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Oral history interview with Jackie Ferrara,
2009 January 16-February 13

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Jackie Ferrara on January 17 and 23, and February 13, 2009. The interview took place at the home of Jackie Ferrara in New York City, NY, and was conducted by Avis Berman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the U.S. General Services Administration, Design Excellence and the Arts oral history project.

Jackie Ferrara and Avis Berman have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Jackie Ferrara for the Archives of American Art, at her loft on Prince Street [New York, NY]. And today is January 16 [2009]—right?

JACKIE FERRARA: The 17th.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, it's Friday. I will correct it when I get home. All of a sudden I forgot the date.

Would you begin by stating your full name and date of birth?

JACKIE FERRARA: You have my full name—I see we have a problem right off. You want my professional name?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you may start with your maiden name, and you can put—

MS FERRARA: My maiden name is not the name I use.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I know. I realize that. Well, we know that your professional name is Jackie Ferrara. But would you state your legal name, please?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, sometimes it's Jackie Ferrara, and sometimes it's Jacqueline Ferrara.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, what about Jacqueline Hirschhorn Ferrara?

JACKIE FERRARA: It's never that. The only time it was ever that was when my aunt died and left me a few dollars. She wrote Jacqueline Hirschhorn very big and Ferrara very small.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: Jacqueline Hirschhorn Ferrara is probably 28 letters.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Okay. Well, and what was your date of birth?

JACKIE FERRARA: November 17, 1929.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. And that was in—

JACKIE FERRARA: Detroit, Michigan.

AVIS BERMAN: And how is Hirschhorn spelled?

JACKIE FERRARA: Three Hs: H-I-R-S-C-H-H-O-R-N.

AVIS BERMAN: So you're not related to Joseph Hirschhorn.

JACKIE FERRARA: No. Uh-huh. [Negative.]

AVIS BERMAN: And did you grow up in Detroit proper?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Or one of the suburbs?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. In Detroit proper.

AVIS BERMAN: And what were your parents' background?

JACKIE FERRARA: My father came here when he was 18. My mother was born here. My father worked as a salesman of restaurant equipment. My mother worked for the city; she was a bookkeeper—for the police department as a bookkeeper. And my grandmother lived with us; she always lived with us.

AVIS BERMAN: Your father's mother or your mom's?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, my mother's mother.

AVIS BERMAN: And where did your father come from?

JACKIE FERRARA: He came from—now, it kept changing names: Germany, Poland.

AVIS BERMAN: And when did he get to this country?

JACKIE FERRARA: He was 18, and all of his family, except for one sister, were killed in the Holocaust.

AVIS BERMAN: And I guess he was the only one who—

JACKIE FERRARA: He was the only one who came here, and I don't even know why he came here. I mean, all these questions that come later, you know, they're gone, and you have no—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, people didn't talk about that. They wanted to assimilate then.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And I don't even know that he came here—you're going to be asking me numbers, and it's going to be terrible because I have no chronological sense.

AVIS BERMAN: That's all right. Well, we'll get impressions, too. But some of this is just really for housekeeping.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And what was your mother's maiden name?

JACKIE FERRARA: Ufberg, U-F-B-E-R-G.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And so that family had come earlier? Was that from Germany?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Russia. I think my grandmother was from Russia.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And did your grandmother living with you, did that have an influence in the house in any way that you thought?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. My grandmother kept kosher, and she kept her things separate.

AVIS BERMAN: So you must have had a fairly large house.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, not at all. My grandmother, my brother, and I slept in the same bedroom. No, we were like—we were sort of like, maybe, lower middle class. My father didn't make much money, and my father had a bad gambling habit, which is, I think, why my mother went to work.

AVIS BERMAN: Did that ever stop?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, probably. Yes, it stopped. I mean, I don't think it stopped because—you know, this is all things you learn later, and you don't really know at the time. I just know that at one point my mother left my father for, maybe, three weeks and took us, my brother and I, to go stay with her grandfather, whom I'd never met. I mean, with her father, my grandfather, whom I'd never met because my grandfather and grandmother, my mother's parents, divorced when she was very young.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that was unusual then.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And he had a whole other family whose kids were older than me. I mean, it was really like a very long time ago. And my grandmother raised my mother and her sister. They lived on Rivington Street behind the butcher or something. She had no money; she never learned English. And my mother and my aunt, they just always worked: paper routes, funny different things, when they were growing up.

AVIS BERMAN: So that was a tough environment for you.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. But, you know, that time my father—well, I lived on a street where there were lots of apartment buildings, and all the kids were from very similar backgrounds. So I didn't feel that we were poorer or richer than anybody else, like all the other kids.

AVIS BERMAN: And what kind of a kid were you?

JACKIE FERRARA: I was a tomboy. And I was also—you know, it's funny being asked this, because practically the first thing I remember is chasing other kids with a dead rat that I had found in the alley. [They laugh.] Laughing hysterically. So I guess I was mean. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you weren't squeamish.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, I picked it up with a newspaper. I can remember that and holding the newspaper with the rat by the tail, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: It was power, you know? And were you interested in school? Did you study much?

JACKIE FERRARA: I liked school okay, and I actually enjoyed tests. That's stayed my whole life, and now I do all kinds of puzzles and stuff because I like them. I was very good in arithmetic, and I was a great speller and got as far as the city spelling bee. And went down with a whole bunch of kids on the same word. Which I still remember. I was like, I don't know, 12 at the time. Yes, I was always in the highest class. But I talked, tended to talk. And in those days you got marked on self-control, and I'd always get bad marks for self-control.

AVIS BERMAN: That's really funny because I know several other artists who had the same. So evidently it's a good marker.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: And when was your brother born, and what is his name?

JACKIE FERRARA: My brother's name is Austin, and he's seven years younger than I am. I mean, there was enough age discrepancy so he was just somebody that sometimes had to tag along after me.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But probably too young to fight with. It wasn't—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. I didn't really play with him. I mean, I'm 12 and he's five. I'm not interested.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right, right. And did Austin have any artistic talent?

[. . . -JF]

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs] So now, was there anyone in your family who you felt was encouraging of you in terms of your education or your future?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. No, nobody. I briefly went to college, but it was triggered by my parents thinking I'd misbehaved about something. And I was sent to college sort of—I mean, I was actually getting away from the house. And I didn't stay in college that long. I ended up marrying somebody because I really didn't know what to do.

AVIS BERMAN: So what college were you at briefly?

JACKIE FERRARA: I was at Michigan State [Michigan State University, East Lansing].

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: Which was—you know, it was a state college, so anybody could go to it from Michigan.

AVIS BERMAN: And by then had you—were you interested in anything visual?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. But I was a great dresser. I was very interested in clothes, and I was voted the best dressed girl in my class in high school. And actually in—I guess before I went to Michigan State, because I didn't go there the first year out of high school—I took a fashion illustration class at Wayne University [Wayne State University, Detroit, MI].

AVIS BERMAN: Wayne State?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes, yes. Wayne State. Which is located in Detroit, and they had night classes. And so I signed up for this class, but I was terrible at it. But I wore these great outfits, and the teacher ended up having

me pose for the class. But no art. I didn't do any art till I came here.

AVIS BERMAN: I just realized I should ask you your parents' first names, too.

JACKIE FERRARA: My mother's Diana Hirschhorn. And my father was Herman Hirschhorn.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what were you interested in, reading or music?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I liked reading, and I liked music. I really liked black music. That started pretty young, being interested in that kind of music. And then, of course, the big thing was that I had a black boyfriend, and that was, my parents found out, and I got sent to Michigan State. And everything—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, so college was sort of like the penal colony in their eyes.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right. Except that in college I met somebody who was very interested in jazz, and we ended up—a woman, she lived in the same dorm—and we ended up going to Chicago to hear music all the time. And when I finally ran away from Detroit and college and all of that, she was already in New York, and I came and I stayed with her for a little while.

AVIS BERMAN: And who was your first husband?

JACKIE FERRARA: I've had a lot of husbands.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. Well, let's start with the first one.

JACKIE FERRARA: The first one was Pete Weber.

AVIS BERMAN: Is that one B or two?

JACKIE FERRARA: One B.

AVIS BERMAN: And that was the person you met at college?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I met him at college. All this has to go in the Archives?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you know, the thing is I would just say, as a historian, don't try to overcontrol the future. I just think you're an important enough artist that we need to know the details. We don't have to do—we don't have to go into the psychology of this. I'm just trying to find out. Because in 20 or 30 years, if someone wants to know, it's a lot easier. Was he just a fellow college student?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. He was from a little town in Michigan, Owosso. And I'm not really not even sure how I met him. But he looked unlike how he is—was; he's not alive anymore. But he looked like an artist to me. [They laugh.] I loved how he looked. He was this tall, lean guy with dark curly hair and very green eyes. But he was a hick, really. And we had absolutely nothing in common. So it was very short-lived, our marriage. And that was when I left to come to Detroit—I mean, to come to New York.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So was the marriage one year, two years? I think you got here in '52. I'm just kind of—

JACKIE FERRARA: And you think I got here in '52. Well, I don't know what I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. Okay. Well, I guess you got here when you were around 21 or so?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So it could've been '51.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right. Yes. I mean, I always think—I know my birthday's in '29, but because I was born in November, it was almost the end of the year.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I was about 20 or 21. So it would've been '51 probably.

AVIS BERMAN: Just out of curiosity, when you were living in Detroit, did you ever go to the museum, the Detroit Institute [of Arts, MI]?

JACKIE FERRARA: Never. And I also never went to Cranbrook [Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI] until years later, when I was living here and I went back one time.

I might've gone; never is wrong, because I'm omitting something. It must have been—I don't know whether it was junior high school or just grade school, elementary school. I guess I always liked art. I was just never very good at it. And I briefly, because my mother signed me up for it, took classes at the museum that were on Saturday afternoon. But I was very embarrassed to go because everybody really could draw, and I couldn't at all.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, in other words, art as it was supposed to be, then, is maybe what you were—

JACKIE FERRARA: It didn't matter. You know, like some kids had facility. I really didn't. When I would draw something, it was because I was going to the window and holding something over an image and then copying it. I really had no drawing facility at all.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] All right. Well, also, I think—

JACKIE FERRARA: But I didn't in my—I mean, once I was, probably, 17 or 18, I didn't then go to the museum, no.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also, I think you were signed up for drawing, probably—I mean, now here this is in retrospect looking at you as an object maker, but if they had signed you up for, probably, clay modeling classes —

JACKIE FERRARA: I would've been better off. Right.

AVIS BERMAN: But that would have been a little harder to discover that, I suppose.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Or they might not have had that for kids.

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't even know if they did. Right.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. So I'm just probing, if there was anyone kind of encouraging you at that time.

JACKIE FERRARA: No. But my mother always—you can see it in my baby book—she was always, like, whatever was the newest, modern, best thing. You know, eat carrots because your eyes will get better. It was always—she cared about all of that.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, so then you just, when you say you ran away, what happened?

JACKIE FERRARA: [Laughs] I borrowed from my little brother; I borrowed, I think it was something like \$20. And took what they called a night train, which was the same price as a bus. And it left Detroit, like, at one or two in the morning. I don't know, it was, like, \$12 or \$14. All I know is I arrived in New York with five dollars. And I can't believe I did that. And took a cab to this person's house; there were these two women who I'd known at Michigan State.

AVIS BERMAN: Now was that Charlotte Tokayer, or is that later?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, that's much later.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: Where are you getting all this?

AVIS BERMAN: I know how to research.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, you know, somebody did her doctorate on me, and she has a ton of information. But I don't think it's printed anywhere. She got her doctorate, but it never got printed.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Right. No, I just—I try to come prepared. So I would never show up not knowing anything.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So anyway. So you went to your friends, the people you had met—

JACKIE FERRARA: —from college, right. And there were two other women and myself. And one had been my roommate, and the other was—her name was Jean something; I don't even remember her last name. The other one's name was Donna, whose last name I also no longer remember. But Donna was quite hip for the time. And she—I just tagged along. We went to the Modern [MoMA, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY]. I heard Truman Capote read. I think it was endless. This was, like, within that first year or two that I came here. I saw probably the only production of that—what's the name of that? [Pablo] Picasso wrote a play.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: And I know we were always going to things at the Ninety-Second Street Y[MCA], and there was a huge range of stuff. And all that time, I was living—where we lived was on West End Avenue, in the 80s. And then there is where I met Don Ferrara. Because I went with my friend Donna to hear some jazz. And Don Ferrara was a trumpet player we went to hear. It was only much later that I moved downtown and started to be an artist and stuff. The first people I knew were more interested in music.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So you were living on West End. But you had to survive. So what—

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, no, I had a job right away. I got a job really fast, at Bowery Savings Bank. Where they asked me my religion; and I thought if I told them I was Jewish, I wouldn't get the job. So I told them I was Protestant. I don't even know that I knew what that meant really.

AVIS BERMAN: Was your family—you said you grandmother was kosher. Was your family religious, or observant?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, but I grew up with much anti-Semitism in Detroit. In fact, the closest swimming pool to where I lived had a sign out in front that said, "No Dogs or Jews Allowed." And, you know, it was pretty much a ghetto existence. No matter if you were a rich Jew or a poor Jew, there was, like, where all the poor Jews lived, and a little farther out in the suburbs is where the richer ones lived. But there were only one or two high schools that we went to, the kids. So I was very conscious of that, you know. In Detroit, I mean, I grew up knowing that there were some—like when I took jobs in department stores there, just as a salesgirl, and I knew that there were certain department stores that wouldn't hire me. So I really actually felt it was going to be the same here.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, that was certainly what you had learned. And I suppose you were using the name Weber at the time?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Which could go either way.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. He hadn't been Jewish.

AVIS BERMAN: So were you a teller?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, I worked in the life insurance department, calculating premiums and stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: And you were there to have fun and kind of, shall we say, just to experience New York. But there was a sense of you wanting to make something or do something else then? I mean, when did the idea of being—

JACKIE FERRARA: It wasn't till I moved here, down here, down to the Lower East Side. I mean, when I met Don Ferrara, I was living uptown, and he was living uptown. And once we got married—

AVIS BERMAN: Which was about when?

JACKIE FERRARA: I have a little thing where all this is written out. I didn't know this was going to be so intensive. You know, a lot of stuff I don't remember so well.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's okay. Well, we're catching it while there's, you know—

JACKIE FERRARA: I have little biographical notes. I actually had to do this because of the [inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: So you just asked me—

AVIS BERMAN: I asked you when you got married and when you got to New York and other things. Well, we'll see if there's anything.

JACKIE FERRARA: There was a lot of stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: You can read anything aloud that you like if that's easier.

JACKIE FERRARA: All right. In 1950 is when I married Pete Weber. And then I decided—first I had February, and then I crossed it out. In March '52 is when I—now what am I talking about? Oh, is when I came to New York. Okay. And I married Don Ferrara in '54. We lived together from '52 to '56. And in 1953 is when I moved to Clinton Street. And that was because he was looking for a place where—a trumpet is loud—where he could practice and he'd be able to play at home, because where he was living, he'd always have to put a mute on it,

and he didn't really want to have to do that. And so we got a loft. It was quite early to be living in a loft. And I've pretty much been living in lofts for a long time. You get used to that.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, you can't go back, because it's so open.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So now, how did Don Ferrara contribute to your education or your development, do you think?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, see, what happened is when we moved here on Clinton, I was still working at the Bowery Savings Bank. But there were all these settlement houses around me, and I signed up. I started taking pottery classes. Well, no, I first took leather classes. I took leather classes because I wanted to make sandals and belts and things. So I took leather classes, and then I made all this stuff I needed. And I went from that to making pottery. And the pottery—I made dishes and stuff, and bowls.

AVIS BERMAN: Do you have anything still left?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I have a lot of things. That big bowl over there.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I see that, yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: There's a few things. And then I went from that to making things that were more sculptural looking. You know, it was very insidious, my becoming an artist. Because I didn't go to art school. And it was just like I started out with this thing I liked to do after work.

But the other thing that happened is that, one day at the pottery class, I complained. I complained to the instructor that at the bank they kept promoting me, but they wouldn't give me the same salary as the guy whom I was replacing. And I thought that was very unfair. I'd no idea about women's lib or any of it. I just thought, this is really very unfair. And she told me that there was an opening at the Henry Street Playhouse [New York, NY]. And so I went, and I applied for it, and I got the job. And that was just working in the office. And I would say that that was probably the biggest influence on me.

AVIS BERMAN: In what ways?

JACKIE FERRARA: Because there was Alwin Nikolais's company, and I was—and at the same time, even the dance program—I mean, at the time, I would say Nikolais was probably, like, very, very advanced, you know, at that time. Like what he was doing, it was very experimental. But the stage—I mean, the Henry Street Playhouse—because of Nikolais, had a really good—like, where the stage was, all the lighting equipment and technical stuff was very advanced. And so a lot of other dance companies would rent space there to perform. So I saw a lot of dance. And I became—I had dancers for friends. And then also the theater program, all the teachers were teaching [Constantin] Stanislavski [Method Acting]. And it was just like a whole thing that I got really interested in. Not that I wanted to participate. I just liked it. And Nikolais's things were—they were theatrical. Like, how he would light things was very theatrical. And when I went to light shows, I really reflected that. Sometimes I'd get scolded because they were a little too theatrical. But I liked it; I liked how it looked.

AVIS BERMAN: So this was very stimulating.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. It was.

AVIS BERMAN: Also you suddenly felt like you were living in New York, as opposed to life passing you by in the savings bank, I guess.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes, that was terrible. And you know what they said to me when I complained? They said—and by this time I'd already broken up with Don Ferrara—they said something like, "Well, you know, he's a man. He's got to support a family." I said, "He's living at home with his mother." You know, it just seemed—anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: So now did you break up with Don Ferrara because you met Robert Beauchamp?

JACKIE FERRARA: No.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, that was—I hadn't met Beauchamp.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: Beauchamp was '55.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, because you said you had lived with Ferrara to '56.

JACKIE FERRARA: Ah. No, Beauchamp is '58, sorry.

AVIS BERMAN: Fifty-eight, okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, anyway, so you broke up with—let me see. Pottery and then—now, did you continue with the pottery? Because I want to find out how you went from pottery to boxes. And how you began to think of yourself as an artist or that that was something possible.

JACKIE FERRARA: I was going to Provincetown [MA] summers, which is where, I think where, I met Bob. Or it's because of that. I mean, I knew Sheindy [Charlotte] Tokayer, who was taking pottery class. And that's how I met her. And she and I rented a place in Provincetown together. And that summer we met [Richard] Bellamy and Mary Frank and Robert Frank; they were still together. And Miles Forst and Barbara Forst, who's now dead. Jan Müller who's dead. And Dody Müller, who's dead. I mean, you know, [inaudible]. But all these people, and they were all wonderful looking. And very exotic to me.

AVIS BERMAN: So that would've been about '57 or so when you and Charlotte Tokayer went.

JACKIE FERRARA: Probably. Because I went with—yes, probably. I don't have that here. Somewhere I wrote Vorse Barn; I don't know where that is. But that was the place we rented; when I was doing this once before, I somehow found it, something.

AVIS BERMAN: You rented—

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, Vorse Barn, '57, okay. That was—yes.

AVIS BERMAN: V-O-R-S-T?

JACKIE FERRARA: V-O-R-S-E. It was Mrs.—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Mary Heaton Vorse. Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And I met Sheindy before Sally. That's interesting. So I met Charlotte in '54, and I met Sally Gross in '55. And Sally Gross, who's a modern dancer, is still my friend, and is the only one. And she was the one who lived with Bellamy for many years after Bellamy and Charlotte Tokayer broke up.

AVIS BERMAN: I know her nickname is Sheindy, but since I never met her, it's hard for me to—

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, it's hard for me to say Charlotte, so I continue to say Sheindy.

AVIS BERMAN: No, you should say Sheindy because you knew her, and I will say it. It's hard to use the nickname when, as I say, you've never met the person. And in Provincetown, that was—wasn't that with Mary Frank?

JACKIE FERRARA: That's where I met her. And that's where she gave me a little bit of wax.

AVIS BERMAN: And said?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know. She just gave me some wax. And I started to make these little mummy figures. It just, you know, went somewhere else. And I would guess—I loved, I loved what Jan Müller's paintings looked like. Actually, I loved what Beauchamp's paintings looked like. It was all sort of like German Expressionist, and I like that look.

AVIS BERMAN: Figurative expressionism.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I think that's what his looked like, and so—but you were still never attracted to painting or anything like that?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. I still can't draw. [They laugh.] Well, I mean, it's really a struggle, what I do. It's always, you know, like the rulers and stuff. No, I wasn't. I mean, I've gotten now so that now I can color some of my pieces, and, you know, I've learned with time to do some things. But, no, I was not.

AVIS BERMAN: No, I just think it's so fascinating. I mean, that you just took it all in yourself. The reason I'm exploring this is that it's extraordinary that someone who, you know, has made the wonderful things that, you know, without any—it's kind of a complete rebuke to art education.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes, I know that. I know that. And every now and then, you know, somebody's thrilled with that, especially someone who's in school and hating it.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, it seemed I had certain—I had certain gifts. One of those, I was very good with numbers, and I really liked numbers, and I don't mind adding up long figures. And I like all kinds of number tricks. I love that. But the other thing is that I sort of like doing carpentry stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Because you always—you like to make things with your hands.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. And when I was with—when Bob Beauchamp and I were living on Delancey Street, I was always finding some little—you know, we had a loft—some little corner I can make some more bookshelves. I really liked that. But at that time I was still making—that was when I was doing all the stuff with the birds and feathers and all that. It's so funny. It seems so alien to me, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Well, I think, as you said, when you moved here, it was just a cleansing on so many levels.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: But you were making—now, were these dioramas, or were they just actually boxes?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, they were boxes. In some cases they were old print boxes that held, you know, little compartments for prints [Linotype, for typesetting]. The print—what do you call those little A, B, C, D, you know, like that alphabet that they use when they print newspapers and stuff, those printing boxes. They're so beautiful. And then at some point I started making the boxes myself with little compartments. But they were just—I don't know. I was just organizing things in them. And some of them, you know, had a lot of compartments. I mean, you could have a little bird's head in one. And then I might have, like, some found object that was very strange. I liked very strange things.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So were you looking at surrealism then? Or were you thinking, let me go and see things? Or let me—

JACKIE FERRARA: No. I still don't do that. I go to the movies all the time, and I barely go to museums, except I like to go to the openings. It's strange; it was not a compelling, you know, visual interest. I mean, I've gone to look at architecture shows, because I like that. And I've gone to look at design and furniture shows. But I really seldom go look at art shows.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I mean—I just, I wondered if someone said something obvious like, "Oh, you should look at Joseph Cornell's work," or anything like that?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, but I probably knew about it because of Bob. Bob and I went to Italy. And, you know, I just tagged along. He wanted to go to all these museums, and we went to that, and we went to the caves, and we saw all these important things. We went to Assisi, and then we saw the Giotto's.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's certainly an incredible education. And you're just also, if you're seeing the buildings there—

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, that, yes. And that's mostly what I remember. You know like I remember the Forum; I remember the Coliseum. I seem to remember buildings better than I do going into some little dark church to put a penny or whatever, their coins; so I got to look at a Giotto, which I had no idea what it looked like.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs] Well, I'm sure that also, though—was that your first trip out of the country, that trip to Italy?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Are you someone that now needs travel?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. I can't even get out of town hardly. No, I'm very hermetic. I never liked it enough, traveling, to want to keep doing it.

AVIS BERMAN: The reason I asked you that, and again we'll touch on it more in your mature work, but when one just sees, you know, one can't help but thinking of things like Mexican or Egyptian references.

JACKIE FERRARA: I've never been to Egypt; I'd love to go, I'm sure. It wasn't, like, enough that I'd love to go. I never applied—like I never back then applied for any kind of grant to travel. I just really wasn't that motivated. And, you know, I've not seen any of the stuff in South America or in Mexico. I went to Tijuana, and I had lunch. And all of that, I know I would love it if I saw it. And I have photographs of some of it, you know. But I just—even now when I think about it, oh, no. [Inaudible] coming out with the [inaudible] and climbing around [laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: Are you someone who looks at books of photographs a lot?

JACKIE FERRARA: Nope. I used to think I have the sensibility or the aesthetic of a plumber or something like that. [They laugh.] No. I'm a big disappointment.

AVIS BERMAN: No, you're absolutely not, because I want the—you know, there's no right or wrong answer.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, I know. I—

AVIS BERMAN: I'm just here to take testimony.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: It's so extraordinary. It's really extraordinary. I think it actually shows that you have a very powerful imagination. So, you know, whatever you think.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, wherever it's coming from, I have no idea.

AVIS BERMAN: Now did Beauchamp do any—did he make any objects? I mean, not to my knowledge he didn't. But I should ask you. And was he encouraging to you of what you were doing?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes, yes. He was a lovely man. He really was. Very, very lovely man. And what he made were, he made the stretchers for his paintings. And he had this little table saw, and that was why I started to make things. And when we broke up, he gave me the table saw. No, he was really nice. In fact, when we broke up, he gave me a bunch of artworks so that I could sell it if I needed to, to support myself.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's wonderful.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. He was really—he was a prince of a man.

AVIS BERMAN: And then when you broke—were you still at the Henry Street studio—Playhouse?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no. I wasn't working. He supported me.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh!

JACKIE FERRARA: That's when I started—yes, I was already making the wax things. And the wax things are to get more figurative. And when we went to Italy, some of it got cast. And I might have—I don't have much. I truly don't have much. But I have one thing, and it's dusty.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh! Oh, that's wonderful.

JACKIE FERRARA: It seems like really German Expressionist. And I even was painting the faces and that all. Yes. You know [inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Just for the tape, we're looking at the three figures.

JACKIE FERRARA: It's Lot and His Daughters.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh! Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You know and actually his head looks Cycladic [Early Ancient Greek], to me.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: That's wonderful.

JACKIE FERRARA: I wonder if there's a date on the bottom. I don't know what this means, "64-7." I don't know. It would've been when we were in Italy.

AVIS BERMAN: So that would have been '59 or '60 or so.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Now when you and Bob Beauchamp were going to Provincetown together, was he bringing you into his circle of friends there?

JACKIE FERRARA: See, I already had this circle of friends, and they all had to do with Bellamy. And actually, now that I remember, it was Bellamy who introduced me to Bob, at a party.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I was just thinking I didn't know if you had met, you know, Hans Hofmann or—

JACKIE FERRARA: No. But I would go to the—I think they were on Saturdays—these critiques that were open. And I would go with Sheindi, and we would go looking for boys. [They laugh.] I don't know. I mean, I knew what Hofmann looked like, because he was there. But I was, you know, like, looking at the guys.

AVIS BERMAN: Checking them out.

JACKIE FERRARA: I was cruising.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. And I'm not sure. But I think that [Robert] Motherwell and [Helen] Frankenthaler might have been there.

JACKIE FERRARA: They were there because I played poker with Motherwell there. I played poker with a lot of people that summer because Nat Halprin, who had a gallery there and knew I liked to play poker, invited me one time. And I was okay. So I continued whenever somebody was not—when they were missing somebody, they would ask me. I even played with Motherwell—I played here in New York.

AVIS BERMAN: I think you must have been a terror, because you were so good at numbers, you could count the cards.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, but I was not adventurous. I'm very conservative. But I continued to play, and I always win, and I win very little.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs] Let me see. Motherwell, Frankenthaler. Oh, maybe Mark Rothko—was that someone you met there?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no.

AVIS BERMAN: Now how did you get involved in performances?

JACKIE FERRARA: It was because of Henry Street. I really am—and, of course, Sally Gross was my friend. I really liked going to stuff. And I probably saw everything from the early Judson Church [Judson Dance Theater, New York, NY] days.

AVIS BERMAN: But you—I should say you performed in some of the Happenings.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, Happenings because of Claes [Oldenburg]. Yes, they were all Claes Oldenburg's, the Happenings. And I think that's true. And, you know, I was like a shy show-off. You know, I would go to discos, and I would dress as wild as I could, and I'd want to be the center of attention. But I'd never have anything to say. And I could never initiate anything. You know, I was, like, waiting hoping something would happen.

And somebody who knew Claes—this is really a long time ago, and at the time he was working at Cooper [Cooper Union, New York, NY]—said that she had a friend from when she'd been in school and college—I mean, school in Chicago—who was looking for people, to paint their portraits. And if you would sit for him, he'd buy you dinner at this Chinese restaurant [laughs]. So I agreed. And I guess we became sort of friendly.

AVIS BERMAN: So was it Claes Oldenburg who painted your portrait?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Yes, way back. Painted me green.

And then from that, I mean, I was really friendly with Lucas Samaras, all those people. But they were all people that were around Bellamy. At the time, Sheindi was my best friend, and Dick was her boyfriend.

AVIS BERMAN: And was there ever any interest in you getting into Green Gallery [Provincetown, MA]?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, no. I couldn't have, I think, no. Well, yes, he had that one woman—because I don't think he had any women in his gallery. He had the one who did L—Liz [inaudible]. I think both her names began with an L. She did machine parts or something, screws? I don't know whatever happened to her either.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, the only L L artists I can think of is from later on, like the artist Lois Lane, but it can't be that.

JACKIE FERRARA: No. It was earlier.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you're not talking about Letty Lou Eisenhauer? No? Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh! Now here's a name from the past. I guess I knew her then.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, she was also in a lot of the Happenings and performing.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. Huh!

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I know her. She's still very much around.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. That's nice. Every now and then one of those names crops up, and I think, "I know that name."

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, also, at this moment—and Oldenburg also was, of course, becoming a sculptor. Were you interested in, kind of, the food or The Store [1961, a "shop" in his New York studio] and all of the things that he was doing?

JACKIE FERRARA: No.

AVIS BERMAN: What was he like in those days?

JACKIE FERRARA: He would [laughs]—he would put people in his Happenings in parts that were contrary to how they were. And he would put me in, like, some kind of a pink, I don't know, funny kind of frilly gown thing that I would never in a million years wear.

But I was in a lot of the Happenings. And I seem to remember I was always walking over to The Store because it wasn't that far from where I lived on Delancey. And I was—I really liked Patty [Oldenburg], and when Bob and I went to Provincetown, sometimes Lucas came and stayed with us—or one time he came and stayed with us only [inaudible]. I considered those people as really close friends.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And were you ever interested in buying one of those objects Claes or by Lucas or anything?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. I actually would have liked something of Lucas. That was more my sensibility, because it was weird.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And fetishistic, which your earlier work sounds like it was like that.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I was much more interested in Lucas's stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, what was your first reaction to Pop Art when you saw some of those paintings. I mean, I don't know if you went to Castelli [Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, NY] or not.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, I couldn't have been all that interested. But what I'm remembering is Marcia Marcus's boyfriend deciding he was going to be a Pop artist. This is while we were in Provincetown. And so he made a batch of very thin plaster and took, like, some old jeans and T-shirts, a couple of things he didn't like anymore, and dipped them in and hung them out to dry and had a show. It just—Bob, my Bob, liked [James] Rosenquist's work a lot. I mean, he liked the different things happening. Very admiring of [inaudible]. And some of Bob's paintings at the time would do that, except they were much more figurative. But suddenly he would—and probably because of Rosenquist—he would, like, the name of a book or, like, take an image from somewhere else instead of one of his very voluptuous ladies.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, also in 1961 you have solo exhibitions. Had you been in any group exhibitions first?

JACKIE FERRARA: Solo? Is that the one with the—

AVIS BERMAN: That was the one at Janet Nessler [Gallery] on Madison Avenue.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, right.

AVIS BERMAN: I think that was our first exhibition.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Somebody told—I have no idea how that happened—somebody told the guy working for her, and he came to my studio. And they showed the pieces that I had had—the bronzes from Italy.

AVIS BERMAN: And who was Janet Nessler? What was this gallery?

JACKIE FERRARA: It's on Madison. I've no idea. I never went back there. It could've even been a vanity gallery. I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you would've known because you would've—did you have to pay for everything?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, I didn't. But they wanted me to pay for the champagne, and I wouldn't.

AVIS BERMAN: And was there any effect of this show? Or did you have a review, or did you—

JACKIE FERRARA: I think I had a little review. And was that—I don't know if that's where that sale was made. Charles Addams [the cartoonist] bought something of mine and put it in a traveling exhibition. And it was—it must have been later. It must have been later, because I used to find things to put stuff into. This was like an old trunk that was a square. It probably was an old hatbox. I think maybe it was leather. And I'd made this, kind of, grotesque head out of wax that was just sitting in the box. When you looked at the wood, there was this face looking up.

AVIS BERMAN: So that's also what Charles Addams got?

JACKIE FERRARA: That's what he bought, yes. But that must have been from—that would have to be later because that thing there was probably in the show, and maybe that's—"64-7" is on the bottom of it, was the number of it, I bet. [The Dark Mirror, 1964-65. One year traveling show with American Federation of Arts.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Yes. Because that's—

JACKIE FERRARA: See, all of that was like me going to art school, in a way. You know, I did that first. I mean, I was pretty old then to start. When I started out, it was really '61, and I was like 31; I'm just sort of branching out. But I guess I made big leaps because I was old enough and been around enough.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So you were thinking of yourself as an artist by then, on some level.

JACKIE FERRARA: I know when Bob and I went to Italy, my passport said "artist." And I wasn't sure if that was okay to do. I was very hesitant about it. But we did it because we had the idea there were places in Europe you could get into if you were an artist, and you might not be able to—

AVIS BERMAN: I think that's true, yes. And was performing in Happenings something you sought out?

JACKIE FERRARA: It was because of Claes asking me to be in it. And I thought it was fun.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, of course. I just wondered if you wanted to continue, or if that was something—if you wanted to create them or—

JACKIE FERRARA: I would've loved to have been in a movie. When I was working at Henry Street, I was so upset because they shot a movie there—Elia Kazan shot a movie there, and he kept coming up to the office to make phone calls. And I thought, how come he's not discovering me? Doesn't he want me just to sit in the audience? [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Now at this point, this seems sort of inevitable, but when do you discover Eva Hesse?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, I'm not sure. I for some reason went to see a three-person show, and I might have gone with Bob. I really don't know. And she was one of the three people in it. And I don't know who the other two were.

AVIS BERMAN: I think that's in the catalogue. But I think that's somewhat later. I mean, not that it's—

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh [inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Okay. This is in your catalogue—okay. "Ferrara saw Eva Hesse's work in a three-person exhibition with Frank Gallo and Tony Delap."

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh.

AVIS BERMAN: And it says that that was in 1970. But I just wondered if—it seems that you might have seen her earlier than that?

JACKIE FERRARA: No.

AVIS BERMAN: That's what I wanted to question.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, I don't think so. I truly don't think so. I mean, she was not somebody Bob talked about, and she was not somebody—I mean, I had friends—I didn't have them for a while, and then I'd have them again, you know. I mean, there was a period when I was really close with Dorothea [Rockburne]. And then a number of years when I wasn't. And then I was close with her again, and now I'm not. And now it's a little confused with, like, the order of all that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

JACKIE FERRARA: I actually don't think I ever talked to Eva Hesse. I know what she looked like, because I must have seen her somewhere. And I knew her husband.

AVIS BERMAN: Tom. Tom Doyle.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And I think I must have known Tom before I knew about Eva somehow. I don't know. You know, I went to [inaudible]. Eva Hesse's show was one of the few shows on my own I decided, I'm going to go see this, and I went up to the Guggenheim [Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY] to see that show. There's very few people I've done that with.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: I haven't been that motivated. And I do have her book, and I must have bought it. It's probably one of the few, you know, big art books I've ever bought.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also I think in the early to mid-60s—although clearly she'd been working a long time before that—Louise Nevelson kind of broke out into larger consciousness. Was that an artist who interested you at all?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. Barely.

AVIS BERMAN: And how about the Minimalists?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, I could see—I was playing poker with Sol LeWitt, and I had no idea what those boxes were. At first I thought they were for storage. I wasn't there yet. I mean, it was only after I moved here in '71 that I—when I moved here, I'd always done rope things, but I developed an allergy to the rope things. It all came—it's weird, I knew them. You know I even knew Don Judd, but I knew Don Judd because he was interested in Sheindi. I mean, I knew them in some other context, you know: who they were sleeping with, or who they were hot for, or they liked to dance. Because I used to like to go to discos. I was like this playgirl or something. It's very strange to me, you know. They had somehow—despite myself, I managed, you know, like, be around, and I'd catch on too late.

Like I knew [Robert] Smithson because—now there's somebody who, I mean, I really missed the boat on that. Smithson babysat for Sheindi. So I knew him when he was a kid. I knew him all along. And I knew nothing about what he made. And I probably really knew nothing about what he made till he died. And it's killing me, because I could've easily—I mean, I would love to have—now there's many who could [inaudible] spiral jetties. Made zillions of drawings of them.

When I first moved here, and right before I moved here—I moved here in '71—I was going to Max's Kansas City [music club] all the time. And that was this big art hangout. But I was going there because I was going upstairs to dance. And it was only when I got tired and needed to come downstairs, that I'd go, and I'd sit in a booth. And I would always sit with Smithson or Carl Andre, who I also knew very well, but not as artists. They were just, you know, like buddies I knew from the bar or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. They probably liked that actually, that it was sort of not, you know, no pressure.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, there's no pressure.

AVIS BERMAN: When do you think you began to be taken seriously as an artist in the circles of people you knew? Not by Bob Beauchamp, but, you know, from what—

JACKIE FERRARA: When I started doing the cotton batting things, that would have been that. And it was never with the rope stuff. And the rope stuff hardly got shown. I did a couple of cotton batting things before I moved here. And when I moved here, I really stopped working for a year because I was making a place here. And that was very time-consuming. I was poking along, no idea, you know. I was putting up studs. I had no idea they're supposed to be a certain distance apart so that you could—because when you bought sheetrock, it was going to be four feet wide, so you damn well better have a stud there. And I was just, like, putting them. And then when I got the sheetrock, and I had to stick in some extra ones because there was nowhere to nail the sheetrock. So I was bumbling along.

AVIS BERMAN: But you were in the Whitney Biennial in 1970 [Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY].

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So what would you have shown?

JACKIE FERRARA: That was one of the "shmoos." That was, like, this big funny cotton—this thing covered with cotton batting. I don't know if you ever read L'il Abner, where there were these "shmoo" characters. But it's like something that was, I don't know, it was, like, maybe six or seven feet tall. And they had a shape that was something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: You're sort of making it an amoeba shape, almost, with your hands.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. But they kind of look like people to me a little bit. And the "shmoos" were people, but they were amoeba-like, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And who selected your work for the Biennial. Do you remember?

JACKIE FERRARA: Was that because of the Gedok show? I was not active. I don't—that first show at—I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Let's—now how did you find that cotton batting? I mean, what happened that you kind of—you changed: you had fur, you had boxes, and you had rope. And then you found a very different kind of material.

JACKIE FERRARA: I wonder how I found that place. What's weird is this was long—well, not long, you know. I never knew I was going to end up living on Prince Street. But the factory that made it was, I don't know, it was either on Mercer or on Green. I think it was on Green. And it was the factory that made moving blankets, and the stuff went inside it. And then they'd stitch, and that's what made it kind of puffy and soft. You know, probably like lining for coats or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, they use it for quilts. They put it inside.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. I have no idea who told me about that place, though. I mean, I went places. There was someplace I went downtown to get coats, which was also at the same place that Nancy Graves bought stuff to make her camels. But it wasn't—I didn't know Nancy at the time. But people would tell me about some kind of a place where they had this thing, this stuff. So I came over here to buy that. And then, of course, I ended up moving here, and I still used it a little bit, I know. I had to walk a block then; it was very nice. It was very reasonable.

AVIS BERMAN: But what attracted—was it the texture, was it the color, was it that it would move? I mean, why did—

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no. I would glue it onto a base of some sort. And then I would go over it with watered-down Elmer's glue. And they actually looked a little bit like concrete. That's how they ended up looking. And I liked that.

AVIS BERMAN: But you started doing that, I think, before you moved here.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, because I was doing it on these strips of canvas. And the strips of canvas Bob had given me. I really don't know—I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Because that was just because—

JACKIE FERRARA: I mean there was some kind of a weird jump; I know that. Suddenly I was—suddenly there was this period, and there's even a photograph of it somewhere, of my other loft, and there were all these ropy things hanging, all this, you know. But I got this terrible skin condition from it, like all the little—

AVIS BERMAN: From the batting or from the rope?

JACKIE FERRARA: From the rope.

AVIS BERMAN: Now did you—you destroyed a lot of this ropy work?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: All of it or some of it?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Well, some of it I gave to somebody, and I don't know what they've done. I have no idea what happened to it.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you take any photographs of this work before you destroyed it?

JACKIE FERRARA: There's some photographs. Yes, there's photographs of some of them, some of that. I didn't take them, but, you know, somebody. I have photographs of some of that.

AVIS BERMAN: Do you regret destroying it?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh [laughs]. No. If you knew me, you would know I didn't regret it. No, I'm this compulsive destroyer. It's terrible. And I sometimes have to—I do that with a letter, and I suddenly realize there's something in it, and I end up having to tape it back together again. I can't stand clutter. No, I needed room. It was really all about needing room. It never occurred to me that maybe I could rent space. I lived with men who supported me. And then I didn't live with men who supported me. And then I, sort of, got odd jobs, you know, doing carpentry and stuff. And I really lived very, very frugally. So that I wouldn't have to have a full-time job. And I just, you know, I didn't want it. I made things.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, how—

JACKIE FERRARA: I didn't get an attitude about it until probably five or 10 years ago. You know, "I'm an artist. Pay attention." I didn't feel that.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, how did you find—how were you led to this loft, or how did you find this loft?

JACKIE FERRARA: I had a friend who lived on Prince Street a couple of doors away. And I was in—you know they used to have—I can't remember what they called it—they'd have these open loft things. They must have started doing it in—they were on Sundays or maybe Saturday and Sunday. And they started doing it before I moved here.

AVIS BERMAN: Was this one of the lofts that were done by George Maciunas?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, my building's not a Maciunas building. I truly regret that it's not. But that's a real estate issue. Those buildings are doing fabulously. They're all on the ground floors, and they get a ton of money from renting them out. So none of them pay anything anymore. And we don't own our ground floors, and we pay.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that really wasn't about—

JACKIE FERRARA: But my friend was in a Maciunas building, but that wasn't why. No, this was—I don't know why it happened. I can't—it had a name, and they did it for a number of years. And they still might do it every once in a while—every year or so. Anyway, she asked me to hang something in her place, and I did. And somebody in her building, who I got friendly with—who actually took the piece; some big rope thing—I don't know if he's still alive, and I don't know if he still has it hanging. I doubt it. I'm sure it's a dust collector. They were the ones who co-opted this building, and they called and asked if I'd be interested.

AVIS BERMAN: How much was it then?

JACKIE FERRARA: Seven thousand five hundred.

AVIS BERMAN: Wow! Well, that was money. How did you do it?

JACKIE FERRARA: I had an aunt, this aunt, my mother's sister, was always offering to buy me things that I didn't want. I didn't want her to pick them out, you know. And I'd always turn her down. And one time she—and I was corresponding with her. She probably would have been the one that would've been the most encouraging, because she wrote. She wrote poems, little poems, and they were kind of comical and stuff. But, you know, she liked doing that. And she had an antique business, and she had a reputation for her antiques. She specialized in something, and she lived in Arlington, Virginia. Anyway, during the course of the correspondence, one time I

said, "Well, you know, I may one day want to get a loft, buy a loft." And I was living on Delancey in a loft. But things were—that was when all that stuff with A.I.R. [Artist in Residence certification] started to happen. I felt that maybe my existence there would—I felt a little vulnerable, and I thought it might be nice to own a loft. And I did have some friends who would, you know—I mean, they probably bought their lofts for \$2,000. And she said, okay. Okay, she would do that.

AVIS BERMAN: So did you have to come up with the full payment?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. First I put down a hundred dollars. And they showed me two lofts. And, man, I wish I'd had the other money. The other one was great, and it was a Machiunas building, and they do own the ground floor in theirs. And it was twice the size of this, but it was \$20,000. And that seemed like a zillion.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, especially if you're asking somebody else for the money.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Now meanwhile, how are you surviving, you know, because you are working? You're back to working again since you're, I guess, on your own. Unless you're being supported again by someone else we haven't mentioned.

JACKIE FERRARA: When I took this place, I was living with Marty, who was supporting me.

AVIS BERMAN: Now who's Marty?

JACKIE FERRARA: Marty Greenbaum.

AVIS BERMAN: That's an unknown name to me.

JACKIE FERRARA: Good. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: You've stumped me here.

JACKIE FERRARA: When I broke up with Marty, it was because—I mean, with Bob—it was to be with Marty. And I was with Marty from then until maybe a year after I moved here.

AVIS BERMAN: And is he an artist?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: He does collage things. He makes—they're sort of like toys. And he's had a very up-and-down career. It turned out he was a big pothead, and I just didn't really have patience. I was like—sometimes when he was really doing a lot of pot, he was like Jekyll-Hyde. He just was another person.

AVIS BERMAN: So he was never in here with you?

JACKIE FERRARA: He was here for the first year. And actually the place was set up different, because we each had a studio. And then when we broke up, I was thrilled; I expanded my studio [laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, but you had bought it, not him.

JACKIE FERRARA: I had bought it, yes. My aunt had bought it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that was good, because it really was yours.

JACKIE FERRARA: It was mine. It was mine.

AVIS BERMAN: So when you were—what were you doing? Was he helping you remake this?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. He started. But then he'd tell me he was going to go over to get something else, and he'd disappear [laughs]. It was so strange because it was really—it was only grass. But it was like being with a heroin addict. I mean, he was, like—all the time. It was very strange how it was, you know—like, medically it was just very strange. I mean, I liked to smoke a little bit then. But he was—he'd start, and he couldn't stop. And he'd smoke them like cigarettes.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that is unusual.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Was this completely loft space when you—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. The floor was not this. It was another floor. And I put this in maybe six or seven years after I moved in, or maybe eight years. And the ceiling was not like this. It was a beam ceiling.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes. There's this one that's exposed.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And was there electricity, and was there hot water?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. It hadn't been occupied for 10 years. And when we looked at it, we looked at it with flashlights, you know, but there was enough light coming in. And it's three buildings. I looked at it with somebody else, and he took—I took this floor; he took the floor above me. And I took this floor mostly because the ceiling was higher than the floor above me. And my loft on Delancey had only had, like, eight-and-a-half-foot ceilings. And these rope pieces were all hanging in there, and I wanted to hang them on longer chains.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, if this was a warehouse, this is what happens when you go up in warehouses. The ceilings get lower as you go up.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: As opposed to the other. So we're on the third floor, right? For the record.

JACKIE FERRARA: The third floor.

AVIS BERMAN: Because I'm in an old warehouse building, and the first and second floors have wonderfully high ceilings.

JACKIE FERRARA: But they don't have as much light.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So I'm on the third floor. I have more light, but I have eight-and-a-half-foot ceilings [laughs], So, yes, exactly. So I guess the question is: you were making—in other words, you were making a place here.

JACKIE FERRARA: I was making a place, and at first I was making it for two people. That's why it took so long. And then we broke up. And then I could revise it. And so that took a little longer. For one thing, this separating thing here went to that column.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: So that was a big change.

AVIS BERMAN: But you really did a lot of the hard—the carpentry and the other ones.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I built those cabinets. They're still here.

AVIS BERMAN: I think that must have been very satisfying.

JACKIE FERRARA: It was. And then, see, when I went back to work, I think I probably did a couple of covering the—I know I did a few covering the canvas strips with cotton batting, because I did a very big piece that was installed in the back.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, this I—

JACKIE FERRARA: Which is probably in there.

AVIS BERMAN: And I love—I mean, I've never seen it. But I thought this piece was magnificent, and I was very sad to see from the—it said it was destroyed.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. I know which one; it's the Corridor.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Let's just get it. Yes, this one, Corridor, from 1972. I just think this was glorious. Was it because you had nowhere to keep it?

JACKIE FERRARA: I had nowhere to put it. Nobody bought it. And I don't know. You know what I did? I cut it up,

and I made it into a big spiral [Tiered Circle, 1973], which the Chicago museum [Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL] owns.

AVIS BERMAN: The Art Institute [sic].

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, because they bought a lot of the cotton batting things. And they ended up with—oh, they didn't buy it. The Lannan Foundation [now in Los Angeles, CA] bought it a bunch of cotton batting. And then when dispersed, they gave it to the Chicago museum.

AVIS BERMAN: So, okay. So they didn't buy anything. And that wasn't the Museum of Contemporary Art. That's definitely the Art Institute.

JACKIE FERRARA: I'm not sure that's right. I can look it up. I'm not sure.

AVIS BERMAN: And you made it into a spiral.

JACKIE FERRARA: I cut it into long strips, and then started and just kept going around. And, you know, it wasn't even that big. That's strange.

AVIS BERMAN: And also, I guess because it was a floor piece, it was probably easier for people to handle. But I think you were doing some more because—let me see, I just have this. Let me see what, that's page—I'm just looking at the installation from the A. M. Sachs [Gallery, New York, NY, 1973] show.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Right, they came after. Then I started to do these—these are all cardboard. It's glued over the cardboard.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So we're looking at this installation shot of the A.M. And it's cotton batting. But it is beginning to be, instead of, you know, pieces of cotton, it's beginning—

JACKIE FERRARA: It's made shapes.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes. They're beginning—geometric forms that are—

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, they're layered; they're stacked.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. And they're stacked forms that are beginning to evoke geometric and architectural forms like obelisks and pyramids, whether it's true or not. But that's what we're beginning to see. And how did you find your way, again, to this, the beginning of the stacking? What happened to you?

JACKIE FERRARA: I can remember the first one, but I'm not—I think it was the first one. I had covered two-by-fours that were about that length. I guess they were one foot. Mostly—I mean, I was using cardboard. There was a cardboard factory on the ground floor here. There was lots of cardboard in the neighborhood. I did—this piece I did with tubes that some gallery owns now, and every now and then they try to sell it or something. But there is all this material just on the street. And this cotton batting stuff, which now I can just walk over and buy, it weighed nothing, and it came on—it was almost like carpeting. It came on something that was as wide as blankets. So they were eight-foot rolls. And I think they charged me—I don't know. They charged me by the weight. And a whole big roll would be like \$2.39 or something. These things were costing me nothing to make, absolutely nothing.

The first one I made is the pyramid, and I showed it to my downstairs neighbor, who was very critical of it, didn't like it. My downstairs neighbor was this kid who was going to Columbia [University, New York, NY] and who was working for George Zeack. And he picked it up and did something else with it, but I didn't like that. [They laugh.] But I don't know the order of these things. I know at some point I made a stairway that I ended up destroying because I didn't like it. But by that time, I'd figured out a way to make a curve. But it wasn't a nice enough curve, so I destroyed it. And the funny thing that would happen with—that one I had to destroy because, from the weight, somehow the cardboard would start to flatten.

AVIS BERMAN: Or maybe buckle?

JACKIE FERRARA: It didn't buckle, no. No, it would just get thinner. And even with these, suddenly there'd be, like, this two-by-four sticking out the top, because it'd fall, and the cardboard was, you know, shrinking—it was just getting thinner.

AVIS BERMAN: All right. But this was always glued. You never sewed or did anything like that.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no.

AVIS BERMAN: You always glued, yes. Just looking at this and the way the texture is—and I don't know if she saw this early on—do you think Ursula von Rydingsvard was influenced by your work?

JACKIE FERRARA: I have no idea.

AVIS BERMAN: Because some of her early pieces had some—well, she still stacks. But she also used felt and materials and this sort of thing.

JACKIE FERRARA: I generally know her wood pieces. I didn't even know that.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, because she had some earlier ones with felt and other—before she went into cedar.

JACKIE FERRARA: I always thought, because so much of my work was based on arithmetic increments, that people wouldn't be interested—you know, like most people wouldn't be interested. I know no one's really going to copy me, because it's too much trouble.

AVIS BERMAN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] You know, it's interesting that—there's nothing about copying, I guess. But just sort of a sense that, you know, with that. But, of course, speaking of math—

JACKIE FERRARA: You know, these things didn't get shown that much either.

AVIS BERMAN: But who—wasn't A. M. Sachs a gallery that showed African art?

JACKIE FERRARA: No.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't think so.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, is that the same gallery that Beverly—Beverly Sachs, is that the same? I guess I want to know about this gallery and how you got there.

JACKIE FERRARA: It's the guy that was working for him. I can't remember his name. The guy working for him—these are too many names. The guy working for him had a very sophisticated eye. I seem to remember some guy living on Spring Street, but I don't know why the guy came here. Some artist came here with some students one time—I really don't know why—and told the director of the Sachs Gallery. Abe Sachs wore a wig, a Beatles wig. And was really kind of a joke. But he had this wonderful director who—he was a lovely man, a really lovely man. Anyway, it was because of him that—

AVIS BERMAN: Because you had two shows there.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So somebody—and he did admire your work.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. No, that guy did. And, you know, it was great. And it was out of this show there, the second show, that had wood pieces in it, that LeWitt bought some of my pieces, that Max Protetch saw in LeWitt's studio and contacted me.

AVIS BERMAN: So then you had—then Max Protetch became your dealer.

JACKIE FERRARA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

AVIS BERMAN: And I guess the next question is, how did you find your way to wood?

JACKIE FERRARA: Because I cut—at first I was using cardboard. But then they got a little more complicated, what I was making. It was kind of hard to be cutting the cardboard really precise, because I was just doing it with a mat knife. And I did have the table saw, the little table saw, that Bob Beauchamp had given me. And so at first I was, you know, finding pieces of plywood and stuff. And then sometimes I could buy it. And I had cut the wood for a piece that I was going to cover with cotton batting. And I assembled it just to make sure it looked okay before I covered it with cotton batting. And I thought it looked just fine.

And really, that was so time-consuming, because first I'd have to glue the wood. Then I'd put, like, this fluffy stuff on it. And then I would have to, like with a big brush, kind of brushing this thinned-down glue over it to flatten the cotton batting. A very, very mindless, mindless, time-consuming job.

AVIS BERMAN: And I guess you were making these all on your own. You had no assistant or anything.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think it's very interesting that we were alluding to Dorothea Rockburne before. And she, too, was fascinated by mathematics and arithmetic, as well. And I don't know if that was something in common that you had then when you were—in your periods of friendship with her? But that was, you know, she—

JACKIE FERRARA: There's probably, like the philosophy of numbers, and then there's being able to add a column, and just being able to know, you know, what eight by 12 is. And she didn't have a clue. And that's like what I knew. But she was interested in all these mathematical relationships and ratios.

AVIS BERMAN: Equations and things like that.

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know if they were equations. Maybe. I know there was the golden mean. It was a very different kind. And the same thing with [Mel] Bochner, because Bochner did things with numbers. But he, too, he probably couldn't multiply. And, man, I could multiply. Oh, big deal. And it was just like very, very—you know, it was really different.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. Now meanwhile, did you begin to teach at all?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. No, I still haven't. [They laugh.] I once taught very briefly. I taught at some senior center briefly. And then in another brief job, I taught pregnant teenagers. And both times it was clay stuff that I was teaching. Both jobs were upsetting.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. But were you ever interested in teaching art?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. I don't feel qualified. I never went to art school. I wouldn't know how. What would I teach? I couldn't teach studio, and I know nothing, or barely anything, about art history. No.

AVIS BERMAN: So okay. So it's extraordinary. I guess—are we going to call you a self-taught or a folk artist? You don't want to get in that ghetto. I'm teasing you.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, I don't know. But when I read what they—I think, well, I guess I'm like a folk artist.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, not really, because you'd have to be unsophisticated, and you'd have to be like a—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I was too sophisticated when I started, is what it was, you know. I mean, it was really late. And when I moved here in '71, I was 42.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you had—but you had to make it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes [inaudible]. Right. I had to.

AVIS BERMAN: But this is what—

JACKIE FERRARA: And I did it all the time. I mean, I love doing it.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right, right.

JACKIE FERRARA: And I didn't have to worry about making money because I had these nice boyfriends who've got it. I mean, it's funny. It hasn't happened to me for a long time. But it was nice that it could happen for a while, I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, while you needed—it's funny, because it happened while you needed your career to develop, but then when you were by yourself, your mature work came to you.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And I do want to ask you, because I think your drawings are just extraordinary. And maybe we can pick an example or two and just—unless it's going to—

JACKIE FERRARA: Do you have one of those little books of my drawings?

AVIS BERMAN: I have this, and I have—

JACKIE FERRARA: No, it's just a little thing.

AVIS BERMAN: I have something called Traversing Space [Perry Nesbitt. JACKIE FERRARA: Traversing Space. Reading, PA : Freedman Gallery, Albright College, 1993], too, from the Albright gallery. But I don't have the

drawings book.

[Pause.]

JACKIE FERRARA: This little book?

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, no, I don't have that. Well, let me see. Yes, I guess I don't have these. But I guess this is Jackie Ferrara Drawings [New York: LAPP Princess Press, 1977], and these were from 1977. And I was just looking in this catalogue: Jackie Ferrara Sculpture: A Retrospective [David Bourdon. Sarasota, FL: The John & Mabel Ringling Museum of Art Foundation, 1992]. And just looking for some fairly early drawings, and I'm looking at this one, which is a T Pyramid 4 from 1975. I mean from someone who never drew, these are extraordinarily complex. How did you figure this—this is a pleasure for you to do?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, for someone who didn't draw, these are enormously complex, right? I guess I would ask you about your drawing process or what happens here. And do you draw first, before the object would be made here?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I have to. I have boxes of these. They're my records. And I draw the outline, and I figure out—I have to figure out the wood because I have to know how much to buy. And that's what all these little numbers are at the top of the drawing. Afterwards, Jan Groover—I don't know if you know who she is.

AVIS BERMAN: Sure.

JACKIE FERRARA: She's a photographer. Jan Groover taught me how to make these aerial thing drawings. And it's a way of compressing—I don't know. I know how to do it, and I love how they look. It's so interesting to me.

And it's really, you know—it's like this aerial shot. What would happen if you looked at it from above? You would not be able to see it expanding. It would be almost like the whole thing was smashed flat.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. It's almost the opposite—well, it's kind of like an aerial elevation, kind of, I guess.

JACKIE FERRARA: So I think that they become like a carpet pattern or something to me.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. No, they're extraordinary. And these from this 1970 almost look like American Indian designs.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, like all that part. But this I—I mean, this I would draw before I would make the work. I would figure it all out, and I'd figure out, like, the length of each layer, of each piece of wood, add up the lengths, and then go to the lumberyard and buy the wood. And then cut it.

AVIS BERMAN: No, it's just extraordinary because that really does look like a Mayan pyramid.

JACKIE FERRARA: It's all done with the rulers and all that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, this is something very different—when I had brought up Ursula von Rydingsvard—because Ursula just does it without, you know, she just does it freehand. And if it doesn't work, she stops and does it. And then if she doesn't—I mean, she's kind of drawing by steps. She doesn't do any of that kind of—

JACKIE FERRARA: I'm very organized and highly planned. It's all very, very planned.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You know, because this is just extraordinary kind of a drawing. It seems to me that you just—I guess it's so hard for me to comprehend this enormous shift that you went through. And, of course, if some of your other work is destroyed, it's hard to see—I'm sure there are consistencies from the earlier to the later work. But do you see, can you—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I'm not sure there are consistencies. But, you know, I can only think about it, as the first work was how I was in kindergarten. And the later was like going into the 12th grade. And however I was in kindergarten, I don't know that there would be any remnants of that when I was in the 12th grade.

AVIS BERMAN: Because these are just such an extraordinary leap. And very, very different. Now, was Max Protetch interested in showing these drawings, too?

JACKIE FERRARA: The drawings—the larger, the floor pieces, the drawings go with them. So if anyone bought work—and Max sold a lot of work—they would get the drawing, whether they wanted it or not. I thought it was important for the owner of the piece. Like some of the drawings show how the taller pieces are in maybe three or

four sections. And I wanted the people to know how it came apart and back together. And I thought they should know—I mean, I didn't care that I was giving out all this information about you know—I mean, anybody could follow this and do it.

And somebody actually did. It was charming. I have a photograph of it. I did a big piece, a big outdoor piece [Laumeier Project, 1981], out of four-by-six lumber, in St. Louis at Laumeier Park. And the people who donated the lumber, I adored. I thought they were wonderful. I gave the man the drawing with all the numbers, where the numbers were, you know, like four feet and eight feet and whatever, you know, eight feet-three inches. And I said, "If you reduce each one by a sixth or a seventh," whatever it was, "you could make it out of, you know, like thinner wood, smaller wood." And he ended up doing that and making that. I have a picture of him [laughs] holding it. And it's quite big. But, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's kind of funny, just like—it is on the continuum of Sol LeWitt, saying that other people could execute the work, if you want to do it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right, right. Yes. And so once I started doing this stuff, I don't feel bad to destroy it, because I know I've got all the information. All I have to do is cut the wood and make it again. And I don't know. Did you see this show that was at the SculptureCenter ["Decoys, Complexes, and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s." SculptureCenter, Long Island City, NY, 2008] with the women in it this past—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, no. I didn't know anything about it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh. Well, there was a show that was work from—had to be prior to, is it, 1980? I barely squeezed in. Mary Miss was in it, Alice Aycock, Alice Adams, Jackie Winsor. I've forgotten. There were 12 of us in it. Anyway, the piece that I had in it is something that was long gone [Reconstruction of Wave Hill Project, 1980/2008.]. But I had all the specs—and they put it outdoors in the yard. And they [inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: You could reconstruct it, in other words.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. It was [inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: And you didn't feel—and they said it was okay to reconstruct it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes. They thought it was fine, and now the piece has gone to Brandeis [The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA].

AVIS BERMAN: So, very good. So in other words, in theory, if you have a show, and there are six pieces in the show, and the show sells out, you have no drawings from those pieces anymore?

JACKIE FERRARA: I have all the records, which look like this.

AVIS BERMAN: And so—but the drawings that are sold have the information on it, too?

JACKIE FERRARA: Some of them, yes. Pretty much. Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So, but you don't feel—in other words, you don't need to keep your drawings as inspiration for you? I guess the question is—

JACKIE FERRARA: I have them. They're all in there [laughs]. I have boxes of them.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I guess—and do you look at them again when you're going to be doing new things?

JACKIE FERRARA: I'm almost only doing public art stuff now.

AVIS BERMAN: So environments. Okay. Well, then we're going to save that for a little later. But what I'm just trying to find out is other—

JACKIE FERRARA: Back then, yes. Yes. I mean, I did so many—it wasn't so much inspiration. I wanted to—
[Telephone rings.]

AVIS BERMAN: Do you want to get that?

JACKIE FERRARA: I've got the machine on, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I'll just turn it—

[Audio Break.]

—talking about the role of your drawings in this period now.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, sometimes I wanted to make sure that I wasn't repeating something, how an opening went. And sometimes, especially when there was a curve, I wanted to maybe increase the curve or maybe make the same kind of a curve. And I would look. Because I would have the increment written down. See, I figure them all out on graph paper, and I would know where to put the little line to go to the next steps. But I don't know that I looked at them—it seemed all the time what would happen back then, thinking about it, is I would—after I completed the piece—now, I would have my record drawings. And then I would make, like, a big drawing from my record drawings.

Now, my record drawings are all eight-and-a-half-by-11 graph paper. And one piece could have anywhere from, like, four to 10 or 11 sheets that go with it. Because the record drawing would show each layer, how the wood gets stacked up as it goes up. And then I would make the big drawing from that.

When I would make the big drawing, it would always trigger what I wanted to do next. There would always be some part of the bigger drawing, some little thing that I had done, that maybe was almost accidental or wasn't what I was focusing on, that now I wanted to focus on. It was like a constant evolution. And I was making them with—it seemed—you know, when you work with numbers like that, nothing can be wrong. If you're following the rules, it's like, nothing's not going to be right. It's always going to be right. And there was, like, endless possibilities. I was really, you know—I was pretty much making them as fast as I could make them and be ready to make the next one.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So they did serve a—beyond function.

JACKIE FERRARA: They were fun. I mean, every now and then, at the time, like, somebody who was interviewing me or something would comment that I sounded like I enjoyed making the drawing afterwards so much. And they felt that it was because I didn't want to have closure on the piece. It was a way of continuing to make the piece once it was done. But then I would devote, you know, like a couple of weeks to cleaning up my records and then making the official big drawing.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, it seems that it was really a way to ferment ideas, too.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And since I think, as you say, you plan, maybe there were—now, once the drawing stage was over, and you had the wood, and you were working on it, was there room for a surprise or accident in your work?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, and sometimes I would decide I didn't like something, and I had to change it, you know. Yes, that could happen a lot.

AVIS BERMAN: So in the basic process of a wood piece, you would use glue, and you would use nails?

JACKIE FERRARA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

AVIS BERMAN: And anything else for keeping it together?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. No, but because they were in sections, the bigger ones, there were little dowels where the sections would fit together.

AVIS BERMAN: And did you find that you had, in the beginning, preferences in wood?

JACKIE FERRARA: I was using pine one-by-twos. And then at some point—no, I really, I was getting what was most available at the lumberyard. Because how I would get it, I would get 10-foot lengths, and I would just come back with them. Or mostly they'd deliver it. And I'd just have, like, 30 or 35 10-foot lengths.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. And where do you work now—I mean, in this studio?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

AVIS BERMAN: And that you always worked—even with all the sawing and all the—did you ever have to rent other spaces?

JACKIE FERRARA: Never. No. I always made this stuff here. And then at some point I had an accident. Actually, it was the fourth time I'd had an accident on the table saw. And I mean, I have all my fingers, but I cut a little bit off of the end of one finger. And at that point, somebody recommended someone to come and finish the job for me, whom I'd never met, and who has been working for me ever since [Russell Busch]. And he was cutting the wood here, and then he got a shop, and he started cutting the wood there. And that was very nice.

AVIS BERMAN: And when would that have been about?

JACKIE FERRARA: That's something I'm going to have to look up.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: Because it's got to do with when he first was cutting the wood here. I'd put in the tin ceiling, and we were putting—hanging—plastic around the table saw and sticking it to the ceiling with magnets. It would just stick. So you didn't have to do anything. You'd just, like, stick it up there, and it allowed a booth for him to cut in.

AVIS BERMAN: That's fascinating.

JACKIE FERRARA: And then at some point after that is when he got a shop.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, you know what? I think this is probably a good point to stop.

JACKIE FERRARA: I had no idea it was going to be like this.

AVIS BERMAN: Is that—

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, it's fine. I love it. You know I enjoy talking. It's like a stroll down memory lane, some of it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what did you think?

JACKIE FERRARA: I was surprised when they first contacted me and said something about several visits.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay. Well, thank you.

[END OF FILE 1.]

This is Avis Berman interviewing Jackie Ferrara on January 23, 2009, in her loft in SoHo.

I just had a couple of questions from last week when I was going over my notes, a couple of things that we didn't quite cover. So I want to pick up from there. Is there anything you wanted to say from last week's interview?

JACKIE FERRARA: Um, no [laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. It seemed to me from what you were saying that you perhaps identified or had a real tropism toward Robert Smithson in those early days. And I wondered if you could elaborate on that.

JACKIE FERRARA: It was too late. He had already died by the time I realized. I mean, I was friendly with him. But I was friendly with him; I wasn't an artist, really, when I was friendly with him. And it was after he died that I loved his work and felt badly that I'd never said, you know, You're a great artist.

AVIS BERMAN: And what is it in particular that—

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, Spiral Jetty [1970]. I thought it was heroic. I thought it like this fabulous, fabulous thing. I thought it was heroic to make it, and to go out there and do that.

AVIS BERMAN: Were you aware of him when he was going out and making those projects and doing those things, you know, his labor and his vision for that?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, I guess not.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: Do you know what year that is?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's the early '70s; that's '70 to—didn't he die in '73?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know when he died [1973]. Yes, that's when I was probably going to Max's Kansas City pretty regular. No, no. Maybe that was later that I was going. '73? Yes, right. Because I moved here in '71. Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Also you—

JACKIE FERRARA: I knew he was making a movie. But it was because I was interested in movies, and we talked

about movies. I really don't know, you know, what art he was making.

AVIS BERMAN: Do you remember, in terms of movies, what interested him or what interest—

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, we both were very perverse in our tastes. I mean, it was really disgusting what we liked. Very, very violent. And he was the only one I knew that I could have a conversation about that with.

AVIS BERMAN: Also, when we left off, you were doing a lot of dancing, disco dancing, and you were doing performances. You were doing movement. And I wondered if you felt—and of course, you're still dancing. But I wondered if—

JACKIE FERRARA: Started again. I've resumed dancing.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. You resumed dancing. Did any of that inform your art?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, you see, I think Henry Street, working there, informed my art. But I wasn't making art when I was working there. You know, I can't—I don't think I can answer honestly, like, really know. I mean, I assume that everything I do informs it in some kind of way. But I was—I mean, I was a party girl. I worked during the day, and at night I went to the discos.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Okay. Well, I just thought I would, you know—because, of course, this is much later on, because moving through a space is so important in your pieces, your later pieces.

JACKIE FERRARA: And that all is stuff that I think about a lot now. But if I was thinking about it then—you know, I don't know that I was thinking about it.

AVIS BERMAN: So it was very, very late and/or buried. Also, you had said—

JACKIE FERRARA: I was a late bloomer, is what it is.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I appreciate your being honest and not tacking on portentous meanings early on. But I just thought I should ask.

You had said when you left Detroit that you ran away with some money from your brother. Were you estranged from your parents for a while?

JACKIE FERRARA: Uh, yes. Yes, then I was. Yes, I think. Yes, it was terrible.

AVIS BERMAN: Did they want you to stay married to Mr. Weber?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. It was nothing about that. It happened before that. I had a black boyfriend, and it was terrible, their reaction and just what happened was really terrible. And I was frightened to stay home, which is why I ended up going to Michigan State. And it was at Michigan State that I met Pete Weber, and I really—I didn't know what to do. And I wasn't brave enough yet to come to New York. I didn't know anybody in New York. But when I ultimately came, I came because my roommate from Michigan State was here, and then somebody else from the same dorm whom I'd gotten friendly with was here.

AVIS BERMAN: And did you ever reconcile with your parents?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. My father's behavior was unforgivable, but my mother, my mother was great. I mean, my father died; my mother, one day at her knitting—at her sewing—club told her friends that she wasn't going to do that anymore. And she gave out her sewing equipment and started going to widow and widower dances. And then ended up living, like the last, pretty much 20 years of her life, with a Mexican man that she met at one of these things who was nuts about her. They got married, and he was 15 years her junior.

AVIS BERMAN: Fantastic!

JACKIE FERRARA: And he took care of her, like when she got really old. He just stayed with her.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, did your mother or your parents live to see your career in flower and what you did?

JACKIE FERRARA: My mother did. My father was already dead.

AVIS BERMAN: And did she ever go to any of your projects and look at your pieces and become interested?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. Yes, she and Mike; that was her husband. They came to the opening in Indianapolis ["Painting and Sculpture Today." Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN, 1974]. They lived in a trailer, in a mobile home. They left Detroit, and they were living in San Antonio [TX]. My brother was very embarrassed by all of this. But

everybody else—I thought it was wonderful. And he loved to dance, this guy, and my mother liked to dance. And my father had never danced. So my mother and her new beau used to enter all these senior dance contests. And I might be becoming the same way, it seems.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, it's certainly great exercise and kept her lively. So I think it sounds pretty good. Usually you read about these things in fiction. And one is not often—it's not often you're lucky enough to have that happen to you in real life.

JACKIE FERRARA: It was great. So they came to the opening, you know. It was a retrospective that had gone to a couple of places. It was very nice.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Now we're going to pick up where we left off before, which was being in this loft and renovating it. And we were talking about the cotton batting pieces. And I think now we want to move on to how you really began to look at wood as an art material, and how you began to build, and the beginning of the sculpture that would, kind of, make you the artist that the world knows about.

JACKIE FERRARA: All right. So the cotton batting things were—at first they were very hairy and sort of anthropomorphic. But when I finished the loft, I still continued to make cotton batting things. And they just became, you know, very architectonic-looking. I started to make steps and pyramids that were very straightforward. They didn't do anything complicated. And I was using—I had glued the cotton batting onto something; and at first it was cardboard, and then I started to find wood in the area. Back then this area was not the way it is now; there were all these factories and lots of stuff that you could find on the street. And I could find big lengths of wood and cut them a little bit to make—and I had a table saw. So the first works were stairways. And, you know, I know the stairways—is it all okay?

AVIS BERMAN: Everything's fine. I just wanted to check. That's all. We're fine.

JACKIE FERRARA: The stairways—they were all covered with cotton batting. But then—I think I started to talk about this last time, I think. I bought plywood, sheets of plywood, and I had a plan to make a piece that was—I was going to cover the wood with cotton batting. And I cut the wood, and I put it together before I covered it with cotton batting just to make sure it was all going to fit right. And that's when I stopped using the cotton batting and switched to wood.

And at first, all the wood I was using was out of sheets of plywood. I was not buying, like, one-by-twos, long slender lengths. I was getting these big sheets. And some of them I could cut myself. But some, a neighbor was cutting them for me, whom I would pay. He had a big shop in his place. And at some point is when I went from the plywood—that was when I figured out there was a way to go tall rather than long. And that had to do with that if I didn't make it out of plywood, if instead I had narrow lengths of one-by-twos, I could start to build up rather. And they started to go up. And right away I was putting—I had spaces in them.

[Telephone rings.]

[Audio Break.]

AVIS BERMAN: So you were saying that you wanted to build up, as well as—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And right away I was—sometimes I would fill in the—I don't know how to say this. But sometimes there were spaces. The first pieces I built were not the—I don't know what to call them, the masonite ones that have all, like, curves, and the things that people always think look Peruvian or Mayan.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: I think I've got that right. I'm going to look at my—let us see it. Oh, maybe I'm wrong.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, just looking in the retrospective catalogue, and I see the pyramid from 1974.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And that's when the masonite pieces started then, too.

AVIS BERMAN: Now that's says chipboard.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And then in '75 we've got masonite.

JACKIE FERRARA: That's when—yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And also plywood at that moment as well.

JACKIE FERRARA: I guess—yes. And I hadn't yet, I guess I hadn't yet—I made one—oh, that's because it curved. Huh! Yes, I didn't—I don't know when that tower piece is.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yes. Are you talking about Beck Tower [sic]?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, Tower Beck [1979], and I was making it for the Beckers.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: Now I picked the wrong thing. Here's my file. Okay. Oh, starting some of this stuff in '74, and now it's—that's a really long time ago. Sometimes I have the order wrong. You know, I think it went one way, and then I'm, did it really go—is that the way it went? And then I'm not convinced anymore. Okay. I'll leave that out. I'm just looking to see—Old Court Pyramid. There we go. I'll keep that separate, because I hadn't gotten tall yet. Well, didn't know that.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Now Tower Beck was 1979.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: But I can also see—and Trid was 1978.

JACKIE FERRARA: This first one was in 1977, December 1977. It was the first one that—and it wasn't that tall. It was four feet. But it was—yes. It was the first one that got tall. And then—and Trid is very soon after that. You know, Trid was just a couple of pieces after that.

AVIS BERMAN: So the tall pieces got you to using milled lumber?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. Instead of the plywood. That's a big word for it. I didn't even know what to call it. Yes, milled lumber.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And then were you—and what kind of wood were you—

JACKIE FERRARA: It was almost all pine.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Was there a reason for pine?

JACKIE FERRARA: Pine was the cheapest, and it was a light color, and it was really what was standard; one-by-twos were made out of that. That was what the lumberyard carried. It was the most common wood then in the lumberyards.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And was it—I mean, it was milled, but did you have it finished more smoothly? Or did you—

JACKIE FERRARA: I would get—I did not get—I got clear; I didn't get knotty pine. And I would saw the lengths, and I would sand the edges a little bit. But, yes, the wood, it wasn't rough.

AVIS BERMAN: And how did you begin to experiment with other kinds—of integrating different kinds of wood in that?

JACKIE FERRARA: I didn't do that.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh? Because sometimes it looks like—

JACKIE FERRARA: I know it looks like that, but I didn't do that.

AVIS BERMAN: So those were all—

JACKIE FERRARA: It's all pine, pretty much. I mean, one time I think there was something else.

AVIS BERMAN: So it was about stain—you stained it, in other words.

JACKIE FERRARA: I stained it, but that was much later.

AVIS BERMAN: That wasn't until '82.

JACKIE FERRARA: Was that when I made my first [inaudible]?

AVIS BERMAN: First with color.

JACKIE FERRARA: Okay. But prior to that, I mean, I would go through the wood. And sometimes wood that was attacked by beetles—there was, like, some kind of beetle disease. And that gave the wood—it got discolored from the—it almost looked mottled—from the disease. But the wood was still functional and still just as strong. And so I would sometimes deliberately use some of those boards. But I would always spread them out so that it didn't have a mottled section in the middle.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. I know you've made bookshelves and cabinets. But how did you learn to build, shall we say, so obsessively, clean, meticulous? I mean, how did you teach yourself really a very artistic level of craft? Did you study, or was this just trial and error? I mean, what happened to you?

JACKIE FERRARA: I had a gift. [They laugh.] I don't know what to say. I mean, even when I was making pottery, I always—I'm a compulsively neat person. It's terrible. I can't help it. Somebody's been working for me for a long time who's—he's more accurate than I am—and he sometimes yells at me when I haven't made something fit together well. And I do the best I can. So, I mean, you can be better than me easily.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, it just looks extraordinary, looking at these things, you know, how they were perfect.

Now I will ask you if you thought of them, if the word "monument" was important for you then in what you were making.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no. At first I was calling the bigger pieces—even the ones that I was doing outside in parks that ended up having 20-year lives and sometimes being rebuilt—at first I was calling them "outdoor." I eventually changed it on my resume.

But I think I was calling them outdoor pieces. And was not thinking about them as monuments and still don't. I'm not interested in making monuments. I eventually realized I was interested in making places, and that I wanted more to happen than—I liked it that, some of my big pieces, there was a way to enter them or to climb them, or whatever would happen. Or that they might have, like, a deck part, or there was some little stage part. That all became more interesting to me to do that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I only say that because some of the ones that people think look like the Mayans, or something that looks like, say, Semaphore [1984], there is a quality to that. Although—

JACKIE FERRARA: I always thought it was architectural.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess by then, in the mid- to late '70s, the idea of the monument had been pretty much demolished itself. I mean, it was an old-fashioned or degraded term.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. Probably. Sure. You know, it was probably like the word "sculptress."

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs] Right, right. It also seems to me—and maybe this was the turning point for the sculpture—is that you—and of course I never saw the furry pieces, so maybe you thought of that then—but it seems that when you were—especially from looking at your drawings—you began to look at these as puzzles to figure out.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. I don't think that was happening with the earlier stuff, no. And the later was. I love drawing them in advance. You know, I'm figuring out. And especially the ones that you're showing in the book here, where there're all these different things going on.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: They were. They were wonderful puzzles for me. I quite enjoyed it. And you know, when I did the very first one, where there were a lot of segments, and, you know, I cut everything, I wasn't convinced that when I assembled it, it wasn't going to collapse. So I thought I'd figured it all out, because I was drawing. As I drew it, I drew each layer and figured out the sizes of the wood for each layer. But I still wasn't convinced that, with that very first one that I put together, that it wouldn't go together, that it would fall over to one side or something.

AVIS BERMAN: And when you stack, do you use glue, or you're using nails?

JACKIE FERRARA: Both. They're overbuilt, my things.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs] Let's see. I guess when you were making outdoor sculpture, did you have a sense that the—were you thinking from the beginning that they would erode or degrade eventually? Was that part of the ethos then?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, the outdoor ones, I used cedar, because I knew cedar could live outdoors. And I think

then I probably thought 20 years from then was, you know, a lifetime.

AVIS BERMAN: Because you know cedar is used for decks and all of that. But it does have to be replaced eventually.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right, right.

AVIS BERMAN: Unless you put something over that, I guess. You know, if you have something like some sort of, maybe, coating on it—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. But then you'd have to redo it.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: And then if, you know—it still wouldn't survive. You'd have to keep re-putting the coating on every year.

AVIS BERMAN: When did you realize you were moving into public art?

JACKIE FERRARA: I can't be clear about this. When I went with—I was Max Protetch's first artist in New York. And at the point where Scott was in the gallery, Scott Burton, and I think Mary Miss was briefly in the gallery [Max Protetch Gallery, New York, NY].

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: And Siah [Armajani] was in the gallery. And I was still figuring out my resume on a typewriter; I don't think I'd gotten a computer yet. And I remember going up to the gallery and looking at their resumes to see how the layout was, what would be the best way to do it. And they were using the words "public art." And I jumped on the band wagon. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, yes, when that—well, you hadn't—I guess you had done outdoor sculptures then.

JACKIE FERRARA: I was doing outdoor sculptures. I wasn't calling them public art. Although, you know, even, like, the one at—I mean, there were some that, they more or less had a function.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And I guess this would be the point, in Dayton, Ohio [Dayton Arch, 1978], and the GSA [U.S. General Services Administration] commission. And maybe this would be a good point chronologically to talk about the GSA piece [Carbondale Project, 1980. Carbondale, IL].

JACKIE FERRARA: Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: Which is in—

JACKIE FERRARA: That's right, so, early.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, well, exactly. And that's part of the interesting thing. And it was a—it certainly began, I mean, it's certainly architectural. There's no doubt about that. So I guess I would ask you to think about how you, you know, got the—first, do you know what the year was? Let's see. Carbondale, there it is. Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: Nineteen eighty.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. You were selected in August 1978. The proposal was approved in February 1980 and installed in May 1980.

JACKIE FERRARA: If I was selected in 1978, I probably didn't know it until '79, I'm guessing.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't think there was that much time that I knew about it. All right. So prior to that, I had done Wave Hill [1980]. Was that the only one? No, I'd done Castle Clinton [1979]. And I'd done the one in Minneapolis [Minneapolis Project, 1978]. The one in Minneapolis, I think, was my first one. Well, they're stack pyramids. Let's see, that was in [Dag] Hammarskjöld Plaza [Stone Pyramid, 1977, New York, NY]. Okay. So the Minneapolis project was the first one. And then they followed each other really fast. Like a couple of months later, it was Dayton. And the following year was Castle Clinton, in '79. And then in early '80, it was Wave Hill and Carbondale. They both got built in January of 1980.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's hard to believe they got built in January in 1980, because this—

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, wait a minute. That's the model; it's April.

AVIS BERMAN: It's April, right. Because this looks like warmer weather on these pictures.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. No, no, it's April. The model was—I made in 1980.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. You know what happened, and how did you get the commission? Did you apply, or were you selected?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. Do people apply for them?

AVIS BERMAN: I don't know. I'm asking.

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't think so. I don't think so.

AVIS BERMAN: So what—

JACKIE FERRARA: I got a phone call.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: From that man who I think is there.

AVIS BERMAN: The head of the GSA?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I think it was. I don't think it was Julie [Brown] who called. It might have been. And I probably—I might, under the GSA. Want me to look? I mean, I've got a GSA folder.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. That would be good.

JACKIE FERRARA: There might be some old correspondence on that.

[Audio Break.]

I don't know if it's the official—there's a whole bunch of stuff in here about trying to conserve it, but that didn't work.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. that was later on.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. This was the person who did a terrible job of doing the footing, and that's why it rotted.

AVIS BERMAN: Is that J. L. Simmons Company?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Oh, Don—this guy was the—I never met him; this Don Dodereau was the something like a—the person in Chicago representing the GSA had some kind of sign-off on it. And I was asking for the rest of my money, and he had to okay—oh, Don Thalacker.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, Donald Thalacker. Right. So that's the person you think is in the picture with you, Don Thalacker. Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I do. I think that's him.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: Don Thalacker. Okay, those are all my black and white. I had to do a thing about maintenance. Now I have some things from them. "Dear Miss Ferrara: We are pleased to advise you that you've been selected —"

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, and that's the letter dated November 2, 1978. So your memory is right, that you were nominated to the GSA by a panel composed of the project architect and art professionals—so several—by the National Endowment for the Arts. This is James B. Shea, Jr. I think that's, like, the son of the Shea of Shea Stadium.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, really!

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Anyway.

JACKIE FERRARA: So the model that I made had to go—went to the National Collection of Fine Arts [now

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC].

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: The federal [inaudible] this thing about the site.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: And I was trying to sort them, more or less, with the shape. I was trying to follow the site. And it seemed like an awkward site to me. It was awkward. It ended up that it was awkward. It was strange. It was just this little place on a lawn or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. It was still that you weren't called in till the end. So on a certain level it was more like "plop art" [pejorative term for public art], because you weren't involved with the architect or anyone else from the beginning.

JACKIE FERRARA: No.

AVIS BERMAN: It was after everyone else was done.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, the building was built when I—

AVIS BERMAN: So sort of you had to add the decoration. I mean, you didn't think of it that way, but that was how it was done at that moment. You weren't in there in the planning stages.

JACKIE FERRARA: No. But I don't even know that they did that then.

AVIS BERMAN: That was at the beginning of when people were beginning to think about that. But not—I mean, in the '70s you were just, you know, getting the plop art on the plaza.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So now, how did you, you know, approach an outdoor piece versus a studio piece at that time?

JACKIE FERRARA: Probably not that much different, because I just—instead of the graph paper being, all the little squares, being an eighth of an inch, they became an inch.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: I still figured it out on the same size paper. And what I was looking at, I just imagined it bigger.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, of course, as I just said—

JACKIE FERRARA: And I made a model. I made the model to scale. And the model was, you know, something like this chunky model. But it looked just fine. So I figured it could be bigger; it would look just as good.

AVIS BERMAN: And, of course, as we just said, you came in later on. And you said you tried to follow the site. Would you consider this a true site-specific piece, then?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. Because I didn't even know that word then, so how could I? And, you know, in looking back at it, I made an effort to make it look nice with the building and to sort of, more or less, follow the shape of the building. You know, it had—the building sort of had that jutting part to it. And my piece, like, had a little jutting part to it. But I did not know the word "site-specific." No, I wasn't thinking about any of those things.

AVIS BERMAN: So you were mainly thinking about the formal aspects?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I was thinking [laughs]—you know, when you don't go to art school, you don't even—I don't know what I was thinking [laughs]. I was trying to make something that would look good there. I didn't have the vocabulary. But I think somehow, innately, I understood that there were things that I should be looking for and trying to do.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you ever have to talk to a public there or convince any of them that this was—

JACKIE FERRARA: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —a good thing to do?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. I did not. I've had to do that with projects. But not at all. No, I made the model, and I

guess I brought it to—I do think I brought it to Washington. It was a very, very tiny commission. I think, yes, they were really getting their money's worth with me. And they wanted the model, and I can't see anything in here. But I think I made them give me, like, a thousand dollars more for the model, because they were getting a model besides the piece. And I think they were delighted.

AVIS BERMAN: And also this was somewhat in the beginning of your career. Did you have a sense they were trying to get younger artists or newer faces?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no. I didn't even know anything about them. [Telephone rings.] That phone is so loud.

[Audio Break.]

I can put the [answering] machine on now.

AVIS BERMAN: It doesn't matter. I can just keep stopping it. Now let's talk about your—this federal building. What was the function of the building?

JACKIE FERRARA: I think it was a post office, like a post office.

AVIS BERMAN: And did you go out yourself?

JACKIE FERRARA: It probably says in here. No, I did not. No. They sent me the pictures—this in here. And I even arranged for the part with—by letter—the part with having the—I didn't know what to do about a footing. I had never done—I never did again—this was a big mistake. Nobody knew it was a big mistake, to have a big concrete pad. Subsequently, when I did footings, they were just a concrete little section that would fit under the part where the wood touched the ground. And when you looked at it, you couldn't even see that it was sitting on any kind of a big concrete pad. And what ultimately happened is the pad, I guess, didn't have—it was sloped going interiorly, so water was always gathering in it.

AVIS BERMAN: So you're saying that the pad was concave?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, slightly. Must have been, because there was always water around it.

AVIS BERMAN: And you're saying that's the reason that it rotted?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Because it rotted sooner than it should have. And it really rotted. They sent pictures of it, and it was—oh, God, it was, like, different kinds of rot, you know. It was green colors and then brown colors and things that looked like fuzzy, cottony things. It was a mess. It was really terrible.

But by mail is how—I guess I must have asked the architect; I asked somebody about who could do the pad or figure it out for me. And they gave me—the man who must have been [inaudible] building.

AVIS BERMAN: So this is James R. Roberts for J. L. Simmons Company. Yes, in other words—but you felt, obviously, the land had to be graded or something to—

JACKIE FERRARA: Something had to happen, and I haven't a clue. I mean up to then everything I had made had just gone—stayed on the ground.

AVIS BERMAN: And this had to have something different because—

JACKIE FERRARA: It was going to last awhile, because all of the other pieces were for temporary installations. Except for the one—there were a couple that, you know, that weren't. But we did something. Like the one in Minneapolis, we put a couple of layers of wood under the—before it started.

AVIS BERMAN: Almost like a pile.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So the regret was, for this piece, was about the footing.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: What would you do now if you were doing this? How would you do it differently?

JACKIE FERRARA: I would probably put it on gravel. That seems the nicest thing to do. And I do have—that Wave Hill piece got rebuilt at the SculptureCenter in their courtyard—is gravel. And it was fine, and it was going from there to Brandeis, and they were going to put it on a gravel path, gravel area. That seems to mix nicely with the grass. And it's, you know, inexpensive compared to maybe trying to make just planks of concrete that would fit

under only the wood, so you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Now did you ever get out to Carbondale to see this piece?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't think so. I mean, I built it; I went out there to build it.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: And I was there for 10 days. But I don't think I ever went back.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you saw it only there initially, but not for any kind of official installation or unveiling.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, there was nothing like that. And they paid no attention to me [laughs]. I'm realizing that now.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: And they gave me, I guess, crappy little, you know, commission. It's disgusting.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, when you got out there and you saw the building, did you think—and the site—did you think, oh, maybe I should've done this instead of, in terms of the piece?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. You know, it was hard to get a picture. And they scolded me because part of my contract was that I had to present them with photographs. And there was just too much going on around it, you know. There [inaudible], but then next to it was a shopping center or something. There were always cars in the way. I couldn't get a good picture of it. It seemed like something bad was always happening.

AVIS BERMAN: But evidently you did. So who was "they," when they were scolding you?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, I think Don.

AVIS BERMAN: Don Thalacker.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I think that he didn't like my picture every much [inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Are there considerations to take into account when the federal government is the client?

JACKIE FERRARA: There probably would be now. I was like a babe in the woods then, truly. It was just somebody else asking me to do an outdoor piece somewhere. I mean, suddenly they were proliferating. And I don't know that I thought about this one any differently than any of the others.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, looking back now, does the federal authority operate differently from a municipal or a state authority, now that you have had so much experience dealing with these entities?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't think so then.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what are your thoughts about the destruction of the piece?

JACKIE FERRARA: What I would find more interesting—I mean, we'll talk about that—but what I now would have maybe some curiosity about, and only because of your questions, is what preceded and followed my work at that moment in the GSA. You know, what kinds of things were they doing? I don't know; I couldn't find it. I thought I had a catalogue. I thought I once had something that had my work in it, something that had come out, like, a few years after mine and had everything listed. Had all the budgets. And that was when I realized that I had gotten, you know, this really low budget, and that I was like the first young woman at the time to even get something, and they gave me this crappy budget.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, maybe also you could've negotiated or asked for more, but maybe you didn't know.

JACKIE FERRARA: It never would've occurred to me.

AVIS BERMAN: But you did ask for the extra thousand for the model.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, because I was supposed to give them the model; I was really outraged that they just thought, you know, they could keep it. And then this guy, I don't know if he knew what my commission was for, but he wanted 5,000 of the 17[,000 dollars].

AVIS BERMAN: This is the Simmons Company.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. To do that pad thing.

AVIS BERMAN: And what happened? Were you able to get the GSA to pay for it?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. It came out of my money.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, boy!

JACKIE FERRARA: I made like 2,000 or something. I've got it written down; I made very little.

AVIS BERMAN: But anyway, let's just briefly go back to your feeling about the destruction.

JACKIE FERRARA: Now that I think about—I think probably the other places at that time, where I was doing the big outdoor pieces, that there was more interaction. Certainly at Wave Hill, I went out, and I picked a site. The same thing—in all the other ones, I picked the site.

AVIS BERMAN: Even from the late '70s?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. I picked the site for the piece at Laumeier, the one at Dayton Arch. I had the whole city to pick. But here it was, you know, it was this spot, and it wasn't such a pretty spot. And with the other places, I don't know, people invited me. They took me out to dinner and stuff [laughs]. I mean, maybe I had lunch in Thalacker's office. I don't know. But there was no celebration.

AVIS BERMAN: What kind of a crew was here for you to build this in 10 days?

JACKIE FERRARA: I brought somebody with me who had worked on one of my other pieces. And we played rummy afterwards. And there was a guy there who was—I don't think this post office had opened yet. You know, it was a Social Security building; it wasn't a post office. It's probably on this little brochure here with the picture. But there was somebody there who was guarding it or something, a young guy, very nice guy. And he helped. So the three of us built. And he was happy to help because he was bored to death. He was a young guy, and it was interesting for him.

AVIS BERMAN: So three people: you and—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I didn't do much.

AVIS BERMAN: Your assistant, whoever that was.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Do you remember his name?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, Ballou, Mike Ballou, B-A-L-L-O-U. And the guy that we worked with there, he had such a good time that he decided it was a lousy job he had there, and he left soon after and went somewhere else. I don't know what he did, but he didn't want to do what he was doing anymore.

AVIS BERMAN: Are these two guys, the ones we're talking about, in this photograph, sitting on the piece?

JACKIE FERRARA: I think that's Ballou. I can't remember what the guy looked like. But I wouldn't have thought he looked like that. Well, that's Ballou.

AVIS BERMAN: The one in the white or the one in the dark?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, the one in the white, I think, is Ballou. But I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. I just thought I would identify the figures in the photograph there.

JACKIE FERRARA: I didn't even know how to take a picture. It's cut at the bottom. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Well, it's less cropped over here. You took more than one so you get—this is another view. So you took enough of them.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Now you said that the mayor of the town was the architect of the building?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, that's what I remember. When I first went out there, he came and talked to me, but I never saw him again.

AVIS BERMAN: Did he have anything to say much?

JACKIE FERRARA: He was the one who'd chosen me, it sounded like. You know, he really wanted me. I guess—I don't remember sending the GSA slides. But, you know, Julie Brown was probably collecting things from galleries and stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also, since there was an NEA panel, there may have been artists on the panel who recommended you, as well. I mean, that was more likely.

JACKIE FERRARA: I think I asked him. I do think I asked him. And he said that, you know, he had wanted me.

AVIS BERMAN: Because, fairly early you're in your work; how does this fit in with the work that was to come, that you were doing?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't like this one as much as others.

AVIS BERMAN: And why is that?

JACKIE FERRARA: That's—and it really might be because I never could get a big, you know, a proper picture of it. Because I seem to remember liking the small one of it, you know, when it sat here.

AVIS BERMAN: But you liked the model.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. But it's—there's just too much around it. Whenever I see it, it's, like, annoying with all these things sticking up all around. I don't know. I mean, it had [inaudible]. You know, these already existed.

AVIS BERMAN: What are all those little things?

JACKIE FERRARA: It must be lights.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: And, you know, I didn't know that I could ask them to move it. Or when they put in the footing, that they stay clear of it. It was just—I mean, the piece itself is okay. But I don't like its setting, and I really didn't feel bad that it went bye-bye.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. Because you feel that the site was too crowded.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: You weren't happy with where you had to put the piece.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. Right. And, you know, it might've been a mistake on my part that I was not seeing it clearly enough. Because I remember there was all this decision on my part—like how far forward I could come so that it would, you know, fit in that space. All I really had was—where these things that I was looking at. And I just didn't know there was going to be all that other stuff around it.

AVIS BERMAN: So clearly a visit to the site first would have been extremely helpful.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Is that something you do now all the time?

JACKIE FERRARA: All the time. And I hope you don't find in there that I actually visited it, because it's, you know, perfectly possible and I just don't remember.

AVIS BERMAN: I haven't found anything like that. But I'm just kind of finding out—I'm just interested in some of the lessons that you extrapolated from it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Oh, yes, lots of lessons. It's too bad, but—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, maybe you didn't know immediately what those lessons were going to be.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. So then there was lots of discussion about trying to save it. And whoever their conservators were—first it was saving it, and then I said I thought it would be cheaper to rebuild it. And they came in really high, and I asked the guy who still works for me, the one who's more organized, what he would

charge. And he was less. And I told them, the GSA, but they decided to let it go.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think there's another problem here, is—I think some of this, again, may be the bureaucracy of semantics—is that they don't have a budget for replication.

JACKIE FERRARA: Probably not.

AVIS BERMAN: But they probably have a budget for conservation.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right. And that was an enormous task to try to do that. Because somehow it would have to be lifted and all of our boards replaced. And still you were on that bad footing, which, you know, should be eliminated. So you had to lift it, pull out that big concrete thing, which went way down. It goes down six feet; it has to go below the frost line. So it was, like, an enormous undertaking with that pad.

AVIS BERMAN: So they did—but they discussed it with you before destroying it.

JACKIE FERRARA: I think they finally told me they were going to destroy it.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: I made the recommendation. I wrote and told them what Russell would charge to do it. And it was fairly comprehensive because, you know, we figured out his airfare, and to stay for three or four or five days, and bring somebody with. But it was still much less than the conservation proposal. And then I just got a letter telling me they weren't going to do that, which might even be here.

AVIS BERMAN: I think there's a document that they had sent me from this man Thomas Podner, who was the conservator who—he did discuss it with you. And, you know, the need for drainage. They seemed to think a little bit more that the cedar decaying was the issue for the rotted timbers, because the wood was impermanent, more than the footing.

JACKIE FERRARA: But, see, what had happened is people I know went there and, you know, visited it, and told me that there was water. Yes, it was probably both.

AVIS BERMAN: Would you make an outdoor piece for long-term use out of cedar today?

JACKIE FERRARA: It'll last 20 years. I mean, I've got that—the piece at the Walker [Belvedere, 1988/2003. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN] they just rebuilt; it was like 15 or 20 years later.

AVIS BERMAN: So you don't mind having someone rebuild your sculpture?

JACKIE FERRARA: I never built it to begin with.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I don't mean you versus someone else. But you—

JACKIE FERRARA: No, I gave them the specs for it, all the drawings. No, I'm delighted that they do that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: I think that's very nice.

AVIS BERMAN: So you are not against, in general, the idea of replication if something, if the sculpture, is deteriorating.

JACKIE FERRARA: Correct. I'm not.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. I just wanted to—

JACKIE FERRARA: I think even with some of the small things, you know, I couldn't store anymore, they could be rebuilt.

AVIS BERMAN: So you would go along if they were almost like ready-mades.

JACKIE FERRARA: They aren't ready-made; they have to be made.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Well, you know—

JACKIE FERRARA: They don't need the artist's hand. The wood is cut. I mean, I used to cut the wood; now I don't cut it anymore. At some point—there are some that I've made, but there are some that actually Russell made—

he glued them together—that were all, you know, like some of the little models were, that had to be more careful.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, if Russell, or any other assistant, makes it, you've made the aesthetic decisions about the vision that someone else is—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I've made the drawing. I give them the specs. I tell them the lengths of the wood. I tell them how much wood they're going to need to buy. I figure all that out. And then they buy it and cut it.

AVIS BERMAN: Like, as a matter of fact, in this letter from Mr. Podner—and maybe you can comment on this a little bit more—"You accepted as ethical and consistent with your philosophy of art that the present sculpture is a physical manifestation of the essential Platonic form. And, like a Japanese temple, rebuilding the physical structure when it becomes necessary, due to decay of the organic materials, is acceptable to you."

JACKIE FERRARA: Right, right. Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And, you know, when did you, kind of, evolve that philosophy?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't—he's putting words in my mouth [laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: I'm sorry I never said anything about a Japanese temple. That was probably the first time I learned they do that in Japan, so—[they laugh].

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, that's why I thought this was so suddenly philosophic in here, that I would ask you—

JACKIE FERRARA: That's not me.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. But, no, you're a much more nuts-and-bolts person. And that's why I was asking you what sounded anomalous to me. So, and you said you would participate in the rebuilding. But they decided not to. So anyway. Okay. Let's see. Now, they destroyed and de-accessioned the work in 1999.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, so, you know, it lasted—but I don't know when it started to look that bad. Two of the pieces that have been rebuilt, they brought me out for the ceremony. And the one in Laumeier Park, I gave them all the specs and stuff. And they built it before I got there. Then they brought me out for the party and stuff. But they built it next to the—it's kind of in the woods in the park there. And they built it right next to the old one, which they eventually took away. But they were doing that to make sure they didn't make mistakes. And, you know, the old one looked pretty bad. And that was 20 years later.

AVIS BERMAN: And they were still going to make it in cedar and do it and maybe think this may only last 20 years.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes, yes. They decided that was part of the piece.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, of course, they are an enlightened place and a professional sculpture park. So they explore these kinds of issues more.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right, right. And the Walker did it without even telling me. I didn't know, which I didn't like that they didn't tell me. I mean, I've seen it, and it was fine.

And then there's another one, the one in Minneapolis, where—that one first, they moved it, and moved it about 10 years after it had been built. They put it—that was wonderful. They had all these logs of wood, and they actually rolled it. They'd drop another piece, they'd pull it with big ropes from one part of this campus to another part. Hundreds of people pulling the rope; it was beautiful.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so they kind of made it into a little bit of—more of a public happening there to do it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: But do most other, shall we say, state, municipal authorities, are they going to object if they have to remake a piece? I mean, is that something—

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, I wouldn't make one in wood now. I mean, I don't—now I would make furniture and stuff. But that just wouldn't happen. If they asked for a wood piece, then they would know. I think there are, you know, I think teak has a much longer life because it's a much harder wood.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's also used to being in tropical environments; it can stand water.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. So I think—and there's some African wood that's also much harder. Cedar is really soft. It's quite soft, as is redwood. They're both really soft wood. I mean with your nail you could, you know, make a line in it. But I haven't I've made furniture for indoors. I've done wood things for indoors. But I've not done anything outdoors in wood, I don't think, for—

AVIS BERMAN: For some time.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. For decades maybe.

AVIS BERMAN: Is that because of the limited lifespan?

JACKIE FERRARA: The budgets are much bigger, and I want it to be permanent.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Well, and also the kinds of things you're doing now, whole plazas and places, are a little—it's a different kind of thing. And you're doing them indoors and outdoors. And certainly more interaction with architects, I hope.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Are there any other reminiscences, things that you can remember about this piece? You must have been happy to get it at the time, no matter—

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. I was. And I got an impact wrench for the job, which was a very useful tool. And it made us finish it much faster and cut down on—I thought we were going to need three guys working on it. And we didn't, because of the impact wrench.

And the town is where Buckminster Fuller's something or other is there. He was at the university.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: And the town has some kind of credibility, which I never got to experience, unfortunately. I didn't know where we should go; we'd go for meals in the area. We were staying very close to—

AVIS BERMAN: So even though it was a university community, no one was very interested?

JACKIE FERRARA: Nobody, no.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean either an art or an architecture department?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, nothing. Nothing at all. Nobody ever came and spoke with us. No, it was very lonely. And I don't know—I guess Ballou never rented a car; I don't think we rented a car. We didn't go exploring in the town. I just, you know, I felt like we stayed within this couple of blocks where—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you wanted to get it done. You were probably working all day. There was a lot of hard physical—

JACKIE FERRARA: We were working all day. But, you know, we were playing rummy, maybe we could have done something. [They laugh.] No, it was strange how it was. And I'm wondering, you know, it was possible we were building it during the Easter break, because we did in April.

AVIS BERMAN: Or May.

JACKIE FERRARA: Because there wasn't any sense of—really, nobody ever came by where we worked. And I actually don't know where we were, where the location was, in relation to, like ,the city proper.

AVIS BERMAN: You have said that the company that made the footing was responsible for the damp, for the rot. Was there ever a time in which someone was trying to assign responsibility or blame to you for that?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, because, you know, you're right. I just found the pictures. It was 20 years later, that would have happened.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: The footing's down here. This is a couple of—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, these are pictures of the mold that you're showing me.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: That was sent to you, green mold.

JACKIE FERRARA: [Inaudible.]

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, you're so close—I can see that this is so close to the parking lot and the driveway and everything.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So there was not enough space for the piece to breathe.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. And I couldn't tell that from, you know—it was really too big for the site.

AVIS BERMAN: At this moment, I should ask you this because it's about the timeframe. In the '70s it's a little bit of an inevitable question. But did the women's movement in art help your career? And how involved were you in all of that?

JACKIE FERRARA: It helped my career 100 percent. And I was not involved at all. I didn't even know it was happening. But I got put in some shows because of it. And it just, you know, took off. But it preceded this.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, exactly.

JACKIE FERRARA: I mean, I was in that first Whitney annual, and then I was in subsequent—I think I was in four of the annuals all together. Or then they forgot about me.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess 1970 or so would've been that first one that the women were in, or early '70s?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. Because I hadn't moved here yet.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. So that would've been '70.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, were you—did you have a sense of yourself being a feminist then?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. But my friends were active, my friends that I met here. That was a little later. That was maybe '72. I'm not sure when I had that accident. I broke my wrists and was in a cast for five weeks, and it put me out of commission. Because of that, I attended all these feminist meetings just to, you know, for entertainment. And met people that became my friends, who were other women artists whom I hadn't known. I hadn't known any when I moved here.

AVIS BERMAN: So that would be like maybe, oh, Michelle Stuart?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, Michelle Stuart, Jackie Winsor—well, not Jackie so much—Mary Miss. I mean, Jackie I always talked with. But I don't go to movies with her.

AVIS BERMAN: Now how about someone like Lucy Lippard?

JACKIE FERRARA: We were in a group, and Lucy—I was part of the slide registry, the Women's Slide Registry—that was under Lucy's supervision. It was Michelle Stuart, Mary Miss, Sandy Gellis, and myself. And we managed the slide registry, and we kept the slides. We each had a different job. It must've been another interview, somebody from the Modern [MoMA, NY], a couple of weeks ago. I didn't say that that file cabinet over there is from when I was on the slide registry to you?

AVIS BERMAN: Don't know. I didn't see that last week. [They laugh.]

JACKIE FERRARA: The week before, the Modern's doing some—a book on women artists in the collection.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, good!

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, you say good, and I thought, "Huh!"

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, you don't want to be characterized.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, it's a terrible thing, you know. I mean, I'm doing it, but—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you know, MoMA and women artists has been so bad.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right, I know. That's right.

AVIS BERMAN: So I guess—you know, it's true.

JACKIE FERRARA: It's pathetic.

AVIS BERMAN: It's true. You know, you might want to start that way, but—in your career if you say it helped it 100 percent—but you don't want to end up that way.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right, Yes. Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: No, you just want to be known as an artist or sculptor or other artist in other categories. But I guess because—know that MoMA was just so retrograde—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: —that I—it's a knee-jerk reaction, because I always think, well, at least they're investigating; the artist is still there, and someone is asking you about it. But it's true: they're still woefully behind in a lot of ways.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, during this point, how was your consciousness raised?

JACKIE FERRARA: I even belonged to a group. But I joined the group when I was still in the two casts. And it was not a good group that I was in. There were good groups for—I wasn't in a good group. There were some people who lived in my building. It's hard to explain, like, how I was.

I know that when I came here, I had a job at the Bowery Savings Bank. And within a couple of years—it was my first job—and I don't even know if I'd been there two years, but I kept getting promoted. And every time I got promoted, I was promoted to a guy's job, and they would never give me the same salary. And I was outraged by that. And complained to anybody who would listen to me. And was complaining one time that time I was taking pottery classes at the Henry Street Play—the Henry Street Settlement House. And I complained about this injustice. And they told me that there was a job opening at the Playhouse and maybe I'd go check it out, which I did.

AVIS BERMAN: In this period, in the mid-'70s, I'm assuming that Mr. Greenbaum has sort of departed. So how were you supporting yourself? How were you staying alive?

JACKIE FERRARA: I was—the maintenance was very low here then; it's not anymore. And I was doing little carpentry jobs. I was tiling people's bathrooms. I would make a tuna casserole and eat it four days in a row. Things were a lot cheaper. I could even go to the movies. And I even smoked—smoked! But I spent very little money, and I would take odd jobs. But right away I started to sell.

AVIS BERMAN: And that was through Max Protetch.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Let's talk about him and his influence on your career and what he sold or how he placed things or how he—if he shaped it, and what you remember about that. I mean, you were with him quite a long time.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, a very long time. I think it happened despite him. I mean, in the very beginning, he would be upset if I were going to show somewhere else, if I was invited into a show somewhere else. And did not tell me when galleries in other cities contacted him to show my work because, I don't know—it was silly of him, but he was afraid he'd lose me.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, would he let those things go and be shown elsewhere?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no. So, you know, like the shows in other towns and other cities.

AVIS BERMAN: So unbeknownst—

JACKIE FERRARA: Very few of them, very, very few of them.

AVIS BERMAN: So you lost opportunities, unbeknownst to you.

JACKIE FERRARA: I would guess so. Yes. But, you know, he was selling everything. So it didn't really matter.

AVIS BERMAN: When and how did you find out that he was doing that?

JACKIE FERRARA: I must have met somebody from a gallery who told me that they had tried to bring my work there. I mean, I don't know that he did it a lot.

AVIS BERMAN: Because certainly in another town, where it wasn't competition, it would only be good for him.

JACKIE FERRARA: I know. It was silly, I know, I know. But this might have been really early. I don't know. Because I did have some shows, you know, not a lot, but I did have some. But I remember someone telling me that. I also remember him telling me—I was in a show at John Weber Gallery [New York, NY], a group show ["Drawings for Outdoor Sculpture, 1946-1977"]. And he told me how worried he'd got because he was afraid—he felt very competitive with Weber, that I would go with Weber. I was happy with Max.

AVIS BERMAN: Were there other galleries wooing you at that time?

JACKIE FERRARA: Not that I know of, no. I used to go to dinner with him sometimes. We'd go to movies once in a while. I considered him, you know, a friend. And I mostly liked the artists in the gallery. I thought, you know, I thought he had interesting artists. I was glad to be in the gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: He did. And he would do things like show Frank Lloyd Wright drawings. You know he did—

JACKIE FERRARA: That was much later.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, as he got on. But he kept it—it was an interesting mix, and he had a—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Like he had a Zaha Hadid show once. I mean, you know, it's true. He was interested in architecture.

AVIS BERMAN: I think Mary Miss was in the gallery, too.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Not for long. And that was a little later, because that was when he had already moved to Broadway. He used to be on Spring and East Broadway.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, how did he feel, as you began to move into these public commissions and working for entities—I mean, the dealer doesn't get anything from that.

JACKIE FERRARA: No. But the first one, which was with General Mills [Stone Court, 1988]—they had been contacting him—allowed it. And that was my first stone one, was with them. And also it was my last—they happened the same year—it was my last big wood piece for outdoors, which went to the Walker. It was built at the Walker. I was going out for both projects the same year. And Max was involved in setting that up, too. By that time I'd really been with the gallery for a while; they would go to the gallery. They don't do that now very much. [Inaudible] Fredericke Taylor, but they mostly contact me. And I don't have them contact her. I know it's not interesting for galleries.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, it's a big headache, and it's long-term and, you know, by the time something happens, it's—but Max got—he got a percentage of the General Mills project and probably also the Walker one. And they had me on a stipend, the Protetch Gallery. By that time I was getting a certain amount. And even when I left, they still owed me money, and I continued to get it for a while.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you like being on the stipend system?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, that was fine, you know. I knew how much money I had each month. No, I quite liked it. And I was getting interest. The bookkeeper set it up like that, and I thought that was fine.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. And it all ended honestly, and you got what you—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes, yes. It all ended honestly.

AVIS BERMAN: At about this point, by then, how did you see your work, then, in relation to minimalism?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, Robert Pincus-Witten wrote about me in his postminimal book ["JACKIE FERRARA: The Feathery Elevator." Postminimalism. New York: Out of London Press, 1977]. And I figured I was postminimalist because I wasn't making art when the minimalists started, even though I was the same age as a lot of them.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you're just—

JACKIE FERRARA: I was just being, like, because I started here, then I can go there. [Inaudible] here somehow. It's just, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, other than chronology, let's talk about what the work looked like, the materials it used. I'm not thinking whether you were later than them. But in terms of a feeling or an attitude that might be similar—or not similar.

JACKIE FERRARA: That work is a little more—there's a little more happening in it than I think of minimalism as being. I mean I've made things that I would call minimal. But then I've made others that have more—see, I couldn't call this—this would be—I couldn't call that minimal.

AVIS BERMAN: We're talking about the Carbondale project.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And why not?

JACKIE FERRARA: If all four sides were the same, I guess I would call it minimal. But this is, you know, probably some distorted idea about what I think minimal means.

AVIS BERMAN: So maybe minimalism was too stripped down for you?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, because I made some, and now I've gotten more stripped down.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also you allow narrative in your work, and I'm not sure that the minimalists ever did that.

JACKIE FERRARA: I allow narrative in my intention, or the ultimate result?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, in other words, just the work evokes references to certain architectural forms. Or because one can enter them. You know, in other words, the idea of enclosure or a staircase. That sort of thing.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right. Okay. And minimalism doesn't ever do that? So you don't consider Richard Serra a minimalist?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, not anymore, actually, I wouldn't.

JACKIE FERRARA: You're talking about, like, the big metal forms that you can walk through and stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Well—

JACKIE FERRARA: But Don Judd is minimalistic.

AVIS BERMAN: Probably the only one then.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, and Carl Andre was, probably.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And also the other thing that—even though you may have repetition within a piece—I mean, maybe I'm not seeing this, but you can correct me—did you ever make, you know, a piece with many repetitive parts?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, you know, six in a row, seven, you know, that kind of thing?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, you mean a piece would be of the same thing repeated.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: Like a bunch of columns.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Or a bunch of, you know, like a number of boxes or one piece stacked in separate parts.

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't think so. But it's not I've always wanted to do something with a series of columns. And I would make drawings for it sometimes. But I've never done it. And if I ever—if the GSA would like a commission, that's what I would like to do. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Right. Okay. Duly noted. Duly noted. Yes, I guess also I think of the minimalists as having a very strict industrial finish, a very smooth, you know—and trying—although it doesn't happen—for an

impersonality, which doesn't happen.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. See, I consider myself more in the vein of Smithson, what his work looked like.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. We're kind of getting around to where we started there. And you mentioned heroic, and what do you—

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know that I think my work is heroic. I'd just love it to be heroic, but—

AVIS BERMAN: But in terms of what it looked like, what do you see as having an affinity or a similarity in your own work to Smithson?

JACKIE FERRARA: I'm going to have to retract the statement then.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. No, you can still think it. It's okay if you can't articulate—

JACKIE FERRARA: I was trying to think of somebody from that time, because they were all friends; they were all, like, writing articles in Artforum or wherever, and they were curating shows. Mel Bochner was part of that group, too.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: If I had to choose somebody, it would've been Smithson.

AVIS BERMAN: Just to go back to the stipend with Max Protetch, I'd like to know when you began to be able to make a living from your art, when you could drop the odd jobs.

JACKIE FERRARA: It was really early. The first show I had with Max—I think I'm right about this—were all the little masonite and those little models; like, there are some here that I've kept, that I wouldn't sell. But all the ones that I would sell got sold. And every show after that, he sold everything in the show.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's fantastic!

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. I mean, I would save things, and that's mostly what's in my [inaudible]. The work from then that's here were pieces I deliberately chose to save.

AVIS BERMAN: To hold back.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Was that a problem for him?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. No, no. I mean, I don't—he never expressed that it was.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: So whenever that first show was, I pretty much stopped having to do odd jobs.

AVIS BERMAN: That's—yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: And then I got, you know, I got a couple of grants.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: I got a—you know, there are sides of me that I cannot—I don't even know who that person is anymore, you know. I mean, the fact that I left Detroit with five dollars more than the ticket, you know; it's like, I don't know who that person is. And I got—I guess I got a National Endowment and a—I applied for a National Endowment and a Guggenheim. And when I got the Guggenheim, I wrote the National Endowment to tell them to please withdraw my name because I'd gotten—and then they gave me one anyway, and I wrote an indignant letter [they laugh] saying, You didn't read my previous letter. What's the matter with you? I told you to—and so they gave it to me the subsequent year.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, isn't that wonderful that they—and also that—but that was the way artists were. You know, people were that way. They didn't—

JACKIE FERRARA: They told me the only other one who'd ever done that was Bob [Robert] Irwin. I wouldn't do it now, I tell you.

AVIS BERMAN: Of course not. Well, different time, different—but, you know, people in the '70s, people were, you know, that was the way people were.

JACKIE FERRARA: I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: In a lot of ways. You know, just kind of being an upright artist. And you probably thought in the artists' community, it was so small, that if you gave it up, it would go to someone else deserving, who needed it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right. Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And what did you make with the Guggenheim money? In other words, what pieces were you able to make with that?

JACKIE FERRARA: I guess I was living off that; it was helping me to live. Because I know that that was my application; my proposal was just to be able to make work for a year. And I think you have to, at the end of the year, submit, you know, some kind of statement. And I guess I just sent photographs of what I'd made. But it wasn't for anything specific.

AVIS BERMAN: Specific. And how about the NEA grant?

JACKIE FERRARA: With all of them, they all just contributed to my well-being.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JACKIE FERRARA: And my rent.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right, right. Exactly.

JACKIE FERRARA: I know I bought a saw. That was what I did with—I don't know which one it was. But I remember, I had, like, a little saw, a little table saw, and I bought a very big-deal saw.

AVIS BERMAN: I think just because of your appointment and other things today, we should probably quit, and we can make another date. Okay. Thank you very much.

JACKIE FERRARA: It's a pleasure.

[END OF FILE 2.]

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Jackie Ferrara on February 13, 2009, for the Archives of American Art and GSA Oral History Project, in her loft in SoHo.

And so what we agreed to do, and what we're going to do, is we're going to go over the pieces that she liked best and found most pivotal in her work. And the questions I'll be asking are how they came about, and what you were after, the challenges, and how you felt it was a departure or advanced your work.

JACKIE FERRARA: Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: And the first one I want to ask about, the earliest one that you had mentioned to me, was Castle Clinton, from 1979. And so let's begin with that and why it was important for you.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, I think—see, I'm not sure. I'm not sure if it was my first piece that I did for a site. I don't think it is. But it certainly is the first piece where there was more than one unit. And I had never—actually, I'd never done it before. And other than doing big landscaping projects that are very, you know, massive, I never built a structure again that was of two components. And it wasn't because I didn't like it. It was just, you know, it's just never—there was never an opportunity.

AVIS BERMAN: So this is a unique structure in your work?

JACKIE FERRARA: It was, yes. It was unique in that it was two different structures side by side. And you could enter either one of them. But you would have to go outside of the first to go into the second. There wasn't a consecutive passageway between the two structures.

AVIS BERMAN: What is Castle Clinton?

JACKIE FERRARA: Castle Clinton is an area downtown by the old—it's the old Battery Park. And it was a fort. And I know for a while it was a nightclub, an outdoor nightclub. And now it's a historical landmark. It's a big oval with a high masonry wall going around it. Maybe it's a circle. And you could get up on the roof of—there's a building that goes around a lot of the circle, and you could get up on the roof of the building, where lots of the

photographs of the piece were taken from.

AVIS BERMAN: And did you build it there?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, it was built here in my loft, in units, and we brought it there. I actually had never built anything on site in New York at that time. And because it was made out of two-by-fours, and it wasn't that heavy, it seemed like it would really just be more convenient to build it here and transport it there, which is what we did.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, looking at the photograph—

JACKIE FERRARA: They pegged them together, the sections.

AVIS BERMAN: And is that gravel, or is that ground—was the ground leveled for you?

JACKIE FERRARA: The ground was fine. It was this—it was all gravel. But we probably shoveled things a little bit to set it in. But it wasn't a big problem at all.

AVIS BERMAN: And were chosen for this, or did you apply?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no, no. I was offered it. Over the period of one summer, Jean Feinberg had, I guess, applied to the Parks department to do a program there, where four different artists—four different makers, because one was an architect—were asked to each do a project for the site. And each project was up for, I don't know, I guess like three weeks, maybe. It ran the course of the summer, so we took turns; there were four of us, and we each had our section.

AVIS BERMAN: So they weren't up all together.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, not at all. No, we each had our own period of time.

AVIS BERMAN: And this was outdoors for three weeks. And then what happened to it?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, from there it went—my gallery was Max Protetch then. And he had some land upstate. And so it went there. And then it stayed there for a while, except Max gave up that property. And then it went to Max—a gallery, a big gallery; he showed a lot of sculptors in it.

AVIS BERMAN: Max Hutchinson?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. He had land upstate.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: And it went to his place; it was like a donation or something. And he had it on his land. And when he died, his—I don't know if she was his wife or, you know, just his woman—called me to ask if it were—she said it was really falling apart, which I'm sure it was. It was of a very slender wood. All my other big structures had been out of four-by-sixes, and they could take it. But the two-by-threes, with all the slats and stuff, it just—it was rotting. So I wrote a letter giving her permission to destroy it. And that was it. But there's a model of it that's in the museum in—I believe it's Iowa. There was a nice-sized model; it was maybe four feet by six feet or something. It took up a lot of space.

AVIS BERMAN: No, well, it's an interesting ethos. That really that was a lot of work to do for three weeks. And then what would happen to it?

JACKIE FERRARA: That was early on, and it didn't even matter. I was thrilled to do it, of course. I don't even know if I got paid. I mean, I know I got the materials paid for. And I'm guessing that—I don't even think he got paid. Doug Holliston [sic, Hollis] did not live here; he lived—at the time and probably still does—in San Francisco. But he was coming to town, and we had met on a project in Dayton where we each were doing something in the city of Dayton. And he said he was coming, and he would like to help build it. So he and I built it, and he was here for a couple of weeks. He was staying with somebody who lived nearby, so it was easy.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, your assistant Russell Busch, right?

JACKIE FERRARA: Russell Busch is my assistant.

AVIS BERMAN: And when did—

JACKIE FERRARA: I didn't know him then.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. That's what I was wondering. Just when did Russell come on the scene?

JACKIE FERRARA: Russell came on the scene when I made my previous cocktail table. Because in the middle of it, I cut off a little bit of my finger. And I needed somebody to finish the job. Just the edge of my finger. I mean, you can't see what I cut off. That's awhile ago. And if you really want to know, I can—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I just thought, at some point you could just tell me, when we're going through these, when Russell started, you know, was there to build it, and maybe we'll get an idea. I guess it must have been in the '80s, do you think?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, it was probably in the '80s.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: I'm just so bad chronologically.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's all right. And I guess I would ask you if this sort of—what kind of ideas this may have given you, even though it was a little different for going on in your work.

JACKIE FERRARA: Too long ago.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Okay. So you had picked out—this was the next thing we're going to talk about—is the Norwalk Platform [1984], right? Which is in Norwalk, Ohio.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And Norwalk, Ohio, is in a remote part of Ohio where there's a lot of lakes. And it's named Norwalk because back when there were four territories in the United States, it was part of Connecticut. And there was a bad fire in Norwalk, Connecticut, so they just moved to the other end of Connecticut. And back then the other end of Connecticut was this end of Ohio, and the town just has kept its name.

The site was a very nice park with lakes and stuff. And the intention was to make a kind of platform that could function as a place for things to happen. And I had—see, I don't know where Wave Hill project is. I'm guessing maybe Wave Hill project preceded this. Because that touched on that idea of something you could—that there'd be some steps you would climb up, and then there would be a little platform area. But this was really intended as a long stretch of platform with a narrow, narrow side, a long narrow length, and then, like, a bigger square where there was—could be a kind of stage.

And I know lots of things have happened there. They have revival meetings and weddings. I mean, there have been occasions, lots of occasions, things that happened there. Somebody who was very friendly, a young woman, who photographed it and had an art background, soon after, maybe a year or two after, wrote me a little note telling me about some of the things that had happened there.

AVIS BERMAN: So was this one of your first real interactive pieces as a place?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. It was really intended to function as like a platform where things could specifically happen.

AVIS BERMAN: And was this—I mean, had you been thinking about the idea of art, shall we say, has a use?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, the very first piece I ever made that—which was just a stacked pyramid, which was really just a bunch of four-by-sixes, all the same size. And the bottom row was, say, 20, and the next one on top of it was 19, 18, 17, 16, and you just ended up with this big pyramid. And it was for Hammarskjöld Plaza. And practically the first time I went back to photograph and look at it, there were kids climbing it, which had never occurred to me that that would happen. And so I got, you know—after that, any of the structures I made, I either made them so that the increments were too tiny, as it ascended that it would really be hard to climb. Or else it was quite comfortable to climb. But with this, I was—yes, I was interested in the idea of it being really a performing space.

AVIS BERMAN: With Hammarskjöld Plaza, I mean, did that upset you when you saw the kids there? Did you think it was like vandalizing it?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. I just was afraid that they'd get to the top and fall.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. I didn't mind. I mean, the wood was hardy; it could certainly take it. And we were climbing to build it. And it was just the idea that, you know, they got up to the top there, and what was going to happen?

AVIS BERMAN: Now, this says that—one of the four works done in collaboration with Cardinal Industries. So would you discuss your relationship with Cardinal Industries? Because it's so happy, and it's so rare and kind of wonderful.

JACKIE FERRARA: All right. So Cardinal Industries, whose main headquarters are in Columbus, Ohio—but they have other factories, and there's one in Orlando, and there's one in Atlanta. And I think there's one in Texas; I'm not sure. And they made modular homes in the factory that would start out at one end with just a pile of lumber and sheetrock, and at the other end would roll out on these trucks, these flatbed trucks, a complete house. But they were small, you know. A complete house that had fixtures in it. I mean, they had like a—they had a little light over the kitchen. They had all—you know, it was furnished, or semi-furnished. You know, as much as people could—but more so than just an empty house. It had, like, the stove and—and a CEO, that actually was the vice president, who was very advanced culturally. I mean, he really had all these wonderful ideas for the people that worked there and what he thought they should have, you know, what should be available to them. And during lunch, he'd have the Columbus Symphony coming there and playing music.

Well, anyway, he got this idea that—he thought it would be good if they would go to the museum sometime. And the way he was going to lure them to the museum was to have an artist make something that would get donated to the museum. Or have the artist design something that the factory people would make. And then it would get donated to the museum, and the factory would want to go to the museum with their families to see this piece that they had worked on [Breaktower, 1984].

And so he contacted the Columbus Museum of Art, and they were interested in the idea. And they suggested a couple of artists that they thought. I mean, he had specifications. And it really had to do with the kind of wood that was available at the factory and what they'd be capable of doing. And so he went around. I don't know who else there was beside me. But I know that he talked to other people. But anyway, he decided that I'd be fine.

And so I went to Columbus, and it was wonderful. They fell in love with me; they fell in love with the piece; I fell in love with them. There was like, you know, all crying when I had to go back. And I was there eight days, and I was there all day in the factory. The factory worked a couple shifts, which was very nice for me, because I'm a night person. And so I could just come in at 11, and I worked till eight or nine at night. It was fine. So I just supervised, you know, to make sure that they didn't do anything wrong.

And then when the piece was finished—I think there were five people working on it. Nobody wanted to work on it. So only five had volunteered. And of course, once we started, everybody else was really jealous. But these five were the ones. Yes, it was their [inaudible]. And so when they took it away to the museum, the five abandoned the factory and went chasing after it to make sure that everything was going to be all right. Because it went out on the flatbed, but it was going into the Columbus Museum Garden, and it had to be hoisted over a wall and then set up in the garden. And they wanted to make sure it was all going to be all right.

And then after—and this was the case—I actually ended up making things at three of their factories. After the piece was completed, there'd be a dedication ceremony at the museum, that all of Cardinal, a lot of workers, were invited to, and they would all go because there'd be a little box lunch, so they could have lunch. And they'd bring their families, and they'd get to see the work that we made. And it was really, it was very nice. And at the ceremony they gave me a Cardinal Industry jacket, which for years I would wear religiously in SoHo. I was so proud of it.

Well, subsequently I also did one in Atlanta, and I did one in Orlando. After I did the one in Columbus, David Baker, who was the vice president, offered that if ever I needed help on any—if they could help me in any way, that would be fine. And so Norwalk Platform, which was with the North Central Ohio Arts Council, run by a woman who was out to lunch somewhere—I don't know where she was—who had an idea of bringing art into her community, but had no sense about what she really was obliged to provide. And so she had said, Oh, yes! You know. She had invited me. It was like the letter written from Ohio Arts Council. Please come. I agreed to come. You know, what did I need? And I wrote—I made a drawing. Actually, I made the drawing for this platform piece, and I figured out all the lumber, and I sent her a list. And she would, yes, she would order the lumber, and the lumber would all be cut to size. And it was going to fit in this park. And the park would be leveled and ready for the piece. And she would have four workers for me. Blah blah blah. And I was bringing one person. I was bringing Russell Busch. And that was very early.

AVIS BERMAN: And this was '84, so early '80s.

JACKIE FERRARA: So we know Russell exists. And we got there [laughs], and she hadn't done anything. There was no lumber; there was no clearing in the park; there were no workers. She just hadn't done anything.

And at first, you know, we went to a factory—we went to the lumberyard. But Jesus! It just seemed like nothing was going to—really was going to happen. Like she didn't know how to make it happen. I mean, I had the list. She was willing to pay, but she didn't have anybody to help work it. And Russell and I could not—I mean, you

know, these big four-by—I was using four-by-six-foot lumber—timbers. I was not—I was just watching them. Sometimes I'd carry a small piece over to them. But I couldn't do that. That was beyond me physically.

And so I called Cardinal, and they were great. They sent a factory truck with three of the people that had been working with me on the other project. And they came down with all these equipment and raring to go. And they stayed, you know, they stayed the five or six days it took to build it. They got paid, you know, by Cardinal. And the piece got done.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's extraordinary.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, it was wonderful.

AVIS BERMAN: In spite of this woman.

JACKIE FERRARA: In spite of this woman who—she lost the job. It had nothing to do with me. I never—I actually never said anything. Her name was Anne something. But a few years after that, I was on a grant-giving panel in Ohio. And the person in charge of the council, I guess, had been having complaints about her, and she knew I'd done something, so she asked me. And, boy, did I unload! Finally somebody cared.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you know, that was crazy! I mean, that would have been a complete waste of public money and your time had not Cardinal come to the rescue.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: Is this still there?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know. I don't know. It was there. Somebody—but it's a few years ago, maybe eight years ago—somebody on a honeymoon trip; I'm not even remembering who this was anymore—anyway, went to see it because they were driving across country, or doing something anyway. It was not out of their way, and they went to see it. And they sent me photographs, and it was okay.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, that's good news.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, had this been sealed or anything?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. But it wasn't cedar. It's that treated lumber. And the treated lumber is actually a harder lumber than the cedar is. So it's potentially—would be a little stronger than cedar. Cedar's quite soft and can get kind of mushy when it gets real wet. And so, you know, it's possible this could last. Actually, what would make it not last would maybe be if something started to happen with the ground underneath it, if it collapsed a little bit or something. I don't know why it would. But they have flooding in Ohio?

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So you didn't put anything—

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. I've never sealed anything.

AVIS BERMAN: Or put, like, a bed—a certain kind of bedding underneath?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, it is—it's on a gravel bed. There's grass outside of it. They ended up throwing down a bunch of gravel—

AVIS BERMAN: I see.

JACKIE FERRARA: —where it was going to go. They did do that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And then the next thing that you wanted to talk about was—I have two different photographs of this—which is Belvedere [1988], for the Walker Arts Center.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: And when I had come before, we had this photo. And then we have another one which—this makes it look a little bit better and not so close to that other structure.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I know.

AVIS BERMAN: So do you feel that this photograph is misleading, that I'm looking at?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no. It would be one way of seeing it. It's really where you're standing.

AVIS BERMAN: Because, you know, as I say, the picture in your catalogue shows that there's a structure too close.

JACKIE FERRARA: See that.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, it's over here somewhere. The pictures that were chosen for the catalogue, I had no control over. And I often thought they made a mistake.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. That just makes it look less monumental and kind of overwhelming to have this glass [inaudible].

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Right.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, anyway, this is a piece that's in the sculpture garden of the Walker Arts Center.

JACKIE FERRARA: Correct.

AVIS BERMAN: And, you know, how did this come about?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, this was instigated by some of the women working at the Walker, because the Walker was planning this incredible sculpture garden with—I don't know how many artists are in it, maybe about 20? And they had no women. And so Martin Friedman, the director, got a lot of flack from some of his young curators and stuff. And so—

AVIS BERMAN: We should say that this was 1988, not 1968. So there was plenty of—you know, it was time.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes, it was time. It was disgusting. No, no, it was really—it was bad. I actually looked at a catalogue about this recently. And as far as I can tell, there was Meg Webster, Judith Shea, and myself. And that was it.

AVIS BERMAN: Who was the second one? Meg Webster, Judith Shea?

JACKIE FERRARA: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: And myself. And Judith Shea's, I believe, was a purchase. It was a sculpture that was set into the park. Meg Webster did a garden, and excavated to do the garden.

And mine was commissioned for an area of the park as a—an intention was that it would be like a sort of entrance for the park. And it's probably at the furthest—it got re-situated, without my knowing it, by Mr. Friedman almost at the opposite end of where it was originally supposed to be. He had made a little—a model of the garden and had things setting on it. And, you know, I had, like, a little model of my thing, my piece. And he just decided it would look better in this other spot. And I was really distressed, because it was so close to this huge glass conservatory. I thought it was a big mistake. But I was, you know, I didn't fight.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, originally, in other words, he showed you the area you would have.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes, yes. I was told where it was going to be. Yes. It ended up like—it was really so far away from where it was originally going to be. At the park the garden, the sculpture garden, had, like, a designated area. And it was rather formal, how Martin had designed it. It was not about site-specific things at all. And so my piece, Belvedere, was not in the garden. It was really on the museum grounds, which are quite big. And it was way far away, really. It was probably the opposite end of both the museum and the garden. It was, like, a corner of their land. And if you came through that direction, that would be the first thing you would see if you were coming from that direction. And what he did was he moved it much, much closer to the garden, to the sculpture garden. And it still was not in the actual sculpture garden; it was still on their grounds outside of it a little bit. The garden's over there somewhere. I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Had you visited the place first to, you know, look at the original site to figure it out, what you were doing?

JACKIE FERRARA: It's possible. It's possible—you know, I really don't remember because at the same time, I was building my first stone piece at General Mills, and they both happened the same summer, and I was going to

both places. And sometimes, you know, one was paying, and sometimes the other was paying. And I suspect that I probably saw the site. I don't know for sure. I mean, I know where it was supposed to go and everything, and I knew what I was going to do. But I suspect that I probably, on one of the visits to General Mills, had stopped by and met with Martin. And maybe Micky, too, his wife.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: You know, it occurs to me—I don't know, they've changed a lot around the park and around their grounds. And it occurs to me now that maybe they might have had plans, you know, later building plans, for that other area, which was really quite far from—it was nice to be closer, but it was not [laughs]—I mean, it was just so close to that conservatory. I think it looks dopey.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, but you—

JACKIE FERRARA: It's very bad siting; it really is. It's poor placement.

AVIS BERMAN: What do you like about the piece?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, the piece was just too—it was really meant as a place where they could have little readings and maybe little music events. I mean, they were asking me for something, you know. They wanted a kind of, little stage and sitting area. And so that was what I—you know, I sent them drawings, and then they approved them.

AVIS BERMAN: So you didn't have to build a model. They approved drawings?

JACKIE FERRARA: I think so. Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And why did you call it Belvedere?

JACKIE FERRARA: I was looking for a word. Well, see, I called it Belvedere because I thought it was going to be at this other end. And belvedere, it's just Italian for beautiful view. And I was thinking of it as the entrance to—I don't know what I thought [laughs]. But, you know, when I hear some of my names and I know at the time it was so clear why I was titling something or what it was. But I knew it had something to do with it being the entrance, and this was the view of the park and blah blah blah. And it was a beautiful view. And belvedere was a word I did not know before. And I wanted kind of an offbeat word if I could find one.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, the reason I asked you that is it's kind of anomalous, because most of the time it seems you are very careful to do a very plain, descriptive title of what it is. You know, like Norwalk Platform or Stone Court [1988] or Terrace [1989] or Amphitheater [1999], for example. So you were very—

JACKIE FERRARA: I wasn't all that whimsical.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. No, this wasn't whimsical. It was just an anomaly, as opposed to having a description of what the structure is.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. But a lot of my nonpublic works, a lot of the studio sculptures, have strange names.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's true, like Zogg [1980] and Trid [2004].

JACKIE FERRARA: Right. Yes, yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: That's true. So you just went into a studio-work kind of name for a public piece, perhaps, is what happened?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, I couldn't call it "Stage" or any of those things. You know, I was actually kind of stuck. I remember now like looking through the thesaurus trying to find a word that I thought would be appropriate.

AVIS BERMAN: And how is the condition of this work?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, they rebuilt it. They rebuilt, maybe, four or five—maybe four years ago. My cedar pieces, the ones that I made out of four-by-sixes, they have about a 20-year lifespan. And then the wood just—it starts to rot. And so a number of them have been rebuilt, and the Walker is one of them.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. And did they contact you about it, or did they just do it on their own?

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, all the other places brought me out and made a big party. And these people wrote one letter to say they were going to do it. And I wrote back and said if they needed anything, I had all the specs and

all the information; I'd be happy to give it to them. And I never heard another word. And I know somebody who lives nearby and who mentioned that they were rebuilding it. So they just went ahead without me and rebuilt it. I've not been there since it's been rebuilt. So I don't, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: It's very strange, but so far—and, obviously, we'll be talking about other things later in your career—but so far it seems like the corporate people have behaved better than the museum people.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. Well, I—yes. I mean, I don't know if that's true of all the museum people. But I really thought—I'm happy to be in the Walker sculpture garden. But I tell you, I never really thought that they were very receptive. And truly they were not interested in site-specific work, and I was going in that direction. I mean, I had recommended Doug Hollis, and there were people like, you know, like Scott Burton; he really wasn't interested in any of these people. I mean, he did do Siah Armajani, but Siah lives there.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. But as you say, this was sort of pushed and not just because of gender. But the younger people would've gotten the site-specific idea as opposed to the traditional sculpture plopped in the park.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. But that's how he was thinking about it, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Because of the way he moved it around, too.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right, right. Yes, yes. No, very much he was thinking about it that way. And it's interesting because his wife was doing all those programs with cutting-edge architects. I mean, she was much more advanced in her thinking about it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I will say that, certainly in the ensuing years, Martin has figured it out by now.

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know. [They laugh.] I have no way of knowing yet. I know he's consulted on some parks, but I've not seen them, so I don't know. I mean, I hope he has.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: I run into him sometimes. He's not that—actually, I've run into them; it's always at a movie theater in the neighborhood.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, they live on West—no, East 13th Street?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes, yes. So that's where I've seen them, is at one of the movie theaters. I always talk a little bit with them.

[Pause.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, let's go on to Stone Court, which as you say, was made about the same time, and you were going back and forth with that and the Walker Art Center piece. And why did you select this as a work that is meaningful for you?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, I love this piece! I'm so happy with it. Well, it was my first stone piece, but it was also, I don't know, I thought it was really successful.

I'd done a series of small wood things that I was calling "wallyards," and they all had a wall, a single horizontal wall, and then a flat area that was the floor. And I did maybe—I think I did 13 of them. And sometimes there would be a side wall. There wouldn't just be the back wall; there might be a side wall. And they were all the same size, the ones that I did. All 13 were the exact same height, width, and length.

And when Don McNeill, who's the curator for General Mills Collection, and General Mills—I mean, at the same time that the Walker was doing their old-fashioned garden, General Mills was inviting artists to do things all over their grounds that were functional or that were sited into the area. They were all about fitting into the grounds in some way and maybe performing a function. I know at one point Andrea Blum did a big table and chairs that's sort of just outside of the main headquarters where the workers could go and sit and have their lunch. It was like a huge, big table, metal table, with high chairs.

Anyway, so when Don McNeil came to talk to me about it—and I had some of these wallyards here—and offered me a hill—there was a hill I could have if I wanted to do something with the hill—and I said, "Well, maybe I can put one of my wallyards in it." And he said, "I was hoping you would say that." So we went on from there.

Now, I had at that point—I'd never done a stone piece. And all the drawings for it are—well, I actually even made a little model of it first, and they okayed it. But I did all the specs, and they don't look that much different than the ones for my wood pieces, because it's built the same way; it's all stacked, and it's stacked lengths. And they

could've been stacks of wood lengths, except it was stacks of limestone lengths. There are two shades of limestone; that was very important to me at the time, that I could have two colors. The quarry [Mankato, MN]—Mankato stone—and the quarry was maybe an hour-and-a-half drive from Minneapolis, and I went there. I went there—you know, Don drove me there. We went there to select, to make sure about the two colors.

And while they were constructing it, erecting it, I was coming out for a couple of days each week that whole summer. And then I was also going out to supervise the piece at the Walker. And this was intended as whatever could happen. I mean, it was big enough, and I used—it's like I blew up the dimensions. I mean, these little wallyards I was making are maybe, you know, like maybe two feet by 18 inches. No, maybe two and a half feet by 18 inches. And the proportions are exactly the same for the big one, only many times bigger. And the thing about it is that I made it so that it was—it's kind of the length of my loft. And, you know, like I was looking at the wall, and I was figuring things out the whole length of the loft to see how it worked. And how far forward the floor should go and how high up the wall would go. So it was all about—and then I even tried big sheets of paper to see what would look nice, in terms of the height of each of the different stones—because they're all the same size—but whether they should be three inches high or four inches or six or two, and I tacked stuff to the wall to see—to figure it out here.

AVIS BERMAN: And is it—what kind of functions would it—

JACKIE FERRARA: They have things there. I don't know. I have a picture of a bunch of people there and some balloons.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And what were the challenges of working with the stone?

JACKIE FERRARA: There weren't any, as far as I could see. I mean, it was fine. I had to make sure that these guys, the masons—but, you know, they ended up being good, eventually, about it—that they really stayed very precisely with my dimensions that I had. Because you couldn't veer a half an inch; something wouldn't fit then afterwards.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Whereas with the Walker piece, it sounds like you would—I don't know if you would change it, but you would maybe change it back to the other location.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. I mean, it should not be where it is. It's too bad. It's just really too bad. It makes no sense to me, you know. And in a way it's really on the entrance to the park. It's probably in a more prominent spot. But it's just too close to that conservatory, and it's not doing either one any good.

AVIS BERMAN: Is there anything you would change about this piece, about Stone Court?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, no. No, no. Not at all. But what did happen is that the—there was some bad engineering on it, and the floor of it, the stones started to go bad. And so it no longer has a limestone floor; it has a gravel floor. And that happened many years later, maybe like, you know, 15 years later they made the change. I said it was okay. They didn't know what to do. And I suggested that they could put a gravel one in. Because I'd done another piece that had a gravel surface, and I thought it would fit in.

AVIS BERMAN: By then, yes. Well, I don't know if people sit on the floor, if they only sit on the side part.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, I think they just sit on the steps or on these little benches; they're sort of like seating benches.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. When you say bad engineering, meaning that—should there have been a different bedding underneath it?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, what happened shouldn't have happened, and it probably wasn't bad engineering, because the guy was really very careful. Where the wall—the back wall—meets the limestone floor, there are what they call weep holes, so that any water that might congregate on the floor part would then disappear into the weep hole. And I don't know what started to happen. But that's where it started to rot out, was the floor where it was meeting the walls.

AVIS BERMAN: I didn't know limestone could rot.

JACKIE FERRARA: It gets mushy, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I guess it's a soft stone.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, it's soft. Yes. I mean, that would happen to marble, too. Marble's soft. It's granite that, you know, nothing happens to.

AVIS BERMAN: You said you had done something with the gravel, which we'll get to in a minute. But given how beautiful this is in its pristine shape, was that depressing to you to find out, or were you used to this?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no, no. It was all right, you know. I mean, I was sorry because there was—the floor had images in it that reflected what was happening on the wall. Like there was an area of the wall that was kind of a checkerboard, and in the floor there was kind of a checkerboard running all through the two kinds of stone. Well, all that got lost, and now it's just a single color. So it's a—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. You know, there are certainly patterns in this, as well, in the hues and the colors. So reflection must have been a real cardinal factor in what you wanted to do here.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. That was what the wallyards were all about, the little small ones that I made. That each one, whatever kind of markings were on the wall, would in some way be reflected on the floor. And that was what was interesting to me about making them. And that was why I kept making more. Because I could make a curve—make a concave curve—and then I'd make, you know, like a concave kind of curve on the floor. And I'd think, oh, that would be nice! And for convex, so I'd make another one that was convex. And then I'd think, oh, that would be nicer if it were just a straight diagonal, and I'd make a third one. And I just kept trying these different geometric angles and curves, and they were all interesting to me. And it wasn't like one is better than the other. They're all just interesting. I mean when I stopped, I was stopping because I thought, you know, I could do 2,000 of these. I'd better stop [laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I'm interested because when you're making wood pieces, reflection isn't usually a quality that you think of that goes with wood.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. And it happened because somebody staying here one time while I was away for a few months highly polished the wood counter in my kitchen, which I had never done. I always had—I never put polish on it. I just had it as the raw wood, because it was a cutting board. But somebody staying here had done that. And very soon afterwards—I had set something on there, and it was reflected, because it was so shiny that it was reflected onto the floor. And I found that really interesting. You know, like if it were a ball or maybe it was a clock sitting there, and the curve of the clock right then was reflected onto the floor. So I started doing that with—

AVIS BERMAN: So that all came from a serendipitous perception.

JACKIE FERRARA: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, if that guy hadn't put that polish on that, these things, they probably never would have happened. I don't know that I would have ever gone here. But I found it really interesting. And I did it, I made the reflections by using very, very, very thin wood, just like a little—I'd make these new shapes; I'd glue it onto the flat surface, very, very thin curves or shapes, whatever it was.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, let us go on to what I think the next one is, which is the Terrace [1991], for the Stuart Collection, which started in 1989 [communication stretched over two years]. And then you did use gravel, which later on when Stone Court had to be—I'm assuming that through your use of gravel at Stuart Court that you got that idea—at the Stuart Collection; I'm sorry, it's called Terrace, and that is the Stuart Collection at the University of California at San Diego in La Jolla. But the curator now is a wonderful woman named Mary Beebe. Was she in charge of that while you were there?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. She's a fabulous lady. Wonderful lady. I loved Mary Beebe.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs] And could you tell me about how she got in touch with you, or what happened and how this commission came about?

JACKIE FERRARA: At that point, the Stuart Collection was just beginning to lose some of the income that—the Stuart Collection work was being paid for by a man who had a canned tuna fish company. And something was starting to happen then with tuna fish. He just wasn't selling as much. I don't know what was happening. But they were running into funding problems. And so this was the very first time that what they did was they took a percentage of a new building that was going up, a medical building. And the percentage had to do with what would be the terrace or landscaping in front of the building. And that was what they discussed with the architect, if that could go toward art.

And the architects were Moore, Ruble, Yudell; and Moore is Charles Moore, and John Ruble, and Buzz Yudell. And it was, you know, they agreed that that could happen. And so the landscape architect on it, Andrew Spurlock—I don't know if they had to twist his arm, or if he just said okay. He was a young guy, and he was like, you know, he was very helpful and really interested in the whole idea. So I think maybe it was, oh—I mean, he was going to lose something. It's true, you know. But I actually don't know what his real feelings were.

But anyway—and I had met Charles Moore once before, because one year when I had a show with Max Protetch,

in the drawing room Charles had drawings that were being exhibited. And he came to the opening, and, you know, we met then. So in advance of doing this at the Stuart Collection—and at the time Charles was in LA—so Mary and I went to meet with him and went to dinner at some nice little trendy restaurant in Venice, where all these young guys are running up to him. I mean, everybody—I mean, he was really such a lovely man. Really very, very nice and helpful. I think probably he had taught most of his life besides the—I think he liked teaching. And because of that, you know, all these people were indebted to him.

Anyway so I got the budget, the budget for the terrace, and used the configuration that was specked on, because they were building the first building. But a second building was planned, and it would go up—and it subsequently did go up; those pictures were taken, you know, years before it did. And so I knew that this terrace, which was going to be between the two buildings, would really end up being a hidden terrace, even though for a few years it was an open terrace; anybody could just go to it. But eventually this other building was going to enclose it. And so it would be a terrace with two medical buildings, on either side of it. So there was definitely a shape and perimeters to the terrace, which is what I worked with. And so I designed images that all had to do with increments that I thought the scientists would enjoy looking at from the building. They'd go out—there were like little open terraces. Not terraces, like little open porches, kind of. And they could stand out there and smoke a cigarette. Because I think people were still smoking then.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs] For sure.

JACKIE FERRARA: And see and look down and be able to figure out what I had done with these increments, and they would enjoy that. I don't know that that ever happened. [They laugh.] Anyway, that was my intention. And I designed seating for it. It was going to be, the terrace was going to be concrete with slate paths in it. And the benches and trees. And the only kind of trees—I mean, I had never, at that point, I'd never even thought about a tree, about what kind of tree to put somewhere. But the only kind of trees I ever really liked was I liked palm trees, and I liked willow trees. And I thought that willows would be nicer there. And actually we did; we found—there are willows.

And so the terrace is a long, long rectangle, and it's really in two sections. And it's flanked on either side by willow trees. And as time has gone on—I mean, the last time I was there, I said I thought maybe they should prune the trees a little bit. Because it was really getting quite—it was becoming like a covered terrace, you know. The trees on either side were starting to grow up, and they could make a canopy. I don't know that that was the intention. But anyway, so it was all going to be the concrete, with these laid-in insets. And there wasn't enough money. And so it was suggested to use gravel. And I thought that was okay, you know. I actually thought it might even be nicer.

AVIS BERMAN: Because?

JACKIE FERRARA: A nicer texture than, you know, just plain concrete. It interested me, the idea. I'd not done anything with gravel, and I thought, this late, that it would look nice with it. The only thing I worried about was that it doesn't feel that great to walk on. And I knew there were, you know, some of the scientists were women. And I don't know if people really have high heels; I don't anymore. [They laugh.] So I used a very, very tiny, tiny, tiny stone for the gravel. You know, the finest—well, not too fine because then it would just make dust. And compress it really hard so that it would be an easy surface to walk on. And that's what we did. And then subsequently there were problems with the ADA.

AVIS BERMAN: The Americans with Disabilities Act.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. They're now strong everywhere. But at that point they probably weren't, but they were in California; they were strong. And they felt it was not accessible. Well, it really wasn't. You couldn't go with a wheelchair on the gravel. I mean, had it not been gravel, it would have been accessible. And so they wanted a bridge to go over. I have no idea where they thought the bridge was going to go. But a bridge would go over it that, you know, that somehow—I don't even know how people would get on the bridge in a wheelchair. But anyway—

AVIS BERMAN: This little bridge to nowhere. [They laugh.]

JACKIE FERRARA: There were all these suggestions, and back and forth. And finally, I got a—I got, like, a very formal letter from the big honcho of the ADA in Washington, saying that this was an artwork, and it didn't—and that there would be a film there somebody could see. But they couldn't compromise it that seriously.

AVIS BERMAN: Wow! So to get a recognition that it was a work of art.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Isn't that—

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, that was what they were pleading, the Stuart Collection. They hadn't run into this prior to that. And maybe since then, you know, they've accommodated.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, if you had—

JACKIE FERRARA: Nobody thought of it—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: —is what it was.

AVIS BERMAN: If you had known from the beginning. I mean, but in this project, though, you were brought in at the beginning of it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, I was brought in at the beginning. But, you know, I didn't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. No, it wasn't just something in the consciousness then.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no. It really wasn't.

AVIS BERMAN: Because I was going to ask you this, you know, sometimes artists are kind of—brought in too late on a project to put a band-aid on a mess.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, because I don't think the architects knew either. I mean the only way to get to this building was—there were some steps, and then, you know, you'd go on the gravel.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. And did Charles Moore accept you? I mean, was it good to work with him?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes, yes, yes. And, oh, I got—oh, I had such a wonderful time. I had a work session at the Sea Ranch [CA], which is on the coast of Oregon [sic]? I think it's Oregon. I don't think it's Washington State; I think it's Oregon. Anyway, the Sea Ranch was built by Moore and Hoffman—I've forgotten the third person's name. Anyway, there were three of them that built it way back. There were wonderful units that were just on the water's edge there. And it was really very, very rugged. It was in no way made like a beach. I mean you're right there at the ocean, but there were just these big rocks.

And Charles had kept for himself—oh, Lawrence Halprin is the third; he was the landscape architect on it. And Charles had kept for himself a unit. And so I got invited out for a—like a long weekend. And John Moore from the firm, he tried—I think he drove me back; somebody else for the firm drove me from—I guess they picked me up in San Francisco, at the airport, and we drove along the coast. A very nice—I had a very nice drive. And this place was—it was great. And Charles's was at the house. He had at the time two firms, the one in California—I think he actually had three. I think there was one in Texas; I know that. He had a firm in Texas and California and in Connecticut. And staying that weekend were something like 15 very cute guys—[telephone rings]. I'm sorry.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, no, that's okay.

[Audio Break.]

Well, we left off at 15 cute guys. [They laugh.]

JACKIE FERRARA: Fifteen cute guys from his three different offices, all of whom were going to get, you know, like, I guess he was just—it was like this massive [inaudible]. And they'd go from one office to the next office to the next office, clearing up outstanding problems. And I was coming with drawings that Charles had not seen. No idea what I wanted to do. And Doug Hollis had—I mean, I could do the layout; I did the drawings of what was going to happen on the floor and did the drawings for the benches. But I couldn't draw trees. And Doug Hollis had drawn trees for me. So I came out with these drawings that were all ruled and very, you know, like, very organized looking. And then I also had the drawings of these leafy trees, which was nothing like—I was incapable of drawing anything like that. And Charles, he draws beautifully and could have drawn the leafy trees probably looking like that, wanted to know, you know, did I do those drawings? Because he thought we were going to bond on this wonderful way of drawing. And I hadn't done the trees. So we had a bond about something else; it couldn't be about my loose drawing style. But he was fine with it, you know. It was just—he was really happy. It was all okay with him.

AVIS BERMAN: Even though maybe Mary had chosen you as opposed to him?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know that—I think that—yes. I mean, for one thing [laughs] there was a factor, and the factor is that it's more Ruble and Yudell. And Buzz Yudell is Mary Beebe's brother-in-law. He's married to her

sister. So this was really set, you know. There was no conflict. You know, everybody was willing. She must have shown them work of mine; I'm sure she did. And so everybody was really just, you know, they were wonderful.

AVIS BERMAN: So it was a good experience.

JACKIE FERRARA: It was a very good experience. And I'm telling you, going to the Sea Ranch—I mean, everybody stayed at the house, you know, all 15 cute guys, and I was in a main building, which is kind of like a hotel, except that the rooms didn't have clocks in them, and I didn't wear a watch, and I had no idea like what time it was. But anyway, but one time we were sitting in Charles's, in his little house there, you know, working on something. And I look out. And I look out, and on the rocks are what I think at first is a bag lady, somebody wrapped in plastic bags wrapped around them. And it was a seal just sitting on a rock. I mean, I had never seen that. I'm a real urban kid, you know. I'd just never seen anything like that.

AVIS BERMAN: I love that, taking a seal for the bag lady. That is an urban outlook—image [laughs].

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Very good. Okay. So our next one after that—let's see. Let me look at this one. This is better. Oh, Lehman College [City University of New York] in the Bronx, the Covered Walkway [1994], which I don't have in this catalogue, and I only have the wood model. But you have the—

JACKIE FERRARA: I have pictures.

AVIS BERMAN: You have a picture of that.

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know what kind of border—oh, yes, okay. I have a lot of pictures of it.

AVIS BERMAN: It's sort of unexpectedly beautiful, I think, given the idea of the concrete block and what's going to happen.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, that started out one way and changed. Lehman College was getting a new gymnasium that was state-of-the-art, in that it was going to have a very oversized pool because they hoped to attract the Olympics there if there were ever any Olympics in New York. And it was an intention to make this gymnasium as advanced as possible so that it could be used for that. And Lehman College is pretty much—I guess it's a state university, you know. I don't even think there are dorms there. It's a big campus, but I don't think there are dorms there. Anyway, so they had, I think it was—I think they were going to give four artists projects. Maybe it was just three, because I can only think of three. And one was going to be a mural that was inside the gymnasium. And one was going to be a sculpture near one entrance to the gymnasium. And what they wanted me to do was to do the plaza to the gymnasium.

And so I did a proposal for the plaza. And all I had met from the architect's office was the project manager, who was a young guy. You know, very nice guy, young guy. And I had met Rafael Vinoly, who was the architect of the building. But I was thrilled, because the building was—I thought it was a great-looking building. And I was really happy to be affiliated with, you know, such a hip-looking building. Anyway, so I did this proposal for the floor, for the plaza. And then I got a call from Vinoly's office that Mr. Vinoly and Mr. Vinoly's hatchet man, whose name I've forgotten, wanted to come over to my studio and talk to me. And fine. Well, it turned out that Rafael was really unhappy about anything happening on the terrace because he didn't think it should. And I don't know what he intended. But I know when they came and he brought his hatchet man, who, you know, did have to hatchet me eventually. But they were going to talk me out of it. I don't really know what they were doing to do.

But anyway, so they came here. And there were a lot of, like, wood models around in my house. And, you know, everything's pretty architectural looking. And Rafael asked if I could do an amphitheater. That's how it started. Could I do an amphitheater on the grounds, like, just before the gymnasium? Well, I didn't really think there was anywhere near enough money. I mean, I'd already done Stone Court and knew what that cost. I wasn't, you know, that wise. But this budget, I just didn't see how that could happen. So then he thought, well, maybe—because I had some long walkways that I had been doing—that maybe, because he felt it needed it, he felt that the sidewalk leading to his building needed some kind of a structure on it, some kind of a walkway, pergola thing. And I loved that. That was really interesting to me. So, yes, I abandoned the floor. I did not mind abandoning the floor. I mean, it was suddenly like I was getting all these because I'd done some convention center floors. I was getting all these floor jobs, and I really didn't want to just be flat on the floor. So that was great.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Here you're three-dimensional again.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And I was really happy with the idea.

AVIS BERMAN: And had you done a real walkway before, or just had built pieces?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. But I'd done wood ones. I'd done like arcade things. I liked the idea. I liked the idea of a long walkway that would be open on one side, and the other side would have all these doors in it that I wasn't going to do anything behind. I would just make flat doorways in them, but they wouldn't open or anything. But I liked that as an idea, that they led to something, but I didn't know what they were leading to. Just a series of rooms.

And the material—actually, it was the project manager who suggested the concrete block. And they were using a very nice concrete block on the building, which is what this ended up being also. It's a kind of a sandblasted—it's a very high-end of concrete block. It's good-looking stuff. And so all the pillars have a big rod going down the center of them, and the block just fits over them, one block on top of the other going up these big rods.

And the guy that worked on it—ah! He was thrilled. He loved doing it. And so he wouldn't let anyone—it was an Italian firm, and the guy hadn't been here that long. And he really had very little English. But I had lived for a year and a half once in Italy. And I know I have this Italian name, but I'm not Italian. But I knew a little Italian, and I could manage, you know, sort of, with this guy. And he wouldn't let any of the other people work on it. He'd only let them bring him the stones. But he was the one who wanted to lay it because, he said, each person's hand was different. And he just wanted it to be—it should just be his hand.

AVIS BERMAN: So it was a real old-fashioned craftsman mason.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes, yes. It was wonderful.

AVIS BERMAN: Also to have enthusiasm instead of something like a union person, and you know how that can be.

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, it was union. It had to be union.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But some unions—

JACKIE FERRARA: But everybody cooperated. And Rafael, who was all for it, he got the price down. He called, like, the manufacturer, because he was doing something else with them.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, of the concrete block.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And he got them to lower the price for me. Because there was a budget. I mean, they had these four, or three, art projects, and everybody had a certain amount. And this was established. There was no way that was going to change. Anyway, I always feel there's no way it's going to change. I didn't know you could change it. I mean, people change them. But I didn't now you could change anything like—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, after this—

JACKIE FERRARA: I was very obedient.

AVIS BERMAN: Right [laughs]. Well, after this, did you start negotiating for more money for materials and things like this?

JACKIE FERRARA: No.

AVIS BERMAN: Is that something you do?

JACKIE FERRARA: No. I mean, I'm doing something now where I'm collaborating with Paul Friedberg, who's gotten—he's gotten seven times what they told me the project was going to be. I mean, he did it, I—

AVIS BERMAN: So you were able to do this to the extent—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes, yes. It really would have been over budget. But Rafael, he got the price down in materials.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you know, his instinct was good because what you ended up with was—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And he was perfectly happy with it. I mean there are photographs of it where it's included, you know what I mean? He felt it was part of the building. And I was thrilled with it.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, is this sort of—it looks like, I mean besides the masonry, is there any kind of incising or different sort of—

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no, no, no. That's just the different blocks making the lines. No, there's no—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But the shadow that it makes is beautiful.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, it makes a wonderful, wonderful—yes. It makes incredible shadow slices on the floor. The floor of it, of the walkway, is the existing floor. But it is, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: The existing sidewalk.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. And this straddles it.

AVIS BERMAN: Now he was happy. Was the university happy?

JACKIE FERRARA: I think so. I never knew if they were. I think the art department was happy. One time when I went out to photograph it, at the entrance on either side, somebody had put a pot of flowers on either side, which I removed. People do such funny things. And then recently—actually it was Russell; Russell couldn't sleep. He turns on the television and ends up watching some program which he thinks—I mean, some movie—which he thinks is called X-Something—it's not The X-Files—where it's all about a group of guys who keep leaving their building. And every time they leave their building, they walk through this. He said he couldn't believe it. He thought he was seeing things because he had just woken up. And I don't know. I don't know why that was happening.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I guess it was a good spot—they filmed it, you know. I guess it was dreamlike to them.

JACKIE FERRARA: I have no idea. But anyway, so—and I know it's in a Law & Order episode, too. Which I saw. I did see that.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, were they chasing people through it?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, they were having a conversation about some student who'd just been murdered.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so it really did take place supposedly on the college campus?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, it was. Yes. Right.

AVIS BERMAN: Interesting. Yes. I think there's something called X-Men, too. Maybe that was it.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, it wasn't. It was something about an advertising agency. I don't know why they were coming out of there.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, that's something I can't identify. So we'll leave that one alone. And by the way, was Rafael Vinoly the one who selected you for this originally?

JACKIE FERRARA: I think—no, I think he sent his—no, I think it was the project manager, this young guy, Dennis, who was attending all these things. I don't think Rafael realized that he could impact the exterior of his building. So I think what he thought is they were going to have little things inside, and he would have no control over that. And he probably wouldn't even care. And once it turned out—because he objected strenuously to the sculpture that was supposed to go outside of the building at the entrance; he was very distressed about that. So, no, he did not attend. I think had he attended, things might have been different. But it was his mistake. I mean, he just didn't, you know, it just didn't occur to him. I'm sure he attends them all now because, I mean, he continues to do buildings that are One Percent projects.

AVIS BERMAN: And is that sculpture still there?

JACKIE FERRARA: It was supposed to be two, and he got them to take one away. But one is still there.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. And the next piece, also in New York City, that you wanted to talk about, which was Grand Central: Arches, Towers, Pyramids [Grand Central: Towers, Arches, Pyramids, 2000], which is the project for the New York subway system.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, MTA [Metropolitan Transportation Authority], Arts In Transit.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Which is in Grand Central [Station].

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, it's at Grand Central. It's in a couple of places. It's at the shuttle platform on both sides, and that's the biggest stretch, because that's 600 feet on either side. And the second longest stretch is the passageway going down to the No. 7 train, which leaves—when you get off the Lexington [Avenue train], there's

a stairway going down, and that is a passage. And eventually you're on a passageway that's going to the No. 7 train. But there's no way that you'd be—it was in another part of the station. And there were two other places where it was. And one is close to the big terminal.

AVIS BERMAN: I've seen it frequently.

JACKIE FERRARA: Where, when you come out of the terminal, there's a stretch there. And that's not very long. And then there's one that hardly anybody ever goes to that's got something to do with, when you're on the shuttle platform, there's a way out where you go up some steps that people don't do and I've never done. But if you go up the steps, there's an exit there, and there's a stretch where these also are. So altogether it was in two locations at the shuttle platform and then three other locations throughout the terminal.

AVIS BERMAN: And how did you get this commission?

JACKIE FERRARA: This was—I got called in to come and to show slides. And there were maybe about 14 of us. There were a lot of us, and we all showed slides. And they were just people from the MTA there. But they always—I've never sat on one of the—which is surprising because usually they use people that have sat on other—have done things there. But I've never sat on one of their selections. Or maybe they don't. Maybe I'm wrong about that. Maybe that's the city one that does. In any event, we all showed slides. And then we were taken over there, and they showed it to us. And I got a phone call.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, the other people, the other artists showing slides, it wasn't all for this particular station. It was—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, really! For this one—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. I mean, maybe it was 10 of us. There were a lot of us.

AVIS BERMAN: Were you showing slides of your previous work?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Or was it a proposal?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no, no. It came out of nowhere. Show your slides and talk about your work a little bit.

AVIS BERMAN: And so were you showing some of the floor pieces because they were flat, or some of the—

JACKIE FERRARA: I have no idea what I showed. I'm sure I showed whatever I'd done up to then, you know, the public things. I wouldn't have concentrated on the floor. And at that point, you know, I'd never done any murals; that's what they are. And then—this part's not clear. Because somehow Jamie Carpenter, he was one of the people. And I suggested that we would go in as a team. We knew that they were going to choose two artists. And Jamie and I talked after we had looked at the stuff there. We talked together and decided that we wanted to do that. And so we made that offer to them. But you know what? I think it was after that we showed slides. I've got the order here wrong somehow. Because I remember he came late to show slides—very, very late. I'm not sure about the order. But in any event, they called me, and they asked if—they didn't know who Jamie Carpenter was [laughs]. And would it be all right if he weren't on the team. And I said okay. Of course, now they've given him a huge one. They could've given him a cheaper one then. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, everybody had a cheaper one then.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. So then I had no idea what I was going to do, which is why I wanted to go with Jamie. I mean, I thought, you know, I'd decorate the columns. I really had no idea what I was going to do. And actually a friend suggested something [laughs]. Andrea Blum said, "Make those great drawings. Why don't you just do those on the walls?" A very good suggestion.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. I mean, at that moment they didn't say, this is what you're going to be on the wall. They were just, you know—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, somewhere in the station. It was not about that. Christopher Sproat, who ended up being the other half, his design has to do with holding the lighting equipment, and, you know, it was all about—it was very functional. Actually, I think what he did is really very nice. It's in the platform of the 7 train, and a lot of people don't see it. But that's where it is. And it's this long, very like, sort of, sci-fi looking, this long kind of Zeppelin-looking thing that's got all the information in it, and it clashes out and stuff. It's very nice.

AVIS BERMAN: I never take that train, so—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, nobody does. Yes, I mean it's rare to take it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I might take it toward Shea Stadium, but I never take it where you're—you know, the other way, which is where I guess it must be.

Anyway, so did you work with Sandra Bloodworth there?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, I worked with Erica Behrens.

AVIS BERMAN: Andrea suggested taking the drawings and making a frieze out of it.

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know. She just said the thing about the drawings. And I said, Yeah!

AVIS BERMAN: And they're already done, too. You've got it.

JACKIE FERRARA: And in the end, it was really—it was fun. It liked doing that. And it was—

AVIS BERMAN: What was it like working for the city, though? I mean, that just seems—

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, I loved Erica. And we had very little to do with Sandra, you know. It was really Erica was my project manager on it.

And she and I went up to Vermont, which was where the tile person was. They have, like, three or four tile people that they recommend. And for some reason—I've no idea why—they recommend—because they have some, you know, people that are closer. But for some reason they recommended this guy. Or maybe they take turns; I don't know in any event. So she and I took a trip to Vermont to talk to him and set it up. I had very, very precise drawings, and it was all these little; I think they're three-quarter, the mosaics are three-quarter-inch squares. And they couldn't be random. You know, they could be a little bit rounded, but all the imagery, with increments, wouldn't work if they were really as random as mosaics can be. So they were really cutting them [inaudible] a pretty precise format.

And then I had to supervise, and I had to go there after the shuttle closed for the night. So I had to go there on weekends because that was the only time they did it. So I had, like, this 12 p.m., you know, I had this midnight date in the bowels of Grand Central to check out the work and make sure that they were doing it right. And they were making mistakes, which it was easy to correct, because it would just be they could—they would screw up something with the increment. And you know, like one thing would be a stone that would just be sticking out too much or something. Or like, it'd be too far to the left. But they could dig it out, and make it right.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, they must have been really happy with you [laughs].

JACKIE FERRARA: Well, there weren't that many. And it was really the tile guy who had to do it. It wasn't the people that were installing it. The people that were installing it were these people from Long Island City. But the tile guy from Vermont, Jim B—Burnett, Bersise[s]? I don't know. Anyway he was there, and he was the one who was making the corrections because he was the one who screwed it up.

AVIS BERMAN: Now what about color here; I mean, the tile, like what was—were you—

JACKIE FERRARA: I was very specific. And that was why we went to Vermont, was to make sure that, you know, I would get the color I wanted. The problem was the red. I think it was the red.

AVIS BERMAN: What was wrong with it? Or what did you want?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. I couldn't find it. I couldn't find a strong enough color. I think it was the red; I don't think it was the blue.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. It's going to be—these are sort of red, blue, and cream-colored tiles?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And I think it was the red. But, you know, it would have been afterward; it would've been all three shades just to make sure. And, you know, it's really very nice because it's not just one shade of red, you know; because it's mosaic, it's got ranges. There was a range. And that was what I was making sure that it didn't make too big a jump in the range. So that it didn't go from red to like a really, very, very brownish red. That would've been no good because then it wouldn't show up against the blue.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you have an opening party in the subway?

JACKIE FERRARA: They didn't do squat. They said they would, and they never did. But Erica and I've remained friends, and we go out to lunch, and she buys me lunch. But it wasn't Erica's fault that they didn't. No, they never did anything. But they did make cards. They were supposed to have a party. They always have a party. I mean, part of it was that Christopher's wasn't quite done yet. And mine was dragging out. I mean, like they did one side of the platform right away. But then they didn't do the other side for a very long time, you know, like maybe for another year.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh! That was probably because of finances?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no, no. It had nothing to do with finances. No, it's, like, how they schedule. You know, like what part—how they could close up one side and not another side. No, I'm sure it had nothing to do with finances. And there was the stretch that's by the terminal; it turned out that it would look better if it were longer than it really was. And so they contracted me to add an addition. I mean Erica fought for that to happen, and I was glad she did. I had been designated an area. I was given these very precise dimensions. And then it turned out that the wall was really, you know, like another eight feet. And so the thing looked skimpy on it. So she talked them into it, letting me add that. And that was maybe two years later. So I think that's why they never had a party.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

JACKIE FERRARA: It was never really done [laughs]. I mean, finally it was done. But, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Also I could see why it would take awhile, because it's such a major station. They can't close it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And they did all that stuff, you know, to make that whole, like, Whole Foods section or whatever, you know, was going on and all those restaurants. There was lots of work that was happening.

AVIS BERMAN: This was part of the general enhancement of the station.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. It was—yes, you know. And they did, I think, fix the ceiling in the terminal. It had all gotten so dirty. Had no idea how beautiful the ceiling was. It was a very, very comprehensive overhaul. And this was just part of it. You know, it was a percent thing, because there was all this money to overhaul that there was some money to do the art.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And the art in the subway as well as the station proper. I mean above and below ground.

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't think anything is in—I mean, Arts in Transit would not be affected by the train system; they're part of the New York Central or whatever it is.

AVIS BERMAN: Next we're going to talk about—and you can tell me why—I think the project you said how much you loved in Coconut Grove [FL], which is Lap Pool and Bathhouse [1998].

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: A private commission.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, it was a private commission. Well, it's all marble. It's glorious. And it's got a bathhouse; it's got a changing room; it's got a sauna; it's got an exercise room; it's got a card room. The card room has a poker table that I made—that I designed, that Russell made. Wonderful poker table.

The project started in—it was going to happen in Cincinnati. The owner, Dan Lewis, had come to my studio because—and at this time I was showing with Michael Klein because Michael—that first pyramid that I had done a long time ago, that stacked pyramid that I mentioned, which was my first big outdoor thing, was just the one that had been at Hammarskjöld Plaza, was sitting on the ground in Purchase, the Neuberger [Stacked Pyramid, 1973, Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY]. But they didn't own it. And he was hoping [inaudible] or maybe he could talk Dan into buying it, because Dan was doing work on his house in Cincinnati and had this big backyard. And besides which Dan's brother—that was Progressive Insurance, and they had a whole bunch of art in their corporate headquarters, and they had been very active in the art world buying stuff, you know. And so Michael was hoping some of this might rub off on the younger brother, Dan.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, the older brother was Peter Lewis, right?

JACKIE FERRARA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And his wife—they'd long been divorced—and she's a consultant. And I don't know her name. Do you know her name? No.

AVIS BERMAN: Which Lewis? Dan or Pete?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, Peter's former wife was the one who was picking art for Progressive.

AVIS BERMAN: No, I don't know it.

JACKIE FERRARA: Anyway, so Michael was going in the back door and hitting on the younger brother, hoping something might happen. Well, in any event, so Dan came here. And I was supposed to be showing him pictures of this piece that was at Purchase. But at the time I had been making a number of small models of things I was calling pool houses. And I was very interested in the idea of a pool house. And I was interested in the idea of a pool house and a changing room and a sauna room. So I was making, like, these little vignettes of—and I had a few of them here.

Well, Dan right away zeroed in on them because it turns out that Dan and Peter, who are both very, very, very tall, have very, very, very bad backs. And what relieves their very, very bad backs is swimming. And Dan was in the process of having his nephew, who was an architect, design a lap pool for him in Cincinnati. And Dan, who when he went on backpack trips all over Europe, visited different pool houses because he loved them, because he loved to go for his lap swim because it made his back feel better.

So anyway, he says to me that he's got this nephew who's making a lap pool, and he's going to tell him to come over, and, you know, he's going to hire us both to do something. And I'm like, you know, sure, sure. Maybe I'll—and that was that. And the next thing I know this guy calls, and it's Bill Bialosky, William Bialosky, who is an architect, who lives in Tribeca, and who has much experience working with artists, because he has been the architect of record on all of Maya Lin's projects. And so he came here, and we started on a pool house that was going to be inside, and the lap pool was going to be inside, in Dan Lewis's big house in Cincinnati.

And in the midst of this, you know, working on that, Dan suddenly is—actually his brother—assigned them to something in Florida. They had a branch of Progressive in—I don't know that it's in Miami, but it's not far. And that Dan should run it or something. I don't know.

In any event, Dan moved to Coconut Grove. And Peter Lewis's son, who lives there, is very, very hip. He's great, and he's got wonderful taste. And he had suggested this incredible house to Dan. I mean he knew about this house. And it's this old Spanish house, a very, very beautiful house. And so Dan bought it, and he had all this, you know, big yard, all these things. And so Bill and I—Bialosky—rethought the whole pool house idea. And now it could all be outside. You could enter it from outside, and the lap pool would be outside. And so we worked on that. And there was a budget for landscaping, and the landscaping was all very exotic. It was great.

And then when it was all done, Dan asked me if I would do a poker table. And I'd never—God! I'd never [made] anything like that. But I played poker. And I had very, very definite ideas about what would be—I mean, it's a round table—and what a poker table, a comfortable poker table, should have. Like how big the area where you keep your chips. And how big the area, a little round thing where you put your coffee cup or your glass of water or whatever. So I made a great poker table. And I actually invited my poker players to come and not play on my poker table but to come and see it. And when I was first doing it, at the poker game I would say, "Well, my poker table has a nicer part here."

Anyway, so I made a poker table. And because he said he didn't only want to use it as a poker table, I made it with a lid that could cover up the poker part and just be a straight wood top. Or you could remove the lid, and then you really had a poker table, you know, with the green cloth. Very traditional. So that came out great. You know, that was a wonderful project. And Bill Bialosky, who—I live in a co-op, and we need a building architect. And we used to have somebody who I felt was dreadful. And I suggested Bill for it. I thought, you know, he lives in a loft; he understands. We had some guy who lives uptown and didn't know anything about loft living. Would make suggestions to us that they were irrelevant. So ever since then he's been the building architect.

AVIS BERMAN: That's great. One thing I'm a little confused about—this is a sidetrack—but you said he was the architect of record on Maya Lin's projects. Isn't she an architect?

JACKIE FERRARA: She doesn't have a license.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. Because I guess she kind of got famous so soon with her projects, she never went through the traditional—

JACKIE FERRARA: I'm not sure if—I mean he knows her from school, from Yale [University, New Haven, CT]. They were in class together; that's how he knows her. But she must have been straddling both sculpture and architecture.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, don't forget she designed the Vietnam War Memorial when she was 20 or 21. And that took

her—

JACKIE FERRARA: She was still, yes, she was in school. She did it with mashed potatoes. Figured it out with—or started it—with mashed potatoes. But you know [Richard] Serra was teaching there then, and she was taking classes with him. I know she doesn't have a degree.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, I guess with that, you know, immediately she went into a whole other universe once that happened.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right, right. And she's done houses, and she'd done them with him. They worked on them together.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, there's nothing wrong with that. So I just—because I know she had studied architecture. So it just seemed that that was why I was going to ask you. So that was really, you know, to really make a functional part of the house.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes. And the whole idea that I'd been doing all these pool houses. And when Bill came here, he incorporated how I was approaching some of these things. And there are a lot of arches in that project. The wall of the lap pool has arches. But there are also arches already on the property. There are coral arches at the entrance to the property. And the sauna room is vaulted, the ceiling, and there are arches in the vault. And then the game room also has arches on the wall. They're marble—do it with two shades, you know. Just make the curves.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, this sounds like a project, especially when money was—

JACKIE FERRARA: It was a dream; it was a dream. It didn't matter.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. No, it was no object, which also probably won't happen again too much either.

JACKIE FERRARA: It was wonderful.

AVIS BERMAN: So I guess—

JACKIE FERRARA: And there was a big party.

AVIS BERMAN: I'll bet! [They laugh.]

JACKIE FERRARA: And people came. They came from New York, you know. It was great.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay. Well, now we're—

JACKIE FERRARA: And we picked out bathrobes. We picked out bathrobes for it, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I hope you still have yours.

JACKIE FERRARA: No, it wasn't for me. I picked them—I never kept one for myself. It was for them.

AVIS BERMAN: So what we should do next is the in Phoenix [AZ], the Sunnyslope Canal Demonstration Project [2001].

JACKIE FERRARA: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: Which was huge and also another—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, another—

AVIS BERMAN: —beautiful and very different, kind of, enormous project. I guess I should ask what it was supposed to demonstrate.

JACKIE FERRARA: So that's way after the Amphitheater [1991, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA].

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, should we do the Amphitheater next?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't know. I don't care how you do that. I just noticed it was further in the book, so in terms of date—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

JACKIE FERRARA: It's okay. We can do this. I'm here.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. Because I would say it looked like they were contemporaneous. And then we'll finish with Los Angeles, and then we'll be done. And you can go to your rehearsal. Anyway—[they laugh].

JACKIE FERRARA: They called it Canal Demonstration Project for Sunnyslope. Sunnyslope is an area, a community in Phoenix. And I'm not clear about the finances of this. But I know the intention was to, maybe, enhance areas of the Phoenix canal system, which is very elaborate, and that this was the first area. So that was why it was called the Demonstration Project.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, I didn't even know Phoenix had canals.

JACKIE FERRARA: People don't know that, and it's full of canals. It's ringed by mountains, and when the snow would melt, it would come down, and it formed all these canals. And there's all these little bridges that you go over. I mean, nobody knows that. It was very strange. And the people in Phoenix barely know it, because they think they're alleys. They're not interested in their canals as a destination at all.

In Sunnyslope, the houses that face the canal—on one side there was a big rainwater ditch that the government engineers had built. And so there was this canal, and then 40 feet of the canal bank, and then maybe another 60 feet or 40 feet—I don't know what it was—this huge ditch that ran for miles. And then way on the other side of that were some houses, way on the—really far away. The one side of the canal—and that was the side we worked on. The other side of the canal had houses all along it. But the houses—it was the back of the houses that faced the canal, so they really thought of it as their backyard. And that's where—like, the garbage cans or the wastebaskets and stuff were all on the canal on the other side.

AVIS BERMAN: It's so strange because—

JACKIE FERRARA: It's so strange. It's so strange.

AVIS BERMAN: So precious to them, besides being so beautiful.

JACKIE FERRARA: It's very, very, very hot in Phoenix. I don't think people go outside. I think the first time I went there, our meeting was at six-thirty. I mean that's barbaric. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: At six-thirty in the morning.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And did you—Was this a competition?

JACKIE FERRARA: This was a competition, and I think it was the first competition I ever did. And I was willing to do it because there were a few of us, and I felt that I wouldn't be upset that it wasn't me being turned down only by myself. There were a little group of us being turned down. Also, it was such an interesting project. So there were three finalists: one was a local group in—I don't know their names. Another one was Mary Miss and George Hargraves. And then Paul Friedberg and Doug Hollis and I with Steve—we had five people on our team—Steve Martelli? Not Steve Martelli [Steve Martino]. He was a local landscape architect which we had to work with.

And then we had somebody very interesting. I guess it was Doug knew about him: some guy who was living in Tucson, at the university, who was all involved with—I don't know if he was some kind of scientist—all involved with recycling water, in ways. And so he had offices—so he had labs at the Phoenix airport where he did all these—it was a hangar; they'd given him a big hangar. And he had all these experiments that had to do with, I don't know, putting water and somehow it would make the water go up there so it would cool. Like various combinations of things to recycle water to do with cooling. But I'm sure he was working on other things, too. But we were interested in the cooling aspects. And so he consulted. He was a consultant on the project for us. He's a man whose name I've forgotten, but I've got it somewhere.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think it will be—I have this booklet, so I'll look in here.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, it'll be in there. Right. Anyway, so our project had an idea about it being a series of rooms. And that the rooms would be at intervals, six, seven hundred feet. And we were dealing with a mile and a half of canal bank. And that each room in some way would work with something to do with the environment. So maybe it would be about cooling or maybe it would be about taking water from the canal. Or just in some way—I mean, one of the rooms is a sundial room. It's a time room. So we had a series of rooms, and we had a pergola structure, a shade structure, at an intersection. There are at—I think maybe there were two bridges, or maybe just one, that crossed this mile and a half that cars and people would go over to get across the canals. I'm not even sure about that. There just might have been a bridge at either end of our mile and a half. I guess they're not that frequent. In any event, so at the one bridge we had this pergola structure.

And Doug designed a couple of things. And one of the things he designed was a chair, a high-backed chair that would have its counterpoint on the other side of the canal. And when somebody sat on one side of the canal—they were whispering chairs—and they said some words, the other person on the other side of the canal could hear them.

This is after we were selected. We were selected with our idea of rooms, and we hadn't, you know—it was probably like halfway done or something. But, you know, we were enhancing it. And so when we presented, they didn't want anything that rose. They didn't want anything that rose up. They didn't want to attract people there. They were not interested in making this a place where people would come. They didn't mind it, you know, for themselves, but they didn't—his chairs were too high; they didn't like that. He had also designed something for a sundial that stuck way up, and they didn't want that. And they didn't want the pergola structure, this shade structure. They only wanted the lower things. And everything else was, like, no more than two feet high.

AVIS BERMAN: So these rooms were more like low, inset, external enclosures.

JACKIE FERRARA: Right. What we did was the 40-foot-wide bank we split into half. And we lowered by several feet the part that was closer to the water. And the other part now became two or three feet higher. And that was where there was a bike path, on that higher portion. And we cut into that higher portion every six or seven hundred yards and made some kind of a room. But it looks great anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: And no one uses it, or you don't know?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, the people that—you know, there's joggers and stuff. It's really hot there. I actually don't know what happens. You know, it's just—I don't know. It's like 120 or something. It's undoable. I know people do things really early in the morning. And we have some in some of the photographs; you know, there's somebody that's walking. But it was—there weren't lots of people at all.

AVIS BERMAN: Were you frustrated by the community's attitude toward this?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, once they made that clear, we just, you know, we went with it.

AVIS BERMAN: And so why was that a satisfying piece for you?

JACKIE FERRARA: Just look at it! [They laugh.] It was just so interesting, this whole idea of making, like, five different rooms. And one of the rooms is a—it's like a picnic table. It's got benches and the table, and the table is a drawing of the canal system that we got off of—we did some research on the tribe that had been there originally: the Hohokam Indians, who predated the Anasazi; they were kind of farmers. And they were the ones who developed the canals, like, so that they would feed water into all their land nearby. And there was this drawing that they had of the canal system. So our picnic table is a copy of that drawing. And there's, like, a little spigot. The drawing is incised into the stone. And there's a little spigot where water come up periodically, and it fills the grooves. And then that a little bit cools the area right around it. And then the water evaporates. A little bit later some more water comes up. And the water's coming from the canal.

AVIS BERMAN: That's great. Now, does that canal serve as a reservoir now or anything?

JACKIE FERRARA: It's part of the SALT something, which is also part of Hoover Dam.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh.

JACKIE FERRARA: Not Hoover, the other dam: Roosevelt Dam. Roosevelt Dam's the one that's there. And we got \$500,000 from the Intercoastal ICE—ISE?—Intercoastal Something. Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. It's some government thing that gives money for transportation, water transportation, to be added to the project. And, you know, like one of the rooms is a sundial, where you stand on a little stone. And your shadow is the one that tells the time. They were just—they were interesting; each one did different things.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

JACKIE FERRARA: And it was a great project. And I've continued to work with Paul Friedberg on other ones because—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I guess you've had a long relationship with him.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, a very fruitful.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. No, as you say, this is baffling. It's big, it's beautiful, and there's this sense of it just sitting there as though it were being underused.

JACKIE FERRARA: Just sitting there, yes. I think it's probably being underused, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And were other canals similarly enhanced, do you know?

JACKIE FERRARA: I know they did something at bridges; where the bridges met the water, like, something was done. But I don't know yet a whole bank. They probably decided it was fruitless. I don't know. I don't know anybody there.

AVIS BERMAN: Because Phoenix certainly had an active public art commission, active and original and—

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Risk-taking.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. The person that was there when we were there is gone. And another person came in, and that person's gone. Whatever's going on there, they really have a lot of turnover in whoever—and maybe it's just too hot. These people come from somewhere else, and they don't like—

AVIS BERMAN: And they're probably not paid very much.

JACKIE FERRARA: Maybe that. And maybe there aren't enough projects to keep them interested.

AVIS BERMAN: Probably not right now.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, that's for sure. All right, so that leaves the Amphitheater.

AVIS BERMAN: The Amphitheater, yes. In Los Angeles.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. So that was Howard Fox, who had for years been telling me he was going to do something with me one day, and this was when he was in Washington [DC]. And then very many years later, I got a call, and it was specific: would I be interested in doing an amphitheater? Hancock Park, which is where LA County Museum is located, as is the Page Museum, which is a paleontological museum, and it's where the La Brea Tar Pits are.

Anyway, the park where both those museums are located was very, very, very shabby and was being neglected, because each museum thought the other one should be taking care of it, and neither one was; they were supposed to be splitting it. In any event, what was supposed to be happening was not happening. There were a lot of homeless people living there in the park. And the tar pits, which are some kind of phenomenon, are not only in that spot. So every now and then, there'd be a fissure in some other part. I mean, in the same park in some other part of the park. Or sometimes it crossed the street where a little bit of the earth would split, and then some tar would be in that spot. So the first time I went out there, every so often there were these big orange cones. And they were straddling some split in the earth where there was a chunk of tar.

Anyway, so Laurie Olin was the landscape architect for the master plan. They had gotten—they had money to, you know, redo the whole park. And they also had money from somebody who had all along been very supportive and been a benefactor of the museum of LA County, who wanted an amphitheater. And so they had money for an amphitheater. And I got the gig. [They laugh.] And then part of it was also to work with Laurie Olin on some of the landscaping. The amphitheater is at the far end of the park and, you know, quite—I suppose as far away from the museum as it can be. And I, with Laurie Olin, worked on a concrete walkway leading up to it. And the amphitheater did meet ADA; it's red granite, and it's got two areas where the stones will roll out so that a wheelchair can go in.

AVIS BERMAN: Who else had to oversee or look at the drawings besides Howard?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, then it was the director of the museum who's not there anymore. And, well, Laurie. There were a lot of people. There's a model, very, very nice model that Russell Busch made. And that's what—I came out with the model. I didn't have drawings. I mean, if I'd had drawings, you know, they—I had a really very nice model that Russell had made for me. And there was one only one change that had to happen. And that was because I had stairways at either end of the amphitheater so you could climb up the little steps. But I had a center stairway. And at either end there was a wall so you could attach a railing to the wall. But I did not have a railing for the center steps. And you had to have a railing. I didn't want a railing, so I took out the center steps, and then you didn't have to have a railing anymore.

AVIS BERMAN: And now were you happy with that site so far from the museum?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes. It was great. It was great! No, no, no. That was fine.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you choose it, or was that where it was supposed to be?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, that was where it was supposed to be. Yes. It was near something—it was, like, a little creek or something nearby. And it was near that. No, you know, it was, like, in the park.

AVIS BERMAN: And then that—is that still in good shape?

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Nothing happened with the stone or anything?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. Granite, things don't happen to. No, granite is very, very hardy. And the—I mean, it didn't have a granite floor; it has a concrete floor. But the concrete matches the granite. There's a firm out there that does wonderful work with granite—I mean, with concrete.

AVIS BERMAN: Was that an economy measure?

JACKIE FERRARA: No, no. That was because trucks have to go over it when they empty—see, these big trucks come in to empty the tar. And they ride through the park. The tar's always—I mean, that's why it was popping up.

AVIS BERMAN: It's erupting all the time.

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes. And these big trucks have to come in. And it couldn't be granite. I mean, it probably could've been granite, but it had to be so thick and everything, that would've just been too expensive to do that. And besides, it was nice what I did, because I made it a grid. And so there are all these nice little squares in the floor. It's very nice how it looks.

AVIS BERMAN: I know; just thinking California, I know there are instances of mind over nature. You know, they're just going to [inaudible].

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes, I know. I know. It's crazy. I can't imagine living there. I'd be terrified. I mean, if the building did that, oh, my God! This is the end.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, not just the earth going. But we've got this, that—

JACKIE FERRARA: The fires. It's really something else. I know. And then they put all those trees there that don't belong there, all the trees from Florida. It's very strange how it is. I know.

AVIS BERMAN: I agree. I agree.

JACKIE FERRARA: It was the only time, you know—it was the first time I went there was for this. I'd never been there. Oh, no, I'd been there for the Stuart Collection; that's right.

AVIS BERMAN: But this was Los Angeles.

JACKIE FERRARA: But this was Los Angeles.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Well, exactly. And was LA County happy? Was the museum happy?

JACKIE FERRARA: I think so. I think everybody was okay. I mean, I hope so. Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And are they using it?

JACKIE FERRARA: Yes, yes. Because they have programs, and they have them there. And they have some kind of a canopy system that they mount over it if it's really hot. Over the whole amphitheater so that—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, thank you so much. I think we've run through it. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

JACKIE FERRARA: I don't think so.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, I'm really pleased that we did talk a little bit about, really, a variety of things and what can happen in the public arena.

JACKIE FERRARA: Oh, yes, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And probably a lot of other things, too. Well, anyway, thank you again.

JACKIE FERRARA: You're welcome.

AVIS BERMAN: I really appreciate it.

JACKIE FERRARA: You're very welcome.

[END OF FILE 3.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]