RIEDEL: Were they primarily mountaineers?

MS. HU: No. There was one woman who was very interested in stamp collecting, and Bhutan always had weird stamps. There were a couple of other artists. It was very interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have any say over the itinerary?

MS. HU: No. It was set. They had a fellow from the U.S. who was the guide that would go over and take care of the passports and that kind of stuff. And then they hired a local guide that could get us into local areas. We were really lucky because the local guide for our trip was Tenzing Norgay, who climbed Mount Everest. Tenzing signed on with the trip because he wanted to get into Bhutan, too.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MS. HU: It made the whole trip special. Normally, for instance, if the back of the temple is not open to the public, well, if Tenzing asked, it opened.

When we were in Gangtok, Sikkim, Tenzing came into the hotel and he says, "Gather 'round. I've got to teach you how to fold the white silk scarves, because we're going to go to the palace and meet the king tomorrow." We said, "You're joking, right?" He said, "No, we're old buddies. We're going to see the king of Sikkim."

So the next day we went to the palace. We didn't go in, but went in behind where there was a tent set up. We sat around on little low carved stools at beautifully carved tables and drank beer and ate potato chips with the

king of Sikkim. And a month later, India marched in, put him under house arrest, and annexed Sikkim.

So I always tell my students, "Take those windows of opportunity. When they are open, take them, because they might not always be open."

So it was a wonderful trip. We had about a week in Bhutan. The women there still wore huge coral bead necklaces. We visited an archery contest down by the river in Paro. They were doing folk dancing after the contest when we got there. I don't think very many of them had ever seen Westerners. They were very friendly. It was interesting. The king had decreed that the no one was allowed to sell anything old because he didn't want them to lose their culture. He saw what was happening in Nepal with all the hippies. He decided to only let in groups on regular restricted tours—you go here and then go there. You could not just come in and hang out and smoke pot. When they rebuilt their temples and repainted the murals, they could only use the native pigments. They weren't allowed to import pigments from India, or the whole color scheme would change.

That was only part of the trip. We were in Kalimpong, India, which is at the southern end of the old Tibetan trade route. And then we went to Darjeeling, where Tenzing lived, and from there we took a—maybe a week—trek around Mount Kangchenjunga, sleeping either in tents or in little cabins, and had Sherpa porters for our stuff. It was pretty cool.

Then afterwards, my dad and brother and I went back to Katmandu. My dad and I had been there, but my brother hadn't seen it. Then my dad wanted to see Burma. We had not been able to get into Burma the year before either, so we went down and saw several cities in Burma.

MS. RIEDEL: And did it make an impression on you in any way that there was already this awareness in Bhutan of preserving the culture?

MS. HU: Well, I remember it. I thought that was a pretty astute thing for a 17-year-old king to dictate. I thought it was pretty cool.

MS. RIEDEL: Really forward-thinking, especially at that point in time.

MS. HU: When we were in Burma, it was already pretty restrictive. At the hotel there was a big jade wholesale fair—the whole courtyard had tables laden with chunks of jade. But I went into the hotel shop, and a little tiny piece was so expensive. I mentioned this to the guide we had one day, that I was interested in getting some jade. She said, "Don't buy in the store. I have a cousin who has a jade company." So we went over to her cousin's, and I took our bottle of duty-free Johnny Walker Scotch and traded it for a big handful of jade cabochons in a rainbow of colors. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Amazing, Wow!

MS. HU: I've used a few of them—the mustard-colored ones [*Neckpiece #25*] and an orange one [*Neckpiece #24*]. It's all jadeite—beautiful stones—and I got them for a bottle of Scotch.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did that trip impact your work?

MS. HU: Well on both the trips—in '73 and'75—I was taking a lot of slides. I knew I wanted to teach, so I knew I had to gather images for teaching. So anytime I saw metalwork in museums, I was taking pictures of it. And I was looking for historical precedents for my wire work.

In the museums in Spain there were wonderful sword handles with wirework wrapped around them. In Burma there was a manuscript bag that was woven strips of gold. When I was in Darjeeling, I bought a little toy Kashmiri houseboat, a souvenir, that was woven like I had been weaving. It had some braiding on it, which I had done. It had wrapping and knitting. All of my categories of processes in this one little boat—and it was $1.75. I thought, Oh, okay. I didn't invent anything. It's all been done. [They laugh.] If people have wire, they figure out to handle it like they've been handling yarns.

MS. RIEDEL: And this must have been especially interesting and welcome news to you, given our conversation right before we turned on the tape, in terms of demonstrating the historical precedent for weaving wire and using wire in serious metalwork, as opposed to coming out of the '60s when it was used in a more casual fashion.

MS. HU: Well, yes. We were talking about the fact that I didn't know that I was treading on pretty thin ice, making wire earrings in the '60s. I guess I didn't really know what was happening in San Francisco with the hippies, so I thought it was a legitimate pursuit.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: But it was. You were in grad school, and it was a legitimate pursuit.

MS. HU: Well, it was for me. But I did hit a lot of resistance, because I was put into a category—"Oh, one of those." I tried to enter some competitions and was just automatically bounced out because it was wire.

MS. RIEDEL: But Brent was supportive from the start? So he saw the big picture.

MS. HU: He was supportive, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But you were then seeing this historical precedent because you were traveling and looking for it?

MS. HU: Yes, it was pretty interesting. In Europe there are the generals' epaulets with all the twisted dangles and military braid. There is gold lace and metal embroidery. I was taking pictures of those, and I still use some of those slides in my lectures for workshops. The trips were really good. I picked up some ideas, like that knitting from the Khamspa piece that we were talking about yesterday.

So in the fall of '75 I taught for Chunghi Choo at the University of Iowa. Then went to London as we were saying, with Richard Thomas and the Cranbrook group in early '76. I met Barbara Cartlidge at the Electrum Gallery. She decided to have a show of six Americans and asked me if I'd courier the work over. So I went back over in the spring of '76. And then in the summer of '76, I taught for Elliott Pujol out in Manhattan, Kansas. He had decided not to teach the summer session there because he was teaching up in Omaha.

But he came down and said, "This weekend we're going to drive to Vail and go to the Summer Vail Workshop [for Art and Critical Studies, Vail, Colorado]. I had not heard of it. He just loaded us into his car and drove all night, arriving at six o'clock Saturday morning. We met Jim Cotter and all the people at the Summer Vail Workshops, and they became really influential in my life. I went back many years to attend them.

MS. RIEDEL: How did the initial connection with SNAG happen? That was a little earlier even then this?

MS. HU: That was earlier. I left Carbondale in the fall of '69 to drive to Bellingham, Washington, where my husband had a job teaching. The first SNAG conference was in the spring of 1970, in Minneapolis/St. Paul. I had heard about it and went.

MS. RIEDEL: What was that like?

MS. HU: It was really interesting. There was an exhibition along with it, and I got one of my first neckpieces in [*Neckpiece #5*]. Brent had been one of the founding members of SNAG. It started around '68. He would go off for meetings. Phil Morton was one of the guys that called it all together. It was a smallish group, maybe 10 or 12. Some were full-time studio people and some were teachers. And there were some women. Miya Matsukata was one of the early women and possibly Alma Eikermann, but I can't remember if she was. I know Miya was.

So then at the conference, they were having meetings behind closed doors. They were making it an organization instead of a loose group of people. They were writing the bylaws and electing officers and trying to make a decision on how they were going to open it up for new membership.

Brent came out and said, "Did you bring any slides with you, Mary?" And I said, "Yeah, a few." And he said, "Good, and did you bring your resume?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, write something up, because you'll apply to be a member." So I handwrote some kind of resume and gave him my slides, and I was accepted as a member. Later on I heard there was a huge controversy about me, that there were some members that really didn't think I would be the kind of member that they'd want—mostly because I was a wife and didn't have a teaching job, and I didn't have a major studio kind of setup. I had a studio in the spare bedroom, but it was pretty soon after I'd left school. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: But you'd already been in Young Americans. I mean, you had a number of significant shows under your belt.

MS. HU: Yes, but I guess they were concerned that they needed to keep their standards a little higher. But Brent talked them into letting me in. So that was good. [Laughs.]

That was in '70, and in '71, I went off to Taiwan. In '73, I came back, and as soon as I came back, I made sure I went to the SNAG conference every year, because it became a community for me. That's where I'd see my friends, that and Summer Vail when I started going to it later on. When my husband died, I found out that most of our friends had been his friends. And what friends I had made as a student had moved all over the country. I really didn't have anyone living close. I was living with my dad in the little village and had no friends there. I made SNAG my community. I went to the Bromwoods [MO, 1975] conference. It was outside St. Louis, and Heikki Seppa organized it. It was when SNAG was trying to decide where it was going to go and what it was going to be.

Only 22 people came. So it was more a meeting than a conference. We sat around a table for three days. It was there we said we ought to have a newsletter. We just have the conference once a year, and we should have more communication with members and try to keep everyone knowing what's going on. So Mark Baldridge said, "Okay, I'll do the newsletter." And for years, he did it on his kitchen table. It was great what he did to start that.

I remember I took the notes; I was like the secretary. I wrote them up, but Heikki wanted to check them first, so I sent them to him to edit. [Laughs.] I guess because I was still this young kid. They had to make sure everything was being presented right.

MS. RIEDEL: What were the early goals of the group?

MS. HU: Well, I guess it was education and communication, so that metalsmiths would know other metalsmiths and know what was going on. I don't think there was a big schism at first between the studio people and the educators because that first group had both in it. Ron Pearson was probably in it, but I'm not sure about that. But they were all pretty well established and very serious. It was their career. They just wanted an organization for better communications.

MS. RIEDEL: And to increase standards, to increase visibility?

MS. HU: I don't know; they did have an exhibition; that's true. They would have major exhibitions with some of the conferences. But the conference was the main thing for me; then came the newsletter. It was called *Gold Dus*t and was printed on deep yellow paper, and then it became a magazine and changed its name to *Goldsmith Journal*, then to *Metalsmith*.

So I was serious about going to the SNAG conferences. I had gone to Bromwoods. I had volunteered to take the notes and type them up—and three days of meetings were a lot of notes. At some point at the conference Kurt Matzdorf suggested we show slides to each other in the evening if anyone had brought them. There was no scheduled programming. I had brought some, so showed my slides.

Kurt came up and expressed interest. And soon after, he invited me to come to [State University of New York at] New Paltz to give a workshop. That was in 1976, one of my early workshops. Kurt and Bob Ebendorf were still both teaching there.

It was on that trip that I went to New York City, visited some galleries, and saw my friend Glenda Arentzin, then went up to New Paltz to give the workshop, or vice versa. But it was on that trip that I remember getting a phone call asking if I would run for SNAG vice president. So I became vice president and attended some board meetings and met some more people that way. Bob Ebendorf was president. He suddenly told me that he was going to take a sabbatical the next year and had decided to leave the presidency a year early. So in '77 I became president. Then I was elected for a term, so I was president of SNAG from '77 to '80.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was your focus, Mary, as president of SNAG?

MS. HU: What were we doing in those days? We were organizing conferences. We had one in Seattle in '77. We had one in Boston that I remember working on with George McLean. For the one in St. Louis, I know I got a lot of letters—it was the ERA amendment days. Members wrote to me and said that we should boycott St. Louis because Missouri had not passed it. This got me interested, and since I had the whole printout of the membership—about 350 members in those days—I counted up, wanting to see how many males verses females we had. It was almost 50/50.

So in the early days, we were about half and half. What was our focus? We had the *Goldsmith Journal* that we published—I think Mark was still doing it—and the conferences and exhibitions. The board really organized the conferences, because I remember George McLean was living in Boston in those days. He was the one that would go around and check out the hotels. He would go and eat box lunches and then call me up, and we'd have long conversations, including should we have this dessert or that one. We were making all the decisions. I remember that, rather than choosing the speakers. When we were in Tucson in '80, I believe Mike Croft did most of the planning.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Right. And did the conferences have themes? Would you focus on something in particular?

MS. HU: The Tucson conference had the *Copper, Brass and Bronze* exhibit, and we visited a large copper mine near Tucson. But I can't remember them all.

MS. RIEDEL: And was the focus still national?

MS. HU: It was North American. We had Canadian members. I don't think we had any Europeans coming in those

days. But when I was president, we went from having 350 members to about 700. So we about doubled in three years.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that growing primarily through university connections and programs? Were there any local guilds that were also involved?

MS. HU: There were not as many guilds in those days.

MS. RIEDEL: That would be my guess, too. And the university programs were really developing?

MS. HU: Yes, university programs were developing and we were having exhibitions—*Goldsmith '74* at the Renwick, *The Metalsmith* at the Phoenix Art Museum in '77, the *Copper, Brass and Bronze* one in Tucson in '80, and then a touring exhibition we sent to Europe [*SNAG*, organized with the Schmuck Museum in Pforzheim] in '79—'80. Members were volunteering and getting these things done. We didn't have many staff because we didn't have a big budget. I think in those days we had a part-time office person.

MS. RIEDEL: And then after your term as president ended in '80, you transitioned immediately into ACC?

MS. HU: Yes, somehow, and I can't remember how it happened exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did ACC compare to SNAG back then?

MS. HU: So different. SNAG—it was all us. ACC—there was an us and them. We were the hyphenated board members. We were craftsmen-trustees, not trustees. We got our way paid to the meetings and were put up in hotels, and we weren't expected to donate a lot of money. We cost them money.

Occasionally, the board would be invited into somebody's home; there would be a nice reception. It was always catered, and there were servers in the kitchen. They were usually serving wine, and they would ask, "What would you like to drink?" I'd ask for a beer, because I didn't drink wine in those days, and they'd look a little flustered because they didn't have any. [They laugh.]

I used to say to friends about the situation, "Well, you might like to collect African art, but what on earth are you going to say if you find an African in your living room?" How can you talk to them? I sort of felt like the African. Some board members, of course, were very nice, but others made me feel a little uncomfortable. So it was an interesting experience. It was during those four years that they were designing the museum space that they just left—across from the Modern

MS. RIEDEL: America House was long closed by now?

MS. HU: Oh, yes. That was long gone. Mrs. [Aileen] Webb had had houses on both sides of the street, and MoMA had taken over the one on the north side, so now ACC was only on the south side. They were now trading that space, because a big building was to be built. It needed the plot of land that ACC had, and so I think they traded it for the space on the ground floor of the big building.

MS. RIEDEL: And was Mrs. Webb still involved at this point?

MS. HU: She passed away in 1979; I never met her.

MS. RIEDEL: Not even at the ACC conference you were at in Japan?

MS. HU: She was there. I saw her, but I never talked to her.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, I talked with Ken Shores about a year ago. He was probably just a few years before you, and he had all sorts of recollections of her.

MS. HU: I hear all kinds of stories. And you know we were talking about how it's a small world? So I meet this Chinese man at Southern Illinois University who is a mathematician [husband Tah-Kai Hu], and I am in craft. I start talking to him about ACC, because I'm getting the magazine, *Craft Horizons*. And he said, "Oh, yeah. My sister married a fellow who's related to Mrs. Webb, and we used to go up there to her farm in the summertime." [Laughs.] So it's a really small world.

So ACC was developing the plans for the new museum, and we craftsmen-trustees were uncomfortable about whether we could afford it later on, that it seemed pretty grandiose.

Jim Wallace was on the board, too, my last two years. He was involved in running the National Ornamental Metal Museum. And I remember him saying, "You don't have a loading dock; you don't have storage." He ran a museum; he knew the practical things that were needed, and they were just talking about the beautiful big

staircase. He said, "Do you know how much of a building you could build in Omaha for this kind of money?" and they went, "Omaha? Who would want to be in Omaha?" So all they wanted was a showplace. And we wanted a center for craft.

Just before I got on the board, the council name was changed from the American Craftsman's Council to the American Craft Council, and I remember saying that it was like they were now more interested in the objects than the makers. So I remember asking the question, "Okay, if we can't afford it and we have to sell it, what we have designed, would anyone want to buy it?" And they said, "With that staircase, it would make a wonderful restaurant." So I said, "Okay. Go ahead."

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So, very divergent views about what was essential.

MS. HU: And in those days, ACC and the museum were still all one. I still don't get the fact that, if I'm a member of ACC, I have to pay to go to the museum. I'm not a member of the museum. They split years ago, but it still doesn't seem like it's right to me. They ought to be together, in my mind.

MS. RIEDEL: You went to several WCC conferences, one in Toronto in '74, the one in Mexico in '76, in Japan in '78, and Vienna in '80. How did these conferences compare to the SNAG conferences at the time? What was the focus? They were very international.

MS. HU: They were all craft, not just one media. But I usually hung out mostly with metalsmiths. In the Japanese one, I met Japanese metalsmiths, and Max Frolich from Zurich was there.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there a significant international attendance in Japan and in Vienna? Was there much communication, much interaction?

MS. HU: Yes, some. I met some of the Japanese metalsmiths in Japan. In Vienna, I mostly went to the lectures and exhibitions and hung out with other American metalsmiths. I only met a few European metalsmiths there.

I was invited to participate in a workshop for the two weeks before the conference in Zurich. I had a little trouble there. I didn't understand how European workshops are different from ours in the U.S. In Europe they often consist of all established people who come together to explore a challenge, working with a new material or idea or whatever, instead of a class led by one person. We were to choose to work in one of four forms—wire, grids, tubes, and one other I forget. I chose wire, thinking we would all be people who were already working with this material and we would trade ideas. But everyone else was new to it. I wish I had chosen tubes or screening. I didn't speak German. Most of the others in my section of the workshop didn't want to speak English because all the rest of them could understand German except me. So it was an uncomfortable time, and I do not feel I got to know any of them.

Also 1980 was a crazy summer for me. I went to New York in June for my first ACC board meeting, and while I was in New York, I got a call from Seattle saying I'd gotten the job at the University of Washington. School had just gotten out in Michigan, and I had started to tear the shop apart to do some remodeling. So I knew I had to put that back together before I could leave.

I was scheduled to go to the two-week Zurich workshop and then go to the Vienna conference. I was flying directly from Vienna to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, to teach at Arrowmont. I was flying from there to Santa Cruz to go to a blacksmithing conference. I had to leave the conference on Saturday night before it was over to fly to Maine, because I had to be in Deer Isle to start at Haystack by Sunday noon—[laughs]—teaching a two-week session there. When I finally got home, I had to finish up the shop remodel, pack up, and move across the country. I arrived in Seattle three days before I started teaching. So that's what my life was like in those days.

MS. RIEDEL: And you managed to get work done at the same time?

MS. HU: Yes, that was the busiest summer, but that was what my life was like. A lot of pieces were dated 1980, and now I don't know how I made them. Yesterday, I got an email from Boston [Museum of Fine Arts]. They're looking at [*Choker*] *#48* in their collection and there is some discrepancy as to when it was made. I looked it up in my records. It was finished in July '79. Well, where was it done? I'm thinking, Summer '79, where was I? So I looked this up in my records, and in the summer of '79, I took the [Satsuo] Ando workshop on Japanese techniques at Cal State Fullerton [NEA-sponsored workshop organized by Al Ching], I taught at Arrowmont and Brookfield Craft Center [Brookfield, CT], and I took a week-long blacksmithing course at Summer Vail. So somewhere in there, I made that piece.

I'm left a little tried when I look at what I used to do. [They laugh.]

I have been off three successive weekends in a row to do workshops or attend craft functions. I'll teach Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, leave Friday, do a weekend workshop, come back Sunday night, teach several days, leave to teach a workshop, come back, et cetera.

MS. RIEDEL: What inspired you to do that?

MS. HU: I really didn't like Michigan State very well, so being away was fine. Well, that's self-perpetuating. Since I was never there, I couldn't go to anything. I'd be invited to a party, but I was going to be out of town. So I never did really get to know anyone. I saw my friends when I'd go to these workshops or conferences. I was not making friends in the locale where I lived, but rather I had friends all over the country in my field. I really wanted to go to the workshops and conferences because I would see my friends there—see people I felt comfortable with and who I had something in common with.

MS. RIEDEL: So SNAG really became your main venue.

MS. HU: SNAG did and Summer Vail did. Summer Vail had many of the SNAG people plus others because it was multimedia Summer Vail. Then sort of became the Yuma Symposium [Yuma, AZ]. Some of the same people who went to Summer Vail organized Yuma. Then Summer Vail ended. Yuma just had its 30th anniversary one, and I've been to well over half of them.

MS. RIEDEL: And from what you've said, the whole temperature of these conferences has been very open.

MS. HU: Oh, yes. We have lectures and demonstrations. The metalsmiths—and maybe this is all craftsmen—but at least metalsmiths in the U.S. are very willing to share. Everybody's a teacher; they have no secrets. I think it's a little different in Europe. And it seems much different from some of the fine arts.

If you are a painter, you're in your studio by yourself. At least the painters at school say they need absolute quiet. They don't want anyone looking over their shoulder. It's such a different thing. Craftsmen are so often working elbow to elbow. So many of the shop set-ups are different.

MS. RIEDEL: So you're never really working alone. There's always a community around.

MS. HU: Well, not always. In my studio I work alone. I've never had anyone work for me or with me. But in school, it was always a group of people. And a lot of times, after getting out of school—because equipment was expensive when you're starting up—the metals students would band together and rent a space, share the rent, share the equipment.

MS. RIEDEL: So the focus up till this point had been fairly much Asia. And then in '86 you took a little bit of a variation and went to New Zealand and Australia. What inspired that trip?

MS. HU: Well, you know, in my zigzag on the big trip, I couldn't go to the Great Barrier Reef. Too much of a zag. I wanted to see it, and I thought that if I am going down there, I should also see New Zealand. I had met Diana Pittock from Melbourne, who used to come to SNAG. She invited me to do a workshop in Melbourne, so I traveled with slides and some of my wire examples. I flew first to Auckland and looked up Peter Haythornthwaite, a friend of Eleanor Moty's. She had told me to, that they were really nice people.

I was a bit hesitant to just walk in and thrust myself onto someone. But I got up my courage and walked into his business—he's an industrial designer—and introduced myself. He was so very welcoming. He said, "You've got to come and stay." I said, "Well, I'm leaving for the South Island." "Well, when you come back to the North Island, you have a place to stay." Everyone was that welcoming.

And a fun story is that I was walking around Auckland and I stopped into a bar for a beer. It was crowded. It was the afternoon and everyone was standing around. A girl comes up to me and said, "Can I stand next to you? These guys are bothering me." So we were talking and I said, "What a nice ring you are wearing." "Oh, thank you. I made it," she said. And I said, "Oh, really? I make jewelry too." And she said, "Well, you've seen Fingers, right? It's the gallery here in town." And I said, "No. Where is it?" "Oh, it's just around the corner." But it was where I never would have just happened on it.

So I left the bar and went into this gallery, and there was a sort of a gruff woman sitting behind the counter. I was looking around and she said, "Can we help you?" I got up my courage and introduced myself, "I'm from the U.S., and I'm a jeweler too." "Oh, well, and how would we know you?" [Laughs.] I felt put on the spot, but I looked above her head at her bookshelf and said, "I've got some pictures in that book up there." It was Oppi Untracht's *Jewelry Concepts and Technology*. So I was okay.

So then she said, "We're having a show opening Monday. Why don't you come back?" So I did. And everyone I met was saying, "You're going to the South Island? Well, when you're in this city, you have to look up so-and-so

and on and on." I had this whole list of places and names. Then I told them that I had a set of slides of American work with me and they said, "Oh, when you come back, we'll invite everybody and you can show them." So I gave a lecture when I got back.

I flew to Christchurch and met blacksmith Noel Gregg. I rented a car and went all around the South Island. I was just handed from one person to the next, in some cases, and either put up or shown around. It was great. I was bawled out by Owen Mapp: "Why didn't you tell us you were coming?" [Laughs.] I thought, Sure, I'm supposed to think I'm so famous that they would all want to know. He said, "You've got to tell us you're coming because you don't understand how starved for interaction we are."

When I got to Melbourne, I stayed with Diana Pittock and gave the workshop that she had organized at the Meat Market Crafts Center. I was shown around RMIT, the Royal [Melbourne] Institute of Technology, by Ray Stebbens, who taught metals there. Then I went up to Sydney and also showed my slides there at the Crafts Council to the local jeweler's group and toured the Sydney College metals program with Helge Larson.

Everywhere I went, people would ask where was I going next. I said Papua New Guinea. And they'd say, "Oh, no. Don't you know that the national sport is raping white women?" So I was getting a little nervous because I was on my own. But when I got up to Sydney and I was talking to one of the Craft Council women, she said, "Ah, well, when you go to New York, do you walk up Times Square at three in the morning by yourself?" I said, "Well, no." She said, "Use some street smarts and you'll be fine."

So I went up to Cairns to see the Great Barrier Reef, and then I flew into Port Moresby [Papua New Guinea]. That was fascinating. I didn't have anything scheduled; I had an open airline ticket. When I called up the airline saying I wanted to make a reservation to fly up on the next available flight, the travel agent asked, "And what will you be doing up there?" I said, "I don't know. I usually just land and look around for a hotel and start seeing what to do." And she said something like, "Oh, dear. What are we going to do with you? Okay, here, call this man." She gave me a name and number.

So I called him when I got up there. He was Bob Bates, I think, and he had lodges on the Sepik River and in the Highlands. I said I wanted to go up to the Highlands to see where they do body adornment, instead of down on the Sepik where they do carving, so he said he would book me into his lodge in the Highlands. I was thinking that "lodge" equals expensive, so I said, "Well, usually I like to go a little more local." And he said, "Lady, unless you happen to know one of the missionaries up there, or you're staying in their grass shacks with the local people, the lodge is the only thing up there." So I stayed at the Ambua Lodge. It had just barely opened, and there were only about two or three other people that just happened to be there at the same time—a tourist agent checking it out, a woman up from Australia, and myself, and maybe one other. They took us to the Saturday market. I saw people coming in dressed with their wigs and body paint—it was wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: And was this your introduction to the bigger picture of body adornment?

MS. HU: Well, no. I think my introduction was *National Geographic* magazine. I used to see the pictures of guys with bones through their noses in *National Geographic,* and I wanted to go somewhere where they did that. In New Guinea, the men had quills through their noses, not always bone. But they certainly had things through their noses.

And they were a culture with no metal. I mean, the men carried a Western-made axe, but their culture didn't traditionally have metal, so all of this elaborate jewelry that men and women, but mostly men, wore was all biodegradable. And I am thinking, once they're gone—buried, nothing is going to be left except shells. You wouldn't really know what they wore at all. The tips of their arrows were even wood. Their knives were cassowary bird leg bones. They wore necklaces and headbands of shell beads, bracelets and belts of woven vines, a netted string loin cloth in front, and a bunch of attractive leaves stuck in their belts in back.

They took various colored clays and painted their faces and then wore wigs made from their own hair that they decorated with flowers and feathers.

MS. RIEDEL: And do you have photos of these?

MS. HU: I have lots of photos, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you see and take photos of tribal jewelry in New Zealand as well?

MS. HU: A little, not as much. I went to museums and saw what they had there, which is great. I love the lashing—lashing canoes together. So I was looking at that kind of patterning. But in Papua New Guinea, it was a living culture. You could see the people who were not getting dressed up for us, but were just going to Saturday market. The men were really strutting around—it looked like they were trying to outshine each other. I had a telephoto lens, so I did get some close-up pictures without having to stick the camera in somebody's face.

The people running the lodge knew I was interested in body adornment, so the next day, we went to a local family's home and the men showed us how they got dressed up. We saw them bring out their wigs and put them on wig stands, take out yesterday's feathers, go into their little palm-leaf book where they kept all their feathers and choose the ones that were going to be that day's design, and then get dressed up and paint their faces. That was really fascinating. I have that all on a series of photos.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's extraordinary. And this now began to play directly into your teaching?

MS. HU: I show those. I always show those photos, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you'd been teaching now at the University of Washington for five or six years? And you were actively developing—this first trip I think, is where you really began to research the body adornment?

MS. HU: Yes, I think so. Because that was in '86, and it was in the early '90s—I can't remember what year—when I started reading more closely.

MS. RIEDEL: And was this trip when you very consciously expanded your sense of body adornment from strictly jewelry to a broader sense? Or had that been evolving for quite some time? Was there an epiphany moment on the trip?

MS. HU: I don't know. It was a good trip. I then went up to China and did the normal tourist things—Kunming and the Stone Forest and then Beijing and Xi'an to see the terracotta warriors and Chengdu. And then to Lhasa. That was pretty interesting, to see all the pilgrims dressed up to make their pilgrimage to Lhasa. You would see people in many types of slightly different jewelry from the different areas.

MS. RIEDEL: And was it a problem, getting in then or no problem?

MS. HU: It wasn't any problem then. They sort of closed it down right afterwards, but I hit a window again. I just went up to a ticket counter in Chengdu and said, "I want to fly to Lhasa." I had a *Lonely Planet* guide book. When I left on the trip, I knew I wanted to do New Guinea and Tibet if I could. And the first morning, I was down in New Zealand at a bed and breakfast, and I overheard these other people talking who had done my trip in reverse. They had just come out of Tibet, and they said, "Oh, yeah, it's open now and there's even a *Lonely Planet* guide." So when I was in Hong Kong, before I went up into China, I bought it and just went. So I landed in Lhasa and looked in the book—oh, there's a little Tibetan-run hotel if you walk down this street.

MS. RIEDEL: So you really figured out this trip as you went?

MS. HU: As I went, yes. I saw three other young women in their 20s or 30s. They were looking in the same book. So I walked up to them and I said, "I'm thinking of going down to this hotel." They said, "We are too. Let's walk down together." The hotel had a four-bed room, so we became roommates for two weeks.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were doing this trip completely by yourself, except where you hooked up with people?

MS. HU: Yes. I saw the Potala Palace and the Jokhang temple. I walked to a temple out of town one day, and I rented a bicycle and bicycled out to one of the nearby temples another day.

Then I heard that if you're at such-and-such a street corner in the morning, you can get a bus that will take you out to another temple an hour or so ride away. There were just a couple of us foreign tourists, and the bus was mostly full of Tibetan pilgrims going to go to this temple to circle it. They kneel down, touch their forehead to the ground, and then stand up where their forehead was, and then kneel down again so that the length of their body is the length of one prostration. They would go all the way around the mountain this way. They all had pots of yak butter that they were going to be donating. They would put a little into each butter lamp they came to, located in little niches in the temple, as their offering. It was fascinating. You know, I have always loved the idea of Tibet. When I went to Bhutan, it was as close as you could get then, and finally I was there.

MS. RIEDEL: And what about it in particular, Mary, was so compelling to you?

MS. HU: I don't know. I keep saying it's the Shangri La complex. It's that hidden, forbidden place that very few people get to, or that you can't get to. And then suddenly, I was able to. It was pretty wonderful. I took a three-day bus ride out. Chinese tour agents needed to take an empty bus down to the border of Nepal to pick up a tour group. So a little notice was posted in some of the tourist hotels that advertised if you wanted to ride along, you could. It would be no frills, no stopping to take pictures, but it was pretty cheap, so I joined up.

It was a three-day drive through the Tibetan countryside and then down off the plateau. We went over an 18,000-foot pass where there were cairns with prayer flags flying—the wind was whipping though them. Then we started down. You just go down and down and down and down and down and down and down and down and down and down. Kathmandu in Nepal is about at 4,000 feet.

The Tibetan landscape was so interesting. There were electrical lines—telephone poles you might say—but there is no wood there, so there are towers of stone supporting the lines. I thought, Well, okay, you need to solve a problem with the materials at hand. It's like sweeping. Everyone needs a broom, but they are different in each culture. So I had to take a picture of the towers to show my electrical engineer brother. And the yaks had red-dyed, yak-hair earrings hanging down from their pierced ears.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything else about adornment that really struck you while you were there?

MS. HU: Well, just looking at the different people on that pilgrim bus, noticing that there are very different kinds of earrings on a couple of the women here than the people over there. You could tell that they were from different areas. And looking at the architecture, taking a lot of pictures of architecture. It stays still and doesn't mind you taking its picture.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] And what about this architecture was different than anything you'd seen before?

MS. HU: Well, it wasn't—it was a little like Bhutan, but on the roof of the Jokhang Temple, the downspouts were pretty interesting. They were all hammered copper. They were raisings, raisings with a spout coming into another joint. And so I was looking at that. There would be water containers at some of the temples where they would collect all the water off the roofs, because it's dry there. They would be huge metal caldrons. There would be wonderful chased sheet metal on the doors—a central boss around a door pull.

So I was looking at those and looking at all of the images on the altar that have jewelry. The sculpted images on the altars all have jewelry. The sculptures were large, so you would see big earrings. So I was looking at all that metalwork.

MS. RIEDEL: And this trip lasted a total of six weeks?

MS. HU: It was four months.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was when you really began to formulate the very conscious idea about a class about body adornment?

MS. HU: No, it was before I thought about teaching a class in it. I remember I had a picture of me with two of the wig men from Papua New Guinea that I sent out as a Christmas card that year. And I used that picture again to advertise the class. [Laughs.] But I started teaching it about 10 years later. I can't remember when I started to do the reading for the class, probably about '92.

MS. RIEDEL: And the trip was in '86? So you were already working on gathering material before you actually started hard research.

MS. HU: Yes, I guess. I was just interested in it.

And the next big trip was in '93. It was six weeks to Indonesia. That's where I saw mostly textiles and very little metalwork. I had hoped I would see more, but the metalwork is all bound up in *adat*, their spiritual traditions, and in some cases you can't take metalwork out of the buffalo-hide box that's up under the eaves and let light on it unless you've sacrificed the right animal. So the metalwork I saw was primarily already out of the culture and in shops, in towns.

But the women were doing their own weaving. So we'd stop by numerous backyards where the women were sitting out there under a tarp in the shade and weaving.

MS. RIEDEL: This was in Bali and Sulawesi.

MS. HU: We went to Bali and Torajaland in Sulawesi. And also to some of Java, Kalimantan, Flores and Lembata, Adanara, Solar, Roti, and Western Timor.

MS. RIEDEL: What was Torajaland like?

MS. HU: It was very interesting. That's where they bury their dead up in caves on the side of cliffs, and they have balconies out front with stick figures of the dead dressed like they would have been. But if a baby dies before one year of age, then there is a baby burial tree. In a huge tree, they will carve a hole deep enough to put in the little bundle, and then the tree will slowly grow over and close the hole.

MS. RIEDEL: I remember Kathy Viskavitch taking a trip there and telling me about that. What an extraordinary place.

MS. HU: They will throw a potlatch. They will throw a party and kill water buffalo and give away the meat, and

then they will take the horns, or the whole skull, but mainly the horns, and stack them up on the front central house post. Old houses have horns all the way up, dozens of them, so you know that the family had been there for many years and thrown a lot of these ceremonial parties.

They do something similar in New Guinea. When a man wanted to obtain "big-man" status—and that is what they call it—he would throw a party. He would have all his relatives and friends come, and he would dictate the general theme. And they would all have to get dressed up in their finest feathers, following that visual theme of color scheme and dance. Then the host would give away kina shells. Sometimes someone would give away scores of them, and he would gain status in the eyes of everyone who received shells because he was so wealthy he could give them away. They would feel in his debt and want to save up so they could also throw a party and give away shells.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there specific pieces of jewelry or certain types of body adornment that marked these occasions?

MS. HU: Well, the kina shells are worn as necklaces. The ones they give away, traditionally, are mounted onto a board. But they are also worn as pendants, like a big collar.

MS. RIEDEL: And did they dye it at all, or [referring to one on wall] is this the natural color?

MS. HU: There's a lot of red ochre used, yes, when they are mounted on the board.

MS. RIEDEL: And the neck strap is woven locally?

MS. HU: It's a variety of netting with cuscus fur on the ends. That's a kind of squirrel.

Then down near there is the Kula ring. I didn't get to that area. It is a ring of islands east of New Guinea. Shell necklaces are traded in one direction, and shell bracelets go in the other direction. Many, many are traded, hundreds, and the more you can accumulate and trade, the bigger-man status you have.

Individual pieces make their way around the ring of islands over several years and get named with their own histories, so stories go with the piece—it used to be owned by so-in-so, et cetera. This is a way that jewelry enters into trade interactions and keeping the peace, because these are the things that cause people to travel to adjacent islands—to trade these pieces, but in so doing, the whole village will get in their canoes and go to the next island, so they take a lot of other things—foodstuffs and all—to trade as well. These big-man ceremonies, or competitions, are sort of instead of warfare. They can trade and show each other up without resorting to killing people.

So when I taught my body adornment course, when I got to the medieval time, I'd talk about some of the badges that the French princes would have—the badge of allegiance. They were competing for the monarchy. In one case, in the late 1300s, King Charles VI was getting feeble, so his younger brother and his cousin both thought they should inherit the throne. They had a competition by giving away badges—

[END OF CD 4.]

—to show how many people owed allegiance. One of them had 300 badges made to give to his retainers. The highest in status would get gold ones, then silver and pewter ones to people of lower status. So I would joke to my students about what a nice commission for the goldsmith that was. [Laughs.] One of them pictured a porcupine as a warning he would be hard to handle; the other then pictured a ragged staff on his badge meaning, "I'll defy you and win over you." The other one then had a badge made showing a wood plane meaning, "I'm going to plane down your roughness."

So they'd have mottos and images on these badges. They were actually having, in effect, warfare with jewelry. Back and forth it went, until they were both almost penniless because it was costing so much. So one of them had the other one murdered. They reverted to regular warfare, but for a while, they were actually competing with jewelry.

I first talked about the religious pilgrim badges, then the livery badges. The leader's page would have a really big one because he was the guy who would come to give the lord's pronouncements to the people. The big badge—eight inches or more—would be a sign to the populace that he really was from this duke or prince. Everyone in the lord's household, all his knights and his squires and his cooks and chamberlains, would have little badges, little pins. When I read an account in one book that these two princes were battling it out with jewelry, I thought that was pretty interesting.

I gave a lecture down at Georgia [University of Georgia, Athens] one time for Gary Noffke. I titled it "Big Men, Big Women." It started out with the big men in Papua New Guinea and then went to the medieval guys battling it

out. And I said, "Now, as far as I am concerned, I think the big women"—and I talked about Jane Addams of Hull House and how she started that to help people, and that the man who was teaching weaving there was invited down by Miss Lucy Morgan to start the weaving at Penland to help the local women, and that Mrs. Webb started the ACC to help people. I was trying to draw a parallel—it's not fair—but with the guys who are doing it for their own status, and some women, who I consider big women, who are working for community and to give opportunity to others.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting that—often in the examples you just gave—it was through some sort of craftwork.

MS. HU: Yes, of course.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's transition into teaching a little bit, because the travel has had a huge impact on your teaching. When you started at the University of Washington, you weren't already teaching classes about the history of body adornment, were you?

MS. HU: No.

MS. RIEDEL: You were focused more on technique?

MS. HU: I did several sabbatical replacements and then got my own job. I did a whole year at Madison for Eleanor Moty, teaching with Fred Fenster. And it was seeing Fred teach—I modeled my undergrad teaching after Fred Fenster, because I thought he was such a good teacher—is such a good teacher. I thought I knew a lot. I'd been at it for years, but I sat in on his beginning lecture the first day, about sawing, and I learned so much I couldn't believe it. He was telling beginners stuff that I had never heard before. And I went, Whoa, he is such a good teacher.

MS. RIEDEL: What in particular? What qualities?

MS. HU: So many little facts, and so many little tips, and how to treat the equipment, and why things are designed the way they are. Whereas, as I said, Thomas was a little iffy, and I thought Brent was great with grads, but maybe not so good as an undergrad beginning teacher. I didn't experience him that way, but I didn't feel that I was seeing all that information. And he studied with Thomas—where you have to learn it yourself. Fred was telling them all that stuff.

The ends of the saw blades are annealed, so you can take your pliers and twist them if you want the saw to cut sideways. Well, I never knew that. Of course they are annealed, because they would break all the time where you were gripping them in the saw frame if not. It made perfect sense, but nobody had said that to me before.

So I patterned my teaching on Fred's. And then I got my job at Michigan State for three years. I did have some grads there, but it was mostly undergrad teaching. I was the only teacher. Then I came out here, to Seattle, to teach with John Marshall. I was teaching the jewelry; John was teaching the hollowware and enameling. I taught beginning jewelry almost every quarter for 26 years. I also taught intermediate and advanced jewelry and, along with John, the grad students. So I taught the whole complement. After John left in '01, I taught hollowware also.

I feel that students on the beginning level should have a good foundation of skill. On top of that, then, they can build their ideas. Once they know how to—they'll get ideas, but they need the skill in order to produce. Now this is controversial. Some people feel that you need to develop ideas first, and they can always pick up the skills they need for that particular idea. And I suppose it could work either way. But my teaching has always been very skill-acquisition based. And along with that, I would try to give projects that would get the kids thinking as well.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, your own ideas have evolved very much as you explored various skills. As your technique evolved, the challenge of that process has been a source of the ideas for your work.

MS. HU: Yes, for me. But for the students—I really haven't thought of it for a while—but I would try to give them fun, challenging projects which would be done with the casting, if it were a casting class, or stone setting if it was a stone setting class, for instance. I wouldn't just say, "Make a piece that's cast." It would have to fit other parameters.

MS. RIEDEL: So you really had very specific exercises that would help them develop specific skills?

MS. HU: And also get their mind going. So, let's see. In the beginning class, the first project evolved over the years. For a long time I gave them a four-by-four-inch sheet of copper and had them saw into it, not dropping any parts away, and then bend it into a form. This was to get them into thinking about form. But for the last few years it would be forging first and sawing second.

I'd give the students short lengths of copper rod and a forging hammer—[laughs]—and let them forge. They

immediately learned how to light the torch, got a little bit, I hoped, over the fear of the big torches. They explored how hard the metal can get with working and how soft it can get with annealing. I assigned various things over the years. In the end it was three quick bracelets, to emphasize that not all of metalsmithing takes forever. But for a while I had them make a chain. They made a lot of pieces—bent them and forged and twisted them. Then, they were to take a look at all the elements they'd made, pick out their favorite one, and then duplicate it and figure out how they're going to link them together. I got some really nice chains that way.

Second, it was the sawing, and then we did rivets, so still without soldering. I had them make five different types of rivet situations, and then they had to make a toy. I had a little figure, like a paper doll, with arms and legs that moved, and I also showed them little pull-toy trucks or whatever. They learned about drilling, could put axles and wheels on their pieces.

Then it was soldering. They were to make a hollow-constructed ring. I said, "Okay, by hollow, I mean it has inside and outside space. It isn't just a band on your finger with a whoopee on top. Think of it more sculpturally. And read about rings in history and write the story of your ring, the history of your ring. This ring of yours has a long history. Why is it in your possession now? How did it come down to you?" And they go, "Huh?" I said. "It's a novel, a story. You're making something up." "Oh, Okay."

And so they would write about fairy princesses, or rings that contained poison. But whatever stone was in or imagery was on it was very special and part of the story. They would be reading some of the history of rings—books from my library collection that I'd lay out. I would talk about how rings have been used for signet rings, or used for engagement rings or for pope's rings or Super Bowl rings.

Then they would have to do a little friction-fit lidded container. Over the years this assignment would have different parameters. Once it was a body-part container. "What do you mean by 'body parts'?" They would ask. I said, "Maybe it's your grandmother's last breath." They would get pretty creative with this assignment. I was trying to evolve. I felt in my later years of teaching that I was getting to be sort of old-fashioned, because everything was going conceptual. Just doing technique was frowned on. So I was trying to get them thinking, get them to do a little research so that they understood a little about the history, but get them to have some—and I hate the word "concept," but some idea that was associated with their piece.

Then the last project would be an assignment that was pretty open. They could use any process that they'd learned. I would write a poem, or I'd give them some sort of challenge. Reflection, say—well, reflection can be physical, visual; polish it enough and you can see yourself. It can be your thinking about things. So I'd toss out a word, and they would have to interpret it. Once it was a measuring device—they were to decide what was being measured. Once it was a musical instrument—I got a steel drum from one student that time.

On the more advanced levels, I would be teaching a different topic each quarter, only repeating them every two or three years. Ancient techniques was a favorite topic for the students—granulation and filigree and chiseling and making their own solder, refining gold. We'd get gold donated to the program—broken pieces or an old ring.

Since I only taught that class occasionally, I would usually have enough donated gold to show them how to refine it. I'd melt the gold and mix it with copper, then pour the molten metal into a bucket of water. This would break it into small balls. I then put it into nitric acid overnight and, the next class period, pour off the nitric and rinse the brown sludge in the bottom that looked, when dry, like instant coffee. This was put into the crucible, heated with the torch, and it melts into a pool of [almost] pure gold. I could get pretty pure gold with this method, as long as there was no platinum or palladium. Now they were all excited. I had them rolling it out to use in *kuem boo* or making their own rose gold, et cetera.

We had a bunch of stones donated by a stone-cutting company, thousands of stones. So they had all the amethysts or blue topaz or garnets or a few other kinds of stones in fancy cuts that they wanted to use. It was all free to them.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that come about?

MS. HU: Well, a man called me up one day and said, "We want to promote the use of colored stones, and so we're going to give a few to a number of jewelry programs." He was down in Vancouver, Washington, the Columbia Gem House. He asked, "Do you want some?" I said, "Yes, thank you, that would be very nice,"

He asked what kind of cut I wanted, and I asked for anything except round, anything fancy. So he donated a small box of stones, and I made sure that we took some pictures of the jewelry the students made with them, and I sent them back to him. I would use those stones to talk about setting fancy cuts, building their own settings, not just abezel or commercial prongs.

Then a couple of years later, he called again, but he said that this time he was only going to donate to our program because he found out that some of the other schools were using them just like glitter—gluing them

onto sculpture. He didn't like that. But since we actually used them in jewelry, he would give us all they were going to donate, hundreds if not thousands of stones. I would tell the students that they could have as many as they could set. No limit. But they could not just take them home; they had to use them. Some of the stones were really good. So it really pushed them; it made them push themselves.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, what a wonderful opportunity.

We had a casting class, and chasing and repoussé. In that, I would introduce the Western-style chasing tools, and then I would introduce the Japanese tools. I always ordered the tools right from Japan, from Komokin, as long as they were in business. So the students had the little *tagane* and learned the Japanese method of chasing.

I took them through a similar project to the one I had done in the Ando workshop—I assigned them a face, a self-portrait. They hated that. I said, "There's nothing that will test your skill more than a face. If you do a rose and you leave off a petal, most people won't notice. But a face? We're really particular about faces." Of course, they had trouble. But a few turned out pretty good, and they learned more, faster that way than anything else I thought I could assign. That is what Ando had us do, and I thought it a good idea.

MS. RIEDEL: And when did you introduce the history of body adornment?

MS. HU: It was in the mid-'90s somewhere, 1996 I think.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that the first significant evolution of your teaching philosophy? Was that a new idea that really kind of traced the evolution of your teaching over the years?

MS. HU: Well, that was a lecture course. They would take that in addition to all their studio courses.

MS. RIEDEL: And you taught both?

MS. HU: Yes, I did it once every other year, one quarter every other year. I did that because I thought that they ought to know a little bit about the history of their discipline. The art historians didn't really cover it. The students had to take art history. They had to take a certain number of credits of art history, but all they got was painting, sculpture, and architecture, pretty much, with a smattering of ceramics and maybe a crown now and then. Fibers had to teach their history. Photo was teaching their history. So some of the studio people had to teach it, whereas painters didn't have to teach their history.

MS. RIEDEL: And when you came to the University of Washington, there was a fairly dynamic program in process. Ramona Solberg was there, and John Marshall.

MS. HU: Oh, yes, metals had been there since 1916.

MS. RIEDEL: Nineteen-sixteen? They had a metals program?

MS. HU: Yes, both hollowware and jewelry. That's when the school of art was put together. I had to go into the basement of the library to look at the old catalogues and other records to find this out. Before that, they had taught some drawing and music for teachers. Then they decided they needed a school of art. So they put one together and started teaching everything they have now that year, except photography and art history, I think. They had poster-making, printmaking, painting, sculpture, ceramics—

MS. RIEDEL: —and metalsmithing.

MS. HU: And metalsmithing. It was coming out of the arts and crafts time. They hired women teachers from Columbia in New York. They were the first. There were a few in succession from Columbia teaching metals.

Then Ruth Pennington graduated from here. She probably started teaching as a graduate student, but she graduated and started teaching metals and probably design and crafts in 1930. She taught until 1970, when John Marshall came. Ramona Solberg came, I think, in '65. Ramona was half art education and half metals. So she was teaching with Ruth, and then teaching with John.

When I came in '80, Ramona was still there. The director at that point felt that any program that had graduate students needed to have at least two full-time faculty. He hired a second photo person the year before I came. Then he hired me and a second person in fibers three years later. He was building up the programs.

Ramona was still teaching jewelry part-time, so they had me teach basic design and metals. Then they needed someone in fibers, so I taught off-loom fibers for a year. "You make baskets; you can teach fibers." So I was teaching felting and embroidery, papermaking and basketry, et cetera. This, in addition to teaching metals.

MS. RIEDEL: So you've really seen the program grow enormously.

MS. HU: Well, it grew to two full-time people. Ramona retired a couple of years after I came, so I began teaching metals full-time. It was two full-time people with John and myself. Then John retired in 2001, and I applied for his position back but never got it. I applied year after year, but it was never granted, so I was handling the program on my own, with an occasional TA or adjunct-taught class.

MS. RIEDEL: After it had been two full-time professors for years?

MS. HU: Yes, for 20 years.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were doing it with undergrad and grad?

MS. HU: Yes. I was told variously, "We can't give you the second position back because there is no money." Well, it was after 9/11. After a few years, there seemed to be some money. "Well, you're too small." "Well, what do you mean by 'too small'? I've got about as many majors as programs with two or three faculty," because I had about 23 majors and four to six grad students, plus many elective students, and I was handling it, basically, all on my own.

I had one TA—usually one quarter a year. And when I would take a sabbatical leave, they would let me hire a replacement. That was interesting.

I ought to back up a little bit, I guess. John and I also had a half-time lab technician. Roger Horner, our technician, retired in 2000, so I had the opportunity to hire a new technician. I knew it was going to be my program, because John had already signed up for retirement the next year.

So I advertised, and chose James McMurray, who could do a lot of things. He had a science background in school, but then he got into making jewelry. He had his own company casting charms that were sold all over the country—casting up to 10,000 of them per week. So I knew he knew about metals equipment. But his hobby was shooting off rockets. He was designing and building these rockets, and he had gotten some up 30,000 feet or so. That intrigued me, because of my dad. And he had a company where he would sell esoteric stuff to the rocket community, so I knew he could source things. When he came and interviewed, I asked about his woodworking skills. Could he build things? He says, "Yeah, I built a house." It seemed like he could do just about anything, and he was very good with computers, just loved computers.

John and Roger had started getting the program into computers because John had seen a show of teapots in Bellingham where they were all CNC milled out of solid stock. He was pretty incredulous about the control that the computers could give milling machines to make these things. So they had applied to a dean's fund and got a small CNC mill and a computer a couple of years before they both left.

I decided that this was something I wanted the program to pursue, and with James's help, I figured I could. The first thing James did was build six benches, and we put them in the hollowware room on one side, so that my advanced students could be working at the same time as I had my beginners working in the other room. We rearranged where the hammers and stakes were put so that it made more room and we could get the benches in there.

Then we wrote a grant to apply through the university to buy a 3-D scanner and a better computer and a rapid prototyping machine that would print a wax form from a design on the computer. So instead of milling from a big chunk of metal, it would be built up in wax. Whatever your 3-D form is, the computer would slice it into layers and then print one layer on another layer on another layer until you had this form take, which could then be cast. We got the grant, so we had this equipment and were doing some experiments with it. We then got another one that built in plastic.

We made this equipment open to anyone in the university to use, and many students from architecture would come over. There was a fellow from computer science and engineering who found out about it. He would come and use our equipment for his Ph.D. research. He would be there all the time, and I felt this was great, because whenever any of the other students would want to do something, he was so thankful that we were letting him use the equipment, he would take his time to show the students how to use it and spare James.

MS. RIEDEL: And he had nothing like that over in computer science and engineering?

MS. HU: Well, there were things around campus, but he found out that we had just what he needed. I later found out that he didn't tell any of his friends where we were—[laughs]—so he didn't have more competition for the equipment. He was working on facial recognition software. His project was scanning infant faces. If they have certain congenital birth defects, there are things in the face that could tell you, like Down syndrome. As I understood it, he wanted to be able to go out into the field, scan the infant's faces, and then tell the parents that

maybe the infant should be taken into a clinic somewhere. So he was printing out all these various-shaped dolls' heads to use in developing his software.

Year by year we kept being very successful at getting grants through an initiative that the university had. We had the wax and plastic rapid prototyping machines, a couple of kinds of 3-D laser scanners, then a whole room of secondhand computers so we could teach a CAD class, a laser welder, and a titanium casting machine. Then we started leveraging that and going out to the companies themselves and saying, "We have this equipment, and we really would love to have one of yours." And so we got a wax milling machine in exchange for James writing up the owner's manual. It was just in the process of being introduced. He wrote up how to set it up and how to work with it and troubleshoot.

MS. RIEDEL: Sort of an operations guide. And what was the vision that you were working towards?

MS. HU: Okay. Well, my whole background is technique-based, right? From the '60s. And so I thought there are all these new possibilities. If you give them to an artist, an artist is going to be able to do things that maybe the designers of the equipment never even thought of, because we don't always follow rules. I also thought this is the way the jewelry and hollowware trade is going. I really wanted to give my students the maximum of possibilities after school.

We had a shop that could do electroforming and anodize aluminum. We could do all sorts of things. I would always caution my students, "When you get out of school, you don't need all of this equipment. You will only need the equipment that is needed for your own work. But we need a lot, because if we don't have a variety of things but only have a limited set of equipment, we're steering you in that direction. I want to be able to let you explore here and find out the things that excite you, so that it gives you maximum possibilities for developing your own work." It was in that philosophy that I thought we ought to be adding this new digital direction in addition to the more traditional approaches.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting, because your personal work is very low-tech.

MS. HU: It's very low-tech, yes. And that is, I think, some of the problem I had. The other faculty looked at that, and they couldn't figure that out, even though I told them, "Hey, I grew up with a father that was helping get us to the moon, and my electronic engineer brother is doing all this avionics and laser optics stuff." So I have an interest. It's just that I don't do it myself.

The basic knowledge that you need to use a lot of this equipment is to know the CAD programs. I did not and could not teach that.

MS. RIEDEL: Could the tech teach that?

MS. HU: He could. And he did in the evenings. He wasn't allowed to teach a regular course, but he did teach an extension course. And he talked to the people who wrote the program [Rhinoceros], who were right here in Seattle, and they sent over one of their teachers. So for a couple of years, the company volunteered a teacher to teach a whole quarter-credit course. They charged nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. What an incredible opportunity for the students.

MS. HU: Some students liked it and some didn't. And that's totally understandable. I really liked the laser welder, and I was playing around with that, with my wire, zapping it together. I had some ideas, but I never seemed to have enough time because there was so much that I was involved with in those days, teaching the whole program.

But then when I took my sabbatical, I was given a visiting position to replace me. I advertised over the Internet. Like most faculty in our school, I took my year off one quarter at a time spread over three years. It was easier on the program not to have me gone for a whole year. Also, occasionally, I would be given an extra position for an adjunct-taught class.

One year I advertised for someone who would teach how to incorporate sensing devices and little motors, because I thought, Why does a brooch always just sit there static when there is all this sensing stuff? It's right off the counter now, not too expensive. You could have your brooches do things.

I brought in Young Harvell. He had a successful software company in San Jose, but the idea of teaching the class intrigued him. We arranged to have the class taught all day once a week on Fridays. He flew up each week. I sat in on the class. The first thing he taught us to do was to wire a circuit with a little LED. Depending on how we wired it, it would change color. So it could be red, or it could be green, et cetera. Then we learned how to etch circuits. For the first one, we just took the flex shaft and ground it away. Then we learned how to etch, then how to design on the computer and send it out to be etched. Next we learned how to program some of the little

sensors and servos—motors.

Every week he would come with Ziploc bags and hand out all these little things that he would be picking up—miniature motors and little sensing devices, et cetera. At one point he said, "I'm going to show how to program a sensor on the computer. What do you want it to do?" So I said, "Okay, use a proximity sensor and have an LED. Have it green, but if someone gets a little too close, have it turn yellow. And then if someone is really in your space, have it turn red." He says, "Okay." He tapped on the computer and it worked.

James and I were saying, "There are so many little motors. If you had a ball chain, you know, just like the light pull-chain, it would be easy to make gears that would grab onto those balls. Attach them to a motor, and you could have a little pendant that ran up and down your chain. Have the little thing sitting there, and if it senses someone is too close or maybe has halitosis or whatever, it can run up and hide behind your neck. I thought that would be so cool. [Laughs.]

I just thought all of this stuff is so neat. I opened the class up to anyone in the university. I had some comparative history of ideas people and a number from the different art disciplines, a student from engineering and one from math. It was a lot of fun.

This was not all the rapid prototyping stuff. Here was another area where using the advances that are being made with materials and electronics—I was calling it "Mechatronics," mechanical things run by electricity. A '50s word maybe? But new to me, and I liked it.

Well, I got into a lot of trouble there. I wasn't supposed to use that word because that was the province of another area on campus. So I was running up against a lot of jealousy. I was stepping out of bounds. I wasn't just making nice little jewelry like I guess they thought I should. I don't know what it was. But at any rate, when I finally had enough and quit, they just gave all the equipment away—or a lot of it—and told me that they stored away all the stakes and hammers. They teach something else in the metals rooms now.

MS. RIEDEL: And one of the reasons that you decided to retire when you did was that there was no support for the evolution of the program the way you were taking it?

MS. HU: I did not feel there was really support for it. I kept asking for the second faculty position back. The other faculty supported my requests. I said to the administration, "I've got just as many students as two- and three-person faculty programs, so you can't call me small. I have waiting lists for all my classes. We're doing cutting-edge stuff." But as soon as the second sculptor left and they were down to one sculpture faculty, they said, "We have to have another sculptor." And they couldn't even fill many of their classes. I was so angry. And then one day they pushed me too far.

James, my tech, was completely dedicated to our program. He put in way more than the 20 hours per week that he was paid for, and we got along great, but he was intense. The students either loved him or did not like him, as they thought he was not as patient with them as they thought he should be. There were student complaints against him. One day I was called into the director's office and told that there had been another complaint and that was it. He would have to be fired—unless, of course, we both agreed that he would switch to the industrial design program, and industrial design would give metals its 20-hour-per-week student position. If he was so bad he had to be fired, why did industrial design want him?

I felt they were really taking away my tech and downgrading metals from a tech staff position to a student technician whom I would have to train every year and who would not be able to help me in taking the shop in the direction I was pursuing. The industrial design technician usually just ordered supplies, was in their shop during open work hours, and kept their limited equipment in working order. They had nothing approaching the sophistication and complexity of our shop.

I would have no one to help write grants, to help in building liaisons with industry or doctors at Children's Hospital for research projects for our students, which we had begun to do. I knew James would not stay under this condition. It was a disaster. So everything came to an end. I finally saw that they just were not going to support me no matter what I did, so I decided to leave.

MS. RIEDEL: And so as opposed to supporting the real evolution of the program, which was happening in a big, cutting-edge technological direction, there was, it sounds like, a systematic attempt to just disassemble it.

MS. HU: Yes, I believe so. I think the administration wanted to build the industrial design program. When they were having interviews for potential faculty in industrial design, they would schedule a whole hour for them to be in our shop working with James and seeing all the equipment, but they wouldn't even have them introduced to me. A friend told me that in advertisements in industrial design magazines for their position that spring, all of our equipment would be listed. [Laughs.] Well, yes, it was available to their students because it was available to any of the students, not just metals.

But I got the feeling that I was stepping on some toes, that the director did not want metals to be going in that direction, that industrial design should be going in that direction. I had tried to suggest to the ID faculty that we work together, but they were not interested. I thought of metals as the bridge between the studio areas and industrial design. But I guess our school of art, at that time, was not interested in having more connection between the areas.

The student who was working on the facial recognition software, well, he started working for Children's Hospital [Seattle] after he graduated. He told his boss where he had done his work, and his boss wanted to come over and see our facility. He came over and got all excited about the potential for working with us. He went back and talked to his doctors, and a couple of them were interested.

We started working with Dr. Richard Hopper, a plastic surgeon. To test us out, he sent James a series of MRI scans of somebody's skull who had been in a horrific traffic accident. This doctor puts faces back together again. He said that before he goes in to operate, it would be really nice to know where all the bone fragments are. So James was able to use our plastic rapid prototype printer to make a model of the broken skull, capturing all the floating fragments on a grid system that he developed. After we passed his test, we started working with Dr. Hopper to make a small clip that he could use on infant's noses who are born with cleft palate or cleft lip.

Molly Epstein, one of my last grad students, who has just graduated last June, worked with him for two years, going into the operating room, seeing the kind of little gizmos that are on the market now, and then talking with the doctor and coming up with changes. Then she would go back to our shop, work up the design in CAD, and print out the new version in plastic, and add the intricate metalwork needed.

Dr. Hopper would operate on these kids when they were three months old. A lot of times the nose is really displaced and misshapen, so between the time they're born and three months, when they are growing, he has the parents use a little clip on the nose that is adjusted as they grow to mold the nose into a more normal shape. Then when he operates and pulls everything into line, the nose looks more like a normal nose. So Molly worked with the doctor to come up with something that he thought worked better than what was available. Now that she is graduated, she's still working with him on something that goes into the mouth—on part-time staff at Children's Hospital.

MS. RIEDEL: And the doctors wanted to work with metalsmiths, as opposed to industrial designers?

MS. HU: Yes. I'd go over there every once in a while. One time I asked the doctor, "Why did you come to jewelers? Why not go to engineers?" He said he tried going to engineers, but they didn't do hands-on stuff. They were all theory, at least the ones he was talking to. I asked why not industrial designers, and he said that he thought if it wasn't going to be engineers, then who deals with the body and has the kind of minute hand skills necessary for making these little things? He thought jewelers. So he came to us.

I thought, well, here is a whole new avenue for those students who want to use our kind of skills, working with the medical field. And that would certainly be a good living. And it's needed.

I also started working with an audiologist at Children's on trying to design a better way of holding on a hearing aid for kids where it can't go into the ear, because sometimes they don't even have an ear. It's an oscillator-like thing that conducts the sound through the bone of the skull. It was held on with a headband similar to earphones, but the way it was riveted together, it would actually dig into the kid's skull. He had a raw place on his head. We were trying to devise a different way of holding the hearing aid against the skull. For this project I was working with a group of undergraduates who were all volunteering. The students were very excited to try and work on it. I had a lot of them that were willing to put in the extracurricular time. But it was a constantly changing group each quarter, and we had not gotten very far before I left.

But the project with the plastic surgeon is really working out well. Molly actually came across the country to do that. She had heard that we were doing this sort of thing and that's what she wanted to do. I thought this direction had so much potential.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. And for somebody who looks at the history of jewelry and the history of metalwork, to see this new 21st-century potential—

MS. HU: It was so disappointing. When I finally decided it was a battle I couldn't win, I had to give up. I didn't want to get myself sick over it—and the stress was beginning to take its toll.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] And is there anyplace else in the country that you're aware of doing anything like it?

MS. HU: Well, a number of art schools are putting in high-tech facilities now. We had a former student who was helping the Chicago Art Institute with theirs. They were putting in a lab that all of the areas could access.

MS. RIEDEL: And it should be said that you had put together one of the best labs in the country.

MS. HU: Well, that's what the guys who sold the equipment told us. They said that we had, at that point—and there are others now—but at that point he felt we probably had the most complete or extensive lab of this type of any art school in the country. But UW didn't care.

MS. RIEDEL: And you see that now as a trend happening in other schools?

MS. HU: Oh, yes, a number of them are building a whole CAD-CAM lab.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were ahead of the curve.

MS. HU: The metals program at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia was getting into computers very early on, and the Birmingham School of Jewellery in England has a fantastic facility. That's how a lot of the commercial jewelry is made. So if it is a program that wants to have its students able to look into that direction, they should at least be conversant with some of these processes.

MS. RIEDEL: So you retired in 2006?

MS. HU: Two thousand six, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And since then?

MS. HU: Since then, well, I did a lot of traveling. [Laughs.] What else is new?

MS. RIEDEL: You really focused on the history of body adornment?

MS. HU: No. Not really. Well, maybe. I'm still buying and reading books. I'm still putting together a library on the subject. But I haven't taught it since.

MS. RIEDEL: But you're putting together a research collection?

MS. HU: Yes, my library will be willed somewhere. I still belong to the jewelry historian societies.

MS. RIEDEL: Are you still teaching workshops?

MS. HU: Yes, I still teach workshops. I taught three last year. They are both at colleges and for local guilds, but usually held at a college if they are organized by a guild. I have two that I teach, one in general wire work, and one in chains—not making as much as categorization and recognition, with trying out one or two types that interest the individual. I have a chain collection of almost 400 chains now that I show people. I have them categorized. You joked about me liking to categorize—so we have cable, curb, coils, loop-in-loop, pressed, milled, chain mail, combinations, and miscellaneous.

[END OF CD 5.]

MS. RIEDEL: Now that you've been out of the university setting for a couple of years, do you think there is a specific place for American craft in the university setting?

MS. HU: Well, that's something that people are talking about. My program disappeared after I left. Heikki's did. A number have. There have been a few that have been started or grown, so I'm not sure it's going to totally disappear. But I thought that the way I was taking mine would be a good fit for a research institution, which ours—the University of Washington—is, that you would have a lot of crossover and collaborative work with people in various disciplines. Treating it a little more like the sciences, in that you are applying for grants and getting some of your own funding, which the arts usually don't do. In a climate of declining state support, something has to happen like that.

My next move, I thought, was going to be to try to get graduate student support from these outside companies. We had started to line up some projects that needed research. Now, whether I could have found students who wanted to do research, or whether most just want the freedom to do art, anything they want, that would be a question. But for those who are very disciplined and can do more strictly controlled research for part of their time at school, I thought there would be—certainly would be fellowships. It would be like the TAs, but would underwrite their tuition and give them some living expenses for a certain percentage of their time. They would still need to do artistic research and participate in a graduate thesis exhibition, but how much they would learn doing the technical research! I could support the students, because it's expensive to go to grad school.

So I don't know. I really don't know. I think it depends a bit on where the metals program is located, the art department or school where it's located. Is it in a college of arts and sciences, like ours was, buried in such a

huge thing? Or is it in a college of the arts? Or is it in education, where some of them are? In communications? And if you've got smaller colleges, I think it's a little easier to get the ear of your dean. I mean, we hardly ever saw our dean. Our college of arts and sciences is huge—over 25,000 students. We had four associate deans for various groups of disciplines, and we hardly saw those. So it was tough at the University of Washington.

MS. RIEDEL: So you don't see any strong driving trends in one way or another?

MS. HU: Well, it feels like metals is losing, but I don't know what the actual statistics would say.

MS. RIEDEL: What about students? Do you see a difference in students that are university trained versus ones who have learned their craft outside of academia?

MS. HU: Well, the university- or art-school-trained people get a lot of design training. Production companies will say that if they try to hire people that come out of universities, they aren't well trained in bench skills. They're slow. They don't have the technical facility. They all want to be designers. They won't sit down and do someone else's work. They won't do repetitive things over and over. And so a lot of times it's going to be harder for a university-trained person to get a job in the industry. Now, the industry will be able to take people that don't have so much training, train them to the level that they need them, and they'll be happier to stay there. This is what we often hear.

If a person has learned their trade apprenticing to a production person, I think they probably have a better level of skill in what they have been doing. I would encourage my students to go out and work for someone, for one of the studio jewelers around town. They would really pick up skills by having to do something over and over, and they would learn a bit about what it was like being in business.

MS. RIEDEL: And what about in terms of artists, practicing studio artists? Do you see a difference in the art that is made by artists that graduated from university as opposed to ones that have figured it out on their own?

MS. HU: You know, I don't know how many non-academics I know. I think all my friends went through programs somewhere. If you pick it up on your own, I think of those people as the ones that have production lines and do the fairs, and since I have never done those, I do not know many of those folks.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. Do you see American craft, and metalsmithing in particular in this case, moving in any particular direction? I know we've discussed the fact that jewelry, contemporary American jewelry, seems very strong right now, hollowware less so.

MS. HU: It really does seem strong. When they talk about SOFA, they're giving examples of jewelry sales. It doesn't quite pull the high-ticket prices that glass does yet. Furniture, of course, does. Ceramics sometimes does. Glass has Dale Chihuly, who is a very flamboyant figure and really—

MS. RIEDEL: —catapulted that field.

MS. HU: Yes, he really did. And clay had Garth Clark, and his gallery pushed up its artists' prices. But metals really hasn't had anyone like that, I don't believe. We're starting. We have the AJF, the Art Jewelry Forum, a group of collectors. And there are jewelry history societies. So there is more and more interest in it, I think. I'm trying to buy books, and I can't keep up with all that are being published. That is an interesting phenomenon. That didn't used to happen.

MS. RIEDEL: And you said you were on Amazon, and you found 2,500 books? Is that right?

MS. HU: Well, that wasn't on Amazon, that was on AndALL.

MS. RIEDEL: Twenty-five hundred books—monographs, histories, catalogues?

MS. HU: Well, many were duplicates. But if you type in "jewelry" as a key word, you get quite a few. And right now, on Amazon, if you type in "jewelry book," you'll get over 2,000. Of course, there are a lot of duplicates, and most of them are the easy-projects-in-an-afternoon kind. [They laugh.]

Now I'm not buying too many from eBay, rather from Amazon. I'm looking for newly published ones to try and keep up with those. I've got 45 in my "save until later" basket, waiting until I think I can afford them. And that isn't the how-to books. Those are all history and surveys of pictures. There are a lot of picture books with very little text coming out.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that international as well?

MS. HU: Well, Lark [Books, New York City] is starting to show international work. I heard that they were trying to publish five books on jewelry a year. This one, *Adorn* [*New Jewlery*, Amanda Mansell] that I just got, is mostly

British, I think, a few Americans. From Charon Kransen, I'm getting all of the European catalogues. Europeans have been printing catalogues for quite a long time—artists printing catalogues of their own work. And Charon has been trying to get the Americans to do that for a number of years now. We're starting.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, we are. Do you think of your own work as particularly American or a part of an international tradition?

MS. HU: I think it's American in that it doesn't follow the European trends. But I don't—

MS. RIEDEL: Which are what?

MS. HU: Well, they were very hard-edged, geometric in the '70s. And now it seems I see an awful lot of fragment-like designs where technique isn't stressed at all, whereas it used to be. It looks to be like disparate bits stuck together. It's a strange aesthetic to me. I'm not that comfortable with it.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. That's funny because when I used to think about that work, I used to think about it as non-narrative, very minimal, more form-based—very Germanic, German/Austria/Switzerland. Your work fit much more in that sort of category than what you're describing now.

You have done a lot of collecting of jewelry yourself for the past 30-plus years. What is it in particular that you collect? Jewelry and metalwork, but what is it that you look for?

MS. HU: Well, some of the ethnic pieces that I bring back—and we've talked about that Tibetan one that I figured out how to do the knitting from—I will learn something from. Some I can give as examples in my workshops, too—different kinds of braids or twists. If I can find a bracelet made anywhere—handmade or machine made, it doesn't matter—that is an example of something I teach in the wire workshops, I'll put it in with my samples of the process as a finished example.

And then I've been collecting chains for over 40 years. I didn't know I had a chain collection until a few years ago when it got sort of big and I figured, Oh, it really is a collection.

MS. RIEDEL: And how many are there?

MS. HU: Almost 400, in Ziploc bags, all categorized as to type and variation of type.

MS. RIEDEL: And where they are from as well?

MS. HU: No. If I write a book, I was thinking that would be the first thing I write on, chains. Because I have them, I can take the pictures myself. I have not seen a book on this, not so much how to make them, but just giving people a look at all the variations that are possible and have been done, so that they can choose something a little less common and make it for their own work.

MS. RIEDEL: And these you've collected all over the world?

MS. HU: Some, but mostly at Goodwill.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. HU: Oh, yeah. It's wonderful; you can find a lot there. I don't care what it's made of—lesser material, plated whatever—so I can afford it. But I haven't found a new one in quite a while, so I pretty much have them all now, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've also collected extraordinary pieces from your travels.

MS. HU: For whatever reason, I seem compelled to bring home examples of the jewelry and textiles, as well as books on the jewelry and metalwork.

MS. RIEDEL: And what do you look for when you're collecting for yourself?

MS. HU: What do I look for? I don't know. I just want them. [Laughs.] And I have to rationalize why I should be allowing myself to have them. So when I was teaching, I would be taking them in to school to show the students. That was real good rationalization—wearing something different every day and trying to get the processes used in them to go along with what I was demonstrating that day. But now that I'm not teaching, I really don't have an excuse. But I still seem to be picking them up. I don't know. A disease, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: And it should be said you have some extraordinary pieces—a chain-mail shirt from Tibet; is that correct? And there's an amazing hat.

MS. HU: Well, it's a helmet, a steel helmet from Tibet. Yes, there are some nice pieces that are not all jewelry. I collect mostly metal and textiles, no ceramics, because they tend to break when you carry them in your suitcase.

MS. RIEDEL: That moves us nicely into your thoughts on the significance of metalworking, particularly jewelry, as a means for expression and what it can do that nothing else can.

MS. HU: Well, yes. You were saying that you were going to ask me that question, and I was trying to think of what I was going to answer.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] What are its strengths and its weaknesses?

MS. HU: I think I started to say scale. A lot of times, I will be philosophizing with students, about public versus private art, and say that as a craftsperson, as an artist, a visual artist who makes things, we're spending a lot of time to make one thing. If it is reproduced, it is considered of lesser value—not as much as the original. Whereas if I were a novelist and it gets published, that's fine. Or a songwriter, et cetera.

Because my pieces are small, only one person can get up close enough at one time to really see them. So you might say jewelry is a private art versus a more public art. I'm not putting them out on a plaza for the public to view. However, when you wear one out in public, it becomes a public art, in effect. Much more so than, say, the painting over the sofa can ever be, because then you have to invite people into your home to see it.

I know Keith Lewis really likes the interaction that happens when he wears his brooches. He'll be wearing his rather outrageous pieces, and people have to make a comment. They just have to—he says even in elevators, where nobody talks to each other, they will have to ask him about them. And so he's interjecting. He's using his work to inject his ideas into society and generate discussion. I find that pretty interesting.

We were talking earlier that in traditional cultures, jewelry is more an identity marker—status or other degrees of identity. So by wearing the jewelry, you are communicating something, but you're not communicating an individual artist's statement. So it functions differently there than some of Keith's work.

Now, for my own work, I say that the hope, or goal, I have for it would be that I have fun, as we have been discussing, with the challenge of the technique. Can I do this? I have fun playing with the patterns, and I do like beauty. I guess that's not always a word that one should associate with art these days, but I do love it, and I try to make beautiful things. And I try to make functional things that can be worn. But then in order for them to have a life, I've got to let them go out and somehow be bought or given away, so that they are owned by someone else and worn by someone else—I would hope worn. And my wish would be that someone could really fall in love with the piece, so much that they wear it quite a bit. That piece then becomes identified with that person, so that seeing the piece will make another person think of that person.

This happened with me and a necklace. My grandmother, my mother's mother, lived in another state. We only saw her once a year. Every time we saw her dressed up, she was wearing this one necklace. It was Victorian. It was machine made. It was not anything special in and of itself, but it was Granny's necklace. When she passed away, my mother inherited it. We were up in Granny's attic, cleaning out her house and found a box of photographs. There was a photograph from the1860s or '70s of a woman wearing that necklace. On the back it said it was my grandmother's aunt, for whom she was named.

My mother inherited that piece, and I inherited that piece from my mother. So that piece helps tell me about my ancestors. It tells me who I am, where I come form. I think craft can do that—the arms of a rocking chair, or the handles of tools that have been rubbed. Wood that's been rubbed by so many hands over generations has a real soft, wonderful patina. I've got a cross-stitch sampler in the other room that a little girl did, one of my direct ancestors. She did it in the early 1800s, and listed her family lineage going back into the 1700s. So that's my lineage.

So these objects can become very precious, I believe, in telling us who we are. And it's a different kind of identity than just wearing—like I've been talking about with tribal people, for instance—wearing the correct hairstyle that you can only wear after you've weaned your first male child. It takes a long time to build up, a generation or two, so that I will never know if the work ever achieves that, because it's only going to be in the future that it can do it. But that is a goal I have for my work.

Okay, well, I'm an artist that was schooled in the 20th century, so I have the definition that was given to me of an artist, and the ego, that artists should want their work in museums. Well, I've been lucky, and some have been put into museums. But they are no longer ever handled directly by human hands. They are not worn; they

are in cases. And in a way, they're dead. They don't have a life as jewelry anymore. So I'm a little conflicted when one of my pieces is taken out of society and put in a box in a museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, especially when it's a thing that has a function, which we've talked about. It's meant to be used. It's meant to be handled and part of day-to-day life. It's not meant to just be set aside someplace and separate, and not interacted with. And there is an importance of functionality in your work in the bigger picture of what function means.

MS. HU: Many museum objects don't function anymore—their original function, like African masks. They weren't made as objects to be contemplated. They had to function for maybe sometimes a brief time during a special ceremony.

MS. RIEDEL: I think a painting functions just as well in a museum, probably better, though, than in a private home, [where] it's not out and about.

MS. HU: Its function is to convey whatever the thought was or whatever they say art is supposed to make you do, look at things differently—the more people who see it, the more it can function.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: So you're recently retired. You've ended this phase of your life, and you're getting ready to move into a new phase of your life. At this point, have you done any reflecting on significant lessons learned, either as a maker or as a teacher or as a researcher, and how it might affect where you head next?

MS. HU: Well, I guess in reflecting on phases of your life, it still interests me that I fell in love with working with metal when I was 16, and that this is still what I love to do and where my interests are. It's taken slight turns. I did a lot of hollowware in undergraduate school, and then I slowly came to jewelry, and jewelry slowly broadened to body adornment. But I'm still interested in making jewelry and in reading about body adornment.

And I never really went through a mid-life crisis, I guess. I never really thought, "Is this all? I've got to do something else." I never got tired of what I was doing. In my teaching, I was always changing my assignments, and I felt I was making the whole program interesting by changing it and letting it grow into a different direction. That didn't work, so I stepped away from it, and now I guess for the last couple of years, I was wondering what would happen with my own work.

Sitting here, I thought I knew what my life would be like—tending my garden and my house, making my work, cooking. But I have an opportunity, possibly, to look at something pretty exciting and different. I have a boyfriend, and we might be moving and building a house.

So the question is: How much energy do I have at this stage in my life? Physically, can I do it? But I think that would be an interesting thing. I've not done that. And I'm sure I will travel more, too, whether it's camping around the U.S. or flying down to New Zealand again. I suppose I ought to go to Europe. I ought to see the Pforzheim [Jewellery] Museum [Pforzheim, Germany]. I should go to Antwerp and Amsterdam, great centers for jewelry history. I've never seen so much of Europe, so at some point I should fit that in.

I still delight in the community of friends in the field. I do want to continue going to the conferences, because that's where I see my friends. I know a lot of my colleagues tend to stop going to SNAG when they get a little older. But I really have a good time at those—the SNAG conference and the Yuma Symposium—seeing my old buddies. We sit and we talk sometimes saying, "Oh, so you remember 30 years ago when such-and-such happened?" It's a good time.

I am concerned about where we are all going to end up—the old-folks-home question. When your friends are scattered all over the country, as you get older, are you going to be as mobile? Are you going to be able to still see them? When I had to put my dad into a retirement home and I was researching them, I kept telling my friends that we should be deciding where we would all like to go so we could be together. They thought it was much too early to be thinking of this and thought I was crazy. But I think that is something I might want to look into, to see if we can't somehow locate ourselves so that there is still a community of artists, metals people. We will still be able to sit around and talk about the old days.

But it's been a good life—and I hope it's not over. I don't think I chose wrong to pursue a craft, to fall in love with a material and to then learn so much about it. I always said that if I thought I knew everything, then I'd get bored. I don't know nearly everything about metals. There's so much to learn, so it is still interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: But there's nothing that you feel compelled to work on now? It seems that you've hit a stage in your career where you've done a lot.

MS. HU: Well, I'm at a little bit of a lull now, after June when the last of the grads finished up—I worked with the graduate students for two years after I actually retired, until all of them were gone. And so, yes, I'm told that it's very common when a person retires, that they sit back. Now that one has all the time in the world to do stuff, you don't get anything done. [Laughs.] And I feel like I should be sort of getting my life in order. I need to make lists of everything I have so I can schedule it in a will. My financial advisor is telling me I need to do all these things. And I haven't yet—the kind of end-of-life things that you do to get yourself in order.

You are telling me to send all my papers to the Archives. And I know some friends are doing that. But I haven't quite gotten myself ready to part with everything. I don't refer to them, but all the old letters are there in boxes. I probably should send them. If I ever move from here, that will be the time when I'll be starting to ship them out, I'm sure, because of, well, the tonnage. You have to scale back on your material possessions at some point.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like what I've seen of your focus over the past couple of years in passing conversations is that your focus has been changing from making and teaching to one more on the body adornment research.

MS. HU: Yes. Not on the teaching of body adornment as much, but I still do love to read about it and collect the books. I want to give a research library to some institution somewhere so that other people won't have to hunt around so much for the information like I did. And it has been great that a few people have asked for my course syllabus. There are a few courses now being taught at various institutions on the history of jewelry.

Lori Talcott, a former student, taught at RISD this last fall. We met several times and discussed how she would design her course. And I think she did a nice difference, in that I took it chronologically by continent, by area, and she was going to look at it by type of piece—so amulets, for instance—and go through time and cultures on that subject. She had it as a studio/art history class. The students would have projects to do as well as readings and papers. I haven't talked to her since she's been back here at Christmastime. I would like to. I'm looking forward to hearing how it went.

But a few other places have asked for my reading list to start putting together body adornment or history of jewelry or metals or of American crafts courses. I think that is positive.

MS. RIEDEL: All that research is moving forward and being used in a new way. Any final words, lessons learned, final words of wisdom you care to share?

MS. HU: Well, just what I sort of started with, that I found it interesting that both my brother and I decided what we wanted to do so early. We both stuck with it, and maybe because we've done it so long, we've both gone somewhere in our fields and, we hope, contributed something to our fields. And I see so many people these days, students in college, they get to their junior year and they haven't decided what they want to do yet, which I think is so sad.

For three summers I think it was, I was teaching a weeklong course for high school students in the shop at UW. It was part of a summer arts festival. And if I had not left, one of our plans was to start a Saturday morning class for high school kids. I was thinking about what I was able to access as a high school student and wanted to make that available.

Our guild here in Seattle, the Seattle Metals Guild, has an all-state metals exhibition for high school students called Passing the Torch. It's in, I think, its seventh year now. I worked on that committee for several years, getting it started. It's a way of giving these kids exposure. Last year, it was held at the Seattle Art Museum. It's been held in Ellensburg, Tacoma, at the Bellevue Art Museum, and this year it will be at North Seattle Community College galleries. What a wonderful thing for these kids to have recognition and be able to show their work in a real arts facility. I think we need to do more things like that. There is so much energy at that age—if it can just be channeled into positive directions. So that is part of my feeling that I want to contribute back to the field.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Maybe a little younger than college age, it sounds like, working with students even in high school.

MS. HU: I think someone should. I don't know if I have the energy anymore. But there are several people here in town who are starting to volunteer in the high schools. We've got President Obama saying that we all ought to be giving; we all ought to be volunteering. Our society can't afford everything anymore. I think we have to do a lot more volunteering and not expect to be paid for absolutely everything.

If things are going to happen, people have to make them happen. One of my friends said that, in talking to people in the high schools, she hears that for the sports teams, the parents are out there. There may be 15 volunteer coaches or assistant coaches for teams. How many in art? People don't think of doing that in other fields. But if we did, I think we could help. The arts are the first to be cut when budgets get tight. They need the help. I think we're going to head into some bleak times unless we all just start giving a little more.

MS. RIEDEL: Great, well, I think we've done a really good job.

MS. HU: About covered it, huh?

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: We've covered it. Thank you very much.

MS. HU: Yes, well, thank you.

MS. RIEDEL: I appreciate it.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]