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Oral history interview with Mineo Mizuno, 2009 September 8-9

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mineo Mizuno on September 8, 2009. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Mineo Mizuno has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, with the artist Mineo Mizuno at his studio and home in Los Angeles, California on September 8, 2009. This is disc number one.

Well, good afternoon.

MINEO MIZUNO: Hello.

MS. RIEDEL: It's great to be here. I thought we would start our two-day series here of interviews with a general introduction about your work and some of the main themes that might come up over the next two days — sort of, orient ourselves on how we might look at —

MR. MIZUNO: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: — your work over the past 50 years or so.

And I've had a wonderful time, really, spending time with your work and becoming for familiar with it. And it seems to me that there are a few main things that really struck me, in general, about your work over time. And one is a "dialogue quality" and sort of a back-and-forth between many different things — between a Japanese background and history and then an American experience between two dimensions and three dimensions; between very functional work and very sculptural work, more conceptual work; an enormous range, also, in scale from the — from tea bowls and plates to then those enormous teardrops which can weigh up to a couple tons, yes?

MR. MIZUNO: Right. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So that strikes me as — and then also the range of work that you've done, the broad number of projects, from the early functional work with the — was it Interpace Corporation, was that it?

MR. MIZUNO: Yes —

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: — right after school — I worked there for 10 years.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right, and then through the much more conceptual work. And have you thought about that consciously over the years, that wide range of different ways of working?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I do. I always think about that. And every show I have, it's different. Never repeated — in type of work. So the people think, "He's always something new." But when I had a show, I been so afraid it looks like a group show.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's funny. I read that.

MR. MIZUNO: So yeah, I always think, you know, I should stick with one thing, but keeps coming up with new idea and I had to try. But it's sometime I go back and forth —

MS. RIEDEL: Right. It definitely feels like a back-and-forth. And that's — that what you said makes me think of something else that I think really defines your work so well is, it is so much to me, it seems, idea-driven. It's not — it doesn't feel like it's pure exploration of material. It doesn't feel like a "theme and variation" on a certain thought, but it feels like a wide exploration of ideas.

Does it feel that way to you too?

MR. MIZUNO: Yes, that's true. But past 10 years has been pretty steady stuck with one thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: I think that's because I lead as — it doesn't matter what I do, I am, my background is Japan and Japanese.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So if I'm trying to be so American and do something, you know, always something different, it's not going to work.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So I realized that, and now I'm just kind of stable — [laughs] — with one idea —

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: [Inaudible.]

MS. RIEDEL: These, the water drops and the teardrops?

MR. MIZUNO: The water drop, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yeah, that makes sense. And those are interesting too, though, because one of the things that I think of as consistent through your career — and especially involved, of course, in terms of ceramics exclusively — but throughout time is your experimentation and your expertise with glaze and with surface. And that seems to be something that you really are delving into with these pieces as well.

MR. MIZUNO: Right. My work — why I picked the ceramic media is I've always thought the glaze is so interesting. My background from Japan, a high school I went to — actually, I was born in a city called Tajimi, which is the ceramic industry.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, really? In Gifu?

MR. MIZUNO: In Gifu prefecture.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: So I had some of the background. My family business was tile business, and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? Ceramic tile?

MR. MIZUNO: Ceramic tile.

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't know that.

MR. MIZUNO: Nothing to do with art, but — [laughs] —

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: — but functional wall tile.

MS. RIEDEL: Wall tile. Interesting. And was — so, did they have a ceramic factory?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Really. And was it purely a family business?

MR. MIZUNO: Family business.

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't know that. And so did that go back a number of generations, or just your father and mother?

MR. MIZUNO: I think it started from my grandparents.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. On your father's side or your mother's side?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, father's side.

MS. RIEDEL: Your father's side.

MR. MIZUNO: But my father died —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: — before I was even born.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So my mother was helping in family business. So I was always there to help to load up the kiln and that stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't — I didn't really — that's interesting. I didn't know when exactly your ceramic experience began, but you grew up, as a child, loading kilns.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was all done by hand, individual tiles.

MR. MIZUNO: Lots of machinery then, but basically by hand.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And were those, then, were they wood-fired? How did — what kind of tiles were they?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, starting with the wood, but before I left they started using oil.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: It's still that same — [inaudible] — burning oil.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And were these — this was a — so it was a single kiln operation? Was it a fairly small operation, or a big factory?

MR. MIZUNO: It was a small.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Interesting, interesting.

And as a child, did you make tiles, or?

MR. MIZUNO: No, I didn't. I didn't. I wasn't interested in making anything for myself. But I did help them, you know. So I knew what's the — what involved to have a ceramic. And I went to the high school which specialized on the ceramic. So —

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — so the glaze calculation, all that, I learned in high school.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, really.

MR. MIZUNO: So when I came and took a ceramic class, I already knew how to calculate the glazes — formula.

[Cross Talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's — so you were way ahead of everybody — here —

MR. MIZUNO: [Laughs.] No, not way ahead —

MS. RIEDEL: Well, really, I think glaze calculation wasn't probably much of a science by the time — when you arrived here, was it? Well, there'd been something a little bit with the —

MR. MIZUNO: A little bit of about, but —

MS. RIEDEL: — of everyone — were here, and —

MR. MIZUNO: But, yeah, I knew more than — sometimes more than teachers did.

MS. RIEDEL: I would think. That's extraordinary. I didn't know that.

Well, let's go back then and start with — start at the beginning. You were born in Japan in 1944?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was your mom's name?

MR. MIZUNO: Taneko.

MS. RIEDEL: Taneko, okay. And your father's name?

MR. MIZUNO: Kyoichi.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, of course. I should know from all the pieces.

MR. MIZUNO: [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And you have one sister. Is that right?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was her name — is her name?

MR. MIZUNO: Shizuko.

MS. RIEDEL: Shizuko, okay. I'll get that spelling later.

So did you take art classes as a child?

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No. Okay. And how did you — what was your childhood like? Would you describe it a little bit?

MR. MIZUNO: What do you —

MS. RIEDEL: Your childhood, growing up?

MR. MIZUNO: Oh, childhood.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. How did you spend your time?

MR. MIZUNO: Ugh.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: I don't remember the younger age. But, you know, I was born in the — right before the end of the war.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: It's not the easiest time. It's poor everywhere.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: So the best place to go is my grandmother's place, my mother's side. I spend the most summer, and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: And where was that?

MR. MIZUNO: That's not far from Tajimi, but a different prefecture, Aichi —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — in an area called Seto —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Oh, yes, of course.

MR. MIZUNO: — which is also ceramic town.

MS. RIEDEL: Ceramic, absolutely.

And, now, this was your grandma — your mother's parents. Did they work in ceramics at all?

MR. MIZUNO: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you exposed to it because of the area, because of Seto?

MR. MIZUNO: When I went to my grandmother's, it had nothing to do with the ceramics, and basically, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: They have a — almost like a farmer. And my mother used to grow everything, and grew silk — silk worm, and sit weaving.

So the art — little bit art backgrounds probably comes from my grandma.

MS. RIEDEL: And your grandmother, you say, is a weave — was a weaver?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, not only weaver, but she did weave all the kimonos. She had three daughters, but every daughter had a, from her — she made.

MS. RIEDEL: She made them.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: She sewed them herself?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And embroidered them too?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, even dyed in those silk, and everything.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that common back then, or was that unusual?

MR. MIZUNO: No, I don't think — it was kind of unusual.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, it sounds that way. And I've seen some of those kimonos, how just exquisitely beautiful they are. It's amazing that she made all of them for her daughters, wow.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. Did you get one? [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, I have one somewhere.

MS. RIEDEL: Good. I'd like to see that.

So clearly, there was some sense of working with the hands on your grandmother's side.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. And then on your father's side they had the tile business.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Did they make pots as well, or just tiles?

MR. MIZUNO: No, just the tile.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And did you work with clay at all as a child?

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No, okay. Did you work with fabric?

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, because I know later on you went and did that residency in Philadelphia. I'm wondering if that fabric — watching your grandmother work with a kimono, and —

MR. MIZUNO: Well, that has nothing to do — actually, I met Kippy Stroud, who was the founder of the workshop —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. MIZUNO: And she asked me to — actually she saw my dinner set with the chili peppers on it. So she thought it would be nice if I could make a tablecloth and napkins —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: — to go with it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: That's the reason I got invited.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: It was the very beginning of the fabric workshop. It's a different — right now —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

So going back to Japan and your childhood, did you spend a lot of time outdoors? Did you spend —

MR. MIZUNO: Mostly outdoor, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And what was that like? Were you camping and hiking, or were there more parks in the cities?

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, there is a mountain behind us which is owned by the family.

MS. RIEDEL: Really.

MR. MIZUNO: So you know, it's not really camping, but I used to build my own little place, with all the woods around and the — we would sleep over, stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And was this your grandparents' place?

MR. MIZUNO: No, my mother —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, your house.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so right behind you was all this open nature, these mountains.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

And did you live close to your father's parents, or did you live with them?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, close to.

MS. RIEDEL: Close to them, okay. And then were you at their — at their home where they were making these tiles regularly?

MR. MIZUNO: Regularly.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay, and did — but you didn't play with the clay at all?

MR. MIZUNO: No. Actually, the family are more interested for me to become a sales person. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I see. [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: Tile salesman.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, and what did they want you to sell?

MR. MIZUNO: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: What did they want you to sell? Or it didn't matter what you sold, they just —

MR. MIZUNO: That doesn't matter.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: That's that one reason — one of the reason they let me come this country.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MR. MIZUNO: At one point, they want me to go back. But I said, "No, not in the middle of the school," and I just can't.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So I never went back. My mother thought that was a good idea not coming back.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: But the family was expecting for me to come back.

MS. RIEDEL: Uh-huh [affirmative], of course, of course. But they — you came to the U.S. and they thought you were going to become a salesman?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's good. Did you spend any time in art museums when you were a child in Japan?

MR. MIZUNO: No. I never went to art museum before I came. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Really. That is very interesting. But certainly there was ceramics; and there was fabric; there were kimonos; there were textiles — very much part of your upbringing.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I'm sure. So after I came here and studied, and every time I go back I just go to, you know, those old museums and everything.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: But after, not before I came.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So then in high school you said you started — you studied some ceramics. Was it an art-specific high school or was it just general high school?

MR. MIZUNO: No, it's general, but specialized on the technical side of — [inaudible] —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — not artistic.

MS. RIEDEL: And was this something you were interested in in shows, or how did that come about? How did it come about that you were at this —

MR. MIZUNO: School.

MS. RIEDEL: — high school, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: It was really a, actually, hard one to get in, and every Tajimi area — it's in Tajimi —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: — who owns a ceramic factory has to go to that school, that kind of school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: So without thinking, you know, that's the place I want to go or anything, but that's the place everyone is supposed to go. So I was be able to get in.

MS. RIEDEL: Just because —

MR. MIZUNO: [Inaudible.]

MS. RIEDEL: — you lived there? Okay.

All right, so I'm just —

MR. MIZUNO: That wasn't the — from my interest.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.] You didn't choose it; you just had to go.

Now, when you say Tajimi was a ceramic area —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — does that mean there were a number, then, of different ceramic households making ceramics in factories too?

MR. MIZUNO: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And did they make a range of ceramics?

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, yes they do —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so —

MR. MIZUNO: — functional, you know, dishes, and all.

MS. RIEDEL: And did it specialize in anything? Was it known — was Tajimi known for any particular kind of ceramics?

MR. MIZUNO: Tajimi, it was known as a [ph] special — you know, how do you —

MINAKO DOKAN: Tile.

MR. MIZUNO: — how do you see Tajimi?

MS. DOKAN: [Inaudible.]

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, rice bowls is the most —

MS. RIEDEL: Rice bowls.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Most rice bowls in Japan is made in Tajimi, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Really. That's interesting, that most of the rice bowls come from there. That's saying a lot.

MR. MIZUNO: Well, dinnerware company too. But later on, when I left Interpace here —

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: — I was working for a company in Tajimi who was making a dinner set —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. MIZUNO: — sending the dishes here to this country.

MS. RIEDEL: How interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: So I was there just a couple years as a consultant, basically.

MS. RIEDEL: So that would have been late '60s, after you left — or late '70s?

MR. MIZUNO: Seveties.

MS. RIEDEL: After you left Interpace —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — you were back in Japan for a couple years?

MR. MIZUNO: No, I was here, but I just go back and forth.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay. And what was the name of that company?

MR. MIZUNO: Yamato.

MS. RIEDEL: Yamato, okay. And also dinnerware.

MR. MIZUNO: Dinnerware.

MS. RIEDEL: And, sorry, that was based also in Tajimi?

MR. MIZUNO: Tajimi.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, interesting. That's really interesting.

And were the glazes anything in particular? Was there a certain sort of glaze that was especially well known from Tajimi, or from that dinnerware — anything in particular about glazes?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, old — traditionally, there is Oribe.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: That's the famous — Tajimi is famous for Oribe.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, okay. Ah, so Tajimi is famous for Oribe? Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, and the Shino.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

And is Seto — is Seto a particular kind of glaze as well, or?

MR. MIZUNO: That's pretty — Seto and Tajimi next to each other —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — so they both are about the same.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay, because that had a very particular glaze too, didn't it — Setoware, that was known for a certain style of glaze, or no?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, they do.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

So you grew up with this — a very interesting sense of particular glazes. But then it also sounds like — was there some experimentation in the glazes too? Were they constantly trying to come up with new glazes, or did they stay fairly focused on traditional?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, the new industry — [inaudible] — tile, they never used the traditional one.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: It's always new glazes —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — more durable, more, you know, functional.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So there, just even growing up, almost by way of osmosis, you had this exposure to a lot of different functional — types of functional ceramic —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — and then very traditional glazes and ware; but also then an ongoing experimentation with glazes.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And is that partly what you studied in high school then too?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Would you just describe what the courses were like, or what you studied in particular in high school?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, actually, they had a — the school had a kiln —

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

MR. MIZUNO: — a different type of kiln.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And we learned how to experiment the glazes, and each kiln has a different effect.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: Like, if you want to have Oribe — traditional Oribe, you have to have a, you know, wooden-firing kiln —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — and a gas-firing would be different, all of that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, because of the wood ash, that sort of thing, yes?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So those —

MS. RIEDEL: Would that be an anagama kiln, or it could be a variety of —

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, they had anagama kiln.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay. And what else?

MR. MIZUNO: What else? Well, we did — you know, when you make a dishes —

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] On the wheel, or?

MR. MIZUNO: On the wheel, but not hand-thrown.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Like a jigger or something?

MR. MIZUNO: A jigger.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: We used to make a template for the jigger —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — and tried selling the home designed dishes.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's interesting. So that was in high school you were working on the forms —

MR. MIZUNO: Yes — [laughs] — in high school.

MS. RIEDEL: — all the different forms —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — for dinnerware. That's pretty extraordinary. And did that go on for two years, or four years in high school?

MR. MIZUNO: It's three years, but I didn't finish it. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: I got kicked out. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Uh-oh. [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: At the end of it, actually. [Inaudible] — I did go three years. I have a grade for the — all three years, but I don't have a diploma for it. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: You wanted to experiment more than they wanted to, perhaps. [They laugh.]

MR. MIZUNO: So that's one of the reason I came here too.

MS. RIEDEL: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Ready for a change.

MR. MIZUNO: Ready for a change. My mother's —

MS. RIEDEL: For more experimenting.

MR. MIZUNO: — my mother thought it was a good idea. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Now, did you know anybody here?

MR. MIZUNO: No. Actually, one of the company who used to buy tile from the family —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: — and I was hoping to get help from him. But it turned out to be I didn't get any help. Actually, I had a couple months to even find him.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MIZUNO: But I met other people —

MS. RIEDEL: So you just arrived in Los Angeles by yourself at the age of, what, 20?

MR. MIZUNO: Pretty much. Nineteen, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Nineteen, and really knowing nobody except one person you couldn't find for two months.

MR. MIZUNO: Right. But I met other people who knew Jun Kaneko.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: So he became a good friend.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And he gave me the suggestion of which school to go.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, how did you even know Jun Kaneko?

MR. MIZUNO: The person I met, he used to be — I mean, I'm sure he's still around, he was modern dancer —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, really.

MR. MIZUNO: — teaching at — he used to teach at the Fullerton college [California State University, Fullerton] — state college in Fullerton.

MS. RIEDEL: In Fullerton?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember his name?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. Kuni.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Masami Kuni.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And so he knew Jun? Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: He was busy, he said, "Well, maybe I ought to pass him on to Jun." [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And Jun was living here at the time, is that right, in Los Angeles?

MR. MIZUNO: Right. He was just finished school — but he didn't finish it either, but he decided to be a full-time artist in a studio.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: So I went to school, and after that I started sharing a studio with him.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So you arrived in 1964, is that right?

MR. MIZUNO: Sixty-six, wasn't it?

MS. DOKAN: [Inaudible.]

MR. MIZUNO: I think.

MS. RIEDEL: I think '64 — "lived in Los Angeles," yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Okay. We got it?

MS. RIEDEL: And then — and you started at Chouinard [Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA] in '66.

MR. MIZUNO: Oh, okay.

MS. RIEDEL: So were you working with Jun before even you started at Chouinard? So you two started off sharing a studio?

MR. MIZUNO: No, at that time I didn't — we didn't share. But he was with someone else studio, and I just sneaked in there and I started working.

MS. RIEDEL: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. MIZUNO: I needed all the portfolio to get into school so that's where I prepared for it.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I see. And you had nothing.

MR. MIZUNO: I had nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MR. MIZUNO: So I did all the drawings, everything before.

MS. RIEDEL: And what did you put together for a portfolio? Was it all functional work? Were you starting to do sculptural? Were you doing drawings?

MR. MIZUNO: Just drawing. I went to — after Chouinard, they had a summer course, drawing course.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And so I went and took the drawing course, and gave them — [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And all that work — I did some sculpture, mostly thrown, functional.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And were the glazes fairly experimental, were they traditional?

MR. MIZUNO: Experimental I didn't know what they had, but I just used it what they had.

MS. RIEDEL: At Chouinard?

MR. MIZUNO: No —

MS. RIEDEL: At Jun's place, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Jun's place.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: So I made it to school, and I was accepted as a special student —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's great.

MR. MIZUNO: — because — even they — thought I had a background from Japan —

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And Ralph Bacerra —

MR. MIZUNO: — which I didn't. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Well, not — you may be not one with a — in a traditional way, but certainly —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — lots of exposure —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — and lots of experimentation. I mean, you probably knew more about ceramics technology than many students, and probably a fair number of teachers at the time, yeah? I mean, there was a lot of experimenting going on in this area — Glen Lukens had been working, and the Natzlers [Gertrude and Otto Natzler], and Vivika and Otto Heino were —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, so — but it sounds like you had done a fair amount of experimenting yourself by the time you were 19.

MR. MIZUNO: That's true, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. So Ralph Bacerra was teaching at Chouinard. Who else was there? Susan Peterson was gone by then, yeah?

MR. MIZUNO: But there — I know the teacher, John Karrasch.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And do you remember any of the other students?

MR. MIZUNO: Ceramics student?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, or art students?

MR. MIZUNO: Only not ceramic student today still working on the glaze is Adrian Saxe.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: He was in my class.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? That's interesting. And was Elsa Rady there?

MR. MIZUNO: Elsa Rady, yeah. But she wasn't a full-time student and used to come in and out.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay. And would you describe those days at Chouinard — what you were working on; what it was like; was there a lot of back-and-forth with the students?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, actually, no. I was so surprised that, before my time, that all the famous painters — you know, like Ed Ruscha was there, all the people, famous people there. And it was an exciting time, especially the Vietnam War was going. People used to get drafted — [inaudible]. Some of them I still the close friend — in the ceramic class—he couldn't wait so he went volunteer —

MS. RIEDEL: Who was that?

MR. MIZUNO: Dave Dixon.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: [I] sorry, he was one of the best student in the class. But the Vietnam War made a mess. He stopped working on art. When he came back, he didn't want to do that anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Really. That's interesting, because so many — it seems that so many artists came out of the — well, before that, came out of the earlier war with the GI Bill and wanted to go —

MR. MIZUNO: That's what he thought too, but he didn't want to.

MS. RIEDEL: Really, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So actually I got drafted.

MS. RIEDEL: You got drafted too?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. They came, they asked — no, I didn't go, but they asked me to come for a physical exam, and they [ph] start cleaning up my apartment.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MIZUNO: So I just immediately went to Japanese consul.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Say, no war, what should I do? And they were surprised. They have heard any such a thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you weren't a citizen yet.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, but didn't matter. At that time —

MS. RIEDEL: Really.

MR. MIZUNO: — anyone stay over three months this country, you had to sign the paper say you could be drafted.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary. And you were here as a visiting student from Japan, but you were eligible to be drafted.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, because every six months I have to extend my visa. At that time, I didn't know I was signing a paper saying I could be drafted.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. [Laughs.] Whoops. Bad time then, right?

And so what did you do?

MR. MIZUNO: So the Japanese consul found out that they have a special agreement with Japan and the United States. If the person doesn't want to go, I could be excused. But when I want to come back to this country, maybe I may not be able to. Also, I may not be able to apply for permanent residency or citizenship.

MS. RIEDEL: Really.

MR. MIZUNO: But those days they didn't even have a computer I guess. When I apply, you know, didn't show up.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: [Inaudible] — didn't show up. So I didn't —

MS. RIEDEL: So you decided — you declined to go. You said, 'I don't want to go.'

MR. MIZUNO: I don't want to go.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So you took —

MR. MIZUNO: When I finished school —

MS. RIEDEL: — that risk — yeah —

MR. MIZUNO: — I may not come back; that's fine.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So I didn't have to go.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. But then you didn't leave. You stayed pretty much —

MR. MIZUNO: I stayed.

MS. RIEDEL: — and you were able to stay and it was not a problem. That was lucky.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. [Inaudible.] [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So at Chouinard, what were you working on? What was your work like? Was it involving the functional work; were you starting to experiment with sculptural work; or, what were you studying?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, in the ceramic class I follow just the assignment —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — you know, functional or sculpture.

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

MR. MIZUNO: But also, at the same time I had to take, you know, design — color design class or a drawing class, something like that [ph].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

And how did — what did you think of the — this American ceramic system, after having taken some classes as a high school student in Japan and then having seen your grandparents' tile factory? What were your thoughts on the similarities and the differences from the way ceramics was being approached at Chouinard versus what you were familiar with?

MR. MIZUNO: You know, that's the only — I knew the technical parts. I had nothing to do with art — no knowledge of the art in ceramics in Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: So I went to library, start studying, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — who's there, and what they do.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: I learned all that in this country.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So it was an amazing place to arrive too, I imagine, because you'd had — [Peter] Voulkos —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — and Bennett Oates and — already come and gone. John Mason must have been working here then, yeah?

MR. MIZUNO: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And Ken [Kenneth] Price?

MR. MIZUNO: That's possible.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. So this was a whole new way of looking at ceramics.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, a whole new way.

MS. RIEDEL: But in many — did that strike you as a natural continuum, because I know ceramics has such a long history in Japan, such a varied history. Did it strike you as a natural part of ceramics in the continuum of the way it could grow, or was it just exciting and different?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, in Japan traditional ceramic is — it's digging narrow down to basically for the tea ceremony.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: And nothing else — they don't make anything else.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: That's the only way they can survive.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: Contemporary ceramics, at that time there was — all the new movement, influence from this country.

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

MR. MIZUNO: So it's still going. I guess they call it "craft movement."

MS. RIEDEL: The craft movement, sure.

MR. MIZUNO: But that started from around the '60s.

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

MR. MIZUNO: Before that, they didn't have —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

So were you — they called it "Mingai," yah? Mingai movement — the craft movement? No?

MR. MIZUNO: Is that?

MS. DOKAN: [Inaudible.] Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah? Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: I don't know that.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you aware of that when you were in Japan —

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: — that craft movement?

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all yet, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: No, I didn't know anything.

MS. RIEDEL: What about, like, Shoji Hamada and —

MR. MIZUNO: I didn't know. I learn it from here.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, interesting. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Okay. And were you aware of Jun Kaneko over there, or you found him when you came to the States?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Interesting. So you had all that background and all that history, but of a very, a very specific Japan — traditional Japanese ceramics, and then this was a whole new world.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: It must have been pretty exciting.

MR. MIZUNO: I think that really shows my work. And if I had studied in Japan, since I — [inaudible] — I might be working differently — especially in — a different way. I didn't know that. That's why I was so free to do anything I want.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And that was what captured your interest —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — was that freedom to experiment.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Because the — and ceramics, as you understood it in Japan, was much more regimented, not as experimental and not interesting to you.

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

So once you got here and saw the possibilities —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — it became more interesting. Interesting.

At Chouinard — I know that Ralph Bacerra was there, did you do any work with pattern and glaze, in terms of pattern in your work? Were you experimenting with that consciously? Because patterns become such an important part of your work and I certainly think of pattern as having — is being so highly evolved in Japanese aesthetics. Was it something you were thinking about consciously at the time?

MR. MIZUNO: What do you mean "pattern?"

MS. RIEDEL: Pattern — surface pattern, different graphic elements.

MR. MIZUNO: Oh, I see, oh. I don't know. I haven't thought about it. Ralph Bacerra is pretty much —

MS. RIEDEL: Pardon?

MR. MIZUNO: Ralph Bacerra — [inaudible] — teaches pretty much with a pattern —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely.

MR. MIZUNO: So maybe I was influenced by him that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you meet the Heinos at all? Were they around — Vivika and Otto?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. So they'd come by. I saw him a few years ago, actually right — you know, he passed away recently —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — but I just saw him — that wonderful little studio up in Ojai. Yeah. Yeah.

When you think about a university-trained artist — you were trained at Chouinard, do you see any difference between a university-trained artist and an artist who's learned his work outside of the university, say, in a craft school, an art school? Is there anything in particular about a university-trained artist that you think is different from an artist who has learned work on his own?

MR. MIZUNO: Oh, I don't know. I think it's individual — depend on the individual. I don't — I don't see which is better —

MS. RIEDEL: Or just different even?

MR. MIZUNO: Different. My favorite ceramic artist was in Japan. He didn't even go to high school. He's all trained in the factory. And I admire him as one of the — everything he does so beautiful. But he did it in the traditional Japanese. Some of his sculpture — [inaudible.]

MS. RIEDEL: And what's his name?

MR. MIZUNO: Goro Suzuki.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And I'm not familiar with his work. What is it about it that you liked so much?

MR. MIZUNO: I think he uses Oribe and Shino, two glazes — I never seen anyone use the glazes so, you know, beautiful way. He makes the best Oribe and the best Shino. And his tea bowls are most beautiful tea bowls I ever seen in Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd love to see those.

MR. MIZUNO: I have some. I'll show you.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And does he work exclusively in tea bowls or does he do a range of things?

MR. MIZUNO: Range of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And does he do sculptural work as well?

MR. MIZUNO: Some.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And he's successful too — financially and artistically, both successful.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

Can you say a little bit more about why his work — what, in particular, about those tea bowls, what he does with those glazes that you think is so unique?

MR. MIZUNO: I guess the quality of the glaze.

MS. RIEDEL: And what, in particular?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, it's hard to say. I mean —

MS. RIEDEL: I know. [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: — you have to look at it, say, "Wow, this is beautiful." That's the — [laughs] — that's the reaction I get from his work.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, I know how difficult it is to — when you talk about somebody's glaze, and what makes one extraordinary and something else. Is it the way the glaze suits the form, or is it —

MR. MIZUNO: A combination of that. And also you compare it to the old one — you know, from hundreds of years ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. MIZUNO: It's not exactly the same, but that kind of feeling it has.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay. So it has a quality of something —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — old and historical — that integrity, that authenticity.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Does it somehow feel very modern too?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. That's what I feel about it. I'll show you some of it. I don't know how much do you know about Oribe, but when you see this — his Oribe, it's the best Oribe you can see. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. So he takes that incredibly long tradition and history, and just adds something new and unique to it, but at the same time in reference to that whole long history.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: It's not the same as this country — you get one formula down to the way you want it, then you continue to do that. But in Japan it's different, because you go out — dig out all your own clay and each clay acts different. And he as to adjust it constantly. So every time he makes, it's a different Oribe.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So every time you dig clay, you're literally digging different clay?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And today, still, one digs their own clay?

MR. MIZUNO: That's what he does.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. Okay. Okay, so then whatever chemical components are in the clay, of course, is going to affect the glaze.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And so he's constantly adjusting that. So there's a lot of technical expertise there too.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And it sounds like it's an interesting balance, between having some idea about what he might expect, but then because he doesn't know exactly the chemical — the composition of the clay, he's never totally sure. So there's that possibility of something unexpected.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. That sounds to me a lot like your work too — is that technical expertise, but then that continual inclination to experiment. So you're never totally sure what you're going to —

MR. MIZUNO: Right. Looking for the "nice accident."

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right. Right. That must be what keeps it interesting too.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've done really — I'm just thinking about the *Water Drop* that we saw out there, that extraordinary layering of glazes; but then something that I haven't seen anybody do as successfully is that sanding of the glazes, where it bubbles up. So you actually use that as a texture that —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — in many ways, many people would consider an accident. I'm sure — maybe it happened the first time as one.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: But then what you've done with it.

MR. MIZUNO: That's what I — [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Really interesting. I remember when that happened on plates. [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't know what to do with it. [Laughs.] If I'd only known.

When you first started working with — or you were sharing a studio with Jun, and using — what was he working with and what was that experience like, having a studio while you were working here in the States?

MR. MIZUNO: He used to work with large-scale sculptures.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Was he doing the Dangos already? Those were —

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Not yet.

MR. MIZUNO: Before that.

But he was just — just started getting in large scale. Therefore, he built a big kiln, which I helped him with. Which, of course, all I have now [ph]. When he moved back to Japan, I took it over, the kiln, and brought it here.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Here in L.A. you took over his workshop. Okay.
And then how long did you have that space?

MR. MIZUNO: Until I bought this place. I think four or five years.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So pretty much directly out of Chouinard, did you start to work with Interpace?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. But I had a studio same time.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. So you —

MR. MIZUNO: And had show at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So you always had your own studio.

MR. MIZUNO: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. And let's talk a bit about Interpace, exactly what you were doing for them and how that worked.

MR. MIZUNO: That's the most boring job. [They laugh.] Trying to paint the flower pattern on the plate.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: I supposed to, but sometime I did something else.

I got along well with my supervisor. So I worked at my own work too at the same time, because I couldn't throw the flower a hundred — [inaudible] — all the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So I did it — part of my work.

MS. RIEDEL: So were you actually painting plates yourself at Interpace?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you were actually doing the painting-on-design. Interesting. Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, they produced quite a few patterns.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Did you design those patterns?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And did you design the forms as well?

MR. MIZUNO: Some of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And all functional work?

MR. MIZUNO: All functional.

MS. RIEDEL: And was it earthenware, stoneware, porcelain?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, the factory, the one they made in Glendale, it's — that's why we live here. It's not far from here, the factory used to be. Now it's a Costco.

MS. RIEDEL: Now it's Costco? [They laugh.]

MR. MIZUNO: But this factory used to make earthenware, but we used to have a dish made in Japan with the stoneware —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — and some of them were made back East. So factory all over the place. So it's porcelain, earthenware, stoneware.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And then were the plates and all the ware that had been — had it been bisqued, and it would come to Glendale to be glazed?

MR. MIZUNO: No, it's all finished in a different area.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: This factory only had earthenware. But the design department was in here — [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And you were working the design department.

MR. MIZUNO: The company called Interpace, but the Glendale part of it's called Franciscan.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. MIZUNO: And if it went [ph] back East, it's an independent Japanese pottery, something else like that. So different factory there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And so you were involved in designing dinnerware. And did you then just design a range of different dinnerwares over time, the forms as well as the graphic designs on them?

MR. MIZUNO: Dinnerware all the time —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: — for 10 years.

MS. RIEDEL: For 10 years. I remember you saying you got sick of plates. [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: There's a show I had, *Dinner for Six* [1977]—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: — 1977.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: That's the result of being a dinner — designer for such a long time. So all the frustration —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: — to, you know, get the show.

MS. RIEDEL: That is a really, really interesting show. Would you describe how you — how you came to make that show?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, that's the same I design — you know, paint the flowers on the plates every day. So I just wanted to do something to kill that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So actually I did that in the factory.

MS. RIEDEL: You did?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's so interesting.

Have you seen that show or catalog from Marek Cecula's show at the Museum of Art and Design called *Object Factory*? There's some wonderful ceramics there that remind me of this *Dinner for Six* — very deconstructivist. Marek, he's from Poland, do you know him? He was at Parsons [New School for Design] for a long time in New York. But, again, these, sort of, deconstructed ceramic forms, very classic, traditional, functional forms, as if they'd been destroyed by water or destroyed by fire. They're all sort of melting or, kind of, in pieces.

And I saw your work and I thought, this is so interesting, because it was so many years ago. This was 1977 that you were deconstructing all these pieces.

MR. MIZUNO: Because of the job I had.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Were they funny to you, these pieces? You know, the ladle —

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: — going through the bottom of the soup tureen. It's just hysterical. They're really funny.

MR. MIZUNO: I had fun —

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: — making them.

MS. DOKAN: [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: [Inaudible] — I did have fun.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] They feel very cathartic.

MR. MIZUNO: [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And so you did these at the factory?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: What was that experience like? What did — what was the response of the people around you when you threw —

MR. MIZUNO: They didn't know what I was doing. Nobody knew, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, they didn't see you doing that.

MR. MIZUNO: Well, some of them saw —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: — but they thought I was just joking or something. They didn't know I was preparing for the show. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] And where was that show — *Dinner for Six*? Do you remember?

MR. MIZUNO: My first dealer, David Stuart —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, Dave Stuart, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: That used to be the — Peter Voulkos show there. He's all in ceramics, but — [inaudible] — a big-time gallery — [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

And this show was pivotal for your career, seminal in many ways. It was [more real. It's a very — a demarcation from the functional, more traditional work, to really branching out in something completely new. Yes?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. I was be able to do that because of — I have a steady income —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: — so my living part is secured.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So that's the freedom I had to do, you know, that kind of — But my first show was screws.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. MIZUNO: At the same gallery, David Stuart.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And these were those sculptural pieces —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — these ceramic pieces.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And these are the pieces that we've talked about a couple of times, because you said that in many ways they were a reference to language, yes?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And learning English, and a play on words.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. But many people have talked about them as being a reference to Claes Oldenburg and —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. But that's really not the case.

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Actually that's — when I saw he was making screws at the Gemini, I said, uh-oh, it's time to stop.

MS. RIEDEL: A-ha.

MR. MIZUNO: That's why it's —

MS. RIEDEL: So you didn't even know he was making them.

MR. MIZUNO: No, I didn't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. So how did your screws come about? Were they the first sculptural objects that you made?

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. MIZUNO: It wasn't the first.

MS. RIEDEL: What came before that?

MR. MIZUNO: I had a free-form, multiple — some of them a hundred — [inaudible] — free-form.

MS. RIEDEL: Free-form motors?

MR. MIZUNO: No, the — just the free-form, solid clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay. Experimental abstract forms. Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: I don't have a catalog for that. I had a —

MS. RIEDEL: And was there a show of those?

MR. MIZUNO: No. But actually it was in a show — included in a show in the museums in Japan — [inaudible] — show.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: That was the very first sculpture. And I saved it — until a few years ago, I had a storage — [inaudible] — all these year[s]. Minako — [inaudible] — she never been to that storage; she doesn't know where it's at and what's inside.

MS. RIEDEL: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. MIZUNO: But before anything happens to it, just to clear that place. I hate — I'm sick of paying rent just — [inaudible] — I don't know what's in there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So one day I cleared that place out. I found those sculptures. I just threw them away.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, no.

MR. MIZUNO: [Laughs.] I have no place to put it. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's a tragedy. [Laughs.] He just threw them away?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, I do that often. I mean —

MS. RIEDEL: Do you?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. I have to. Otherwise, I'll be stuck with all the works I have done.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I can understand that. They were abstract. What was the scale?

MR. MIZUNO: Each one is about that piece — you know, just bent over like this, like a moving form.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: There are about a hundred of them.

MS. RIEDEL: A hundred of them. And just variations on moving — the idea of movement in clay?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, just the basic — pretty much same form, but it's — [inaudible] — a little color in it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So they were glazed. And a variety of colors, or pretty much monochromatic?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, monochromatic.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Interesting. So the very first sculptural pieces were very abstract —

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: — and very minimal.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Interesting. And then came this melting dinnerware.

MR. MIZUNO: Yes. Then screw and the melting dinnerware.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, and the screws, right. Okay.

And how did the screws come about? That was an — that was really related to learning English, yeah?

MR. MIZUNO: English. And I loved the mechanical part of it — trying to figure out if I, how do I make it. And if I

figure that out, I could actually throw them on the wheel.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So actually I threw them —

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: — all the thread and everything, just threw them.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, and the thread is thrown too.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's interesting. That's interesting.

And there's definitely sexual innuendo in those, and they're really — they are very — they're, again, a real sense of humor. And, again, that exploration of the going back and forth, I think, between Japanese and English, and looking at language, no?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. And where were those shown? Those were Dave Stuart too?

MR. MIZUNO: Dave Stuart.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: My first show.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And they were — they were porcelain. Is that right?

MR. MIZUNO: Screws?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, there were different one[s]. I did make some of the wood.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Out of wood, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. Which I have one in my collection. I did a porcelain and I did earthenware, and stoneware — large pieces of stoneware.

MS. RIEDEL: How large did they get?

MR. MIZUNO: The biggest one was eight foot.

MS. RIEDEL: Really. And how small was the smallest?

MR. MIZUNO: The small ones just about that big.

MS. RIEDEL: So six to eight inches, okay. So again, a huge range in scale.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: And some of them were painted.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Okay. Not even glazed; painted.

MR. MIZUNO: No, I mean that painted and glazed.

MS. RIEDEL: With glaze. Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: I should have said "decorated" — [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: And then were the eight-foot — was the eight-foot screw, was that thrown as well?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MIZUNO: Throw as one piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, biggest one was commissioned after the show. And I didn't know who the person was until a couple of months ago, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Really.

MR. MIZUNO: This person came, said, "Oh, you're the one that made the screws." How do you know that? "Because we used to have it" — his partner was the one that bought it — said, "We used to have it" — oh, you're the one that had it at each side on the bed? They said, "Yeah, that's correct." [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Which one what?

MR. MIZUNO: Each side on their bed.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, they had one on each side of the bed?

MR. MIZUNO: [Inaudible] — bed.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: The screws on each side.

MS. RIEDEL: The "screws." [Laughs.] That's great.

MR. MIZUNO: I didn't know where they put it, but I saw — one day I saw those photo in the magazine.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Okay. And that was how you knew where the "screws" were. So you'd made two?

MR. MIZUNO: Two.

MS. RIEDEL: As a commission?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And they were both eight feet tall. [Laughs.] And they had one on each side of the bed. [Laughs.] That's great. That's amazing.

MR. MIZUNO: [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: What a great way to discover where they — how lucky that you found them. You didn't know who had them; you didn't who'd ordered the commission?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, I still don't know, but this person who was a partner — he was his partner.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, I could find out, you know, where it's at now, but.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Somewhere in Hollywood. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That sounds right.

Let's talk a little bit about commissions. It sounds as if you've done commissions, then, from very early on?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. And you were willing to do them?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually, I don't enjoy doing commissions because of that — so much pressure you get. Because once people ask you to do something, they already have an idea what they want. They expect to see

the piece exactly how they think. And in ceramic it doesn't work that way.

But sometime you can't say no, so I take the commission. Like the one I'm doing now, this is the second piece, you know, because the first one didn't come out. It's really difficult. Especially the people saw the sculpture in a show —

MS. RIEDEL: Which sculpture?

MR. MIZUNO: It's the blue one right here.

MS. RIEDEL: The waterfall?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: But they say that's the wrong size.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: They want it to be a little bit narrower, taller and deeper.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: They're going to put it outside.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: But they still want it to be exact measurement. So measurement is fine, but it's already lost the balance, everything what I think; it's lost the interest. But I had to do it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So I did it. But it just didn't come out.

MS. RIEDEL: Is it the glaze?

MR. MIZUNO: It's the glaze.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So I refired it and it came out cracked.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MIZUNO: So I make a second.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you have to make another one.

MR. MIZUNO: I just finished making it. It has to fire again.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MR. MIZUNO: So commission is not my best. But some of the successful one[s] I have done — which is, I think, 2005, they bought a piece from the show —

MS. RIEDEL: Which show?

MR. MIZUNO: Light [ph] sculpture — *Water Drops* it is. [Inaudible.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: One of the big ones. So they said, "We're going to put this one in the living room, but outside the living room needs to be relandscaped." So if I am willing to do that, they will buy a piece. So I said, that's a deal.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: So let me do — however they want to do it. So I did it and it came out to be most satisfying commission I have done.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? The most satisfying?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: What about that one worked so well? Was it because they —

MR. MIZUNO: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Why was that one so satisfying?

MR. MIZUNO: I didn't know how it's going to come out, and it was so pleasing to see, you know, the finished part of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: And everyone is shocked and happy.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: So it was most satisfying thing, and at the same time, I got paid. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So this is what we were looking at on the computer, yeah?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, this is the one —

MS. RIEDEL: This inside; and then the outside, they're covered in moss. Is that correct?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. It's —

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: — a different kind of moss than I'm using. But this is the show I had with the piece they bought, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: This the piece, and they put in the — inside the living room by the window.

MS. RIEDEL: I think this is on your website too, isn't it?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: So they already have the piece. But I made a proposal to do — and I actually started building this with mud. [Inaudible.] Finished part is like this.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I see. So there's a wonderful dialogue that's established with that interior water drop, and then four or five —

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: — shapes outside that are very similar, except for the cone.

MR. MIZUNO: They call it their "contemporary Japanese garden," but it's — [laughs] — I don't think so.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: It's definitely not a Japanese garden, but that's what they call — some people.

MS. RIEDEL: It's some kind of contemporary garden —

MR. MIZUNO: [Laughs.] Some kind of contemporary.

MS. RIEDEL: — but probably not — [laughs] — Japanese.

And is that here in the Los Angeles area?

MR. MIZUNO: Long Beach.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, in Long Beach.

And this is — what year was this commissioned in, this one?

MR. MIZUNO: I think in 2006, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Two thousand six. So commissions were something you've done for 30 years, it sounds like?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. Actually, I only did one public artwork commission, which is the downtown central library water fountain.

MS. RIEDEL: A water fountain.

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, the whole park was designed by a famous landscape architect from San Francisco.

MS. RIEDEL: Who was that? Do you know the name?

MR. MIZUNO: Lawrence —

MS. RIEDEL: Lawrence?

MR. MIZUNO: Lawrence, what's his last name?

MS. RIEDEL: We can look. And what's the — which library is this? South —

MR. MIZUNO: Los Angeles Library, main branch.

MS. RIEDEL: The main branch of the LA library, okay.

And you designed the fountain for that. I don't think —

MR. MIZUNO: Lawrence Halprin.

MS. RIEDEL: — I've seen that. Oh, Lawrence Halprin, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Oh, that terrible person. He was — designed the park, and it turned out to be he's the one that want to do this water fountain. And I was chosen to do it. When I went to see him in San Francisco, he start talking to me, he said, "We will see if you are qualified or not."

And he started showing me what he want me to do. So I told him, I am chosen to do something I like to do. So he got mad at me, start — every meeting we had. After I got approved by library commission, and the city cultural affair[s] and everything, he made the whole thing change. He actually designed it by himself. But I already had a deposit — half of the money from the commission.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: So they had to find another spot for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MIZUNO: Water fountain — another small one.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: And they also had someone else in that, so two of us have to get together to do this one small one.

So I ended up doing something [that] really didn't mean anything to me. But I was committed and I couldn't back off. So I finished it, and something I never talk to the people and say I did this or anything.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So I'm — I don't want to be part of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: But, you know, that's the one commission that I — the one public art commission I did.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll, I think that's —

MR. MIZUNO: Not satisfied at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And when was that?

MR. MIZUNO: What year was that? We worked together on it. It's about 20 years ago?

MS. DOKAN: Less than 20 years ago.

MR. MIZUNO: Less than.

MS. RIEDEL: Less than 20? So a long time ago.

MR. MIZUNO: Long time ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

[END CD 1.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's actually very interesting because artists have very different feelings about commissions and some are happy to do them, it seems, because they stretch them in directions they might not have gone otherwise and others absolutely refuse to do them because they find them so unsatisfying and really frustrating. And it seems like you've had both experiences we've just heard — in extreme. That's one of the worst stories I think I've heard about commissions. That sounds incredibly frustrating. And here, you had a signed contract to do this foundation at this place.

MR. MIZUNO: Right. And no one could tell him to say, no, you can't do that because we already chose this honest [ph] way that no one said anything. That's how awful he was.

MS. RIEDEL: How odd. And here, you had to sign a contract to do a fountain at this particular place, this sort of fountain, and, no. And that's the one experience you've had with public artwork and I guess you're not in a rush to do that again. [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: No, so I never tried again.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, but in thinking about commissions, I'm thinking about a broader definition of the term with your work because I know you've designed — you've done landscape design as well; you've done restaurant interior design as well. Is there a restaurant you —

MR. MIZUNO: Landscaping and restaurant design, it's not actually comission. But just a restaurant is a — first. I did two. First one is a — well, actually both of them are sushi restaurants.

MS. RIEDEL: Right and they were started — both by Hiro Nishimura?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, the second one was Hiro Nishimura, a close friend, and love to eat his sushi. And I enjoyed making the dishes to use for ourselves, so I made all the dishes for him. Actually, I got paid for those but so at the same time, I decided I'd do the design for him since he didn't have a budget for a designer. That's the reason I did design but it's not — I don't know if I should commission.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative.]. And that's very close to here, isn't it? Just 10 miles or so from the restaurant? Yeah, I want to try and go see that. Try some of that sushi, too, but and is it still — your plates are on the wall? Is that correct?

MR. MIZUNO: The plates are on the wall.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, so the plates — did you make the plates that the food is served on as well?

MR. MIZUNO: When he opened, most of them. He still has a lot of them but now he didn't replace any. Now he uses something he bought. Some of them looked terrible, but what can you do.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] And you said you've done two restaurants for him, is that correct? When was the first and when was the second?

MR. MIZUNO: One of them is called Katsu.

MS. RIEDEL: Katsu, okay. And when did you do that?

MR. MIZUNO: That was — when was that. 1980.

MS. RIEDEL: In 1980?

MR. MIZUNO: Right before the whole — all this sushi got popular. And it sort of was about time to have a contemporary sushi restaurant. And we didn't have so many chefs from Japan. He was from Japan. So interested to do something new, so I designed a contemporary interior design with contemporary music and sushi chef wears a white shirt and tie, and I did a whole thing.

MS. RIEDEL: So you designed everything.

MR. MIZUNO: Everything. The whole concept.

MS. RIEDEL: The interior — the whole concept. Dishes, costume, walls, everything.

MR. MIZUNO: And that was the biggest hit.

MS. RIEDEL: Does that still exist?

MR. MIZUNO: No. Once Katsu got so successful and famous — all the chefs are the same way; they move onto a new thing, new place. And the plates are no longer there; too bad. But everyone knows about that — the whole art scene. Every dealer, artist and collector went there.

MS. RIEDEL: To Katsu?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. Nishimura is, in a way, safe.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And did you design the entire interior of that as well?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, but it's not as exciting as Katsu was because I didn't have that much interest anymore after doing Katsu. But I did help him choose the final decision. I did a counter, actually, with Japanese paper.

MS. RIEDEL: A counter with Japanese paper?

MR. MIZUNO: Yes, over resin.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so it's resin over the paper. Interesting. That's interesting; that's different. Had you seen that before?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually, this paper, the photographs with resin, but I got an idea. He didn't have any budget for the counter. I said, don't worry, I'll come up with something. At the last minute, I just decided, okay, I'll try and see what it looks like. So I did brushstrokes on paper, each strip, and pasted it on with resin. It came out pretty good.

MS. RIEDEL: So was that something that you imagined after the work that you'd done with fiberglass?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, okay, okay. That makes sense. That makes sense. Okay, I want to move us back — well, actually, I want to finish up some thoughts on commissions, too, because something else that you've done in terms of commissions is special-order functional wear. Is that right? Special-ordered dinnerware sets for special clients, too? Those were commissions as well, weren't they?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've done those — multiples — over time?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually, only a few people. Oh, actually, quite a bit, I guess, come to think of it. Some large, small. But the one I did for this art collector who is a movie director, a big collector, Dan Melnick.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And he's a movie director?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, he was a big collector in town. He commissioned me complete dinner set — a set of 10 or 12.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that because of Katsu and they had seen the work there?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, that, too. And after I had a show with a big plate on the wall. And that was one of the biggest commissions I did. He said, my budget is $1,000 a plate setting. So that was nice. So I did a whole new design. It wasn't easy but it was nice to do especially he was entertaining a lot with more collectors.

That was one of the nice dinner sets I had commissioned but the different one, like — there's an article that mentioned it, Vidal Sassoon.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I did read that.

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, I used to — his wife used to ask me — commission me all the time with — I was almost like their payroll. Every month, I'd take something, get paid and come back with a new commission on and off.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? All functional work that they wanted for the house?

MR. MIZUNO: All function, yeah. And it helped me in a way financially but sometimes, she would pile them all up on the cabinet randomly, open the cabinet and then the whole thing falls down. And she would call me and say, come see, look what happened because you're going to have to make more. So I got tired of doing the same thing.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I bet. Was it hard, too, to replicate them if they had to match the rest of the set?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually, she wasn't that particular, so it was okay. But definitely losing interest if people start using them that way.

MS. RIEDEL: It strikes me that the commission work may have been really important because you stopped working at Interpace in the late '70s, yeah? In '78, something like that. But you didn't teach. You hadn't been teaching. So was the commission a way to supplement your income as an artist, then?

MR. MIZUNO: Right. That's when you start showing people the one-man show. Though — [inaudible] — or *Dinner for Six*. I started showing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, because the very experimental work —

MR. MIZUNO: Because I was thinking, work has to sell. That's when I started having the big plates on the wall.

MS. RIEDEL: And those first plates on the wall, was that the first sense of really using the ceramic plates as a large-scale canvas because that seems like it was a big transition as well when you first had those plates on the wall and the form, the pattern, the surface design connected over all the plates. Was that the first time that you'd really begun to think of that as a canvas that way? Yeah. I mean, I imagine many of the small ones are small canvases but to go that scale and off the table literally onto the wall.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. But still, plates are plates.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] But that's something you've returned to over and over again. I think of the circle and the square in your work in the more linear pieces but the rounded form is something you've come back to over and over again.

MR. MIZUNO: I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. There must be something there that's appealing.

MR. MIZUNO: Well, I guess, its form is already there; it's open to almost anything.

MS. RIEDEL: There's inherent negative space once you start to put those circles together. There's always negative space between them.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I guess that's really pottery's basic form.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So was it important to maintain that, too, in terms of ceramic history?

MR. MIZUNO: I don't know if it's important or whatever. I don't think that way anymore but it definitely has that experience from the very beginning.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, that makes sense when I think about especially the history and the tradition of ceramics, that we can see the progression off the table and onto the wall but then still the round plates carry visually that long ceramic tradition.

MR. MIZUNO: The last one I did is those airplane plates. So lately, I haven't done any using the plates. I haven't gone back to the plate. Even that decision had nothing to do with the plates but I had painting a painting on the plates again.

MS. RIEDEL: And so were these painted on? Is there some sort of silkscreen as well?

MR. MIZUNO: No, just all hand-painted.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the title of this series?

MR. MIZUNO: Zero [1998].

MS. RIEDEL: That's right. And then these were the planes on the plates? Was that the first Zero series, the plates? And then we went into the planes, correct?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually, I did a smaller plane and then it got bigger and it got bigger in the grouping [ph]. Actually, these plates are the last one in the series. The last one in the Zero series.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Maybe I'll move it back to try and keep us here and moving in a little bit of a chronological order. Let's go back and — we talked about *Dinner for Six*, 1977, as a turning point in your career. And I think there have been significant changes in your career throughout.

Many artists have a sort of fluid, moving-through of their work over time. And it seems that there have been numerous points in your career where there have been significant changes. And the next one that occurs to me was in 1980 when you did the residency in Philadelphia at the Fabric Workshop. That seemed a big, new experimental phase in your work. Did it feel that way to you at the time?

MR. MIZUNO: Not really.

MS. RIEDEL: No? Would you talk about that because, as you say, that was when the program was just beginning, correct?

MR. MIZUNO: Just beginning. Her background was more interested in the craft. Today, it's all conceptual. Successful, too. So that's the reason I went but it didn't — after that, I didn't change anything.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the first time you'd started working in something that wasn't ceramic? Was it the first time you'd gone to — because this was work in fabric as well?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, but — no, actually, I didn't get to work that much. I just designed and looked over to see how it's done. They had a technician in there. I didn't do anything actually. I just watched them do it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] For six months, you just watched them?

MR. MIZUNO: No, no, that didn't take six months.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. How long were you there?

MR. MIZUNO: Just two weeks.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, just two weeks. Okay, all right.

MR. MIZUNO: Maybe you were thinking about —

MS. RIEDEL: The residency in Omaha. Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, that definitely changed my way of thinking. Not thinking, but — you want me to talk about that one?

MS. RIEDEL: Your way of working? I definitely want to get there but I just want to make sure that we talk a little — before we jump to that, I want to make sure that we cover what happened before then. And so that residency in Philadelphia wasn't especially significant for you?

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. But that was when you also designed for ceramic and fabric as well? Is that correct?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you designing functional ware, tablecloths, napkins to go with plates? Was that the idea behind it?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So that was almost a continuation of the more functional work.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And that, in many ways, seems to have been almost the end of that real focus on functional work.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So then, yes, let's by all means talk about Omaha and all that; how that came about. That was 1987. That was a year of big changes.

MR. MIZUNO: Tell you why its big change was I had a life before married to someone else and it was a process of getting divorced, so I needed to get out of here. And I was always looking for someplace to make a big piece, so this was the perfect opportunity. They had a space and a big kiln and I could be gone away for six months.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, this was Jun Kaneko's space in Omaha, yes?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, it's not his space but it's a program called Alternative Worksite, the Bemis Foundation. So I took that offer and made a *California Landscape* [1987], came back with it. So that was experiment experience with a large-scale sculpture successfully. It was always my dream and it finally happened.

When I came back here, I didn't have this studio. Half of the house was a studio and half was for living. So that changed the whole thing. I had to build a studio.

MS. RIEDEL: Because now you'd made large work and you wanted to continue. And how big were those pieces?

MR. MIZUNO: They were close to 7 feet and this wide and this tall.

MS. RIEDEL: It was a whole 'nother way of working, though. You had to use forklifts and everything.

MR. MIZUNO: Right. It's nothing you can lift by hand. It's a whole new way of working. And I guess a whole new sculptor, too, of me. So both ways, a whole new way.

MS. RIEDEL: That was probably one of the very few locations in the country at that time where you could work in ceramic at that large scale, yes?

MR. MIZUNO: I didn't know any other place. And actually, I didn't pay — [inaudible]. They just gave me space and gave me a kiln to use. But gas I had to pay; materials I had to pay. But still, that was best for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And you spent six months there?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, off and on, but I came back in the between time, drying time. But altogether, six months.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the inspiration to work that large? You said you'd always wanted to do it. This is the first time we've really discussed it. What in particular made you want to stretch the scale that large?

MR. MIZUNO: I think it's just a plain challenge. I guess my whole career has been a challenge of something new or something. So it was time to move on; challenge for that big scale.

MS. RIEDEL: And these pieces also got very minimal in sensibility as well. There are no more painted images on the — [inaudible, cross talk].

MR. MIZUNO: No, I didn't want to get into that. So I actually was surprised I even used different colors. But it was successful and I sold those pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: In what collection are they?

MR. MIZUNO: A museum in Japan. One bought all five of them.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you intend them all to stay together?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I was hoping, but if not, I was — actually, I had a show here at Jan Turner.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right. She showed those.

MR. MIZUNO: But, sadly, oh, another Mineo, something new. And it's totally different. They didn't know what to think about it. So I couldn't sell even one. I was willing to sell individually but no one was interested. So I had offers to have shows in Japan and it ended up in the museum.

MS. RIEDEL: And they were shipped to Japan. That must've been an extraordinary feat in itself, getting those

over there.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. How much do they weigh, Mineo?

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, they're pretty thick, so maybe 800 pounds each.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, that's extraordinary. It's interesting, too, because those pieces were preceded. I'm thinking we didn't really touch on some of the pieces that I think as the most — the most — historical reference in terms of your work. I'm thinking of *Octopus 1500 B.C* [1983], which made me think of that famous reference to that Greek pot, yeah? That beautiful — I think from Crete. And then *Dragon* [1983], the Chinese tri-color. So this, to come with the California landscape, was, again, a huge change from what you'd done before.

MR. MIZUNO: *Octopus B.C.* and *Dragon* — I was scheduled to have a show. I didn't know what to do until the last minute.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that your normal way of working?

MR. MIZUNO: No, that's not true, but it happened to be — she just said, here's the opening and you're supposed to have it. So I said, well, I'm going to have one with looking back on all I had done in the past. And I just chose my favorite, important — the vases. Chose 12 vases and made a pedestal for each piece to elevate all this pretty much the same height. So I wanted to look at each piece in the same perspective by putting it on a pedestal.

MS. RIEDEL: So these were 12 vases selected throughout history and throughout culture that you felt were especially significant ceramic bases. I didn't know that. What else was there besides the *Octopus* and the *Dragon*?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, some of them, I just made a contemporary version: martini glasses, coffee cups, spoons. And these were one of the — actually, the original ones are glass.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Oh, yeah, that beautiful picture.

MR. MIZUNO: So it looks kind of weird if you look at it individually but when you see — there's a photograph of an illustration. I think it was successful.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Interesting. And so you went back throughout ceramic history and picked the 12 vase forms or container forms that you felt were more significant.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was your criteria for choosing those?

MR. MIZUNO: Uh, I don't know. I don't remember exactly. But I went back and forth and spent quite a bit of time — oh, some of them I scratched it, thinking glaze was going to be on it. And some of the new technique came in like sandblasting and — so in a short time, that was a big change.

But I thought it was done. I didn't have to go back to the same concept anymore. That's why the *California Landscape* came so different.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So with these 12 vases, just following that a little bit further, it was an opportunity for you to look at ceramics historically and culturally. But also it sounds like it was an opportunity for you to experiment with new techniques. So as you were choosing what you were going to do, you were also looking for inspiration about how you might challenge yourself technically.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Can you give me an example?

MR. MIZUNO: This one, like a martini glass?

MS. RIEDEL: The martini glasses.

MR. MIZUNO: It's so — glass is so fragile; I wanted some kind of pedestal to go with it. And almost this was impossible for me to make. It was a struggle but this piece was successful without a — [inaudible, cross talk].

MS. RIEDEL: Is that all ceramic as well?

MR. MIZUNO: It's all ceramic and one piece, fired one piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MIZUNO: So it was a challenge technically.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. And those are all individual columns?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. And the pedestal — and then you did all of the pedestals as well.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And is this stoneware, earthenware, porcelain, sculpture mix?

MR. MIZUNO: This is earthenware; all of them are earthenware.

MS. RIEDEL: Earthenware, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And this Chinese piece, I had to do it — [inaudible, cross talk].

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: And this is part of the sandblasting.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, in the pedestal.

MR. MIZUNO: In the pedestal. The octopus.

MS. RIEDEL: The octopus is wonderful. And that's sandblasted as well, yeah. And that seems to be something that is consistent throughout your career, is that drive to experiment technically.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. And that ties in with the idea that — or what seems to me, again, that consistent desire to follow whatever your curiosity is, whatever your idea is, and find materials and techniques that will back that up.

Would you say that many of your ideas or the majority of your ideas are related in some way to the history of ceramics as well as your own personal experience? Those seem to me to be two of the major motivations behind much of the work.

MR. MIZUNO: I don't know if — [inaudible] — or not. But I do think about the past and if this was done. If it was, then how — and I look into before I actually start making it.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you give me an example, what you might be thinking of in terms of looking into the past?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, let's say something — I was working on Greek series.

MS. RIEDEL: Greek series, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MIZUNO: I had actually made a number of pieces and based on —

MS. RIEDEL: Those amphora, right, yes. Mm-hmm.

MR. MIZUNO: This form and they were useful as an offering.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, for making offerings. Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So that really made me interested to get in farther. And this whole series of pieces I did, titled like [ph] — actually the steps, but I call them a flight. And this piece's flat is called rest. And wall piece was the main piece of the face.

MS. RIEDEL: These were all based on the amphora shape?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, for all of these. So that was one of the examples; I did get back into the history of the —

MS. RIEDEL: Is it a deconstructivist approach to examining the form as a way of having insight into it, how it was used over time and in different cultures? Or what about that particular form intrigued you to take it apart and

examine it in so many different ways, three-dimensionally, more two-dimensionally — on the wall, on a pedestal?

MR. MIZUNO: I don't know. I don't —

MS. RIEDEL: It's a pretty intriguing form. I mean, as a form it's pretty complex.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: It's certainly — I mean, you can deconstruct that and have a lot to look at as opposed to another form that's much more simple might not be quite as interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: It's true. But this turned out to be — the most difficult part was finding out, for me to find out why is a [ph] Japanese doing a Greek? So I think it wasn't totally a waste, but it was definitely a part of my — a successful part of my past. But I just went through that. I had to go through what I had to do. But that's the reason — I feel that that's probably part of the struggling so long. I've been doing something so off from my background.

MS. RIEDEL: So it sounds as if the first part of your career was a trajectory away from where you'd come and your history and your own background.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And to experiment and do something completely new and different. And then it's been a rediscovery, a re-examination —

MR. MIZUNO: [Laughs.] Rediscovery. I'm getting old or something.

MS. RIEDEL: Of — yeah. [They laugh.] "I'm getting old or something." That's interesting. And so it took you to L.A. and it took you to Greece and it's taken you to all of these different — through martini glasses to work a way back.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, maybe you had to get far enough away to be able to see it.

MR. MIZUNO: True. That's what I feel, too. Something I had to do to realize that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, when I think about this form, the other quintessential extraordinary ceramic form I always think of is the tea bowl. And so maybe it was helpful to be able to see the tea bowl and see the history of ceramics in Japan, which is extraordinary, by going and really examining ceramics in Greece, which has another extraordinary history of ceramics.

MR. MIZUNO: Right. I mean, that's what I thought. I mean, Chinese and Greek — actually Greek is the one that's the oldest ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: And so different from what I think of as Japanese ceramics.

MR. MIZUNO: It's definitely different.

MS. RIEDEL: With the emphasis on drawing and narrative, it feels about as different from Japanese ceramics historically as I can think of a ceramic tradition being. So it's interesting to go — I mean, I think that's a way to identify now, is to go someplace to the other extreme so you can come back and look at where you came from from a distance.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that all conscious or just something that you think about in retrospect?

MR. MIZUNO: These days I think about it a lot. This one artist, painter, Japanese painter, Masami Teraoka, do you remember he used to paint Japanese watercolor paint — looks like watercolor paint — with Japanese samurais [ph] eating McDonalds French fries.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. MIZUNO: He was so successful with that, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: But the latest painting show he had, it was like a very European, Christian. No one knew what to think about it — terrible. I mean, he didn't even get reviewed.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: He shows at the same gallery I show at. So I was there, interested to find out what people think about him. But I knew why, I mean, people was going to be confused. I knew people were going to be. So I was interested to find out what was going to happen. It turned out to be a disaster.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. I was thinking about — as I was thinking about your work, I was at the Asian art museum in San Francisco recently with — just taking a look through the collection. And they had a couple of his pieces on the wall and had a beautiful California landscape, but done in that very stylized Japanese — a series of panels. And it made me think of your *California Landscape* just in terms of seeing the California landscape from a distance and being able to see it in a way that I don't feel I could see it because I don't have enough distance to see it and also with a whole different tradition, way of examining. It was very — it's interesting, I think, to think about as the back and forth, especially between Japanese and California art. It seems like there has been an interesting exchange the past few decades, in particular — more so even than that, in particularly ceramics.

MR. MIZUNO: So that's the — in a way, I mean, I'm conscious these days about it. Teraoka's case is very obvious that people feel — people expect to see something Japanese from Japanese people.

MS. RIEDEL: And what do you think of that? Do you think that's limiting? Do you think it makes sense?

MR. MIZUNO: No, it doesn't make sense, but nothing — you can't go against it. That's what I feel.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you feel like you've experienced that yourself?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I definitely did.

MS. RIEDEL: And because your work has changed so frequently over time, has that been difficult in terms of dealers and exhibitions, museums, to show continually new work?

MR. MIZUNO: I think.

MS. RIEDEL: It's not like somebody can say, okay, we can count on you to always produce this exact same thing, a new variation on that every single show.

MR. MIZUNO: No, I — it's definitely not helping to — that's the reason it's hard for me to find galleries. Well, actually, this new dealer in New York is — to me — is the best thing that happened to me. It feels like a lifetime achievement. That's what I feel. And they don't even want to look at my old work.

MS. RIEDEL: How refreshing. You must be happy to have somebody that's interested, that interested in where you are now and where you want to go.

MR. MIZUNO: And we talked a little bit about, you know, ceramic and contemporary art. And he was saying, "You're not in the group of that ceramic — [inaudible] — are you? I said, "I hope not." That's what I said. He is — Jack Shainman is accepted as not a ceramic artist but a contemporary artist; just happened to be my media is in ceramic. So that was a little — that's why I'm saying it's the best thing that ever happened to me. I mean, that has been my goal for all of my life.

I'm not saying I don't want to be a craftsman or anything, but if you are a craftsman, where are you going to show? How are you going to survive? And it's getting more and more difficult. I guess in the '60s, '70s, still okay; but today, I mean, if you — a potter, even a good one, where are you going to show? How are you going to survive? That's the part I hate to be — call myself a potter or a craftsman.

MS. RIEDEL: That's really interesting because that's certainly a gulf or a divide, that divide between craft and fine art that is talked about repeatedly by artists working in ceramic. And so it sounds like you've struggled with that for your entire career until now you feel —

MR. MIZUNO: Right, because I knew the answer. And they said, "Oh, we don't show ceramic." They don't even want to look at what I do. Most of them are just, "No, we don't do this."

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. No matter the fact that they're abstract sculptural forms that could be made out of fiberglass.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you find that then even with the fiberglass work, once you — because you're known for work in ceramic then galleries were not even interested in looking at the work?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually, galleries are surprised: Why is a ceramic artist making with fiberglass? People don't collect it the same way.

MS. RIEDEL: And why is a ceramic artist working in — why did you start to work with fiberglass? What inspired you to do that?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, I wanted to do something that ceramic cannot do, which is I wanted to use a photograph. With the fiberglass you could inlay the photograph because this Zero series; I was going back to — it was almost like my family back soul searching journey. It started when I saw the Japanese zero fighter plane, which — in Japan — they were destroyed: everything. They had — I was shocked to see some private collector would own two of the zero planes.

I was trying to explain to my son, who is 10 or something, "See what this plane is about." And I always associated it with my father in the World War. He wasn't a kamikaze pilot, but a zero factory was really close by Nagoya. So he was connected with that. So this zero has been always in my mind, always remember my father in connection together. So that's the reason I started making — instead of explaining to my son, we both made up a clay piece, Zero piece. That's how we started. It got bigger.

Towards the end I wanted to use four images. And that's where the fiberglass came in. This one is from my parents' wedding. That one is a cherry blossom tree in Hiroshima memorial park. And that big drop is a memorial building in Hiroshima. That's where she is from. So we go back and forth there. So that's why I really wanted to use those.

One plane I put my father's portrait all over. And I had the plane. My son carried [ph] that plane, took a photo of that. But the other one is — so it went on and on. It was fun. And the last one is a painting on the plane.

Plates —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay. And is this the piece that you called *Wings* [2003] or it's like —

MR. MIZUNO: *Wings.*

MS. RIEDEL: It's beautiful and it's so striking because the pattern reads at first, of course, as so abstract. And then only on very close examination do you begin to see the narrative or the story there.

MR. MIZUNO: The story is a plane without a main body because my sister and me, brought up by my mother, herself, she could never get married because we didn't know where he died, actually; the body never came back. So everyone said, don't give up your hope; he'll be coming back sometime. So she was all by herself. And it was really one of those sad war stories.

MS. RIEDEL: Because she never could move on or close one part of her life and move on to the next.

MR. MIZUNO: Yes. She worked without a main body; so that's why I just put the wings.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I saw first a visual of that, a two-dimensional photo of it. And it was very powerful, but it's really a pleasure to see it here in person because it's incredibly strong. And the pattern seems to come so much to life with these pieces with the photographs. The patterns become so incredibly complex in the work.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. So we enjoyed that part. Actually we moved on to something without a — not just the Zero series, but we used it — not too many encouraging from the people's reaction. That's why it just stopped. I may go back to using a photograph again someday.

MS. RIEDEL: Your work with the Zero series became much more personal.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Much more narrative, much more personal.

MR. MIZUNO: That's something I had in mind somewhere. I just had to get it out and finish it. So the Zero series is all finished. It's done.

MS. RIEDEL: The Zero series is done. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It's interesting — and it sounds as if you felt this way, too — you had to get away from it far enough so you could see it and address it. And then once you've addressed it you can move on to the next section.

And the work feels to have gotten increasingly minimal. Does it feel that way to you, too?

MR. MIZUNO: I don't know. Used to be that way, but —

MS. RIEDEL: No? You see the complexity of the glazes, I'm sure — those layers and layers of glaze.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. What I — now I'm really into colors, multiple colors. So maybe the shape is really simple, minimal, but the way I work, I mean, once you see the — and how it's glazed upright. It's all — [inaudible] — and every one of the drawing [ph], they coat it, you know, how I apply the glazes and everything.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's very methodical.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, and very complex?

MR. MIZUNO: Very complex.

MS. RIEDEL: And so let's talk a little bit about the working process maybe, which has changed drastically with all of your pieces as you've gone from dinnerware to the Zero series on the plates to the water drops and the teardrops. The working process has changed completely, no? I mean, you don't have a consistency and a way of working. Or do you see one? It seems like you're constantly having to find a new way to work in order to actualize what you —

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, it's always — have to develop the technique for each series is different.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. The one thing that's consistent is the consistency to constantly change, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Right. The water drop was one thing. I mean, they are made — the best way to make it is solid. But, of course, you cannot fire a piece in the kiln in the solid form. So I had to cut it in half between the drying stage, take some sections out, put it back together.

MS. RIEDEL: And people — I mean, technically, that's extraordinary. I mean, people may not understand ceramics.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. It doesn't look like much technique but it is. It's a pretty complicated thing: timing and everything.

MS. RIEDEL: It's very complicated, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Then how I'm going to vertical tear-drop shapes. They were totally different. Actually it's all technique made out of coils. Instead of going on the wheel, I go around the piece and just build it up. Once you start, drying condition is so perfect. So they all have to be done within a couple of weeks. Once you start it, you can't stop. You just keep going every day.

So it's a totally different technique and a different way of thinking. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And then what about the glazing? That seems like that's something that you have evolved over 30 years. Can we talk about how that has evolved, your sense of glazing?

MR. MIZUNO: I think — I like ceramics because of the glaze, like I said before. And I just don't understand the people who work in clay and they're trying to make something look different. I mean, there are artists — especially more up north in the San Francisco area — this lady used to make a bag, little bag.

MS. RIEDEL: Like Marilyn Levine.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Or Richard Shaw, that —

MR. MIZUNO: Richard Shaw makes cards, stack them up, and books. Last time I saw his show and they look like a little paper; you just can't tell. I touched it after. Gallery people weren't looking. They'd be so mad.

But I just don't get it. I mean, to me, why bother with the clay? So difficult, try to make something looks like a book. Why can't he use just paper or even a plastic? The reason I use clay is because of the glaze quality I love. If it could be done in plastic, I would do it in the plastic. But it's — those glaze qualities you cannot imitate with anything else. It has to be glaze. That's the only reason I struggle with the clay material.

MS. RIEDEL: Is because of the glaze quality.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. And the glaze quality — it's not just the color or the glossiness or matte. That's not it. To me it's a glaze movement. It's all — glaze lines [ph] from top to bottom. Every piece I fire, the bottom of the kiln is all part of the glaze run [ph] from the piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, interesting, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And those — especially the vertical one — it runs [ph] but so slowly. They just don't drip like water. And it's a long process. Some of them it takes a few hours from there to there, you know? So that slowness of all of that will show in the — [inaudible]. Maybe not everyone, but I can see them. That's what really excites me about glaze quality; glaze moves inside the kiln. That's what I call glaze quality.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And so when you say "move," you mean literally moves — because I know it changes from powder, of course, to glass. I mean, it changes chemically. But you're interested in the movement you see. Interesting. And it strikes me as amazing that many of these pieces are fired multiple times?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. With some of them it's not possible. They would crack.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, because that strikes me as courting disaster. [They laugh.] If it comes out once and it's okay, you think, good. But to do it multiple times is risky.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, the last minute could blow the whole thing. It's the most difficult part of it.

MS. RIEDEL: And is there a depth or a layering that you're hoping to get by this multiple firings? Is that the reason for it?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And is it something that you feel you can't replicate with paint?

MR. MIZUNO: No. It's just — well, actually, if you're a painter, you could say, yeah; but I'm not. I don't know that much. Sometimes it looks okay, but if the glaze is thin it's not right for me. So I have to add more glaze. That little piece I'm sending to New York, I wanted to have the piece pink. And it came out pink; it's fine. But I just didn't see anything exciting. So I decided to put yellow over it, see what comes out. And it turned out to be — it's not a pink; it's not a yellow. It's — to me I see both. That's what — almost took a chance on that. But it came out to be something surprising. It's not an accident, but surprisingly pleasing.

MS. RIEDEL: Sorry, the — "It's not accident and it's not surprise; it's" —

MR. MIZUNO: Did it please me, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: So that really attracted me to get on glaze quality. That's the part I get excited about.

MS. RIEDEL: So it sounds as if you have an idea and an expectation, but you'd like it to show you something that even you haven't imagined in it.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. I think there is that quality of glaze that nothing else has.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Because paint, if you put it on, it's very deliberate. You have a sense of where it's going to go —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: — or you get an immediate sense within 10 minutes of how it's going to wind up. Whereas a glaze you really don't. There's a real quality of the unknown.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, you just don't know. And if you try to repeat it again it may not come out the same.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. Chances are good it won't. [They laugh.] Right. Okay —

[End disc two.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art with Mineo Mizuno in the artist's home and studio in Los Angeles, California, on September 8, 2009, disc number two.

We were talking about Omaha —

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And the fact that it was significant for you not only as a change in scale but as the arrival of color in earnest in the work.

MR. MIZUNO: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: What enabled that? Were you looking for something different? Was there something available at Jun's studio in terms of color that you hadn't had access to before?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually I took all this color from here.

MS. RIEDEL: From the California landscape?

MR. MIZUNO: I'd prepare everything I wanted to do. Even I had a drawing of this and I just got there and did it exactly what I wanted and I didn't want to waste any time.

MS. RIEDEL: So when you arrived, you already knew exactly what you wanted to do?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So you knew there was going to be a huge change in scale and that you were going to really embrace color in earnest.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: And once I got there building this shape I ran the city's as a test like that with the color mixed and ended up using just one color on each piece instead of mixing colors and make the patterns.

MS. RIEDEL: And are these glazes, engobes?

MR. MIZUNO: These are just glaze over this, but it's different layers.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've talked about the importance of movement, the glaze's movement.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And so this must have been something you were looking at closely.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, this was already — the movement was there and when you look at it individually, it's really like looking at landscape, like this green on looks like, or this particular green one looks like a Chinese painting.

MS. RIEDEL: It does, absolutely, a Chinese landscape painting.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And so the texture became very significant too, no?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there a particular reason why you chose to focus on these colors?

MR. MIZUNO: That's the — I don't know about how my color selection — is always odd but actually I had more colors but these the ones that came out successfully.

What else I had? Yellow and I had a navy blue — not navy blue, bright blue, purple, but in this group I had one more, brown, didn't go with the piece. So I decided only go five. I still have a brown one which is my favorite one. I didn't want to sell so I'm still keeping for myself.

MS. RIEDEL: It's here, and these are the pieces that are all in the museum in Japan?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, this is shot from the museum.

MS. RIEDEL: It was shortly after this, shortly after this exhibition or your residency, then you started the stacked horizontal paintings.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And you said the reason for that was — I'll let you put it in your own words.

MR. MIZUNO: Well, just the result of mixing these colors together and running a test with a strip ball of clay, just to see how much they move.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: And the result of that is just to make a pattern out of it, big painting, which is possible with a small scale.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, so you can still have a very large scale final piece by firing a number of small strips.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, and these pieces I think are so interesting because they take the idea of a canvas on the wall, which I think of as some of those early ceramic round plates on the wall, making a canvas, which just changes the whole form of the canvas, it changes the whole feeling of it. But it's still circles and squares in many ways.

MR. MIZUNO: It's kind of tricky. It's fired — actually, you hold it like this, put your hand on this part.

MS. RIEDEL: And really colorful, really bright. It's interesting too because right around this time, it seems in '89, right around the time you were doing these, it seems that you began a series of exhibitions in Japan as well.

MR. MIZUNO: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And up to that point you'd been showing it seems primarily in the U.S. but this marked the period — it seems like —

[Cross talk.]

MR. MIZUNO: I never interested to showing in Japan. I don't know why exactly, but mostly because I'd never sought out to be accepted. It's so different from what they do there and I never had a chance to even pursue a gallery in Tokyo until I met this person in Gifu who was my art dealer.

MS. RIEDEL: What was his or her name?

MR. MIZUNO: Kumpei Kouketsu.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And his gallery I had two shows, three shows?

MS. DOKAN: Two shows.

MR. MIZUNO: Two shows and that led me to when I finished this landscape.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: This gallery in Tokyo, which is not a gallery, department store. It's gallery but inside a department store owned by the department store. There's a lot of those in Japan, all the galleries.

MS. RIEDEL: Sort of like a Takashimaya sort of idea?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, each department store has an art gallery inside a store.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: And was the last time — first time and the last time. I tell why because they are — they run the show only one week.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my goodness, wow.

MR. MIZUNO: And every week they have a show goes out for one week and then another show.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow, once a week?

MR. MIZUNO: Once a week.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's normal?

MR. MIZUNO: That's normal.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: They don't stop.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: They don't close another weekend and have a new show, nothing like that. Every week, you take it out, a new one comes in. The next day it's already open.

MS. RIEDEL: I guess that's the department store part of the gallery aspect, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, so they don't care. Once you're out, they're dealing with the new person and you just forget about them.

MS. RIEDEL: So if it doesn't sell that week?

MR. MIZUNO: That's it.

MS. RIEDEL: That's it. Interesting, very different idea.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, very different and of course nothing was sold. I mean, this scale, everybody just goes woo.

MS. RIEDEL: So was that where you were showing the *California Landscape* piece, in this store?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the name of this store, this gallery?

MR. MIZUNO: Seibu.

MS. RIEDEL: Seibu?

MR. MIZUNO: Seibu.

MS. RIEDEL: Seibu, okay, oh yes, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And at that time, other people who saw the show were interested in me.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay

MR. MIZUNO: The one in Yamaguchi, place called Hagi.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, yes.

MR. MIZUNO: That gallery sold these five pieces to museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay and is that Saitoan?

MR. MIZUNO: It's Saitoan.

MS. RIEDEL: Saitoan, okay, and in 1989, it seems like up until that point you'd been showing exclusively in the U.S. In 1989, there are four exhibitions in Japan.

MR. MIZUNO: Well some of them were the same, moved.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, this piece, *California Landscape*, was shown in four different locations. Is that it?

MR. MIZUNO: No, just the two.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: I showed these at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: The stacked paintings?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: So once create a connection, another one, another one, but —

MS. RIEDEL: And how was the work received?

MR. MIZUNO: Not too well.

MS. RIEDEL: Not too well? Interesting, so you were invited and dealers were excited about it but then the clientele —

MR. MIZUNO: Japan is that way. I mean, they're big collector or nothing but they have to do something different. So they would try but just for the show, I mean, they can't have every week have a successful ceramic show. They only have a few big artists that they will sell and the rest of them are just trying to show we could do something different. So I kind of feel I was used for that.

MS. RIEDEL: And is there a sense, as I sometimes have in the States, that this work may have been shown, what, in '89, but then 10 years later, in '99, perhaps interest in this sort of work would be growing?

Did you find — have you had that experience that while the reception might not have been in sales, which you would have liked when it was first shown, that then later in time as people see more innovative work like that it becomes more accepted and there's more interest?

MR. MIZUNO: No, I found out there is people who buy expensive, like antique paintings and stuff, it's those groups and there's today a group of people who buy some young artists' paintings, not a lot but some, but come to ceramics, it's different. The only people who buy ceramics is traditional people. So they look at, oh, interesting, but no one would buy like that. It's only museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: But today, all the museums after bubble busted in late '80s in Japan, none of the museums had budget to buy new acquisitions and there's no interest.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. How frustrating.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, it's so cut clean and cold.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, and it's interesting because I might have thought that given the long and innovative history of ceramics in Japan or at least — well not — well yeah, innovative over time, that it might be especially embraced, given the history of the medium in the country, but no, it sounds the antithesis, that it's much easier to show and sell the work here, not that it's easy here.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, that's what all the artists in Japan think.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that it's much easier here?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: Today, ceramic artists — my friend, he works in a traditional way. He's the only one selling well, successfully. If you look, they all make the tea bowls anyway because that's only source of income. But some of the people make sculpture too. I think that that's the bad attitude. You can't survive with just the sculpture so we make tea bowls at same time.

But they can't survive either way. Well, they do sell some of the bowls but not enough to survive. So they either teach or they have a wealthy family. They don't have to make money. That's the only people who could survive in Japan, just such a person survive by selling their artwork, especially clay sculptures. It's sad but that's the way it is.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems that a large number of artists in the U.S., not all, but a large number of artists in the U.S. also teach to supplement the income of their work.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And it seems extraordinary that you have been able to support yourself as an artist completely since late '70s, yeah, early '80s.

MR. MIZUNO: Because I don't know any ceramics artists today still surviving just by working. They all teach or some other support. Elsa Rady is the only one.

MS. RIEDEL: Elsa Rady.

MR. MIZUNO: But she lived on a trust fund. So she doesn't have to worry about selling. Adrian Saxe, she has been always teaching, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, absolutely.

MR. MIZUNO: So I don't know anyone.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't either, and does Jun teach?

MR. MIZUNO: Not anymore but he taught most of the time.

MS. RIEDEL: And so for you, did commissions sort of fill that gap?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: And doing some functional work or some commissioned dinner sets, that sort of thing.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, and yeah because it seems that there was a group of shows in Japan from '89 to say '98, so maybe a nine-year period and then really not again and I was wondering why that was.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, because just didn't make sense.

MS. RIEDEL: But how wonderful that the *California Landscape* is still in that collection.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you show all sculptural work in those exhibitions in Japan? Did you show any of the functional work at all?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually I did have a couple shows with all the functional and I did sell some of that.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that better received in general than the sculptural work?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: But it's so much work to ship it over there and people who — they thought it was okay but mostly just interesting. I mean, they don't love my work. They just thought they're collecting something different or they need a gift or something like that.

So it wasn't worth going through all the energy in shipping over there. I still have a lot of them in storage in Japan, the functional pieces. You don't know if you want to send them back, spending a lot of money.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you have to pay for the return shipping.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, not only the shipping, you have to go through the customs. It's a big hassle.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I bet. I know I want to talk about the Zero series in depth but since we were just looking at the *Water Drops* maybe let's talk about those this afternoon and then we can pick up with Zero tomorrow.

MR. MIZUNO: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: We were just looking at some of the *Water Drops* with moss on them and these — the *Water Drops* are interesting because you've been working on them as a series for a long time now.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, about 10 years.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: How did those first come about because they were completely different at the time when you started those than anything you'd done before.

MR. MIZUNO: The *Water Drops* I think one, putting color in, I didn't know how, maybe some of them a tiny bit of color, a trial, but just to kind of almost black glaze I'd been using for 10 years. I really wanted to bring in color. I kept thinking one day we went to Japan and I saw the moss growing on the stone, those lanterns, stone lanterns.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. MIZUNO: Was covered in moss, beautiful green, so I said there is a beautiful color and I said if it grows on the stone, why not on the ceramic.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: So start looking at moss all over and I'd never thought we had so much moss in L.A. but it turned out there's enough of it. So first I thought I would just grow them on the shape and I just made a little plastic greenhouse and plant the seeds and water every day with a little window to peek through at the end of the day.

MS. RIEDEL: How are they doing?

MR. MIZUNO: Just to follow — they started finally tiny coming up and all of a sudden I realized that this is not art, something I create. I'm just planting something on my shape. So I said this is wrong. So I stopped. I said it's got to be something more creative than this. That's when I started drilling a hole and planting them individually. Then it became more like this is something I want to do.

Even if they start growing on the top and spreading that's fine. But you just can't have a plain empty shape and let them grow the way they — whatever comes out. I thought it might be beautiful but that's not right. It didn't sound right to me. It wasn't comfortable enough to just do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So that's where the early stage of just seeing those moss patterns.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, the pattern seems important, yeah. But it's interesting; the color was the principle or the primary motivation.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, and then at the same time it seems that a whole environmental angle came in with those pieces. Were you thinking about that?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, thought about that and the more I thought about it, it's so right, connected with the water and I got all excited. The more I look at it with the moss everywhere I go.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah and there was a wonderful story you were saying when we were looking at the studio about how you take a bike ride every morning and sometimes you'll —

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, my bike ride and find the moss and just put into my backpack.

MS. RIEDEL: And bring it home.

MR. MIZUNO: And bring it home.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a great image and then actually you said they do create almost their own little microclimate. They can dry out and then with water they'll come back.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think about that? Do you think about a spiritual quality to those pieces?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, definitely.

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, first of all, when I saw that in the temple, that's how definitely I got a strong sense of that and I don't know if they intend to make it — let them grow more or if they are trying to clean the place, they would scrape it off like our mother does, grows all around the house, so she thinks it's getting all messy look, shabby, not taken care of. So she would kill them.

MS. RIEDEL: Just scrape them all off.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Throw them away.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, but there in the shrines and the temples, they would just leave them. So maybe there's some spiritual thinking behind that, keep it that way.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think that time, time is very important in your work, time becoming visual, like the sense of those drips running down and how long they take.

MR. MIZUNO: Right, it's true and the moss, it's trying to grow that full grown size probably takes a long, long time. I don't know exactly how long. But it's not a couple years.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, you're thinking of what you've seen on some of the temples that could have been growing for years and years and years.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, years and years.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: You've seen my website?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes those lanterns on the front, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Must be a long time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, that's true.

MR. MIZUNO: We went to a moss garden in Kyoto, which I'd never been, it was kind of — in a way it was disappointing because that's something I was thinking like more spiritual thing but it's sort of kind of sort of more decorative than spiritual. Maybe the season that we went was early in the spring. It wasn't quite right time. But I think about a lot, like I said, I take my tea with myself and I get a spiritual feeling.

MS. RIEDEL: Having tea out in the woods with the moss?

MR. MIZUNO: Tea out in the woods with the moss.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's such an extraordinary material in itself. I mean, the color is, as you said, so vibrant, so unique. It's very fragile but at the same time it's very strong.

MR. MIZUNO: Very strong. They don't actually need the soil. All they need is moisture from the air.

MS. RIEDEL: Which connects back to your interest in water as well, too, just a little bit of water somewhere would be enough to help that moss grow.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting too it can flourish in so many different places and if left alone, as you say, in some of those temples, it can exist for ages and yet this moss right out here in you studio that was brown and almost dried up, you took a little bit of water and in a day or two it's coming back and green.

MR. MIZUNO: And people can relate to the moss so easily. I mean, they don't have to be thinking about Japanese or anything. It's moss everywhere. So immediately they get a reaction in people, nice reaction.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like the moss pieces seem like an especially interesting and in some ways logical progression from the reflecting wells, the well pieces, the water drops that had the wells for water.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: The first water drops were plain, correct, or did they have the carved wells as well?

MR. MIZUNO: No, just the plain.

MS. RIEDEL: They were plain and then came the wells, yes?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And then the moss, yeah. It's been an interesting progression.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, well, the well part is first I made for myself, for my backyard because we were having a tea ceremony.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And this is a true spiritual thinking behind. Every temple and shrine you go, you have a — there's a big —what do you call it in Japanese — that word goes always — huh? Anyway, it'll come back to me. But you wet your hands before you enter. Tea ceremony is the same way.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: Nobody there have those big stones and bamboo and make noise.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: I didn't want to do that. So that was my version of a water piece. That's how the whole thing started.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, in preparation for a tea ceremony you were going to have here in the backyard.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And so this is what you created. Interesting, interesting, so it had an inherently spiritual quality to the form from the start.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, I was going to ask how that form came about because the form was very different than anything you did before too.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And what about that form in particular resonated with you? It's very low. It's very flat, very round. Just literally the manifestation or reflection of a water drop, the form itself, the round water drop form?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah? How did that come about?

MR. MIZUNO: The beginning piece, the small piece.

MS. RIEDEL: The first ones were small, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I was just playing with the — [inaudible] — thinking what's next and thinking about the most natural form and made a few of those not thinking that much but keep looking at it every morning and it started growing in my head. So I got a little more organized than the first few pieces I made.

It's so interesting. Every piece I make, it's different. It looks same but especially when size gets bigger, a little bit inside — [inaudible] — the shape is totally different. If it comes really far out, then it's really different again and the other way. So it has to be perfect. So I got more deeper into that shape and especially started putting water inside, it changed the whole thing again.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, when you see the hole in the middle, empty, it looks so empty. But fill that with the water, it's another shape again. That's why I'm sticking with the same shape for this long, still enjoying making.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting too. It seems that you have that shape and then there's almost a deconstruction or quality to it because the shape stays the same but you just take out different pieces of it. You'll remove the holes for the moss or the hole for the water and that shape changes and with those subtle variations it becomes

completely different and then of course the glaze on top of that or the pattern of some of them.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. How would you say that your sources of inspiration have changed over all of these years?

MR. MIZUNO: I don't know if it's — I guess the way I live here and these days I only do what I would like to have in this place, instead of selling to people more. So I don't have one source of inspiration but maybe more limited to one style. So it's probably the way I live around here.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's limited increasingly to what is of interest specifically to you?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I keep watching the same thing over and over and try something a little bit different instead of a big change, but it turns out to be a big change just to even try moss on the pieces is a big change.

But it's not ideally — it's not a big change for me. It's just the same as applying another glaze. That's the only idea difference. But it looks different I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, well it does feel like a different kind of glaze. It feels very process-oriented. It sounds very process-oriented, that one step within that process leads to the next piece. Does that seem accurate?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So one piece in one generates the next.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah, interesting and that seems to have been true for a while now whereas in the past you would go from maybe screws to plates to the Zero pieces, these water drops have been consistent for a while.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah, maybe we'll close up today discussing the long-term experience you've had in Maine and what that is. There's a summer workshop that you do every year in Bar Harbor for the past 10 years or so?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I haven't been there for the past few years now but when we did it consecutive for 10 years, every year. We liked it. I mean, it's a beautiful place and we —

MS. RIEDEL: Is it in Arcadia National Park [Bar Harbor, ME]?

MR. MIZUNO: Inside the park.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay and is it part of a summer visiting artist program?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, it's Kippy Stroud who is the founder of Fabric Workshop.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: Actually her grandparents — grandmother, she owned her grandmother's house — had a house there that's typical wealthy back East people. She had house in Florida for the winter, Pennsylvania, but she has a house in Maine, a summer house and she has not only one or two. There are quite a few houses. They are all beautiful and right on the water.

MS. RIEDEL: In Maine?

MR. MIZUNO: In Maine, Bar Harbor.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And she started inviting people for the summer to keep her company, just for artists. She loves to be around artists and that grew out to be a big program. She started calling it Arcadia Summer Art Program and she let any available house on the island for the whole summer. Sometimes there's 50 people, guests, will be in this program the whole summer long, two months.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Wow, how wonderful.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, and we have a beautiful house right on the water, just the whole house to us, no one else. So it's really exciting, so different from California.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: Like our son, when we stopped going I said without Maine it's not a summer, it's not the same anymore, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I bet, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Because he was like five years old and after 15th. But only the things I didn't like was we each had to give a talk and I did a slide lecture. That's the only things I can do. Most artists do the slide lecture. Some people just talk.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: But so interesting to listen to the other people. I hate to do mine but it was so interesting to listen to the other people's, what they had to say, why did they work in this working media, some of them were video artists, some of them were painters, sculptors, some of them not even artists, philosophers.

MS. RIEDEL: Writers, musicians.

MR. MIZUNO: Writers, musicians, director from the museum. I didn't care the director, curator of the museum, people kind of stay out of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Those weren't as interesting to you?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, but — [inaudible] — was so interesting to listen to.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember anyone in particular at the time that was — because you started this in '97 I think, yeah?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, anyone in particular that stuck out in your mind or is it just the range of people?

MR. MIZUNO: The range of people, some of them we never seen, only once. Some of them we seen over and over. This philosopher from Columbia [University, New York City], Arthur Danto.

MS. RIEDEL: Arthur Danto?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, we became good friend and even we only understand half of what he's saying.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, he's wonderful.

MR. MIZUNO: But interesting to listen to him.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. MIZUNO: And his wife Barbara is a painter, interesting. Who else? Actually this one kid from — [inaudible] — his name is — I keep forgetting.

MS. RIEDEL: We can look it up later.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I loved — he used to make a video there while he's there. That's his presentation at the end. Before he goes home he would show what he made and it was really good. We all enjoyed.

His wife participated and anyway, my feeling about that whole going through tough speech, I hated it at the beginning but I had something I had to do. So I would come home and oh, Philip Brookman.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: But I'd come home and say I'd better do something better next year. So I started thinking on what I'm going to be making and make sure I keep all the photographs, keep records and see what I do. So that changed the whole — my attitude how I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you began to think about it in terms of an annual — in terms of an annual cycle and what would be accomplished in that year and how you would talk about it.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: So that helped me a lot to move on to the different direction.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: So probably one of the most influenced things that I've done, going to Maine.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Not one big favorite artist or anything like that, just listening to, prepare for my next presentation.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, so you would literally think about it throughout the year on how you would talk about what you'd done next summer in Maine.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, because I was so different from others. Jun Kaneko was there. We ran into each other a couple times, that's all.

MS. RIEDEL: And so you're thinking more as a community of peers all discussing different ways of working.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, not trying to impress himself — ourselves or anything. Just an honest talk what they think and that's how they do and what they do. That part I really liked, everybody would talk and I learned that myself, except I never got to be a smooth talker. But I ended up showing more work, work would tell the story more right and that worked. So I learned that to be effective and again, it's so many different people. I mean, how the musicians would be successful. This one musician, I forget the names so easy, the one in New York.

MS. RIEDEL: What does he play or she play?

MR. MIZUNO: Actually he is a composer, he organized, but sometime he performs inside a museum and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: We can look it up.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, Jonathan Adler.

MS. RIEDEL: And he said something in particular?

MR. MIZUNO: The way he comes up with idea, it's not so much we thought — actually never heard of a musician talk about idea and it turns out to be it's not so much different from what we do. It's almost same. So I felt pretty comfortable and really connected and associated with him.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: At dinnertime when sitting next to him talking casually and more intimate and became a friend with other artists that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, so does every — is it a communal dinner that everyone has to — how does it work? How is it set up?

MR. MIZUNO: Three times a week, three nights a week there's a dinner party and after dinner a few people talk, usually 15 minutes but some people talk the whole hour. So sometimes three people, sometimes a couple, right? And sometimes some of the people cannot talk because it's not enough time. They just have to get invited or keep — [inaudible] — on who's going to talk.

MS. RIEDEL: So then would they have a chance to talk a couple nights later or that was it? Then they were off the hook and they didn't have to talk at all?

MR. MIZUNO: Some people they don't get to talk.

MS. RIEDEL: And so during this time, you would give a slide presentation about your work and you'd hear other people give their talks. Was everybody also — did they have to make a piece or did they have to be engaged in working while they were up there or was the only stipulation that they give a talk?

MR. MIZUNO: Just to give a talk.

MS. RIEDEL: That's it?

MR. MIZUNO: That's it, that's the obligation.

MS. RIEDEL: So for two months you come and stay and you're part of the dinners and part of the conversation but that's all — that's the only requirement?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: How wonderful.

MR. MIZUNO: There is some studio people that like to work there, especially young people.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure, right.

MR. MIZUNO: But us, nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were completely happy with that?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, it's great to have the break but you just — you worked on other things while you were up there?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, on a few.

MS. RIEDEL: You want to talk about that project because that was extraordinary, really interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: It's something which started as just for fun. First year we went, on a tour of the old farmhouse she owned, beautiful metal with the mountain all the way around, you saw a part of the ocean and she had a beautiful house, old house. Now it's completely new. It's not the same anymore.

But we found this old tractor in a barn and said did this run and she said, "Yeah, if you can try and make it run, it's fine." So next year we went back and I'm thinking already what we're going to be doing and she said, "Fine, go ahead, do it."

So we did it and it turned out to be we just had to charter the airplane and see what it looks like from the clouds.

MS. RIEDEL: And what are the characters? There's two, right?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, well we didn't know exactly but it looks like — all the character we could think of was water because it's all water and wind.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, water and wind, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So without planning it or drawing it or anything, she would get on the roof — was it the roof or top of the hill? Top of the hill which goes this way

MS. RIEDEL: Really were you directing? You were directing and you were driving a tractor. Okay and so you were carving into this meadow these characters just following your direction of go a little right, go a little left.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary and people can see these on your website so they understand what we're talking about. But that was really interesting and different than anything you'd done before. That was '98 was it, or '99? Do you remember? I might have it written down, '98, yeah, '98. So that's maybe a good example of one of the things that Maine does for your experiences as an artist.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah and now she has published mostly on the Fabric Workshop but now she wants to do a book about this program she has and I got called the other day from the book designer. She's including my project that I did. So it's nice.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great. Do you know the name of the book?

MR. MIZUNO: I don't know yet but I'll let you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay and so this will be documenting the program in Arcadia?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: That's fantastic. That sounds really, really interesting and I hadn't heard of that program until you mentioned it. I certainly know Penland and Haystack and more traditional art schools. But this was completely

new to me.

MR. MIZUNO: This is all private money, all her money and it's only the — you can't even apply for it, invitation only.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting, so invitation only. Does it feel to you very much like a community?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, now all the people friend we have is through this program.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: Go to New York in the summer, we visited from there.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting, I haven't heard of another program exactly like it.

MR. MIZUNO: It's really unique in a way.

MS. RIEDEL: Very unique.

MR. MIZUNO: Only problem we had was that she would make us cook Japanese food and every year — [inaudible] — and she was so demanding and it got to be a little too much. So we didn't want to do it one year.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? You wanted to take a break.

MR. MIZUNO: So after that we don't get initiation anymore, which is okay. I mean, we were trying to say every time we have invitation we say we're going to skip this year. We'd like to make more room for the younger people. She said, no way.

MS. RIEDEL: Uh-oh [negative].

MR. MIZUNO: But she finally for the message. So stopped inviting us, which is okay, we're still friends. She comes here and she will call us and we'll have a dinner or something.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, so and you did that for almost 10 years I think, yes?

MR. MIZUNO: Ten years, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Ninety-seven to 2005 and then there were just — there were some other projects. That was the calligraphy project, yeah, and then you did a tea ceremony didn't you?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, one year we had a tea ceremony. I built a wire mesh tea house, invited two ladies from Japan to serve the tea. That was a big project and everyone enjoyed it but we didn't enjoy it that much. The first — I didn't think a tea ceremony takes that much energy. But she did all the cooking for each person.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my goodness.

MR. MIZUNO: There were more than 50 people, right?

MS. DOKAN: Yes, 60.

MR. MIZUNO: Sixty.

MS. RIEDEL: You cooked a meal for 60 people?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my goodness. I can see why you'd want to take a break.

MR. MIZUNO: I keep on saying well, what's next year.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Before we leave, you know, so.

MS. RIEDEL: These are wonderful photos of the tea ceremony there. Maybe we can — do you have digital images of these. It's be nice if we could — or maybe if we could somehow scan them perhaps and make them available to people listening to this disc. But you can see some images certainly on your website. But maybe some of these eventually will —

MR. MIZUNO: These are — we have these but most of them are snapshots of it. We don't have digital.

MS. DOKAN: Digital image.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh great, maybe we can make a disc of these and send them along.

MS. DOKAN: This is not.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: We can scan some.

MS. RIEDEL: How lovely. So was this — this was an actual tea ceremony for all 50 or 60 people who were part of the residency?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, at the time people was there, yeah.

MS. DOKAN: She invited neighbors.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, and she actually invited neighbors too.

MS. RIEDEL: That's pretty extraordinary and this all took place one afternoon?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, but to prepare it took us —

MS. DOKAN: Three days.

MR. MIZUNO: No, a whole week to build —

MS. RIEDEL: I would think — I would think so.

MR. MIZUNO: And we shipped so much stuff from here, all the tea bowls and everything.

MS. RIEDEL: It must have been a very interesting annual break to have in your schedule to just stop any ceramic or fiberglass work that you were doing at the time, whatever you were working on and stop and just work in completely different media or no media at all.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, so refreshing, especially in that kind of environment with different kinds of people. It was good.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it sounds like a real true creative community with a real exchange of ideas, very open spirit it sounds like from what you're telling me. People were very generous with their — open with their thoughts.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And that ability to interact with creative people working in such a range of media must have been really inspiring.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh these — yeah there are many, many photos here of the incredible — are they bento boxes — prepared for 50 or 60 different people.

MR. MIZUNO: Sixty.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh yes, one can see why you would not want to rush back to do that again. That's exquisite. Well, maybe we'll stop here for today and jump back in tomorrow.

MR. MIZUNO: Okay, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, great.

[End disc three.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with the Smithsonian Archives of American Art with Mineo Mizuno and his wife Minako Dokan at the artist's home and studio in Los Angeles, California, on September 9, 2009, disc number three.

So here we are again.

MR. MIZUNO: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I know you thought we covered everything yesterday but we have a few things to revisit and take on today. I thought a nice place to start would be really sort of smack in the middle of your work because we talked about the early work yesterday and we talked some about the later work as well, the *Water Drops*.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: But I'm thinking particular of this series or these pieces from 1992 and 1993 that really used the Greek amphora as a starting point.

I'm thinking of the piece *Face* [1993] on the wall and then the piece *Guard* [1992] and how that iconic form just really seemed to function in some ways as — how do I say it — it's a way to examine both history and cultural identity through ceramics and when I looked at those pieces, *Face* felt very much as if examining — almost examining portraits or cultural identity on the wall.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And then *Guard* feels very structural and foundational and interior and I wondered if you thought about those things in specific or what exactly you were thinking of.

MR. MIZUNO: Well, the series started with — we talked a little bit about the commission work.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: And I did a commission work for the Los Angeles Central Library. I made as a water source for the fountain in Maguire Gardens in 1993.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: And that was idea I was going to use the Greek and that's the part that designer didn't like.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, oh interesting, didn't like the Greek amphora.

MR. MIZUNO: No, he didn't, he thought it was nothing to do with the library.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: But I sort of made the Greek was original, anything you want to study about ceramic art would start with Greek. So I sort of thought appropriate to use that thing. So I had all ideas but that didn't go but I still wanted to continue.

So I keep working on it. That's how, and the show was coming up. So I did the whole thing with starting with the gate, you go through the gate and steps up to go to the shrine and you seen the garden on both sides of the step.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this the mesh gate that we were talking about?

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No, this is the gate where the show was?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, the same black gate, the whole thing — the whole place was black and the — [inaudible] — and the face in the middle of the wall, that's the whole show was.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay and was it all based on the Greek amphora?

MR. MIZUNO: Every form is based on the Greek, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay and what in particular about that form was so interesting to you that it was something to hold your interest over that many — that number of pieces and that period of time?

MR. MIZUNO: I don't know. I just used that form before for the pedestal piece too and that was my favorite one, one of my favorite pieces and I start turning it around the piece, sideway and start hanging on the wall and it was all kind of possibilities.

Even the gate was a simple minimum, looks like a slab but from the top view there was a handle of this shape. So I used a little bit of everything from that shape.

MS. RIEDEL: And so was it a way to just explore the essence of that form?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you thinking about it culturally as well too?

MR. MIZUNO: No that's the part I got later on from the people's reaction. Also the review from the paper, critique wrote, why the Japanese fooling around with the Greek.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: Which is true, I mean, I was kind of upset and didn't feel too well after that. I'd spent so much time. I don't think nothing wrong with that but I understand how they think about that. That would also relate to the same things I said about the terracotta.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. That strikes me as an odd point to pick because if someone is involved in ceramics and has been for decades at this point, any of the Greek vases are such an iconic form, historically in terms of ceramic in particular.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, but basically the people, if you are Japanese, they like to see something connected to Japanese background.

MS. RIEDEL: So if everything was related to the tea ceremony, it might have been more acceptable.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: How do you feel about that?

MR. MIZUNO: I don't think it's right.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't either.

MR. MIZUNO: But that's the way it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And have you encountered that multiple times?

MR. MIZUNO: No, not so badly but that's when I start working consciously start thinking about I am — have to show my background with my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: That's why I feel more successful the later work I am doing today because of that.

MS. RIEDEL: Does it resonate more with you, the later work?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, I feel more comfortable and easy to explain.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems to me an odd comment to make given the iconic form one things of in terms of Japanese, ceramics being a tea bowl, but certainly tea bowls are made by many people in countries all over the world.

MR. MIZUNO: Right and you can't go too far with just the tea bowl. Tea bowl is tea bowl, build for that.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. MIZUNO: Not much story, it's the functional beautiful bowl.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's a fairly simple form when compared with an amphora which has all sorts of different aspects of it structurally, formally to investigate.

I would think too some ways investigating a form that different would allow one to reinvestigate forms that were more familiar with new eyes as well. Did you have that sense or not really?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I do — I did, but now when I go look at the art show, I immediately start thinking who this person's background. It's true.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, that is really interesting. So I was going to ask this question later but it seems appropriate now. When you think about yourself, do you think of yourself as an artist working in an international tradition? Do you think of yourself as particularly American, particularly Japanese? Where do you see yourself?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, I see myself as American.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: Because I studied here. I have no background in Japan, art background in Japan, even though I was grown in Japan until almost 20. But my idea and everything, when I go to Japan and show my work in Japan, they feel the same way, I'm American. I mean, I'm not Japanese anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: So it feels very American.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. But at the same time, it seems that you felt if you were going to experiment in ceramics, that the history that you either were inclined to or were felt pushed to regard would be the Japanese and not something like Greek ceramic history or Native American ceramic history.

So it's interesting because there is a — what you're describing sounds American but it does sound like it's also — there is some foundation that's inarguably Japanese.

MR. MIZUNO: Right. If you're in Japan, it's fine. You can do anything. Another one that I thought this through a friend of ours we met this couple. He is a musician and he specializes in flamenco.

MS. RIEDEL: In flamenco?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: A Japanese person.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: Both parents are also specialize in the flamenco.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay and they're both Japanese as well.

MR. MIZUNO: Both Japanese as well and he's really well — [inaudible] — but everyone feels why the Japanese playing flamenco.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? That's interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: So he's never going to get success. He might in Japan but not in this country.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? And do you find that — is that true in America do you think as well?

MR. MIZUNO: I think so, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: That's why I think.

MS. RIEDEL: I have to think about that. That's really — that's an interesting point that I really hadn't thought about before. It's funny because actually —

MR. MIZUNO: I never thought when I was younger and studying and everything. I never thought that way, especially I was married to American. So I would just remove from being Japanese.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right, but now you feel differently about that?

MR. MIZUNO: Now I feel different.

MS. RIEDEL: Does that feel — actually that does lead into another question I had which was does that feel then that it's somehow confining or does that feel comfortable to you?

MR. MIZUNO: It was confining at the beginning but it's comfortable right now.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Once I accepted that fact, that's fine.

MS. RIEDEL: And do you feel like that really helped direct the way your work developed?

MR. MIZUNO: It did, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting. I wanted — you moved on from the Greek pieces to — oh I wanted to visit when the calligraphy first arrived in your work and the first pieces when you began to work with the Japanese characters. I'm thinking it was sometime in 1998 and it seemed — was it also related to when you did those pieces in Maine in the field? Was that the first time the Japanese characters appeared in your work?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that come about? How did that — was it the pattern? What in particular was it that —

MR. MIZUNO: I thought about once before, I don't know what was, how did I — what was the first form? Actually I did writing on a piece after Maine.

MS. DOKAN: After Maine —

MR. MIZUNO: I got so excited about it — I remember.

MS. DOKAN: Very connected to the water, like water just meeting water —

MR. MIZUNO: When I did a peach.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, the peach was the first one I saw the calligraphy on was that piece.

MS. DOKAN: The peach.

MR. MIZUNO: And that time was —

MS. RIEDEL: In 1998, yeah, this piece.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, around that time.

MS. DOKAN: That character is meaning a peach.

MS. RIEDEL: Peach? I thought it might be.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I did it different character at the beginning, a special tea bowl I did, all different characters and it ended up with just Zero. It's the most — some word it's too —

MS. DOKAN: Just has only a simple meaning but this —

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, at the beginning the Japanese character has so many meanings, each one, not just one, but when you start explaining to people, translate to English, it just doesn't show that depth of the meaning anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: So that is the only one that work that way. So I ended up not using any others.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting because two things come to mind immediately. The first is language, which we started off talking about yesterday and how language I think in many ways has been a major thread throughout your work, either directly and obviously or as an undercurrent and then the second is how significant Maine and Bar Harbor has been and how formative.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the first time that you actually worked in characters or did the *Peach* precede Bar Harbor?

MR. MIZUNO: I think Bar Harbor is the first.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so that was really a beginning.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's very interesting because that seems to have been a place, a genesis for many ideas that came into your work. I'll revisit that over the next couple of thoughts.

But what you just said about Zero and language really resonated with me as well and I was thinking about how we talked about language early on yesterday and Zero, the Zero pieces, I started thinking about the plain and the layers of meaning in the form of the plain, also the history of the plain and of course your personal experience and what that meant.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Then zero, the number, zero as a Japanese character, and the layers of meaning in that seem so right.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that all apparent to you from the beginning or is that something that unfolded slowly over the making of this series?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually we — I mean, we both agreed also that means pure water.

MS. RIEDEL: Pure water?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh it does.

MR. MIZUNO: This character.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: So that also relates to the *Water Drops*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay and it's interesting. Another thing that was interesting is the *Water Drops* and some of the Zero series seem to be evolving at the same time.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And concurrently and do you often work on multiple series at once?

MR. MIZUNO: Not before but I start doing like now I work on the teardrop and the *Water Drop* and the moss is something else.

MS. RIEDEL: Now how do you call those forms that we were looking at yesterday, that sort of giant, looks like a double-walled form, almost like an enormous tea bowl, the one that's what, 23,577 characters on it? What's the name of that piece?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, I don't have a special title. So that particular one is 23,577 times zero because of the character.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah but there are literally —

MR. MIZUNO: But the shape —

MS. RIEDEL: There are literally 23,577 characters on that piece.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary. Each one done by hand.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I think that's extraordinary, interesting to point out. Did you help him out on that?

MR. MIZUNO: Oh yeah, she did most. I had all the photograph from the beginning.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: That would show the scale because you have to almost get inside the bowl to start at the bottom.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet.

MR. MIZUNO: So I had to tilt it, suspended from the ceiling on the hydraulic lift.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? And how do you describe that form? We talked about teardrops and we talked about waterfall and water drops, but how do you describe that form?

MR. MIZUNO: Well actually I used the same functional bowl because I really loved the thick lip.

So that was always my favorite shape and I always thought this would make a beautiful sculpture and never had a chance to do it. Finally when I did the teardrop I needed something to catch the teardrop. So that's where the bowl is from.

MS. RIEDEL: That's beautiful. That's beautiful. I didn't realize that. I'm glad I asked.

So the Zero series, the first piece with calligraphy was the peach and then how did the — was the catalyst for the Zero series, was it literally your stumbling on that plane at the airport? How did the series — what was the starting point for that series?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, in Japan no one wanted talk about a zero fighter plane because it is the — they are the ones that attacked Pearl Harbor and they had to destroy.

They were so proud that that plane and no evidence — really wanted to talk about it but not allowed to talk about it. So I knew about a plane but never learned anything about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: It's kind of that made me more interesting to investigate once I saw the plane, the actual plane. How could it be possible this plane is owned by somebody else, privately owned.

MS. RIEDEL: And here in L.A. in Santa Monica, right?

MR. MIZUNO: Here in L.A.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you literally just — how did you even come across that plane?

MR. MIZUNO: Actually this — [inaudible] — at the Santa Monica Airport had a party that evening and he borrowed the airplane for that evening just to have it outside his restaurant so everyone could just go out and touch it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: So casual thing, so that was the first time I actually — of course the first time to actually see the plane and it was shocking, trying to explain to my son is even more harder. That's how I was interested about this plane — [inaudible] — it was forgotten about the whole thing but now came to my mind and we are always connected to my father. So something I had somewhere had to come out. That's where the whole thing started.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah and you just happened to be at that party and that plane happened to be there?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary. The chances of that seem pretty remote. That must have been a very powerful moment for you.

MR. MIZUNO: And I found out who owned this plane. Actually now I know this collector, her name is Dallas Price, she's the one that owned that. Her husband and she owned the plane. But now they divorced and they sold the plane.

I don't know where but they loaned it to the movie company when they made *Pearl Harbor* [Michael Bay, 2007. They shot in Hawaii and when they were shooting they had an accident and most of them collided together. They had to redo the whole thing, send it back to Russia.

MS. RIEDEL: They got — something happened and they were damaged when they were filing and so they had to go to Russia to be —

MR. MIZUNO: Actually, someone found this plane and rebuilt the whole plane in Russia.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Because they are the ones who could do it, made each parts handmade and put it together.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, the layers of complexity in that story are pretty impressive too.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. The fiberglass pieces, I'm thinking just briefly too, the first fiberglass piece, was that one of the Zeros or was that one of the *Water Drops*?

MR. MIZUNO: Fiberglass, the *Water Drop*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, and the reason for moving to fiberglass was because you wanted to be able to collage with the photos, the images, right?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And then but that just played beautifully into the Zero series, is that right?

MR. MIZUNO: Right, when I started making that it was so — that was the biggest I can make with the clay, those.

MS. RIEDEL: Pretty small, a couple feet tops.

MR. MIZUNO: Right. So I wanted to get a bigger scale with the photographing. So it was perfect. I already knew how to do it with the fiberglass. But the fiberglass I did — *Water Drop* I did was when we did a tea ceremony.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, in Maine?

MR. MIZUNO: No, here.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh later. When was that? Do you remember the year?

MR. MIZUNO: The photograph was so beautiful and I wanted to do it in *Water Drop*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: That's the idea that came first, why do I make it something else, not ceramic. So that was successful. Actually a piece went to Japan. There's a hotel in Japan bought it.

MS. RIEDEL: And it was a photograph of the tea ceremony here at your home repeated over and over again on a water drop? Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: So I started doing a self-portrait I called, these *Chopsticks* I made. I use them every day and did something like that and plus — what else did I do. Were there three, the ceremonies and what?

MS. DOKAN: Memorial.

MS. RIEDEL: Those were the three water drops that were collaged with fiberglass and then the photos, right. I think those are one the website too, *Memorial*, and the *Chopsticks* piece and the third.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I think so, yeah. Thinking of Bar Harbor, it seems that that was a place of genesis for multiple things. I'm thinking about the calligraphy and then I'm thinking of the wire mesh pieces.

Did those come out of that first experience in Bar Harbor with the tea ceremony and the wire mesh, was it a wire mesh house that was contrasted, a tea house there?

MR. MIZUNO: That was the first tea house I built there but I started using wire mesh here before I went there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: First one was the *Water Drop*, right?

MS. RIEDEL: The one we were looking at yesterday outside?

MR. MIZUNO: No, I did it with galvanized metal. It was must soft and easier to make. All at the beginning was galvanized metal.

MS. RIEDEL: That would have been 2002, 2000, something like that, early part of the —

MR. MIZUNO: When they're new they're kind of shiny but after a while it gets all gray. I like that subtleness but the reflection is gone. So I decided I'd move on to stainless steel. So I throwed [sic] the first one away and kept the stainless steel.

MS. RIEDEL: And the stainless, it's the way it handles the light you are so intrigued with?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: What in particular? Is it the way it reflects it or bends it? What is it?

MR. MIZUNO: Well it was so hard to work with, to cut it even was impossible. But the reflection of light was so interesting, especially at night when light hits it. So it's more effective. But if I make like an entrance that I have in the studio that would probably be too shiny, even functions better because the steps are durable.

MS. RIEDEL: So what's this material?

MR. MIZUNO: Galvanized.

MS. RIEDEL: That's galvanized?

MR. MIZUNO: Just regular steel, galvanized.

MS. RIEDEL: Galvanized steel, okay, and how did that idea come about? That's such a transition from fiberglass or ceramics. How did that material first occur to you?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, for that gate we have, I wanted something — this house doesn't have a front entrance because I keep remodeling and never decide where to have a front interest. I have an idea but I haven't got that far.

But when the people come, they don't know where to come in. So I wanted an entrance but I didn't want to close it in. So the wire mesh is perfect. It's there but it's not closed in. It's there. It's not there and I could still have a door and everything else.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, it is an interesting material that way. It's so porous that it's as much not there as it is thee.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Did that happen concurrently with the moss pieces and the drilling and the porosity or are they completely separate?

MR. MIZUNO: It's separate.

MS. RIEDEL: Separate, okay, and have you continued to do — work with the wire mesh?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually no one encouraged me to do, which no sales.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: Like I really wanted — every time I go to New York to visit someone's loft, you get — [inaudible] — when the door opens, that's their living. No one in New York — people who live in loft.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: So I wanted commission — someone commission to make — [inaudible] — for it but I didn't have a dealer to promote that to them, never had a chance to do.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think that's something you might be able to do — [inaudible] — New York?

MR. MIZUNO: I'll talk to him about it someday because he's coming here. He probably see — you can't tell him about it unless he sees it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: Then I'll tell him what I want to do.

MS. RIEDEL: I've seen something — I think I'd seen them install the gate perhaps installed in the window maybe in a gallery or in your studio but to see them outside is completely different.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah and I think that is something that would be very hard to translate through just a visual.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: It's even hard to take a photograph.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So it is something though that you'd be interested in revisiting?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, if there's an interest I'd be happy to get back in again, explore more.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, it seems like it has all sorts of potential. It's a different material but you can use it similar ways, like the water drop out of the wire mesh is completely different in feeling and it feels so structural.

It has such an architectural quality to it and the way it handle light is so different than the ceramic or the fiberglass pieces. It seems like such an interesting addition to that form.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. When I did it — when they were new, copper wire was still shiny and the copper color, looks like a — [inaudible] — so next one if I do it I look to the wire doesn't turn — still the color is there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, so it stays silver.

MR. MIZUNO: Stays silver or stays something.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay because that was unpredictable.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, didn't expect that. But that's probably something you've come to expect is things that you don't expect, right?

MR. MIZUNO: Right, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: We did talk briefly about influences in your career and we talked about Maine, which is does seem those summers at Bar Harbor seem to sort of have been a big influence both from the people you met and the conversations you had and then the way you thought about your own work.

You mentioned also yesterday in passing Isamu Noguchi. Would you describe him as a significant influence?

MR. MIZUNO: I didn't have that much influence by his work. But talking to him was interesting, more interesting. First time I met him was at the Fabric Workshop.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: When I was working there, they had a big party for vice president's wife, Joan Mondale.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: Was visiting Fabric Workshop and also Noguchi was having a big show at the museum.

MS. RIEDEL: In Philadelphia?

MR. MIZUNO: In Philadelphia museum, so that — because I was a guest of the workshop. Joan Mondale was sitting on this site and Noguchi was sitting on this side, so I go to talk to both of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow, that's extraordinary.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, that was lucky.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was Noguchi doing there? Why was he there? Do you know?

MR. MIZUNO: I guess they just invited him because he was having a big show there.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh he was having a big show at the museum.

MR. MIZUNO: At the museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay and that was the first time you had met him?

MR. MIZUNO: First time I met him.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: Then I met him when he was working on this big garden called *California Scenario* in Orange County.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: It's one of the best ones I think of his gardens.

MS. RIEDEL: Really, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: The last one too, different from the others.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh I've never been. I'd like to go and see that.

MR. MIZUNO: While he was working, he used to come Japanese term, he also did one in downtown Japanese community center.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MIZUNO: Working at same time, so —

MS. RIEDEL: When was that? Do you remember?

MR. MIZUNO: When I had a show at the Riko Mizuno — there's a gallery called Riko Mizuno. I had a show, no relationship but same last name. She used to be one of my favorite gallery when I was in school. After school I went to her asking for a show and she wasn't interested. But afterwards she came back and she wanted to show my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Nineteen seventy-nine?

MR. MIZUNO: [Inaudible] — so she invited Noguchi for lunch and we used to meet. So I was there and talking all the time. So I got to know him. He remembered meeting at Philadelphia so I got to talk and once I meet him in Japanese restaurant. So we got to talk again.

MS. RIEDEL: And was there anything in particular about — you said it wasn't his work in particular that was influential but perhaps his way of working?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, talking about his life in Japan and he loves Japan and he said that I understand he wasn't respected as much as he wanted. Other people said that. He didn't say that but I asked him that. He said it's true because he was American. But I guess he didn't want to be a Japanese there and he was even related to Japanese lady there.

MS. RIEDEL: But he didn't feel his work received the recognition that it did here in the States in Japan and that was frustrating.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes sense. So that must have been something you could very much identify with.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, so the future, I would probably feel the same I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you thinking that at the time —

[Cross talk.]

MR. MIZUNO: No, I wasn't — still trying to figure —

MS. RIEDEL: Seventy-nine is still early, yeah, interesting, interesting. We've talked about Maine. We've talked about Noguchi. Are there any other people or art movements that you feel have been especially significant to your work over time? Any other influences that you would recognize as significant early in your career, middle, late?

MR. MIZUNO: Well early in the career definitely Jun Kaneko. We shared a studio and even though we worked different, he would set his goal and he'd just go straight to it and it's already a huge goal when he sets it up. Sometimes he can't even imagine who would do that.

But a few years back, several years, like five years back I heard he is going to build a museum and now it's done. So that's the way he used to be young. He said, I'm going to stop working now and go back to school so I can get a teaching job and he did that. But I never set a goal for myself. I always had a dream. But a dream and goal is two separate things, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. How so? How is it different for you, a dream or a goal?

MR. MIZUNO: Well dream is a dream. I think it's more romantic. It doesn't happen, it's fine, it's a dream, but if you set a goal, it's a different thing.

MS. RIEDEL: A dream also allows for experimenting and things to change in route, yes? It's more fluid. It's more flexible than a goal.

MR. MIZUNO: Right, but I did respect Jun Kaneko that way on several things. So it was me and quite a bit of that partner.

MS. RIEDEL: In sense I would imagine if you did decide to do something, you could go as large as you wanted or larger than you imagined and you could set goals and make things happen that didn't necessarily seem possible otherwise. Is that what you're saying

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I mean the sheer scale of his work, especially early on.

MR. MIZUNO: I mean, who could be competing with him? It's just impossible.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MIZUNO: But I guess if someone's mind set to just do that way, then it's possible.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, so that's a wonderful example or an inspiration I would think to show, especially a young artist just getting started, that really many things are possible and it's interesting that your paths have overlapped over time. When you first came to the states and then again in the mid-'80s when you went to Omaha to do your residency.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Anybody else who comes to mind later in career or even now currently? We talked about Goro Suzuki yesterday. Would you think of him at all as an influence or just someone who you admire?

MR. MIZUNO: Someone I admire. I think we're totally different approach, even the way we get idea and everything is different. So just as a good friend — actually it's more than a good friend, but just that and nothing more. I don't know. I just don't go out enough to find out other people's work these days.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like nature in many ways I think of as an influence for your work, from the moss and the water. There's a subtlety and the way the moss grows on the lanterns in the temple. There is something about nature and its way of being water dropping.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, it's true. I'm not sure what is really influencing me to do them. I should have thought about it more carefully for today's — I'm sure tonight I will come up with some idea.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, well we'll turn the tape back on afterwards. We'll give you a little time to think about it. Have your sources of inspiration changed over the years? Do you think they've changed over the years?

MR. MIZUNO: Oh yeah, I think so. I definitely had more sense to the things I see. As you get older, it's just something you never thought about anything before but now you're moved by something unexpected. So I don't

know what would be the example but *Moss* piece for instance —

MS. RIEDEL: Pardon?

MR. MIZUNO: *Moss* piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, the *Moss* pieces, right.

MR. MIZUNO: Because the moss has been around forever and I never thought about using moss.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So once you get into it, I'm sure it will be more things connected with moss. So the source is constantly changing, expanding more I think.

MS. RIEDEL: It feels to me that that brings even more of a process focus to your work and evolution process and a sense of chance. Does it feel that way to you too?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And we were talking yesterday about time and time being visible in your work and with the moss, that feels to me like another dimension of seeing time change.

MR. MIZUNO: Right, just sitting there painting moss, keep thinking something else and from there it's fiberglass and move on to something else.

MS. RIEDEL: We mentioned that yesterday, how each piece leads to the next. There's a process.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I'm sure it's going to change, keep changing, you know, once you start sitting and thinking constantly on a piece.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like the early work had often a reference to art history and form and then with the Zero series things became more personal and more narrative and now they feel more formal again and the focus seems to be shifting again, more nature-based perhaps, more abstract. Does it feel that way to you or how would you describe that transition in sources of inspiration?

MR. MIZUNO: It's true. I didn't think that way but now you said it. It is true. Conceptually Zero and other piece had a more depth to it. But the moss pieces different.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, just a different kind of depth.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, it's different kind.

MS. RIEDEL: You started off early in your career with function being a central part of the objects. Do you think about function in terms of your work and I don't mean strictly functional, functional.

It could also have a spiritual function, a conceptual function. But do you think about function at all in terms of your work besides the dinnerware? Is the function — do you think about it as serving a specific function?

MR. MIZUNO: I do that all the time actually. I think everything has to function well. Even the design of the dishes, if it really doesn't function well, it's not a beautiful design. That's the way I grew up learning how to make the thing, everything has to function right.

Even the water piece, when I do the inspiration, I always think about what's going to affect the drains, how water's going to drain off. Like I did the installation in a gallery show, I used just the soil, dry soil, fine soil packed in.

Looks like a beautiful velvet, smooth, and work on this moss piece, sitting on top. It's beautiful, doesn't function in the outside environment. So I had to use gravel, which you have to compromise. But it has to function too. So I constantly think about that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. That's interesting and surprising in certain ways but it makes a lot of sense now that you say it. Let's see. Has your working process changed significantly over time?

I think of your work as constantly being in series and sometimes series running concurrently. Has that always been true and is that aspect of your working process fairly consistent?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, it's true.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you feel that your way of working or your working process has changed significantly? I mean, certainly since the dinnerware of course, but just your way of working, has that changed for you?

MR. MIZUNO: No, I think always I think I just make a couple piece. Then I get a new idea or I get tired of the same thing. I always move on to something else and it end up having a whole series of the thing. That's why I work that way, until I feel I've had enough. Then I move on to something else. But that's why everything is series.

MS. RIEDEL: So when you work in that series, do you think of that also in some ways as a single large piece, all of those pieces?

MR. MIZUNO: Not every time. sometimes it ends up to be just an experimental thing, whole thing, but like Greek series, I did work on the series but it ended up to be just one piece.

MS. RIEDEL: The Greek series ended up all as one?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, in the show.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: I called it shrine but it's just one shrine.

MS. RIEDEL: But all exploring that Greek form.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So that worked that way but sometimes like other things, it never — like Zero series, I did it in so many ways but nothing came all together.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right, and certain series seem to really complement each other, like the *Teardrop* and then the bowl then, that bowl form that I think you showed for the first time a couple years ago, no, that double-walled, giant double-walled piece form we were discussing and the *Teardrop*.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And do they always — do you try to show those together?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, that's a lovely idea.

[End disc four.]

MS. RIEDEL: We spoke briefly on the phone about magazines and art periodicals that have had — been significant to you over your career and there wasn't anything in particular that was media-specific in terms of *Ceramics Monthly* or *American Ceramics* — nothing like that that you mentioned that had been significant. But you said *Artforum* was really significant for you.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. Well, in a period of time, I subscribed to *Ceramics Monthly*, too, one called *American Ceramics* or something.

MS. RIEDEL: And *Studio Potter*, too, maybe?

MR. MIZUNO: But once you look at it — I think the same with *Art in America*, too, if you subscribe one year, rest of them looks pretty much same again, over and over. Not so refreshing. But since I not that interested in ceramic magazine anymore, it's like technical information, sometime, I look through.

But otherwise, I would never read the article, what people — whatever they do. So I always was looking at *Art in America* for a while — how many years now — never thought — I used to read the *Artforum*, too. Then I went to this meeting with Jack Shainman for the first time. And actually, I saw one ad *Art in America* had full-page ad at the gallery he had. So I asked him, you know Jack — [inaudible].

He said, "No, no, we already — every month we show with *Artforum*." And I said, "Why is that?" So every artist wants that. That's what he says. So he give me a copy of that *Artforum* and I turn it and it's that thick and it's shocking to see — it's most of them — ads. But every ad is so different from the *Art in America*. That's — now, *Art in America* looks so conservative. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And so is that something you, then, subscribe to? Or is that something that was significant to you?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, this just happened last month. So now, yeah, I'm going to subscribe to look through.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, so it just happened last month, interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, just happened.

MS. RIEDEL: And what about it was interesting to you in particular?

MR. MIZUNO: Well —

MS. RIEDEL: About *Artforum*.

MR. MIZUNO: Okay. I went to new museum for the first time in new location. This Japanese architect designed it, also it was interesting how he designed it with a — not a low budget, but it's not that expensive. And my son came with me to New York. He was looking at schools — two of us. That day, he asked me — he was free so where I'm going. I said I'm going to check out a new museum. So he came with me. And there was show called "Younger than Jesus."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] "Younger than Jesus."

MR. MIZUNO: It was kind of interesting show. It was all the young people was born around '80s. So they were still in their 20s. I said it was kind of fun but you know, I wasn't definitely sure but my son was so excited by the whole show. He was — some of the room, he was just sitting there, laughing, having such a great time.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, he came up. Let's go to shop, I'm going to buy a t-shirt. [Inaudible, they laugh.] And I was surprised. Well, he's a lucky guy, you know, even he's going in a different direction, not going to be an artist, but he can go to museums, see that kind of show and could appreciate it. So which is pretty nice. And when I saw the *Artforum*, there was a big article about the show.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, yeah, yeah. So it's really reporting something that is intriguing to you, more cutting edge. And you can tell from your son's reaction that that's very much of the moment. Interesting. That makes sense.

MR. MIZUNO: And one of the article — one of the artist's room was sponsored by Kippy's Fabric Workshop.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah. Kippy Stroud's workshop.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So coming full circle and still very much engaged in very cutting-edge work. That is interesting. And that was when you were at the museum?

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, one of the exhibitions. Interesting. That had to feel good.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: When I look at the wall — her name was — my Tomi said, "Here's a Kippy supporting this show." Then he was really more interested too. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: You've had a relationship with a number of different dealers over time and I wonder if you would describe that a little bit — what the relationship has been like with dealers, different dealers over the course of your career.

MR. MIZUNO: Well, every time — not every time — very, at the beginning, it was so hard to get because of course, it's impossible — almost impossible to get dealer. And then finally, I got one and I said, now, I'm going to be okay. I don't have to worry about how to sell my work. But every one of them was disappointing. Jan Turner Gallery, I think she was the one who sold the most work constantly — steady.
She had to tell me I wasn't the number one artist as far as the sales go, but she didn't have to worry about making payments because of me. So that's how well she sold my work. Of course, I had all the plates and stuff. And every time I move onto, I have a new dream about how the gallery's going to, in fact, change my life. But that really didn't happen. So I didn't have a gallery for a while — for about 10 years, maybe?

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you sell your work yourself?

MR. MIZUNO: From here, at studio.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: That was hard, even harder, but I couldn't find anyone.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: This, today, too, I, you know, what the gallery would say — now you are 65 and you're still looking for a gallery? They were saying, why do you think we have to have someone like that? We want someone established. Jack Shainman said the same thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: But he's decided that it was a good —

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, he told me — [inaudible]. That's what we normally say. Why do we have to take someone like your age and still looking for gallery?

MS. RIEDEL: But many artists change galleries.

MR. MIZUNO: Changing is fine. So the same thing — it's really hard to find a gallery to start with. The one I have now, here in town, the Samuel Freeman, he bought a gallery from the last owner, Patricia Faure because she got old. Now, she passed away. So he's kind of young, newcomer, not much background.

First, I thought, we didn't speak the same language, you know, I thought we definitely have a generation gap problem. But it turned out to be — you know, he's really an open-minded person and helps me a lot — even installing the show, willing to take a chance and have a — [inaudible] — at the gallery — [inaudible] — to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: And he did that?

MR. MIZUNO: He did that, knowing today's economy, it was something so odd, you know, something I never done before, a special moss [ph] piece. But he liked the idea of the piece and he did that. And now, I like him well and working on it pretty well.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, that seemed to have been a show that got a lot of attention.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, it's opened up a whole new place. I mean a new door.

MS. RIEDEL: For both of you, I would imagine.

MR. MIZUNO: Both of us, both of us.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it difficult when you changed series fairly radically with the dealers? Were any of them open to that, or did they find that very difficult?

MR. MIZUNO: Some gallery feels difficult. But this particular one is what we — he just — [inaudible] — what next year are you going to do? But once before, I had five tons of gravel spread all over the floor and two water drops and water dripping into it. That was kind of odd thing to do. He's saying, no, what are you going to do?

This time, you had a — [inaudible] — moss inside the gallery. He welcomes that change. But some gallery — just I'm lucky this time. And of course, never had a gallery in New York, but I finally found one and it's not only — I feel great about this gallery, but he's willing to — those seven pieces, he wants to have it in the gallery and viewing room downstairs is a good size and he's paying for all the ship — crate and shipping.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MR. MIZUNO: Which they think — [inaudible] — everything goes well.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. And when is that exhibition scheduled?

MR. MIZUNO: It's not exhibition — just to have it.

MS. RIEDEL: Just to have it. Interesting. And when will you ship them?

MR. MIZUNO: As soon as they make a crate. They're already in the process.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So they should arrive in New York sometime this fall?

MR. MIZUNO: This month.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, this month — this September.

MR. MIZUNO: So I'm going there to help them pack.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MR. MIZUNO: So it's the most encouraging story with the gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: It must be challenging to find a gallery because the work is ceramic and we've talked about the limitations — [inaudible] — deal with that material at all. But there is, as you were talking about, the installation about Samuel Freeman, very much of a conceptual and site-specific installation quality to it too, which would appeal, I would imagine, to whole other gallery, audience, dealer. Has that been difficult for you to find somebody that would — that could show the breadth and variety of your work?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, it's really hard. I don't know how many times I went to New York to — [inaudible]. And there's so many galleries.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: Well, actually, there were a couple of them that were interested, but — [inaudible] — at that time, I was doing this — [inaudible] — bring it into the —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, or probably even for the floor to support the weight.

MR. MIZUNO: And plus, I wanted a more established gallery, if I were in New York.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you had any bad experiences with less-established galleries?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually, never. [Inaudible] — this summer? Yeah, I did. I had one called LMAN.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MIZUNO: In Chinatown.

MS. RIEDEL: They showed the Zero pieces.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. He owned — he just opened the gallery, brand new, young fellow. He had — he graduated from Harvard [University, Cambridge, MA] — [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: In architectural office? He was a practicing architect and a gallery?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: It's really, just a hole in the wall. It's more gallery space. But I thought it was interesting to have it in Chinatown, especially with the interest with Zero. But he was — he didn't know about how to line the — [inaudible]. And that time that he called on me was, you know, almost — [inaudible]. So he was doing okay. I guess he couldn't handle that excitement. He started buying all the cars and spending money and not paying me.

MS. RIEDEL: Ouch.

MR. MIZUNO: So immediately, I had to get everything back — bad and sad experience.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm sorry to hear that. And it's interesting that many artists have stories like that. When you say

that many of the galleries were disappointing over time, is it just in terms of sales and marketing and advocacy of your work? Is that — yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, yeah. They talk about it, but I don't — never felt they do enough on that. And I don't know why, but those the one — they don't pay.

MS. RIEDEL: When you sold work out of your own studio, did you have some degree of success with marketing and advocacy and getting the work out or getting people in to see the work? Or were you strictly focusing on sales?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, you know, I had to — this — I had to thank someone very special person I know, which is Deborah McLeod.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, mm-hmm.

MR. MIZUNO: She did interview.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it's a lovely interview. It's really —

MR. MIZUNO: [Inaudible.] When I was showing with Jan Turner, she was director there. Since then, we have been friend. So at the time, I didn't have a gallery, she also helped me to try to find one, you know, even in New York and all that, wasn't successful, but she always brought client here. Everyone she knew, once or twice, they bring us in. All the time. She sold quite a bit, no commission, nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? That's extraordinary. So Jan Turner closed and she was no longer working as a —

MR. MIZUNO: Well, she, no, before Jan closed, she moved onto director of Blum Helman, open up in Santa Monica. She was director there and the — [inaudible] — gallery closed, she went to auction house — Christie. She was head of the — [inaudible] — branch for 10 years. Now, she's the director of the Gagosian, Beverly Hills. So now, we don't have business together anymore because she's the director there. But she's still supporting me, like she has one of my piece in the gallery, in her office.

MS. RIEDEL: The Gagosian?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. Still good friend.

MS. RIEDEL: She — it's funny, there was — I'm sure you know it, it's been quoted fairly often, but the — I thought this description of your work was just one of the best things I've ever read and one of the best descriptions — I loved the way she describes you as striking her immediately as a triple threat.

You probably remember this where she said he was talking about — you had exceptional technical skill, an experimental point of view and drop dead gorgeous work in a deconstructivist sort of way. That was one of the first things I read about your work when I was preparing for our interview and I still think it's one of the most accurate and succinct descriptions of your work and her enthusiasm for it comes across really clearly. So she was a huge help, it sounds like.

MR. MIZUNO: She was always a huge help to me.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MR. MIZUNO: [Inaudible.]

MS. RIEDEL: I think so too. How have you seen the market for craft or ceramics change in your lifetime? Have you seen anything specific over the past three decades? We talked yesterday, it seemed like you thought there was a declining market.

MR. MIZUNO: Well, it seems like when I was just out of school, anything that we make, there's a place to show around town, you know? But this day looks like — this town we only have one gallery we show, specialize in ceramic is — Frank Lloyd. Even he start showing a painting, so I don't know about how market goes, but I think it's definitely no place to show for the ceramic artist. I don't know how they survive — [inaudible]. To me, it really shouldn't — [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: When you show at Samuel Freeman, does he show anyone else working in ceramics or —

MR. MIZUNO: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So it's really — he's responding to your work completely as sculpture and not as

ceramics.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. I always look for that and I respect for that too. Like I said before, I'm not saying I hate to be a craftsman or a potter or anything like that, but just — I have to — there's not enough audience to be just a craftsman, you just have to get into something everyone else, painter and sculptor, so I always look for gallery who is not only specialize in ceramic.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, that makes sense, especially with your work. Well, I think we've done actually quite a good job of — you'll be delighted to hear — [They laugh] — of covering most of the questions. So maybe just a few final questions and conclusions, sort of wrap things up? Any overreaching thoughts?

The first is — and I think this follows perfectly on the trail of what we've been discussing — where do you see yourself and your work fitting into the larger picture of contemporary art?

MR. MIZUNO: Where do I fit in? At the moment I probably don't fit in much. But I think I feel I have a bright future because of the Jack Shainman gallery. I don't know if I am dreaming too much about a new gallery but it seems like, you know, New York is still New York, a bit different from — [inaudible]. I hope.

MS. RIEDEL: Now this would be your first New York gallery. Is that correct?

MR. MIZUNO: First New York gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: You've had many in L.A. and some in Japan, but this would be the first in New York.

MR. MIZUNO: First in New York.

MS. RIEDEL: Even all of that time in Philadelphia and all of that connection with Maine? Nothing materialized on the East Coast?

MR. MIZUNO: No. People who I met — some of the people who tried to help me: One is Larry Kardish. He's a curator for MoMA [Museum of Modern Art]. And he had called or taken in my package to a number of the galleries.

MS. RIEDEL: Really, in New York?

MR. MIZUNO: In New York. Still couldn't — wasn't possible.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: Still wasn't possible.

MS. RIEDEL: Did he tell you why he thought that was? Did he show the response? Was the problem still the material?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, I just said, you know, same question — they're not interested in any new artists at the moment. That's all they said. It's hard to tell, but I'm sure they're not interested in my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. [affirmative.] Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: I think they are all the same. Jack sort of told me we never look at the people's works through someone that we know. This — when I walked in, this never happened before. I thought I just have to say no to this man who took my managing. I thought I was going to give him a big favor by just looking at your package while he was standing in front of him. And it turned out to be he gave me a big favor — [Laughs] — that he said, which was nice.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the favor? Because he looked at it?

MR. MIZUNO: Because Jack Shainman was giving this man a favor by looking at my package.

MS. RIEDEL: And your work, I see.

MR. MIZUNO: Because he wasn't interested at all.

MS. RIEDEL: He never does that, yes.

MR. MIZUNO: He normally doesn't do it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, that's true. And so he just decided —

MR. MIZUNO: He couldn't say no to this person he knew for many years. So he did it as a favor and it turned out to be the way around.

MS. RIEDEL: Isn't that wonderful.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, that's what he said.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary. And when did this all happen? Recently? In the past —

MR. MIZUNO: July.

MS. RIEDEL: In July, so it's very new.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's exciting, really exciting.

MR. MIZUNO: So I came back and start working like crazy and finished those seven pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow, since July. That's two months.

MR. MIZUNO: Well, some of them already in the way, but — so I just finished them all.

MS. RIEDEL: And will — they will be all teardrops and the larger bowl forms? Or are you going to send some of the waterfall —

MR. MIZUNO: Waterfall, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Waterfall, too.

MR. MIZUNO: That's right. Actually, he picked the ones, but some of them are not available. Some of them already crack, not comfortable. So I finish as much as I can and I post that up on webpage. Actually, my son did it for me. He attached the preview page to my website.

So Jack Shainman and his partners is in two different place for the summer vacation. And there's a register in the gallery and they have to communicate with the packing, shipping company to have an estimate. So they need to have a — [inaudible] — to communicate. So they all could look just going to my webpage and look at the piece, decide which one they want. Turned out to be they want everything I posted.

MS. RIEDEL: What a wonderful response.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: It must have been hugely gratifying and exciting after all these years.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah. [Inaudible.]

MS. RIEDEL: Very exciting. It makes me want to go see that show. My sister lives in Manhattan. I have to think if I can go have a visit. [Laughs.]

MR. MIZUNO: Sure, you can go downstairs.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: Walk in the gallery if you want to see my work.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd love to see that. Where is it? Where is the gallery located?

MR. MIZUNO: In Chelsea, at 20th.

MS. RIEDEL: Perfect, how wonderful. How do you feel your work has been received over time? Were there specific series that were especially well received? Do you feel it's been a fairly consistent reception to the different series over time? Do you feel like it's getting better? Do you feel like it was better earlier on?

MR. MIZUNO: You know, when I felt really nice — never felt that way for a long time, but that was — when I had a show at the Long Beach Museum [of Art, Long Beach, CA], that was curated by this person, director of the museum, Hal Nelson. It's not exactly the way I wanted — everything for this piece [ph] because it was — you know, I understand the way the museum is structured.

They need to borrow the work from the collectors so they can get the support for the show and all of that. So I understand that part of it. Turned out to be — everyone was so supportive and everyone congratulate me, you know, more than I expected. So it turned out to be my happy moment; I felt comfortable.

MS. RIEDEL: And this just happened a few years ago, right? Two thousand —

MR. MIZUNO: Five [2005] and '06.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So that's fairly recent.

MR. MIZUNO: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So do you feel that they support — [inaudible] — building.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, for your question, you know, yeah, I felt pretty good about getting of support. At that time, I thought, finally get everything together and look back. At the same time, people, you know, supported me.

MS. RIEDEL: And then to have the — the Samuel Freeman exhibition and his excitement and the next generation being excited about your work and then now this New York opportunity. It seems like it was a nice time.

MR. MIZUNO: Right, right. So I should feel pretty good.

MS. RIEDEL: Does it feel like it's been a long time coming?

MR. MIZUNO: Very long time — definitely long time. [They laugh.] Sure is.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you see as the similarities and the differences between your earlier work and your current work?

MR. MIZUNO: Similarity. I don't know. To me, it looks like two different person.

MS. RIEDEL: It feels very different to me too. It feels like there are threads that run through many of the different series and there's a sensibility, certainly. But —

MR. MIZUNO: You could say —

MS. RIEDEL: How would you — sorry, please, go ahead.

MR. MIZUNO: You could say this — so and so — this and so on, everyone is thinking, you know, believe that way. It's oh, that's nothing personal, that's fine.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, yeah, you've joked about this before that it was sort of a group show quality. But I don't think so.

MR. MIZUNO: No?

MS. RIEDEL: No. I mean, certainly between the early functional dinnerware pieces and the more sculptural arc. One might see that, but does it feel completely different to you?

MR. MIZUNO: It's not completely different, but it's definitely, you know, completely different idea, come from — so maybe made with the same hands, but — [Laughs] — different head or something.

MS. RIEDEL: One of the things that feels similar is your seeming continuing interest in experimenting and the way of working in series and of sort of following an idea through to its logical conclusion, then being done and looking for the next step. Within a series, one piece sort of suggesting the next and then a desire to experiment with new materials or new techniques. Those feel like the similarities to me whereas the work itself can feel a little different.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Does that seem accurate?

MR. MIZUNO: I think I'm going to be — depending on how successful I'm going to be, but that's the way I am, so I'm going to be working same way, style, but different situation. As you get older, it's not possible to, you know, physically be able to create everything you want. And plus, Minako wants to go back to Japan in the future, sometime.

MS. RIEDEL: Permanently or to visit?

MR. MIZUNO: Permanently.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MIZUNO: I mean, I live there and come back here often. So if it's possible to keep both place, I would like to keep this place and go to Japan, see her. And she can come and so have like, you know, time together, quite a lot of time, but have to have two places. But I don't have energy to build a studio there and work there.

MS. RIEDEL: Or ship from there, for that matter.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, but I hope I could go to Japan, have fabricated things I want with a different media, create too, but possibly other media I find there. So idea would come out from when I see the material. That way I could experiment with different things.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: That's my dream, not the goal, but a dream.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes — [They laugh]. So in many ways, the way you went — well, no, you went to Omaha with a very specific idea, but the way you would go to Bar Harbor with a general idea or you'd go to Bar Harbor and experiment and then come back and try something — so it sounds like what you're envisioning is something not too different from what you've done in other places, but now it'd be a back and forth between L.A. and Japan.

MR. MIZUNO: Right. Basically same idea, but just different. And I — people — I'm sure that there's enough people, really to work with me.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. MIZUNO: And create the way I want. So —

MS. RIEDEL: So do you envision more of a designer position over in Japan or more of — just an experimental position?

MR. MIZUNO: No, actually, you know, these things happen all over now with young artists. Once they get well known, established, they don't make their piece. They have it all made.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. MIZUNO: So I need to get to that point. I don't want to be — [inaudible] — just to have it fabricated, do it, but I experiment — I work with them to, you know, see what's possible.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, so work with a team on the sculptural pieces — on new sculptural pieces and perhaps with new material.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, right. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. That sounds really exciting. And that sounds similar to what you've done in the past, but in a completely new way. That sounds great. That actually leads nicely into this question. And we're winding up here, but what do you — what do you think of — what do you think the importance of clay is as a means of expression? And what does it do that nothing else can do? What do you see as its strengths and its limitations? And what has held your interest about it for all this time?

MR. MIZUNO: Well, I still think, you know, clay, itself, is not much — it's flexible. It can do just about — you can build anything. You can even take something with it too. But that's not a reason I'm working with the clay. I work with clay because I am interested with the glaze.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, yeah.

MR. MIZUNO: So I don't see any special advantage with the clay. I don't use that because there's no trace of the clay once my work is finished. There's no finger marks, pinched clay or nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: That's true.

MR. MIZUNO: The — [inaudible] — of the clay, you feel some of the ceramic work, but I'm not interested in that. I, actually, I don't want to show — I have to somehow — has to be finished looking, actually — [inaudible] — the clay, good part of the clay, covered with glaze.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you ever think about working in bronze and patinas? Was that appealing?

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, yeah. I'm interested in working — I've never done it, but I'm definitely interested.

MS. RIEDEL: So that's something that you might explore in the future.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. Why don't we — we were talking about your career. We can see it easily in terms of series of work that are distinct. What do you see — or do you see a thread of continuity that runs through the work? And what about it in particular is significant or important to you?

MR. MIZUNO: I didn't get the whole thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. They're really two separate questions. Do you see a thread of continuity running through your work over time? Or no?

MR. MIZUNO: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And what about your work is most significant to you? What about it most matters to you?

MR. MIZUNO: That's a good question. [They laugh.] That's a good boot camp question. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: It's the last question, too.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah, I have to think about it. But that's not direct answer to that question, but my work — I don't visualize the finished part of it until I finish it. And basically, how I start the piece, series — each series — the main drive is challenge. So most time, I'm really not looking for the finished result from the beginning. I could easily accept whatever comes out. Maybe I'm not satisfied of what comes out and I move on to improve the piece, but I don't know exactly what I'm looking for at the second — [inaudible] — at the beginning. Does that answer your question?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it comes — it makes me think of what you were talking about yesterday when we were looking at the pink-colored teardrop. And you said you envisioned it as pink and it came out pink and you weren't happy with it. You knew it wasn't done. And so you thought about what would be the next step, even though you had an idea that it would finally be a pink teardrop, there was that thought for it being the end product. Once you got it, that wasn't it. And then you added the yellow. And so it involved to something that you hadn't imagined or expected. That seems to me, example of exactly what you're describing.

MR. MIZUNO: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So it seems to me like a continual openness to experimentation and staying very focused on whatever the current stage of the work is. And even when it reaches what you think might be finished, you may find out it's not.

MR. MIZUNO: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like that is also what keeps it interesting.

MR. MIZUNO: It's true. Sometime, you know, and I've always aimed at finding a way to make a more interesting or improved work. For instance, when I was working on the memorial piece, which was big commitment because it's a scale. And once I started, I realized I had so many problems with photograph because the printers we had, inkjet printers, keep breaking down.

So every time we buy a new one, the color comes out different. It's never same. So figured out — it's fine, we cannot fix it — cannot get exact same photograph anymore. So figured out how to use these different photographs and the color photograph — same photograph but different color. And so I put it off a while and start thinking of what to do with it. Then, there's a story about the whole park, a big river runs through inside a park.

It's a huge river, but that's where the most people went into the water, tried to escape from heat. Actually, most people there died in that river. So I decide to do this shape of the river with a different color, which turned out to be, you know, more — worked out, deeper into — [inaudible]. So sometime, work — I didn't plan that. So I explained to them, what is this? So I said it's a river, but I wasn't planning it to be. [Laughs.] Inkjet printer did that. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: This has been wonderful. I think we're done. Thank you very much.

MR. MIZUNO: Okay, great. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]