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Oral history interview with Tom Patti, 2010 January 18-19

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Tom Patti on January 18 and 19, 2010. The interview took place in Miami Beach, Florida, and was conducted by William Warmus 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.

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

Interview

WILLIAM WARMUS: This is an interview between Tom Patti and Bill Warmus.

Hi, Tom.

TOM PATTI: Good morning, Bill.

MR. WARMUS: And give us the location where we're at with the street address today.

MR. PATTI: We're in South Miami, overlooking Biscayne Bay —

MARILYN PATTI: In Miami Beach.

MR. PATTI: Miami Beach. The weather is beautiful, in the high 70s, and the sun's coming up over the marina here. And it's beautiful reflections on the surface of the water. Sky's clear. And ready to rock and roll in our interview.

MR. WARMUS: Okay, we've talked about the format. I have the recommended format in front of me. The leaf blowers will stop eventually, once the pool is clean, and we may take a break for a little swim at some point. But again, I'm going to start reading the interview format. All of this is just a way of loosening us up.

So this is William Warmus interviewing Tom Patti in Miami Beach, as we just said, at 1800 Purdy Avenue in Miami Beach, Florida, on January 18, Monday, 2010, for the Archives of American Art for the Smithsonian Institution. And this is the first disc we're doing. So the first question is, when and where were you born?

MR. PATTI: That's a good place to start. I was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the son of Viola and Quinto Patti.

MR. WARMUS: Spell that, please, the two names.

MR. PATTI: V-I-O-L-A, Viola. And my father was Quinto — Q-U-I-N-T-O — Quinto Leano.

MR. WARMUS: Okay. I'm going to ask you to spell certain things — people's names — because it drives the transcriber crazy if we don't do that.

MR. PATTI: Okay.

MR. WARMUS: But that part doesn't get transcribed, the question.

MR. PATTI: If I can remember how to spell them.

MR. WARMUS: Okay. And then the next question is to describe your childhood and family background. So what they want is a little bit of information about you as a child, like where you grew up and what the family structure looked like.

MR. PATTI: Well, I'm one of three children. I'm the youngest. I have a brother, Ronald, and sister, Gail [ph]. Pretty normal childhood, very comfortable as a child growing up in that area. I come from a lower socioeconomic background.

MR. WARMUS: What did your parents do for a living?

MR. PATTI: My father was a barber and my mother worked in a local factory when I was very young, and then just became a housewife. She was a musician. She played the piano. And during that period of time, she had her own orchestra and she would go out and play at weddings and some of the clubs in the area. She continued to do

that most of her life — to raise the children, and her little musical career.

MR. WARMUS: Did you have an interest in music because of that?

MR. PATTI: No, I didn't have an interest in music, but she was totally absorbed with playing the piano, so growing up there was always the sound of the piano in our home. We'd often gather around the piano as a family and would sing the songs our mother would play. We had a player piano and you could open the piano up and see the paper roll, the perforated paper roll. As kids we'd all move the pedals and play our own songs.

I remember making my own paper at one time and punching holes in it and laying it over the device inside the piano and working the pedals and making all these strange sounds with the piano. So the piano may be the — maybe I was a musician. [Laughs.]

MR. WARMUS: So what did the music sound like that you played?

MR. PATTI: Oh, it was very abstract. It was early Stravinsky, I'm sure. [Laughs.] But it was fascinating, you know, the idea that you could punch holes in paper and then translate that into sound. You know, I was preoccupied with that for a little while when I was a little kid, I remember. And my mother was — she was very accommodating.

There wasn't much that myself and the neighborhood kids couldn't do in our house or in the neighborhood. It was very, very loose. We'd go out in the morning, play all day, and then come back before dark. So every day was an adventure when I was very young.

MR. WARMUS: Wasn't there a famous opera singer in your family?

MR. PATTI: I have a great-great aunt on my father's side — Adelina Patti, the opera singer. The word "coloratura" was a word coined to describe her voice and she was very well-recognized all over the world.

And often, when I began this — as my work became recognized and I began to speak in Europe, particularly, people would come to my talks because they saw my name somewhere and it was that word — the name Patti attracted them. And they just wanted to meet me and hear about me and see my work — because of who she was there.

MR. WARMUS: Was she someone that was a known person in your family when you were growing up? Did your parents, for example, refer to her? I assume it was your mother's — your father's relative?

MR. PATTI: My father's. My grandmother would talk about her, and my father, sometimes, would mention there was a famous person in our family in the old country, and that she occasionally came to the United States and she was very important. But we didn't pay much attention to that.

You know, it seemed like all my friends had somebody important in their family, you know, generations back, in some way. So it wasn't anything significant until I began to realize who she was and what she had done and accomplished in her life that it became interesting to me.

MR. WARMUS: Do you have family reunions?

MR. PATTI: Not really. You know, as we get older, more and more, I'm starting to hear from certain people that are related in the family. When I go to Europe, I'm now trying to contact cousins and people that know my family in Italy. I often go to Europe now. I mean, I have a gallery. There's a gallery that represents my work in southern France, Serge Lechaczynski.

MR. WARMUS: I won't ask you to spell that.

MR. PATTI: Don't ask me to spell that.

MR. WARMUS: But we know the first name is Serge — S-E-R-G-E. And Lechaczynski begins with an L and I'm sure the transcriber can call us or Google him. He's at Biot Gallery?

MR. PATTI: Yes.

MR. WARMUS: B-I-O-T, gallery in Southern France [Galerie International du Verre, Biot, France].

MR. PATTI: In southern France. I have two dealers: Serge in France and Doug Heller [of Heller Gallery] in North America in New York, on Fourteenth Street.

MR. WARMUS: We have to wait. That comes a little later. So going back to family and growing up: We have the

player piano, and were there any other interesting stories like that that you remember?

MR. PATTI: Oh, what was interesting about growing up was — we lived in a two-story home, so there was always another family that occupied the house. So you, not just your family, but you absorbed a lot of the culture of the family that lived upstairs. My backyard was the landfill, abutted the landfill for General Electric, which is the predominant industry in that area.

My grandparents came over at the turn of the century and, as immigrants, formed a labor force. They came into Pittsfield area, where many of the Italians settled from the same village in Italy, or in that area. And they worked at General Electric. So that landfill was in my backyard and I would constantly make these escapades up into the — through the yard, over into the GE landfill, where they would constantly, every day, dump truckloads of new materials — all kinds of chemicals and hardware.

As they broke down the laboratories, as they developed new products and new technologies, they would discard all the byproducts and the old labs in that landfill. So I would dig up all that stuff and a lot of it was just on the surface of the ground, wasn't covered — acids, all kinds of chemicals.

There was a river nearby and we'd take the stuff down and throw it in the river and float it around and the water would change colors. And between that and the sewer that went by, it was a pretty dynamic neighborhood.

MR. WARMUS: And tell us again the town where this was.

MR. PATTI: This was in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. During the war, in the '40s, the population was over 50,000 people — 56,000, I believe. And I think it's probably now, 2010, about 45,000 people.

MR. WARMUS: And you've lived in the Pittsfield area most of your life.

MR. PATTI: Yes, my studio now is still there. I live on the outskirts. After I went to school and returned to the area —

MR. WARMUS: We'll get back to that.

MR. PATTI: Yes, but I've always had a connection to the area that I grew up in, in some way. So I've lived there in that area all my life so far.

MR. WARMUS: Tell me about the school system — elementary school and high school. What kinds of schools did you attend?

MR. PATTI: Well, because I lived in an Italian area on the east side of Pittsfield and it was the Italian neighborhood, so when people came from Europe and settled in that area with their friends, we'd all go to the same elementary school. Many of the people that are prominent people in the community now, I remember when they were in school.

They came and couldn't speak English, and they had no tutorial services at the time. And they would sit there, two or three years older than most of the kids in the room, not knowing the language. It was up to them to sort of survive —

MR. WARMUS: In which religion were you brought up?

MR. PATTI: I was Catholic. My parents were Catholic and attended the local church.

MR. WARMUS: Which church? What was the name?

MR. PATTI: The Sacred Heart Church in the neighborhood. And we'd walk — you know, we'd walk to the church and we'd walk to all the schools. Elementary school, junior high and high school — it was all within walking distance of our home.

MR. WARMUS: Was there a parochial school, a Catholic school?

MR. PATTI: There was a parochial school, St. Joseph's. It was a high school, a parochial high school. There was also Notre Dame Elementary School, the parochial school. But I went to the closest schools, and those were public schools.

MR. WARMUS: Do you want to talk just a little bit about the schools — and you can talk about the education there, and also your friends there, a little bit, if there's anything that comes to mind.

MR. PATTI: Yes, well, the friends I had in elementary school, several of them are still my friends today. Some of

the best relationships I have developed are that — you know, when we were very young. I value those dearly. It was a very special time.

I often think that much of what I do today is a response to a lot of the experiences I had as a very young kid growing up in that area. A lot of the things still resonate with me —the exposure to industry, my interest in it, interest in community and friends, maintaining those kinds of relationships. They're still important to me today.

MR. WARMUS: Can you name a couple of the friends you've stayed in touch with?

MR. PATTI: Yes, Fran DiMassimo, Louie Coco.

MR. WARMUS: How do you spell Coco?

MR. PATTI: C-O-C-O. Louie and I are — every Thursday night, we get together. We go out and now we talk about our grandchildren [laughs] and reminisce about —

MR. WARMUS: What does he do?

MR. PATTI: He retired from GE, which was not unusual for when I grew up. The idea was that most of the kids, that you'd go to elementary school and on into high school and you'd graduate and then go into industry. And the prize was to be able to go and work for GE. My grandparents — my grandmother worked at GE and retired from GE.

MR. WARMUS: What did she do?

MR. PATTI: She made parts, injection-molded parts — that I remember. All her fingers had been broken at one time or another. I can remember her hands. She operated a press, and it was — and I remember, we had talked about it — that you got paid by the number of pieces that you produced and she worked very hard. Everybody in the community — it was a very blue-collar, hard-working community.

I can remember, as a child, roller-skating on the sidewalk, sitting on my porch. And people didn't ride to work; they would walk to the factory in the morning. You'd see them leaving to go in the morning with their lunchboxes and come back in the evening. And they'd be all covered with some kind of dust — they'd be orange or white or green from the powders of the processing equipment that was used in the factories.

MR. WARMUS: I gather that this was before the era of environmental awareness, let's say [they laugh] — but I gather that you —

MR. PATTI: It's what created environmental awareness. [Laughs.]

MR. WARMUS: Right, but at that time, I think, it sounds like you were more fascinated by it than afraid of it. Was that correct?

MR. PATTI: No, no, we weren't afraid of it. We really didn't think about it. It was just a natural part of the environment — you know, the people in those conditions. What people valued at the time, I think, was that they could get a job, and particularly that GE paid very well. So we were fortunate. People saw themselves as fortunate to be able to work there, because it was the highest-paying place you could work in, and it had benefits that — retirement benefits.

There were a few bars that sprung up in the neighborhood because GE would have two or three weeks every year — they would "have shutdown," it would be called. The whole plant would shut down and everybody would get two or three weeks off. And people would all take their little trips or fix their houses and their yards and stuff.

Thursdays was payday. Everybody would go over to the local bars, which was — young kids, children, the whole family would be in there, you know, celebrating the paycheck. You know, it was just accepted. People, I think, thought they were fortunate to be able to do that and raise their family in the American dream — that the kids would find another position, move on and grow up and maybe move out of town. But if they stayed in town, they would get another job at the GE. Louie's father worked at GE. Louie Coco's dad worked at GE and he worked at GE and he retired from GE, and he has a beautiful home now, wife, grandchildren, all as a result of that sort of built-in plan.

MR. WARMUS: Now, did the General Electric Corporation and plant have a specific name, or did it have a specific focus in what it made?

MR. PATTI: Instead of just saying — we called it "the GE." And at 12 o'clock, they'd have a whistle that would blow. Everybody could tell — nobody had watches, I don't think. And you'd just hear the siren go off at 12 o'clock and four-thirty. Twelve was lunch or shift change; four-thirty was, again, a shift change, the end-of-the-day

workers. You could hear it all over the city. It became just a natural part of the way we lived.

MR. WARMUS: Now, growing up in that environment, did you plan to go and work for GE, as well?

MR. PATTI: Yes, I think there was a point where everybody saw themselves hoping to maybe get a job at GE. I don't think I was — I think, early on, I realized I wasn't probably GE material.

MR. WARMUS: Why not?

MR. PATTI: That's a good question — why not? I don't know. Although I didn't know what I wanted to do, it was hard for me to see something in there that would — in a plant — although, I did like when they — at open house, they had manmade lightning. Every year, they would have open house and all the employees would bring all the friends and family you could get in. The kids in the neighborhood, we'd all go over there and they'd display the manmade lightning event.

MR. WARMUS: What was that?

MR. PATTI: Because GE had their transformer division, electrical, [Charles] Steinmetz — a lot of visionary people — and with electromagnetism and electrical technology, were brought into GE as scientists. A lot of visionary people came through the area and they developed manmade lightning. It was created in Pittsfield. There is a building that was devoted to research technology for high-voltage electronics.

That and plastics were developed. I remember, as a kid, one day we heard a loud explosion. All of the kids, all of a sudden, everybody's out in the street. We all ran up the end of the street. The whole corner of the building blew up. One of the laboratories at GE exploded and all the fire trucks and the ambulances came. That was an exciting day, there.

Another exciting day was when the river caught on fire because of all the chemicals that were put in there over the years. We'd all run down to the shore and work with the firemen, putting out the fire along the side of the river, where all the chemicals accumulated.

MR. WARMUS: What got you in the direction of becoming interested in art? Talk about how that happened and then how you decided what the next step would be, like where you would go to college.

MR. PATTI: Yes, I didn't think I was going to probably go in GE and also — I was probably a social delinquent around in the early high school years with my friends, as we grew up. It was actually my probation officer that thought that — that was trying to find something that I could do that was socially acceptable.

He saw these tattoos that I had on my hands and he asked me — we started talking about them. And I said, yes, because I was the only one who could draw, among my friends, that I was the one responsible for all the tattoos in high school. Because we'd skip school and go up to the lake.

MR. WARMUS: And you did the tattooing?

MR. PATTI: I would do all the tattooing on the beach, up at the lakefront. And a lot of bad drawings — I mean, I feel bad, today, thinking that a lot of my friends are wearing these really bad drawings [laughs] — permanent drawings.

MR. WARMUS: Do you still have the ones on you?

MR. PATTI: Butterflies were big, and bluebirds. I used to do a lot of "love" and "hate" on the hands, on each finger. L-O-V-E. There were little packs, groups of guys that hung out. They'd have their little unique tattoos that I would do. Some were very, very small and others were pretty good-sized on their chest or back or forearms.

MR. WARMUS: Where did you learn to tattoo?

MR. PATTI: I didn't. We used to go to the carnival and they did these marvelous tattoos, these full-color things. I never had the nerve to get one. And I still, today, regret that I didn't follow that impulse to get those beautiful ones with the daggers going through the skulls.

So I went back and fooled around; I got some different kinds of needles and experimented. And somehow, I found out if you used India ink — and I found a drafting needle for a drafting set, a drafting compass tip. The shape of that — the point of that compass has a little step in it, so it measures the depth of the point of the compass, so you could press that into the skin and it would stop at a certain level.

So it was perfect for tattooing. And it was just trying to get the ink under the skin. I'm amazed — they're permanent. I mean, they're still on me — my leg, my arm, my hand. Anyways, my —

MR. WARMUS: You brought up the probation officer and so I should go back and ask you what that was about, if you feel like talking about it.

MR. PATTI: Yes. This is probably the first time I've really spoken about it because I think it needs to be said if people are really looking at my career. But I always hesitated to talk about it because I didn't — young people are impressionable and I didn't want them to think that, you know, to be a successful artist, that you had to be a delinquent, that you had to do the things that I had done. That's not the only way to find a path in life.

A lot of things I did, I'm not — I wasn't comfortable with today. You know, it was part of growing up — it was things that attracted me at the time. Again, I was pretty much out there, free to do what I wanted to do, when I wanted to do it. And I abused a lot of things at the time.

There was a pack of guys. [Laughs.] I was the only one that actually graduated from high school of the six, seven, guys that I hung out with, kids. And it was guys and girls and they were all tough. Every one of them was tough, the guys and the girls. You couldn't tell them apart and they were all very tough. And by the tenth, eleventh, grade in high school, they had all been expelled.

Because the judge in town knew most of the kids in the community — Judge Cimini — you pretty much had a choice: You went in the service or you went to jail. Most of them opted for the service and so by tenth, eleventh grade, most of my friends were gone, out of school. So I was pretty much alone there, and I had gotten into trouble again and I was on probation for two years.

So my probation officer, Mr. Primmer — every Thursday, I would meet with him. Mr. Primmer said, "Tom, all these tattoos — maybe you could show me some drawings or do some drawings." So I figured, I'll do some drawings for this guy and in six months, I'll be out of here. You know, I won't do two years. I'll do everything he says, do the drawings. Well, two years of drawing — I never did get out in six months. He loved my drawings. He loved my work. I started doing paintings for him, all kinds of stuff.

MR. WARMUS: What kind of paintings?

MR. PATTI: Very surrealistic stuff. They were part tattoo art. They were very surreal, like young people, I think, would do at the time. They're very, sort of, visionary landscapes. Realize, at the time, you know, the space program was developing, you know, in the late '50s, early '60s, after the war [World War II]. So they're sort of visionary, science-fiction-like landscapes, and they all had a sort of foreboding, sort of ominous visual component to them.

You know, there was this sort of dark and light that continues to appear in my work. I often thought it was something that was just something deep within myself, like I think many people have something that reoccurs continuously. This relationship between the dark, the light, the sort of foreboding side of things — and the work reflected that.

So he'd continue and we'd go back and forth with my drawings. In school, they tried to put me in — I tested high on some of the exams, but I was in a general course because of my behavior. They put me in a college-prep class once and I didn't get to the second day; I got in a fight, I think, the second class, and I was expelled. They never let me back in that room again. And I had go back to my other class.

I ended up in the commercial course and I learned — it was great, because I learned to type and I made a lot of friends with all the girls in the classroom. It was great. Even today, I go to the class reunion and all the girls still remember me from typing class. You know, it's nice. I still see people in the community that I grew up with, still have a lot of respect for one another and how our lives changed. It's great.

But my probation officer was the one that steered me on a course, a path, in the art world. At the time, I didn't realize you could go to art school — that you could be a professional artist or that art was even a possibility for me.

Although I had always drawn and I had this peculiar interest in it, without knowing that there was a path in art, but that I was always, in some way, doing — making things, building things. Like, all kids do it, but it was very much a preoccupation with everything I did. I'd be outside and I could play all day up in the dump, you know? I mean, it wasn't just a couple hours. I could be there from morning till night, and I could do it year after year.

I remember one day — in the morning, we had to walk through the dump to go over to my school — to the elementary school. And one day, I got playing and the next thing I knew, I saw kids coming back in the other direction. I had never made it to school. I played in the dump all day. [Laughs.]

MR. WARMUS: Let's back up to a couple of things. We're still in your early years. I just wanted to remind people that you were born on October 16, 1943, and that the dedication of the General Electric lab and the lightning you

saw would have been in 1949, and that you had an accident in 1951 with your eye. Do you want to talk about that?

MR. PATTI: Yes, you know how I was describing how I was always playing with things, making things? There was this little device where you could put a button on a string and you could put the string in each hand. And as you pull it, the string would wind up and unwind, as you pulled it back and forth. And the button would spin at a high rate of speed.

So I started experimenting with different buttons, trying to get different kinds of behavior from this. I was eight years old. And the centrifugal force — the button came apart — the button fractured, came apart, and it hit me in the eye. I went to the hospital, my parents brought me to the hospital. I couldn't see, stayed in the hospital for a couple weeks. An infection developed and —

MR. WARMUS: We're still recording. We're just going to move indoors a bit because of the noise from the leaf blower. Let's see, right here? Maybe right there. Okay, keep going.

MR. PATTI: Where was I?

MR. WARMUS: You were talking about the injury to your eye.

MR. PATTI: Yes, so I went to the hospital and after a couple weeks, I had an operation in Pittsfield. And an infection set in and it was recommended that they couldn't do any more for me there, that it was getting more serious. My parents decided to take me to Boston and we went to Boston. They operated that evening in Boston and removed my eye. I had an infection and it was moving towards my optic nerve. If they hadn't operated immediately, I would have been totally blind.

So you know, in a way, it was fortunate that my parents took the initiative to take me out of the hospital in Pittsfield and bring me to Boston, where it was taken care of right away. I always thought that experience — I've always had a keen interest in perception — you know, how we see and why we see the way we do and the phenomenon of sight and the eye as an organ, as a sensory organ and how it functions. It has always been a preoccupation with that experience.

MR. WARMUS: You were seven or eight years old when that happened — does that sound correct, the chronology?

MR. PATTI: Yes.

MR. WARMUS: So was it psychologically traumatic for you to have this happen?

MR. PATTI: I don't think so. No, I mean, I was fortunate. I'm not aware that I was treated any differently. It was just part of growing up. I have young friends that have gotten killed or mutilated by different kinds of things in some form or another, and as kids, it was just an accepted part of the neighborhood, of the way we were. It never seemed to be a problem for me. And I never wanted it to become an issue. I never wanted to be thought of any different than anyone else.

In fact, in the big picture of life, it's a very small part of who we are. But I'm sure it influences the way you look at the world, you see the world — not just the visual experience, but the psychological experience. I'm sure they shape — I don't think of it as a handicap in a negative way; I think it's a handicap in a positive way. It gives you a unique way of looking and interpreting things, because you *are* somewhat different.

MR. WARMUS: Let's mention that in 1960, you met Norman Rockwell at an exhibition.

MR. PATTI: Yes, at the same time that I was working with Mr. Primmer, my probation officer, he had me — I started to do paintings. And he recommended that I meet — that I go over to the Berkshire Museum [Pittsfield, MA] — that they were offering classes on art. So I went up there one evening and I met a teacher named Mr. Joseph, and he was a draftsman at GE. And he taught a painting class at Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield. For two dollars a class, I could join the class and he gave instructions. And I was 15, 16 years old. And most people in there were — they seemed very old to me — they were probably in their 30s, 40s, and 50s at the time.

So I went to one or two classes and painted. And he said, "Tom, you know, you have a unique interest in art and your painting is very accomplished." He said, "You don't have to come to class." He said, "Why don't you come over Saturday mornings?" He didn't live too far from where I lived. He said, "You can come over and I'll give you private lessons on my porch" — like that. So for a good portion of a year, every Saturday, I would go over and he would give me drawing lessons and painting lessons, and we'd talk about it, and so on.

Then I was exhibiting my paintings — and on the lawn at the Berkshire Museum was this group of people that were in the painting class. They asked me to put my paintings outside, and the tourists would come by and I

would talk about the paintings and sell paintings to the local tourists. I made money, and everything I made, I'd give a portion — half of it to my parents, and then I'd have spending money for myself.

It was outside, on the lawn at the Berkshire Museum, in the summer, when I met Norman Rockwell. He came by and he saw my paintings, and I didn't know who he was at the time. He came over and he was talking to me about my work. He was curious about what I was going to do, and I told him I didn't know. I didn't have any plans. I didn't know what I could do.

He called me a few days later and invited my parents and I to his studio. Again, I didn't know, really, who he was. My parents — my mother knew who he was. We drove to Stockbridge, a town about 20 minutes from Pittsfield. And he was concerned that — what I was going to do. I had enough talent that he thought I should go to art school. Like I said, I didn't realize that you could go to art school, that it was a valid profession — that a trained artist could make a living. That's how we thought at the time.

He recommended that I go to the best school for studying art at the time, and it was called Pratt Institute. And I remember my parents asking him where it was, and he said it's in Brooklyn, New York. I told him about that I saw the Famous Artists School [correspondence courses; Wilton, CT] on a packet of matches when I was learning to smoke. I thought, that's what I was — I said to him, Jeez, yeah, I was starting to think about the Famous Artists program that's offered.

And he said, no, that's for kids that do not have access — that live in very rural areas like the Ozarks, or something. I remember him describing it, that they wouldn't have access to a professional art school, and that was an opportunity for them. But for me, I should go to professional art school and get training.

So for me, it was this constant — not ever anticipating, sort of, what the next thing was going to be. There were these constant little surprises that I kept turning the corner on and discovering, that led a path. There was never any preconceived notion of what I was going to do or how I was going to do it or where I was going. It was sort of one little thing at a time.

MR. WARMUS: So you went to Berkshire Community College in 1943?

MR. PATTI: Well, you can imagine, from my earlier description of my life's path, that I applied to Pratt. The interesting thing was, the art component — in those days, you had to take an academic — you had SAT scores. There was an academic component to the entrance exam and a visual art component to it.

I scored very high on the visual art component, but I really had no high school grades. Most of the grades that I had were — the teachers told me, you know, you just behave, sit in your class, and we'll get you through, here, Tom. And that was about it. So I had to develop academic skills. So I went to a community college in Pittsfield. And Pratt suggested that I go for two years and then reapply.

I was very fortunate. It was a very good school. There were many teachers that mentored me. They realized what I was trying to do, where I had the potential to go. So after six months — I didn't do any drawing or painting — within six months, after the first semester, I had very high grades and I reapplied and I was accepted at Pratt the following year.

MR. WARMUS: Let's pause for a second. This tape has about eight minutes on this particular disc, so this is actually a good point to pause. When we put the next disc in, we'll start with Pratt. But in the few minutes that remain, is there anything we should follow up, going backwards, again, about your first 20 years or so that we may have not discussed that you'd like to talk about?

MR. PATTI: No, I can't think of anything.

MR. WARMUS: Did you take family vacations?

MR. PATTI: No.

MR. WARMUS: None at all?

MR. PATTI: No, no, we didn't. You know, we didn't have the resources. The biggest thing in our family was, every five or six years, my family would get a car — get an automobile. They would save and we'd get a car. But my parents didn't have the luxury of — they didn't have the resources to go on vacations and to do these things.

MR. WARMUS: But did they take you —

MR. PATTI: Pardon?

MR. WARMUS: Did they take you, maybe, on small trips to, I don't know, a local beach or amusement park or up

in the mountains or the ocean?

MR. PATTI: No, we would go to the lake. The community had lakes. They had a state forest. We'd go on picnics and — I was fortunate that — on our street, the houses were one home next to each other. But my grandparents, who owned the house we were in, they owned the lot next door, where there was no home.

So the idea was that we had a yard to play in, where the other kids didn't. And it was the largest yard on the street. And the back yard was opened up to the GE landfill, so there was a lot of area to play in. By the way, by the year 2000 — I think in the year 2000 — the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] came in and removed the entire yard. They dug down from two feet to four feet deep around the house and down the GE landfill and they removed the entire yard because it was so contaminated with PCBs.

And that happened to other homes in the neighborhood. They took out all the trees and they brought all-new soil in and new trees, bushes, and so on. They replicated the landscape that existed before. They put up a large wire fence that separated the formal GE property from our yard.

MR. WARMUS: What about family gatherings? Did the dinner table play a big role? Were you together?

MR. PATTI: Yes, yes, it was — we had a house where all the relatives — every Sunday, after church, we'd have a large meal. Friends and family, we'd spend the entire day around the table eating, talking. My cousins, a lot of relatives, everybody would come. That was the experience, really, traveling from one — you know, to my aunts and uncles that lived in the area — their homes — and going to the lakes for picnics.

MR. WARMUS: That gives us, I think, a good start on tape one. And we're coming close to the end of tape one. Yes, so we can probably stop this one. It's about ten forty-nine a.m., and we're going to call this disc one, and we'll be ending and taking a break and then starting on disc two. Disc one covers roughly the period from 1943 to 1963.

[END DISC 1.]

MR. WARMUS: Okay, this is disc two of the interview with Tom Patti by William Warmus. We're in Miami Beach, Florida.

The first disc explains where we are. And at this point, we are about 1963 in Tom's career. That takes us to when he received a full scholarship to enter the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. And I noticed here — I have a note that you studied with Rowena Reed Kostellow — that's R-O-W-E-N-A R-E-E-D K-O-S-T-E-L-L-O [sic]. Do you want to start with that for the second disc, talk a little bit about — it's a woman, I assume, yes?

MR. PATTI: Yes, Rowena Reed Kostellow was the department head in the industrial design department at Pratt Institute. I didn't major in industrial design until the second year, of course. The first year is called the foundation course, where you get fundamental courses in art as taught by Pratt. The foundation course at Pratt is based on the Bauhaus program [Weimar, Dessau, and Berlin, 1919-1933] in Germany in the early-to-mid — in the 20th century, in the 1900s, between, I think, probably 1917 and 1939.

MR. WARMUS: You mention the term Bauhaus so easily right now. It's such a thing that's built into your knowledge bank. But I assume in 1963, you probably didn't even know what the Bauhaus was. Is that correct?

MR. PATTI: No, I didn't. I learned it and have a lot of respect for it. The foundations for the Bauhaus, they're still being developed — they're still being discovered. They're still evolving. A lot of things have been rejected; a lot of things are being improved upon. It's still a valid form of visual art.

MR. WARMUS: The thing that interests me, though — and you could talk a little bit about it — was, you're going from this industrial background where you were hanging out with almost a kind of gothic crowd, doing tattoos. And then you go straight to Pratt in New York City, and you're suddenly attracted to the Bauhaus, which is quite different from the art you were doing, in terms of tattooing. How did that come about? Why were you attracted to it?

MR. PATTI: I'm not sure. The Bauhaus is a program that I learned and gained respect for because of the foundation course at Pratt, which was a very rigorous program. And it was rigorous for several reasons. One, I think, was it separated people out. Whatever they thought they were going to do or wanted to do, the program was rigorous enough that you would realize that you were in for more of that kind of training — whatever program you were going to eventually go into.

And the people that were — the head of that program at the time, Rowena Reed Kostellow — they would evaluate your foundation program to see if you were a good candidate for the industrial design program, which was, again, a rigorous program at Pratt in the '60s. And it's interesting — we'll talk about it later in this

conversation, but that was 1963, '64, when I entered that program; and we're in 2010, and next week I'll receive the Rowena Reed Kostellow Award from Pratt Institute to recognize her for her work at Pratt and to recognize me as one of the more promising students and my career in the arts since then.

It's a big honor for me. It's very special. I have a lot of respect for the school, what they did for me, and the help that, even on a large-scale, large program that Pratt is, that they were able to recognize each student there as an individual and give them the attention — the unique attention — that each individual requires in those formative years.

MR. WARMUS: Was she someone you stayed in touch with after?

MR. PATTI: Yes, it's interesting — she was tough as nails, Rowena Reed. My roommate was Japanese and we both competed. And then you received a scholarship based on your —

MR. WARMUS: Your roommate's name?

MR. PATTI: Nobuhide Etoh — we called him Nobi.

MR. WARMUS: E-T-O?

MR. PATTI: E-T-O-H. He was very talented. He had already graduated from Kyoto College of Fine Arts in Japan. He was recognized already as a very promising artist in Japan. And he came and we were roommates. He had, and still has, a big influence on my career, because we worked so closely together, being roommates.

We both competed for scholarships. And those, they weren't handed out easily, it was based on your academic record at school. There was only a couple of scholarships available. One was for grades among the student body and the other was another scholarship for the department — the highest grades in the department that you were in. We were very close friends, and Rowena Reed had influenced both of us.

The interesting thing is, Nobi had such a conflict of aesthetic ideas and emotions in the department with Rowena, that he — because of the intense work that we were doing at the time in school, he left. He actually left the school. And I stayed on and I just absorbed everything she had to teach and say to me as a class — she was eventually my mentor and teacher for my thesis in my last year in undergraduate school, which was, I believe, her retirement year at Pratt.

She was interesting. Maybe it was [because of] Rowena that I feel like my work is just — I talk about my work as evolving, and one work as a resource for the next work. There's a sense that no object is complete within itself. That's, in a sense, the way Rowena taught us that — even when I was through that class, a year later, I was visiting her. She had an apartment on Greene Street, and Soho was just developing residences for artists and art types in that area, in the large lofts.

I would visit her because she never really let me go — she never signed off on my project. It was this ongoing dialogue that we had in the program around that work that I was pursuing. It was about — it was this relationship between surface and interior space that, my last year in high school, I got involved with — I'm sorry, not in high school, in college — that I got involved with habitats — spaces that people could occupy and live in, as either the habitat as a home or habitat as a shelter experience.

Realize that at that time the Vietnam War was raging. There was a keen social awareness and the Peace Corps was developing. There was a lot of social upheaval in the country, civil rights. The Black Panthers had chained the gates closed on the campus. So there was a lot of things, so this social consciousness was developing.

So I think my interest in art and design and that social awareness — I had this need to tackle a huge problem. And one was global housing. How could we better shelter and provide habitats for human beings on this planet? So it was part of the program that Rowena and I worked on. I kept relating everything in our class to that interest that I had. That predominated most of my courses during my last year in undergraduate school.

So although her class was very formal in terms of design discipline, there was this added component, that I was trying to actually realize these environments as practical living spaces for people. We continued to work on that, even after she left the program. And the person that came in after her was a man named Joseph Parriott. He also took an interest in my work — that he and Rowena encouraged me to stay in Pratt for graduate school.

I wanted to continue the work that I had begun at Pratt and I applied to Yale [University, New Haven, CT] and Cranbrook [Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI] and other schools, and I had received full scholarships for graduate school. The teachers at school were filling out their recommendations. Joe Parriott invited me to his office, and he and Rowena had a conversation that if possible, that they should keep me at Pratt for graduate school, that often the recognition that the schools and the students get is wherever they attend graduate

school; that they were hopeful that they would provide all the resources for me and that I would choose to stay at Pratt and in New York.

In fact, I did, because New York City, as a resource, and Pratt — I just needed the access to the intellectual community of Pratt. My work had become very specialized, very specific towards the program that I had started in undergraduate school. So there was not a lot of help that I could get from any one individual. But I needed a community, an environment, that I could work in comfortably. I started to engage the city more — Manhattan and so on.

MR. WARMUS: So that would be 1967, when you received your B.F.A. in industrial design from Pratt.

Let's back up. You were in New York about three or four years at that point, at Pratt. Talk a little bit about the experience of going from a small- or medium-size town in western Massachusetts to New York City. Was that your first trip to New York?

MR. PATTI: It was the first time I had been ever out of Pittsfield. We used to go to Albany in the car. We'd travel over there to go drinking and stuff — over the mountain, we'd call it — from when I was 16 to 18 years old. But Albany was about 36 miles away, and that was about as far out of the area that I had gotten. But I was comfortable — eventually got to Brooklyn and got into New York and I loved it.

MR. WARMUS: How did you get from — you know, one of the rites of passage is always packing up in the family home and then going to college the first time. How did you get there?

MR. PATTI: Yes, it was great. My father also had never gone to New York, but his partner in the barber shop had been to New York. So he drove my father and I down to New York and dropped me off at school in the dormitory. The dormitory then was on Flatbush Avenue. It was about 10 blocks from the campus because they hadn't finished building the dormitories at the time, or providing dormitory space.

So it was a hotel on Flatbush Avenue, which was where I stayed in the dormitory, which was quite an experience. Getting to school, going up DeKalb Avenue — it was like running the gauntlet, getting past the neighborhood kids all wanting to pick a fight with you and hassle you all the way up. But fortunately, I had all this early experience in Pittsfield [laughs], and I became part of the neighborhood and I had no problem. I had a lot of friends in Brooklyn by the time I finished there in the neighborhood.

MR. WARMUS: You had a lot of weird tattoos, too.

MR. PATTI: Yes. I had no problem relating to the neighborhood types. Actually, I saved my friends from getting beat up a lot, my roommates and that.

MR. WARMUS: Did you go into Manhattan very much?

MR. PATTI: You know, yes, it was interesting — because of the way I looked at the problems I was working on that the school was providing, it wasn't hard for me to see — to relate experiences that were going on in the city, programs in and around school, that I couldn't integrate, in some way, to solve the problems that I was given in class.

So I would engage in programs throughout the school in the engineering school, the fashion school, the interior design program. I would go to take lectures in the city, visit, introduce myself to the people providing the lectures in the city. And they would let me in and attend the lectures; I'd sit in the back. I would often contact the speaker and write and share my notes and information that I was doing that would relate to their talk. And I met a lot of very interesting people.

MR. WARMUS: Was this related, for example, to the Experiments in Art and Technology [New York, NY], EAT project?

MR. PATTI: Yes, that was very specific in the arts, but I got to know Buckminster Fuller, Dr. [Michael] DeBakey developing the artificial heart, at the time. [He] did the first heart transplant in the States.

MR. WARMUS: You met him when you were in New York?

MR. PATTI: Yes.

MR. WARMUS: Was he lecturing?

MR. PATTI: Yes, he spoke there, and I went to — on Thirteenth Street, there was — now, this is early on. It was hard to realize — they became a prominent force in — I was interested in art and I was interested in technology and interested in industry. And there was a program — I think it was 13th Street where I met Bob Rauschenberg

and some other major, contemporary artists that would gather and meet there once a month.

They would put out a small publication and I would help spread, bring the publication around, drop it off at certain areas around the city or at the school. I sort of was the representative at the school for disseminating the information that we were developing on — it was called Experiments in Art and Technology, E-A-T.

They weren't much older than me, but I was the youngest person there. There wasn't a lot of interest outside of that program, at the time, and they were very inspiring people. Within a few years, they did the expo in Japan. I wasn't involved in that, but I was there at the time in the early stages of it. But I became involved, through my school and through that, with the expo in Montreal, where my work was exhibited as a student.

MR. WARMUS: That would have been Expo 67 in Montreal?

MR. PATTI: Expo '67 in Montreal.

MR. WARMUS: Did you go to that expo?

MR. PATTI: Yes, I did. I drove up there to represent the school and my work that was exhibited there, and it was on experimental housing for habitat space. There was a special pavilion that was a student pavilion; and my work was featured in that area on housing, and it was these strange, inflatable structures that could be mass-produced — that they had infinite form possibility.

I had developed — begun to develop materials, and they were starting to take form where people could recognize them as possible spaces for habitat. And Moshe Safdie had built this structure, habitat there — the first modularized mass grouping of prefabricated structures. That still exists there. At the time, I thought this was —

MR. WARMUS: Just an editorial note is that I think — when we're talking about habitat, it's spelled two different ways in this conversation. Habitat — H-A-B-I-T-A-T would be the structures you were designing.

But I think that the building that was built in Expo 67 was spelled H-A-B-A-T-A-T, Habatat — if I'm correct. I also think, just as a footnote, that maybe that was what inspired Ferd [Ferdinand] Hampson to call his gallery Habatat Gallery [Royal Oak, MI]. I'm not certain about that. We'll have to check that. Okay, go on. Well, I wanted to go back —

MR. PATTI: You know, I never took the initiative, but it was my teachers that did that. Go ahead.

MR. WARMUS: I wanted to backtrack and ask a couple more questions about just your introduction to New York.

MR. PATTI: That's why you need to re-edit this, and when you edit it, you can —

MR. WARMUS: Maybe, but they might just let it run on, but they'll take out the blips —the little blips where we're reorganizing. But I'm trying to go back and just get a sense of your introduction to New York and what it was like. I'd like to ask you about museums, because probably, this was the first time you would have been to the Museum of Modern Art [New York, NY] or the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY]. Was that a big influence on your —

MR. PATTI: Not really. I was more interested in these sort of out-of-the-way experiences that — yes, I would go to the museums when it was more or less a requirement, related to the teacher's motivation — "Go to the museum, write about this particular work," and so on. But it wasn't the environment that attracted me. It was like the work was already finished and clear.

I'm interested in art history. In my last year — I think second or last year in the department, I studied with Moholy-Nagy — Sybil Moholy-Nagy — I studied architectural art history with her. She gave me a unique perspective on the history of architecture.

I was working on this one very experimental side in the design department, yet in the architectural department — in the art history department within the architecture school, I was studying with Sybil and I was getting this strange sort of historical reference to the sort of visionary component that I was working on. I think much of my life has been resolving these relationships more than, at the time, coming to any conclusion about them.

MR. WARMUS: Which relationships?

MR. PATTI: Between the history of architecture and that an individual could propose a unique system for the way they, themselves, believe people should live and function within a space and interact from space to space among each other. We're in a social, in a conglomerate group — social behavior in an urban or rural environment, and so on.

MR. WARMUS: Were any of your designs from that period ever turned into real structures that people lived in?

MR. PATTI: *I* lived in them. [Laughs.] I was building — and that's why, in the summers, I would go back to Pittsfield, where I had access to a lot of land — I rented a rural farmhouse and I would experiment outdoors building these quarter-scale models of all these structures and working out a lot of the technical issues and experimenting on a larger scale, where, in school, a lot of it was theoretical, although I did build some things in the trees on the campus in the early '60s.

I began to make them full-sized or quarter-scale mock-ups outdoors, or transform part of the home where I was living in — the porch of it, I did some large-scale experiments. But outdoors, I would erect large structures. I would document them, photograph them, and use them when I went back to school and continue this work, which eventually became my graduate thesis work.

I never sought publication of it, but it's interesting that it is documented, because the teachers or people that I was involved with at the time — what I took for granted, I think, they saw as something important. I was struggling with it and never thinking of it as finished. I just had — I saw infinite possibilities with what I was doing — you know, that's what I mean by struggling — not in a negative sense, but in a very positive way.

It was my teachers that took the initiative to publish it or to get me grants and awards and things. It was published in, I think, '68 in *British Design* magazine — structures and some other ones that, really, the teachers or people around me got published. It wasn't something that I sought.

MR. WARMUS: Let's go back to 1965 for a moment. There's a note that you opened a loft gallery art studio in the Miller Supply/Colonial Theatre building in Pittsfield. Anything to say about that?

MR. PATTI: Miller Supply is interesting. You know, he's [George Miller] another person that helped my career a lot. There was this old — it was a theater for a time; it was an opera house. It was originally an opera house and vaudeville stage. And over time, it was in disuse and it needed a lot of repair. George Miller, a man who acquired the space and it became an art supply — wallpaper and art supplies.

This is where I would go as a young kid growing up — we talked about the earlier experiences — that I would go up there and get my art supplies from him. I think he — you know, again, they're always a lot wiser than I was, at the time, these people. He would give me art supplies or he'd give me tubes of paint that had been damaged or broken that he couldn't sell.

In the early years, he would give me a little — he'd always have a box or a bag of stuff that he would give me. I'd buy one tube of paint and he'd give me 10 of them to work on, or old brushes and stuff. But what was the question?

MR. WARMUS: That was it — just to explain what this open loft gallery was.

MR. PATTI: Yes, and when I was in school, I also had this other interest because I still never separated myself from the painting — the drawing and painting side — call it the fine arts side, if you will. It's hard to express, because it was really an impulse — that I still continued painting. I couldn't, for some reason, let that go.

And in fact, I took classes — I was the only one in the industrial design department that could take classes in the fine arts program at Pratt. So I would take painting classes. I would leave one class early in the design department and I was able to go over into the fine art area of the building and work in the painting class.

I would come in a little late, but I would be in there just like a painting student, and I would continue to paint. That teacher was also a mentor in school and after school with my painting. So I continued to paint. That loft gallery was — when I came home, I needed a place to paint — something large, because I was working on very large paintings at the time — canvases six, seven [feet], in height and width. They were big at the time.

And [Mr. Miller] said, Tom, I've got this space upstairs in the building, you know, for $5 a week, it's yours. I took it and then people started visiting me, and I called it a gallery. And I would paint there and my friends and people started coming up, visiting me. And I'd sell some paintings and I made money to support my schoolwork and these projects that I was doing. So I was painting, building structures. And that was the '60s, for me.

MR. WARMUS: In '66, you received the Society of Plastics Engineers research grant, but you also met Marilyn Holtz, who was a fellow industrial design student at Pratt.

MR. PATTI: Yes, that's changed my life [laughs], and it's still changing my life. I met Marilyn at Pratt. Marilyn was one of the few women in the industrial design program at Pratt. And she was very talented at the time, still is. She's still a major part of my work and my career.

I often helped a lot of the undergraduate kids when I was in graduate school, or late in there, I did some

teaching at Pratt. We'll get to that, I think, later in the tape. A lot of the kids that came into class, they had seen my work around school. So I was often —I tried to mentor the younger students, and that, and I was always available to people to share ideas with and my work.

MR. WARMUS: It says here, also in '67, that you frequented the backroom at Max's Kansas City in New York, where Marilyn was working.

MR. PATTI: Yes, Marilyn was a full time student, but she also supplemented her income for school. She was a waitress in the city. And Marilyn had an interesting — she worked for Mickey Ruskin at Max's Kansas City. It was a famous hangout for the emerging pop artists — Andy Warhol, [John] Chamberlain, Larry Poons, and a lot of these artists. So Marilyn got to know many of these people.

She was one of Mickey's favorite waitresses, and all of the clubs that would open in the city, Marilyn was usually the lead waitress or person that would work in these clubs. It was a very avant-garde, very progressive art/restaurant scene in the city in the '60s. I would sneak in the back door and sit there by myself or with some of my friends. And Marilyn would feed us and we'd watch the crowd. It was a pretty exciting time.

MR. WARMUS: We're going to move on to talking a little bit about your graduate period at Pratt, but is there anything else you want to talk about, in terms of just your general life in New York City?

MR. PATTI: No, it was just a very inspiring time. It was my formative years. I think very much of what Pratt was at that time is very much of what I've tried to create ever since. My studio today and my lifestyle has been very much around creating that sort of inspirational, creative environment that existed for me then — access to a shop where you could make anything you wanted; access to the intellectual life of the city.

All my teachers were committed academic people. Some of them did part-time work, but their main profession was teaching only. They didn't have, until later in my career, they started hiring part-time teachers that worked in the field and outside, but most of my teachers were committed teachers. They only taught. They had very slight practical experience in the field. But anyway, much of my life, my studio, the conditions around my life today were to replicate a lot of that inspirational time and that very creative period I had in the '60s around Pratt.

MR. WARMUS: I think this is the point where we ask the question about whether you feel there's a difference between a university-trained artist and one who's learned their craft outside of the academic context.

MR. PATTI: Tell me again. I'm sorry.

MR. WARMUS: I think the question they're asking is, do you see any difference between a university-trained artist, like your background, and an artist who might have learned his or her art outside of the academic —

MR. PATTI: I think so, yes. I think so. I don't know, specifically for me, you get a very rigorous academic background in the arts, very formal. And it takes years to digest it, to find yourself within all of that. Even though early in my career, I seemed to have a very unique path, it was somewhat different than a lot of the other kids — at a certain point, I realized that I may not go into industrial design, as many of my peers at the time were going to go into industry in some way, that maybe I wouldn't go in a traditional way that designers went in.

I think you learn more quickly being taught by someone — you learn certain skills more quickly than you would, maybe, on your own. But to find yourself within that formal training takes, maybe, a longer period of time to find your own voice — because you're so inundated with experiences of other artists, other people and influences. When you're taught by yourself, you're often unaware — naïve, in some ways — again, not in a negative sense, but naïve that you just haven't had those kinds of experience. It doesn't become baggage, in a way.

To become sophisticated with your work — to find a specific truth within what you're trying to do, you know, they both require intense work. I think academically, you become, often — you get a broader picture of the world you're in. When you tend to be self-taught — and there's exceptions to everything I'm saying — that it's more insular. It becomes more personal earlier in the process.

MR. WARMUS: Okay. In '67, you received your BFA in industrial design from Pratt and then you traveled to Bogotá [Colombia] to present ideas on inflatable structures and low-income housing to the architects at the University of Los Andes. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

MR. PATTI: Yes. There was a group of architects and anthropologists that were involved in a project outside of Bogotá, in La Guatavita. They were developing a hydroelectric facility. And of course, you need vast amounts of water, so they were flooding a huge valley area in this region to power the hydroelectric facility. They were confronted with an issue of relocating the native people in that region.

They were smart enough to recognize the socioeconomic conditions that these people would be under, the stress of being there for centuries. It was farming communities that could provide their own sustenance and they would have to be relocated. And they realized that they'd be subject to significant social change.

This was a component of what I was developing at Pratt — I began to recognize that a lot of the issues around architecture and housing people wasn't around just the ability to mass-produce a lot of structures that you could put people in, but it was their relationship to those structures and to the community in general that would be created by these spaces.

Long story short, I was invited to work with this group, to give a talk out there on the work that I had been doing here in the States, that there was possible application for these structures in this area — again, these were architects. They were quite visionary, and to think back and to realize that they thought that my work had implications for benefiting this area is interesting. At the time, I thought, well, of course, this is what they need. You know, I thought everyone needed what I was working on.

It turned out that none of it was successful — there was never implementation of any of the work that I had done during that period of time, even though after school, I had gone to Washington. I had built larger structures. I got one letter from Thomas Paine, director from NASA, that they were interested in the work I had been doing for habitats on the moon. Well, I said, if this is where they see application [laughs], my chances of this spreading on the earth are slim to none, at this rate.

MR. WARMUS: I assume this was your first trip outside the United States.

MR. PATTI: Yes, that was my first trip out —

MR. WARMUS: Except perhaps Canada.

MR. PATTI: Oh, that's right. I went to Canada in '67 and Bogotá shortly after. Yes, it was the first [time] I left North America.

MR. WARMUS: You had to get a passport and —

MR. PATTI: I had to, yes, get everything.

MR. WARMUS: Did you travel alone?

MR. PATTI: Yes, I was alone. I was alone. I was in —

MR. WARMUS: How did you go?

MR. PATTI: I was in Colombia. I was in Bogota, Medellín, Venecia, Cartagena, by myself. It was pretty wild, because [Fidel] Castro was coming into power and it was a pretty wild time. You had to be careful where you went, who you spoke to, how you go around, everything.

I was traveling alone and I decided to break out of what my regular itinerary and go off and look at other areas of the country. It left a big impression on me, big enough that it had such an impact on my life's work that it changed the direction of my work entirely.

I realized that people — what people needed wasn't what I was doing, specifically, that I had never looked outside of — I had sort of never looked outside of my notebook to see what was really going on in the world. And so the exposure to seeing people live in these makeshift structures, to see how people survive in these environments, was very shocking to me. And to think that I had the solution — it was very humbling, the whole experience for me. I took it serious and I took it in a different direction when I came back from that experience.

MR. WARMUS: Different direction — how so?

MR. PATTI: Well, I started to — where a lot of my work dealt with the technical side of things, the material side of it — it's like when you see photographs of new buildings and stuff, you'll rarely see people in them, because often, designers, architects, people that make things, even though they're made for people, they often isolate the individual from the structure in some way.

And the fact that there won't be many people in there, it won't be showing them how the space is used; unless there's a descriptive component of how it's used, you won't see people. So from then on, I started to put people — if I couldn't put a person in a structure or use it in some way connected to an individual person — a body, a figure, a family, a child, an infant, a baby, an adult, an older person — I couldn't do it. Everything was focused that way.

MR. WARMUS: Just to clarify for a second, you're talking, first of all, about architectural drawings, and so on, that tend to show very few people, as do the models, right?

MR. PATTI: Yes, but even if a building is finished today and it's photographed, they see it as a pure structure. They see it almost as contaminating the space with a human being. [Laughs.] They see its purest state — they think it's without people. But its purest state is with people — I began to think that way.

MR. WARMUS: And with furnishings, too.

MR. PATTI: And with furnishings. Yes, you know, that's why designers go crazy when they see what people — that's why Frank Lloyd Wright designed all the furniture — because he didn't want to leave it up to the client. He didn't want to leave it up to the people that live in the space.

So I would design spaces and furniture and things that people could accommodate to themselves, to their shape, to their limitations, to their handicaps, to their — we call it standard deviation — whatever their height, width was. If you were extra-tall, the chair, the seat, the wall, the ceiling — you could occupy that space and it would adjust to you, rather than you adjust to that space.

I started to think in terms of surfaces of infinite potential to change shape, color, surface, texture, transparency, translucency, that way. All of that came from that experience of seeing — putting a person in it. Even if you broke down a person into a body of sensory organs — eyes, ears, nose — you took away the — you know, say the skin of the body was just like a rug on the floor and you put all the organs in there that were needed. How could you accommodate them in a holistic way?

So fundamentally, to that, is the work I'm continuing to do today. It's a string of beads, and I'm still — Rowena Reed, Mr. Primmer, my probation officer, all these people — looking back on it now — I never really look forward, but I can look back easily. Never looked very far ahead, but looking back, it's amazing how straight that path is.

MR. WARMUS: Well, right now, once again, we're coming down to the last 10 minutes of the tape. This is a good point to summarize because you're really at the end of your education. When we start the next tape tomorrow, we can talk a little bit about the last years of Pratt.

But one thing to sort of summarize — I'm curious about what you thought your future would bring when you were done with school. When you were in school, what did you think you would do next? You remember my earlier question was, when you were growing up, did you think you would work with GE? This question is, what did you think your career would look like when you were finished at Pratt?

MR. PATTI: It's hard — I can imagine that I probably thought that I was going to become and industrial designer and go into industry. I think that probably was the first week of school. Then I realized that it was the process of art and discovery that eventually became — my life is defined by a process of discovery, of making things and discovering them, not knowing what the next thing is.

Instead of teachers giving me the assignment, I learned to give myself the assignment. I looked for — when you're independent, you have no excuses. When you work for a company or you work for things or a client, they provide you with the program.

MR. WARMUS: Toward the end of the Pratt years, did you ever put on a suit and tie and do the interviewing with —

MR. PATTI: I did. I went on a couple of interviews. Because I had graduated the highest in the class, I had a very select list of places that were interested in me working for them, plus the people that provided my scholarships — Ford Motors, General Motors, Owens Corning Fiberglas. I had opportunities to work in all those environments. Clearly, if I wanted the job there, I had the job.

When I went to the first office, I went in there and I saw designers working on these desks and I showed my slides and my portfolio, and all the designers would gather around, and we'd look, they'd look at the work and talk about it and what I wanted to do. And then I asked them and I said, "Well, where do you work here?" And they'd go, "Well, here." And there was no shop, no tools, no materials. Everything was clean and very formal. And I looked down and I said, "Well, maybe I could work on the rug — you know, on the carpet here, you know, or do something."

And I just — it occurred to me that it wasn't going to happen, you know — the environment was so unlike school, for me. School was my studio. School was the environment with a shop that you could come and go whenever you liked, the school was open almost 24 hours a day at Pratt. I eventually became the technician in the shop and helped other students there. I built things. I worked for most of my teachers that had projects in the different departments of the school — the interior design department, industrial design department,

architectural design department. I did projects for those teachers. I worked for them because they had jobs and projects. And I made money for school that way.

MR. WARMUS: So assuming that you were not favorably disposed to getting an industrial design position after these various experiences, did you think you would just go out and become an independent artist and money would appear, or what did you think would happen? Were you thinking of an independent career as an artist, or what was —

MR. PATTI: It's funny, you know, I didn't think of it. It's strange to talk about it now [laughs], but — growing up, I learned how to survive. I survived in getting from school from the hotel — downtown Flatbush Avenue. I was able to get through the neighborhood to school. I was able always to solve those little conditions.

They were difficult for a lot of kids. They had cars pick them up at school to drive them to — or kids would get to school with broken arms and get beat up on the way. I loved the idealism of school, and I wanted to create an environment like that, and it just didn't exist in industry as I proposed it — or it was proposed to me.

MR. WARMUS: How did the financing for the Bogotá trip, for example, materialize? Was that a grant?

MR. PATTI: No, the group that brought me over there — the university of Los Andes provided the resources for that trip.

MR. WARMUS: How did you meet those people?

MR. PATTI: They came to school. There were people at school, they toured the department. And at the time, they had exhibits in the cases at school — the students' work that was displayed. A lot of those cases had my work in them, my architectural work in them. It was called architectural at the time because it was shelter/housing-related.

There was over 500 schools in the — interesting, over 500 students in the architecture school, but there was a proposal by the Buckminster Fuller [Institute] to create an environment on a Pratt property somewhere, either on the campus or in Queens, where they were going to do experimental structures, based on the experimental work of Fuller and stuff, and was inspired by that kind of work.

And out of all the students in the architecture school and the industrial design department, they used my portfolio to do that, even though I wasn't in that. It was just interesting, if we think about what was visionary, how many people were thinking outside the box at the time. There weren't a lot at the time. It's interesting that you would be recognized as a visionary, because it was rare.

So it's just a curious thing — you know, I'm trying to put my work in context of what was going on at the time — that I wasn't aware of. I was called down and they wanted my portfolio to use it. And I go, why? They said, well, you've got the only experimental work going on in this whole place."

MR. WARMUS: Winding down now, the last couple of minutes, I liked what you said quite a bit about the idealism getting you through, more than a specific career plan.

MR. PATTI: Yes, no career plan, zero. It was all about trying to be creative. I always saw that you could get part-time jobs, that I had a lot of skills because I had always worked and always had part-time jobs to bring money home to my parents. So I could always get a part-time job, and then in my spare time, I would do my work and I would fund it myself. And I would be beholden to no one.

If you're going to really go out on — the further you go out on a limb, the more you explore — if you're really out on the edge, you don't bring many people with you. That's a sign of, again, how much risk you're taking. If everybody's out there with you, you probably haven't gone far enough.

So it wasn't strange for me, and it was very accepted that there wasn't a lot of interest in what I was doing at different stages in my career, and that it may have gotten negative commentary or didn't seem promising at the time, even to myself. But I trusted it and I had faith — good Catholic, you know. [Laughs.] I was able to apply that — I had a responsibility to keep pursuing, that I had faith that it would work.

MR. WARMUS: We're down to the end of this disc, so that's a good place to stop. When we start again, which will probably be tomorrow, I think it would be good to pick up a little bit on that, because as you said, you had faith, and then the years ahead in the '70s show the success of that, so we'll touch on that. But we're ending at about 1967, and it is Monday, January 18, 2010, and we're still here in Miami Beach. We've moved from outdoors to indoors. And this is disc two coming to an end right now.

[END DISC 2.]

MR. WARMUS: It's January 19, 2010, and it's approximately nine forty-five in the morning. And again, we're back at the Patti apartment in Miami Beach, where Tom and Marilyn are staying for a week or so. And we're continuing the interview. This will be disc number three.

We finished off around 1967 in the previous disc, and we're starting now, again, in 1968, while Tom is still in —

MR. PATTI: Entering graduate school.

MR. WARMUS: — graduate school at Pratt. Okay. So, would you talk to us a little bit about the important moments in graduate school, as well as taking a position for the Appalachian Project and then teaching some industrial design at Pratt? Let's start there, Tom.

MR. PATTI: Yes, let me see. I was fortunate to decide to stay in New York at Pratt — end up not going to Yale or Cranbrook, accepting the scholarships. Rowena Reed had retired and Joseph Parriott became department head of the industrial design department at Pratt. And I continued my work in visionary structures for habitats and shelters.

He managed to get me more involved in the — I think he saw me as having possibilities of eventually teaching, or articulating my ideas in some way to an audience. He engaged me as his assistant on several projects while I was a student. He was my senior advisor — my graduate advisor in graduate school.

So I became his assistant on certain kinds of projects, when he was in school and he was too busy to attend certain projects that were going on. One of them was — he was invited to attend a meeting at the [New York] Foundation for the Arts in Manhattan, where a group was assembled to look at the possibilities of utilizing industrial designers or industrial design concepts that were prevalent at the time to alleviate some of the social conditions that existed in the Appalachian region — poverty and housing and job loss.

I attended that meeting, took notes, and then reported back to him, and I also added some suggestions for him to follow up on. I spoke up at the meeting a couple times. I was taking notes, but I was asked certain things, and I responded. People at the meeting and [after] his review of my notes — he suggested that it become a project for me, that I get involved and represent that project at school and introduce it as a program, while I was in graduate school, to the undergraduate students — senior undergraduates.

I did that while I was doing my own studies, so I got exposure to something that I was, in the back of my mind, always interested in, was education and that sense of social responsibility, that I could be engaged in helping our own country, in some way, through design. At the time I was very idealistic. I thought industrial design and design was the — could offer a lot of solutions to the problems of the world.

MR. WARMUS: Do you still feel that way today?

MR. PATTI: And I still feel that way. I was idealistic; I still am. I think we lost track of it for a while. It had become subservient to certain trends that took place in industry. And I think the designers, like many did in the '60s — I'd like to see that reappear in the 21st century — where the designer takes more initiative and becomes somewhat more independent of industry.

One of the reasons industrial design is a good position to be effective is because of the skills you learn in the profession. And that's what helped me. Even though I wasn't economically doing well in the early '60s, the skills I had gotten as an industrial designer from Pratt enabled me to do all the things necessary to communicate my ideas.

I could do typesetting. I could do all the public relations skills that were needed for the work. I could design my equipment. I could build it. I could document it, articulate it. I photographed it. I did all the camera-ready artwork for the presentations I did. So you have a vast array of good communications skills that the industrial designer has, and you're in a position to see the world in a very broad way.

These are the kinds of things that I was learning at Pratt, and I think my teachers, a mentor like Joe Parriott became, he saw that I responded well to those things. He continued to give me outside projects to do that were a part of what he was involved with, and part of the responsibility the school had. So I've always had — parallel to the work I did, I always had an interest in education and in the evolution of ideas and how they could be applied to society.

MR. WARMUS: Okay. Let's talk about '69, when you received your MFA in industrial design from the Pratt Institute. Do you want to talk a little bit about your thesis at that time, which was titled "A Proposed System for the Development of Environmental Spaces from Latex Skins"?

MR. PATTI: Yes, the title of the piece defines the materials and the properties of those materials that I was

seeking out, where a lot of the solutions for housing came out of fundamental geometry that was applied to structures.

And minimal structures, minimal amount of material for maximum amount of space, there were two directions that were taking place at the time. One was geodesic structures, pioneered by Buckminster Fuller, and the other was inflatable or pneumatic structures, pioneered by Frei Otto.

MR. WARMUS: Could you spell that name?

MR. PATTI: F-R-I O-T-T-O, I believe. F-R-E —

MR. WARMUS: F-R-E-I and then O-T-T-O.

MR. PATTI: The interesting thing about both systems was that they could provide the maximum amount of space with minimum amount of structure. They were limited, in the form potential, by their coherence to mathematical formulas, or the dynamics of the membrane system that was used.

My goal that I recognized early that I was trying to do was to develop infinite form potential so that I could maximize the integration of the person — the human being — into the space, so they could define and customize the space as it was needed. Say someone was married and they had — or one person, they get married; there's two people. Then they have children and so on, and the space in the building would expand to accommodate the peoples [sic] and the functions necessary for them to survive in that space, and a shelter in whatever environment.

I dealt with it globally. I looked at it not in one region — North America — but I looked at it in all temperature zones and climate conditions all over the world. I got soil samples. I did studies. I integrated the soil conditions and the materials, actually, into the components of the system in some way.

MR. WARMUS: How would the soil samples matter?

MR. PATTI: Plastics were developed from the '30s, '40s, and '50s. By the '60s, they were being applied in very practical ways. But still, there was a very experimental side, and the experimental side came with expandable foam products, resin materials that were often utilized in adhesives or glues. Silicones were a big emerging market.

But the idea that you could have a liquid material that had adhesive components that could be opaque or transparent, that was transportable and that could be defined by the user and not be limited by the material itself — like a tree is a large object. First, if you're going to use it in certain ways, you have to transport it, you have to cut it down, you have to get it to a specific area, and so on.

But these liquid materials and plastics were easily transportable, and they had tremendous, infinite possibilities, I thought, for form potential. Anyways, to make a long story short, I took advantage of these materials and I used the resins — liquid plastics — with different soils, to try to achieve a rigid structure, just like — how could I say?

They became the binder and sometimes the matrix for the structure, but they became the material themselves. You could pour it; it would be absorbed; it would be circulated in the system. It would be cured either with a catalyst or it would be cured with its exposure to oxygen.

MR. WARMUS: So are you saying that the soil would be mixed into the plastic?

MR. PATTI: It would be blended in or mixed in, and combined. It could be sprayed on.

MR. WARMUS: Why would you need to have the soil with the plastic?

MR. PATTI: A simple illustration would be, if you had a large surface — mound, a vault-like shape — that you could rigidize the exterior surface, evacuate the interior material —

MR. WARMUS: — which would be the soil.

MR. PATTI: Which would be the soil. That would be redistributed in another mound or vaulted shape. And this sequence of rigidizing the surface, evacuating the material, relocating the material at another location, so on and so on, that the forms would get — they would diminish in size, slightly, but you'd get a progression of forms from that basic technique and this single component of material. So I looked at different soils all over the world, sand.

MR. WARMUS: So the soil would become the positive element in the molding process?

MR. PATTI: Yes, it would become the base material for it, and the resin would be the binder or the catalyst to hold this material together as a shell. That's a very simple description of what eventually became a myriad of similar proposals, and, what I thought at the time, very innovative ways of developing forms.

In some conditions, a grid was developed only as a stabilizing form for membrane-like structures that were not stable in the initial stages of construction. So they'd be attached to a rigid frame system, stabilized or rigidized into a specific kind of form, which I call the terminal form. Then the grid or the framework would be removed and you'd have a stabilized structure that could function as a shelter or a living space. This is a simple way of describing a lot of work in this one area.

I would build these structures as models in school; I'd build them, in the summer, in the Berkshires, or even in Manhattan, [or] on the campus lawn. I used to build structures between buildings in the city in Manhattan. Between doorways or windows in vacant buildings, I could suspend structures in the alleyways between them, and using the support walls — the vertical walls of the buildings to support the structure in between.

So you could have an isolated structure that could exist all by itself in that space, or you could have a connected structure that would connect those two surfaces of the building and become a passageway or an extended space that could be a living space and so on. I would create these — what seemed like normal structures with a lot of possibility, but most people saw as bizarre [laughs], as something that scared most of them.

So as I got through graduate school and entered the real world, it became more and more difficult. School was a very idealized environment. I loved it, and I think most of what I do, still today, is to try to recreate that same world, that same environment that I had during that period of time in my life. Everything, I think, has been, in a way, to maintain that inspired time.

Certainly, the needs haven't changed a great deal. I just decided to approach it from a different way. My work became much more theoretical. It got reduced in scale, because it was very difficult to — I wasn't able, by myself, to get this work accepted out into the world. Once I left school and I no longer had funding, it was very difficult.

And for 10 years after school, I continued this kind of thinking and work. And the work that you see in glass is an extension of the — the early work in glass is an extension of all the work that I had done in school. It became, again, purely theoretical. I spent less time trying to promote it, and using all my time working on it, thinking about it.

MR. WARMUS: So we'll be moving to that stage. Just to finish up with '69, you studied perception theory with Rudolf Arnheim — that's R-U-D-O-L-P-H [sic] and A-R-H-E-I-M [sic] at the New School for Social Research [New York, NY]. Want to just talk about that a little?

MR. PATTI: Yes, I was interested in — we talked about the combination of — I'm not sure how all these things come about, for sure, but maybe there is a connection between the fact that I have one eye — monocular vision — and I was always curious about how we see the world and why we see it the way we do, and how you can look out at a visual field and two people can interpret it two different ways.

And I was wondering, is there a cogent way that you could scientifically interpret this phenomenon — that a broken line — two lines with a space between them — do we see them as a connected line or do we see them as two separate lines? Does the element of continuity of space enter into that phenomenon? Does a broken circle, if you look at it from a certain angle or a certain distance — or does the mind see that as a completed circle? Does the mind fill that space in?

I was fascinated with the idea of what the mind does on its own that, as we seem to be consciously aware of everything, but that subconsciously, the mind is interpreting the visual world in its own unique way. And how do we use that to define the work that we're doing? I became very preoccupied with that. I met Rudolf Arnheim and I showed him my thesis work and what I was interested in doing.

And he invited me to come to the school and audit his class. I went to the New School for Social Research, met him and met other people at the school. They were very interested. Eventually, I spoke to the class, delivered some of the ideas I had at the time while he was teaching there. I'm still preoccupied with that kind of thinking. All those fundamental things that I had done in that time, they've never been resolved. They're just fundamental ideas that I've been working with ever since I discovered them when I was very young.

MR. WARMUS: So in 1970, you moved to a farmhouse in the Berkshires to continue your work. And that's when you became interested in glass as a medium and built a small glass furnace. The first thing I wanted to ask you is, why did you decide to move back to the Berkshires, which was where you had grown up, as opposed to living somewhere else?

MR. PATTI: Yes, it was interesting. It was a time in the '60s where I was looking to — because of the ideas I was doing and that I was so connected to New York — I think, looking back on it, where my career, as it developed into glass, I was probably the only one at the time, that the foundation of my work had developed in the metropolitan area, and in New York City, specifically, that had a lot of influence on my intellectual base, at the time.

Other artists that were involved with glass came from outside the city area and, I think, later in their career, went back to New York or went into New York. New York, in the '60s, was a dynamic art culture, so it weighed heavily on the influences in my work. But in fact, after school, I had no resources.

It was difficult to find a job with what I was interested in doing. If I did find a job related to what I was doing, it wasn't as a visionary, as the kind of work that I was doing or interested in. It was a more practical one, and for me it was somewhat dated. It still dealt with prefab structures, modular structures that dealt with conventional materials, dealt with panelized systems. They were lightweight structures and they were portable, but they didn't resolve the infinite form possibilities that I was trying to define at the time.

I was looking for an apartment in Manhattan, and at the same time, I was looking down where I used to buy all my materials and things down on Canal Street in lower Manhattan. And I began to recognize that there were lots for rent. And I thought, geez, this would be an interesting thing, just to live in a space surrounded by all the materials and the interests I had.

But within a short period of time, obviously, other artists and people recognized it, and within a year, Soho — the rents skyrocketed from all these vacant, industrial spaces. The rents skyrocketed. They were taken up by artists and socialites, people that wanted to be in the scene in lower Manhattan. So it became unavailable to me. I wanted to build these structures and continue experimenting, and the place that I was most familiar with was in the Berkshires. I rented a small farmhouse on a large property with some friends, and I took odd jobs. I designed interior stores. I did whatever I could.

MR. WARMUS: Do you recall the address, or a more specific location for the farmhouse?

MR. PATTI: Yes, it was on Barker Road on the outskirts of Pittsfield. It was near the airport. It was a large parcel of land owned by a farmer and his family, and we shared that. He lived in a little outbuilding, and we would help take care of the farmer in his old age. He gave us modest rent and allowed us to do pretty much whatever we wanted to do on the property.

So I erected these large structures outdoors and in the trees. Instead of in the urban space, responding to that, working in architectural structures, I began to work in — more connected to nature, being in the country and stuff. So I felt more connected to the land, as such. So the work I had done then and all my large-scale work still has that relationship to those structures and to nature and to the land that evolved.

MR. WARMUS: You've cited D'Arcy Thompson's pioneering work, *On Growth and Form* [1917], which I think is — was published around 1917. That's capital D-apostrophe-capital A-R-C-Y, and then Thompson — T-H-O-M-P-S-O-N. Was it around this time that you became aware of that book?

MR. PATTI: No, it was in school. It was one of those — besides the people I had met, there was a few resources that were enlightening for me, that showed me another way of looking at the world. And D'Arcy Thompson's book, *On Growth and Form*, was one of those.

It was unique, looking back on it, because it had this continuity between form and structure, that you could create a form and that there could be some almost subliminal structure that existed within it that he, through his writing and his book, made physical. He represented it. He shows that it did exist in nature, and that there was this sort of logical sequence of forms in nature that had resolved a lot of the conditions and technical requirements that my work was searching for.

MR. WARMUS: I recall that one of the things that he wrote about was — and I probably will paraphrase this slightly —

MR. PATTI: This was a long time ago. You probably remember more than I do about it.

MR. WARMUS: The relationship between mathematics and nature — that many things in nature follow a form of development that can be outlined mathematically.

MR. PATTI: Right, but the forms ended up — often there was this wonderful relationship between the organic and the geometric, which is what my work seemed to appear like, those two things. It was the membrane with a grid structure. And it wasn't too difficult to draw that relationship between his perception — the work that he was doing — and the work that I was trying to do. There was this common relationship that existed. For quite a

period of time, I held a lot of what he did very closely, as a direct influence or a counterpoint to what I was trying to achieve. It felt like another voice on a similar path.

MR. WARMUS: I know you introduced me to him and I've used quotations from his book in a number of my writings, because there are several paragraphs in the book that talk about the relationships between nature and the glassblower, you know, to the effect that nature makes a stomach, which is basically an ill-blown bubble, and the glassblower does something very similar when he blows glass, or she blows glass. So that was an influence. It was also about this time that you became interested in glass, in 1970. How did that happen?

MR. PATTI: Well, I had been interested in air pressure as a method for inflating a membrane system — a nonpermeable membrane system to lift load, to distribute what I call the informational elements — that you could attach, say, a rigid pipe/tube structure, a wooden beam onto that surface of the material, use air pressure to lift the load, to lift those elements into space.

The membrane would move out into a three-dimensional space. It would reorientate [sic] those elements that would be attached to that membrane and then they would be attached. And they would form an independent structure. That structure could now exist with that membrane, or independent of that membrane, depending on what the terminal structure was. I had done work in that area, and the idea that the membrane itself could be impregnated with resin.

I had developed and sought out a patent on a system where it was multilayered and there was a sequence of release materials and resins that worked with a catalyst, that became rigid at exposure to air. As the surface expanded, it would fracture elements on that same plane, and expose the interior of that surface to other chemicals or to oxygen, and then become rigid. That was a patentable idea, and for a while, I sought that out. It started in school, and I continued it beyond school.

MR. WARMUS: So how, specifically, did you become aware of glass?

MR. PATTI: Well, I began inflating things. I began to use air. What happened was, with the materials I was using, most of them were opaque or somewhat translucent. But I became interested in, could you create the interior and exterior simultaneously? I was thinking for so long about this sort of exterior shell that, if you were inside it and you pushed it out, you created it from the inside out. It's like getting inside of a box and then cutting out your own window where you needed it, or pushing a side out or expanding it from the interior.

And I thought that, were there materials that I could investigate that would give me information on simultaneously creating interior and exterior? So I started inflating plastics — all kinds of plastic-bonding surfaces together, creating multiple layers of materials.

MS. WARMUS: Blowing straws, for example.

MR. PATTI: And I developed this thing — you know, anything that was plastic and that could be formed into a shape that would support air, I would do, like a straw. If you held the end closed or fused it closed on the end, that you could heat it, simply blow on it — put air pressure in that tube — and create a form, while it was soft and malleable.

You could pinch it off; you could connect it with other elements; and you could still, with your lungs, and simply with your hands, manipulate this form. And I was looking at other transparent materials and one of the obvious ones is glass. I had some torches and other things, and I had one insulating brick. I cut that up and I put it in the ground to support the six pieces of brick. Now, this is out of one brick, probably nine inches long, two and a half inches wide.

So this thing's very small. I cut a hole in — I had some window glass — there was this little dump near the house where they used to throw stuff, so there was some glass. I broke up some window glass, threw it in there, took my torches, put it in the hole — what you'd call now a door — and I melted the glass. I opened it up. I had no idea what temperature it would melt at or what it would look like.

I actually melted the tip of the torch off in the process of doing it. But I took the door out and I could see this bright red substance inside. I didn't even, initially, think it was the glass. I didn't know what it was in there. Well, it was a combination of the tip of the torch and this glass that actually melted. So then I got a tube — I got a galvanized pipe.

MR. WARMUS: Was it bright red or bright orange?

MR. PATTI: It was bright orange, towards red. It was towards a reddish color.

For me, it wasn't the fact that I could melt it, that it could be done. It was now, how could I take this and form it

in some way to — for the direction I wanted to go in, so that you could make interior, exterior, and that you could see it from the outside — that you could look from the outside and *see* the structure. It was like a three-dimensional drawing.

Realize that it was still very theoretical, analytical work that I was doing. I wanted to be able to hold an object up and to be able to focus on the exterior and see the exterior surface, understand that, and then refocus the eye on the interior, or focus again and see the interface between the exterior surface and the interior surfaces, all in the one form.

I had no knowledge of glassblowing or that these things were possible, I just knew that I'd had a potentially — a material that could be transparent and that I could form in some way, using air pressure and stuff. I had worked with water, frozen water. I'd taken fabrics, wet them and froze [sic] them — during the winter, the objects were created that way.

I would drape material that was wet — instead of the resin that was, at the time, expensive and potentially dangerous to use — I began to use water and form that in molds that could be taken apart. You'd have this rigid glass, or ice, structure, and I'd photograph them, and that would be the extent of it. But the glass presented itself as a permanent structure that I could look at not as a document — that's the photographic term — but as a three-dimensional form that I could continue to work with as a device.

MR. WARMUS: We're going to talk about 1971, when you went to the Penland School of Handicrafts [Crafts] in Penland, North Carolina. But first, I'm going to ask you at what point you became aware of the studio glass movement.

MR. PATTI: At what point with studio glass? Probably several years — probably five years after I had initially gotten involved with glass, I had seen a little catalog at a friend's apartment that described Penland, and it talked about glass. I applied to Penland and I received a scholarship for there for two weeks.

I got enough money together, went down there. I went in from the airport and it was difficult, because I didn't have a ride or anything. I got there late, and it turns out, at these camp-like programs — [laughs] it was their penal colony code that if you were late for anything, you would have certain duties to do around there.

And because I was late in getting there, my responsibility then was to wash dishes between — after dinnertime or lunchtime, between 12 and one o'clock. [Laughs.] The strange thing is that — and I was fortunate at the time — there was an interesting guy that taught the glass program there. His name was Fritz Dreisbach, and looking back on it, it was my exposure to studio glass. He was studio glass. I didn't know about studio glass. He didn't talk about studio glass. He was just there demonstrating it. And his demonstration was at the same time that I was washing dishes.

So when I got there, he was exhausted. He was through. And everybody began trying to blow glass. So I would, you know, try and pick up on where everybody and he left off. It was a very strange experience for me.

He had tremendous technical skills. I was amazed at — I was thinking that, well, if you can get a bubble and pinch these surfaces while they were still hot — because I recognized — the early experiments that I had done that the difference between the interior temperature and the exterior — there was a broad temperature difference, and that you could attach those interior surfaces, which is what I was interested in doing, in finding a way to control the interior temperature and the exterior temperature to manipulate this form.

But I realized that it takes skill, and what I decided to do was just practice on getting some basic skills, that I wasn't going to do the kind of work that I thought was possible for me at that stage, that I needed these fundamental skills. So I learned the basic skills of working with glass — how to take it out of the furnace with a pipe, how to handle that liquid material. I think you develop a certain sensibility for it.

And like most students, I made the same basic shapes. I was able to make a cylinder, a disc, those fundamental forms that — that's how I saw it: If I could make these basic, elemental forms, then I could pretty much take that experience and knowledge and do what I wanted to do at some other time. I wasn't sure I was ever going to even return to an experience like that.

But when I left there and went back home, I realized it was — it made a deep impression on me. It wasn't something that I wanted to let go at the time. So I continued that pursuit of exploring glass — the form potential of glass. And for the next five, six years, I continued to work with glass, related to the earlier work in housing.

MR. WARMUS: Were there any other experiences you brought away from Penland? Did you take any other courses, or were there lectures that were of interest?

MR. PATTI: There weren't. You know, I don't recall. For me, there wasn't a lot of exposure to — in the end, with

the weekends, getting there and leaving, it was probably eight, nine days that I was there. People that were there for a longer period of time, you could see that it was more a campus-like environment for them. And there were a lot of relationships, communal relationships that they developed.

But I didn't experience [that] because I wasn't there long enough and I didn't have the background and interests that it seemed like many of them had. They were dazzled by the material, and a lot of it was that preoccupation with the material and the manipulation of the material at the time, where I looked at it specifically related to my interest in that interior/exterior component. I looked at it, I think, quite a bit differently than the people that were there at the time.

MR. WARMUS: Were there any other studio glass people you were aware of? Were you aware of, for example, Harvey Littleton?

MR. PATTI: Not then, no. It was just Fritz Dreisbach and then, when I went back home and I began to want to do more with glass, then I did — Harvey Littleton had a book that came out. I forget the title.

MR. WARMUS: *A Search for Form* [1971].

MR. PATTI: *A Search for Form*. I saw that book. I read that and that became, I'm sure, an element of my discovery in relationship to glass.

MR. WARMUS: So after Penland, you came and moved to Savoy, Massachusetts, and began doing more work with glass and lamination and Vitrolite plate glass from abandoned buildings. Can you talk about that?

MR. PATTI: Yes. Realize, my economic conditions were disastrous. I was never able to get a teaching job. I applied at different universities and universities that had glass programs at the time for a teaching position.

I thought that my interest in glass and form, in general — even though my work wasn't about glass, necessarily, all of it — a lot of the information that I was working on was easily translatable with glass. And I thought that I would be a great asset to a school that had a glass program. But it never happened. The people that were teaching — it was a pretty closed system. It was a fraternity of — like many institutions have.

MR. WARMUS: Do you recall where you applied?

MR. PATTI: RISD [Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI] was one. I let it be known that — my work started to get attention, related to glass. This may be a little further on than the time period you're talking, but it comes into it. Because I was struggling and I was looking for an opportunity to make a living in some way. I had always had that interest in teaching that had developed at Pratt.

But anyways, there was no interest. Eventually, this is what led to taking my work out into the marketplace. You know, when people found out — and there's a wonderful story that I was in the unemployment line in North Adams — a town near Savoy — and I met a person named Duan Hall, who was looking for —

MR. WARMUS: Can you spell that? I think it might be D-U-A-N. I'm not sure.

MR. PATTI: Duan Hall, who had studied glass. When I had gone into the unemployment office and they asked me what I had done or what I was doing, and trying to help find a job in the area, I was doing roofing. That was a job I had. I was doing roofs, mostly in the summers, making money; and I was working in restaurants trying to support my work. And at the same time, I started to have a family. It was very difficult.

So anyways, I told the woman at the office that I was working with glass and such, and then I went into the other room and I was looking on the wall for a list of jobs that were up. And a man came up to me — a young guy — and he said, somebody told me that you work with glass." And I said, yeah. I told him I had a studio and he didn't believe me. He said, "Well, if you did, I'd know who you were." [Laughs.] He was an interesting guy, really a talented guy. I later found out more about him and we became close friends. Another interesting aside to this is his wife was Toots Zynsky.

MR. WARMUS: And we spell that T-O-O-T-S Z-Y-N-S-K-Y [Mary Ann "Toots" Zynsky].

MR. PATTI: Yes, this is a wonderful little story. I said, well, I don't know what to tell you. Yeah, I work with glass as a medium for the stuff I'm interested in, and I have a school for children that work with glass in this town of Savoy. And you're welcome to stop up and visit me, if you like. It was difficult because I was supporting this school with very little money. I had this school for children.

MR. WARMUS: I'm going to stop for a second because I think we skipped ahead to 1973, and I think we need to go back. Again, we're down to the last eight minutes on this tape, so this might be a good point, as a conclusion, to skip back to the period in '71 when you were working on the theory and development of the fusing and

laminating for the pieces. What I'd like to capture in this part is how that all started to come together.

MR. PATTI: Well, I didn't have a great deal of knowledge about how glass was supposed to be done, or the way it had been done — the traditional methods, which were basically what was being rediscovered. But I was able to, with the existing technology, develop a basic — a tool that could heat or melt glass, make it formable. So I built this very weird — looking back on it now, some very strange equipment.

I didn't have the resources to buy glass to bring it in the way it existed; and to melt it, like in a university situation, is very expensive — to take the basic ingredients that make up glass and to bring the heat and the energy necessary to melt that, to make it workable. Just to get to that point, for me, didn't exist. I couldn't afford something like that. But the desire to work with glass and to develop these ideas that I was working on, to continue that with glass — I developed a way of stacking glass, window glass that I could salvage out of Dumpsters at the local glass shops, and load up my car and put it on the roof of my car, or whatever, and bring these pieces of glass home, break them up — simply break them in pieces, stack them up.

I built some equipment to be able to connect to the glass, that I could remotely put air into that form while it was in the oven. And while it was in that oven, I had these openings in the oven, that I could manipulate that glass on the interior of the oven. That was one of the techniques that I was developing. I did that for a long time. I developed all kinds of forms and I photographed them, documented them.

Most of them didn't survive, because I didn't build what I later found out was an annealing oven. You had to control the critical temperatures on the descent from high temperatures, where the glass would be malleable and workable, to room-temperature glass, where it needed to exist outside of the oven.

So these pieces would fracture and break, and I just thought that was a natural part of the process that I was involved with. I didn't think of it as anything unusual, because I could get the basic information that I needed doing it that way. Some of these images are — I'm not sure if they're — some of them are in the book.

So I learned to work very thin. I developed a way that, I realized that if you could make a thin-walled structure, the stresses would distribute over that. It would almost be like tempered glass — that it would cool at a very fast rate and it could be preserved. I found these interesting temperature ranges, and a way of working these materials, without a lot of equipment that existed in the university programs.

MR. WARMUS: This Vitrolite material you found is an interesting object in the history of glass. It's spelled V-I-T-R-I-O-L-I-T-E [sic]. And that's a type of, brand of, glass that was used in architectural glass, for example, for the façades of buildings. Where did you find the Vitrolite?

MR. PATTI: Part of the interest I had was — because of the way I was thinking at the time, it wasn't so much that I was interested in glass; I was interested in a material that was malleable when heated, that you could form. And there are several materials that can do that with these modest temperatures that you could create in an oven.

So I was starting to look at buildings because I was getting the window glass. And then I discovered I could walk by — there's a one-hour Martinizing [dry cleaners] in Pittsfield — a building that had all this black material on it, and in fact, it was glass. I looked at the building and I looked at the surface and I could see that it was glass. And I went in and asked the man that owned the dry cleaner — I said, "You know that broken piece of glass out there, can I take that off and replace it with something else?" Because it was broken and you could see the other paneling on the inside of the building.

And he said, sure. So I went up and I removed it and I repaired that section of the building for him. And he was happy. Every time he'd break another one, he'd call me up and I'd come up and take that piece out. Then I discovered that there was the black and there was gray and there was a range of these.

I would look at the buildings or I would find it as scrap in salvage. Because Vitrolite replaced — façade or curtain-wall structures, façade structures specifically — they were stone and then they went to metal, and then glass replaced that. So I used them. It was interesting, because although I wanted to see in the structures, I was also — that dominated my work, was this sort of interest in the pure form, that you could — an object that could exist in an environment on its own and relate to it just by its sheer exterior surface, and how it related to the space that it was in.

So it was purely — you can call it sculpture, if you like, but it was this pursuit of a surface that was infinitely formable. I would often paint — I would take spray paint; before I found the Vitrolite, I was actually painting the glass — opaquing the surface of the glass so I could study the exterior. Because the interior became a dominant element, and you would see through it.

So to see the exterior surface, I would spray paint that and then wipe off the paint to be able to have sort of

openings into them that I could see into and so on. The Vitrolite gave me an opaque material that I could transform into pure form.

MR. WARMUS: Today, we would say that what you were doing was recycling materials. Did you think about it that way?

MR. PATTI: No, not at all. It was out of necessity.

MR. WARMUS: We're coming down now to the end of this disc. We have less than a minute, so it probably makes sense to stop so we won't get cut off. But this is disc three, January 19, 2010, Tuesday morning, with Tom Patti and Bill Warmus sitting on the couch in the apartment in Miami Beach. We'll move on to disc four in a little while.

[END DISC 3.]

MR. WARMUS: Okay, this is disc number four of the interview between Tom Patti and William Warmus conducted in Miami Beach, Florida. It's January 19, 2010, Tuesday morning.

And we're starting to pick up again where we left off on disc three, which was 1971, and Tom is beginning to design interior spaces for retail clothing stores and also begins to teach as a part-time adjunct fine arts department professor at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield.

Another note that we want to talk about is Marilyn opening the Sunshine Diner in Adams, Massachusetts, where you worked, I think, as a dishwasher.

MR. PATTI: Yes.

MR. WARMUS: Want to talk about all of that together, mixed up?

MR. PATTI: [Laughs.] So we'll start, right. Well, along with the experience of moving to Savoy — Marilyn and I moved there, we were two single people sharing — we bought the home together. And I began to build my studio, all salvage materials, on the hill above the house. It was a combination of fixing up the house and make it livable and building a studio where I could do my work.

I was teaching. It was actually in the evening, the evening program at the community college, teaching there and hoping that maybe someday that that would translate into a job in the day program. At the same time, I was applying for teaching positions at other universities.

So the Savoy experience of settling into that home, building a studio, really takes me up to probably 1976.

MR. WARMUS: Right.

MR. PATTI: So the Savoy, that sort of formative time in my work, where the housing and the forms I was making were directly related to the earlier work that I did in the '60s from school. The forms started to become sort of independent of that idea. It seemed that the more I got directly involved with glass as a source of material for my work, the more that those forms became autonomous objects for me.

I started to refine the techniques I had developed that I called fused glass, where I was joining the surfaces of glass to make a volume of glass, a volume of glass large enough that it's probably similar to what a glassblower would take out of a furnace, but that I assembled, constructed in various specific ways.

The way they were constructed, the logic of construction was the same logic in theoretical application that I had in my housing — that you could take elements, put them in a three-dimensional bundle or package or a surface even, introduce something that would stretch, inflate, create a three-dimensional form or surface with all that information in it.

That's what I began to do. Even today, that still is the precursor of the work that I'm doing today, and it dominated most of the small-scale work I did in glass.

MR. WARMUS: Okay. We're going to move along to the period sort of between '73 and '79, which, in a sense, was when your work moved onto the public stage and was accepted. This is the era when the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired work, the Museum of Modern Art acquired work. You had a piece on the cover of the Corning [Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY, *New Glass* exhibit] catalog.

But to launch that period in '73, I just wanted to ask you a bit, because the Smithsonian is interested in the relationships of artists with the various program schools. In '73, you had an internship at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts [Deer Isle, ME]. Can you talk a little bit about that?

MR. PATTI: Well, '73, somehow I heard about — I'm not sure how — I heard that Haystack had a program in glass. I had been working in glass, and I received a scholarship as what was called a monitor. I was assistant to the instructor at the program. This followed my course of thinking at the time that it involved teaching, and it involved sharing ideas with young people.

MR. WARMUS: Who was the instructor?

MR. PATTI: I'm not sure. I can't recall her name. It was a woman from the West Coast.

MR. WARMUS: Was she a glassmaker?

MR. PATTI: She was a glassmaker. I can get that information.

MR. WARMUS: We'll get that information. If the transcriber would make a note there, a blank space, we'll get the name.

MR. PATTI: It was a program similar to Pilchuck [Glass School, Stanwood, WA]. Kids came in with specific interests related to glass. And because I didn't have a lot of technical glass experience, because that was the conventional glass studio — it had a furnace, and people had blowpipes and these metal tubes that you reached in and you took it out, vinyl glass out. And you brought it to a bench, and you worked on it, which was quite a bit different than the way I had been working.

But I was able to carry on, although I didn't do a lot of actual glassmaking. I was able to carry on a discourse related to glass with the students there that interested me. This is where I met Steve Feren, who later, shortly afterwards, had visited me in Savoy and asked if he could work with me, and he did for several years.

We fixed up a facility, another friend and I cleaned out a chicken coop down the road, cleaned it all up with Steve. I told him he was welcome to stay and work with me as long as he wanted if he could do certain things, and that was to maintain a sketch pad, ideas every day, to be at the studio every day, to do what was ever necessary to support the community through the work that I was doing in there.

So we had a group of children, young people in the community that Steve and I and some other young people would work with.

MR. WARMUS: And that's when you founded the Savoy Glass School for Children?

MR. PATTI: Yes.

MR. WARMUS: In 1973.

MR. PATTI: We put a name on it to sort of establish it within the community. And it was a wonderful experience, and it went on for quite a while.

Steve was a very bright guy. He became more academically inclined. He mastered all the basic skills and working with glass. He built some of the more traditional glass equipment. And he then went to Alfred University [Alfred, NY] and then went on to Rutgers University [New Brunswick, NJ] and then received a teaching position at the University of Wisconsin [Madison, WI], where, ironically, many years later I was invited, he invited me out, and I did a workshop for one week with his students at the university a number of years later.

MR. WARMUS: In '74 you married Marilyn in Savoy. Can you say a little bit about the wedding, very briefly? Did your families attend? Did you take a honeymoon? What happened?

MR. PATTI: The wedding was your basic ceremony. You have to understand, Marilyn owned a diner in Adams. She had a partner. And I washed dishes during the day. I was a part-time dishwasher there. So most people in the area where the diner was only knew me as the — that Marilyn married the dishwasher. We went to the justice of the peace and it was the beginning of the winter season. It was cold, we got in the car and went to the justice of the peace in the next town. We were married, then went back. A year later, Sienna, our first daughter, was born.

MR. WARMUS: On June 25, 1975.

MR. PATTI: Right. And it solidified our relationship and Marilyn and I as partners. Marilyn has always been — she's been my wife, of course, but she was always my collaborating partner with the work and my life's work related to art, in general.

MR. WARMUS: Both of your daughters are named after colors — Sienna Rose and Scarlet. And what's Scarlet's middle name?

MR. PATTI: It's Flora.

MR. WARMUS: Oh, so they're not colors, in a way.

MR. PATTI: Flowers.

MR. WARMUS: Flowers, then, is that it? Flowers and colors.

MR. PATTI: You always curse the kids with a weird middle name so people can ask them, "How did you ever get a name like that?" And so for the rest of their life when we're all gone, people can say, "You don't know our parents." And then they can talk about what their parents were like. [Laughs.]

[Audio Break.]

MR. WARMUS: We had a brief pause there, and now we're starting again. Okay, so we were talking about your marriage and your children. And now we're going to move to — we can continue with that as we go on with this. But in '76 you were invited by Art Wood to lecture on forms at the Rhode Island School of Design. And then in the same year, the Corning Museum of Glass acquired one of your works, the *Opal Green* [1976]. Let's talk a little bit about both of those events in '76.

MR. PATTI: Yes, it mentions Art Wood's name? Art Wood was a marvelous person. He and I became friends through Duan Hall because he taught in the printmaking department at RISD. It was actually — his department did — it wasn't even the glass department that brought me there. Or I think he got them to share the $50 that they paid for me to go there and give a talk for the day.

I spoke for four hours in the auditorium, and then I did a glass demonstration in the glass studio. Then in the evening, I did a straw blowing workshop at the local pub.

Art Wood was a marvelous person, and we became friends. He's probably — he and Duan were instrumental in exposing my work, literally outside of Savoy. Up until then, there were few if any people that really knew what I had been doing for over 10 years related to glass in some way.

MR. WARMUS: When you talk about speaking for four hours, did you use slides? And if you did use slides, were you taking the photographs?

MR. PATTI: I used slides. It went through lunchtime. People would leave the room and come back. So I spoke four-plus hours, I'm sure.

MR. WARMUS: Did you take the —

MR. PATTI: I left only because I had to do another demonstration. I had 10 carousels of slides. Remember that I had documented my work. I didn't really keep a lot of objects, but I had a volume of slides, visual documentation of the work, none with me in them, because I was always the photographer or always shooting the work.

They were important. It was the way I saw things, that I used the camera as a tool to try to understand the objects that I made.

MR. WARMUS: Do you recall what kind of camera you used?

MR. PATTI: It was a Pentax, early Pentax. I salvaged a number of lenses, types of lenses that I could adapt to that camera, that I could use macro and micro — the visual field with these lenses. I was always trying to, again, look into the object. Because the objects were small, the depth of field was a difficult issue with these.

I spent a lot of time on trying to develop a camera that could do what I wanted it to do. When I was in school, I actually mounted a camera over my work table so that I could document my work in progress without even picking up the camera. I could just push the button and pick up the stages of it. I was always interested in how work evolved and the evolutionary process or stepping back, looking at the work in another way. The camera or the image was a great device for doing that for me.

So I had all this work, talked to the kids about it, and showed all these wonderful details, these micro-ways of looking at — it was a different way of looking at the work, I think, more than what I showed them they could see, because they had spoken to me later, it was the way I thought about the work rather than the work in general, I think.

MR. WARMUS: We're going to segue for a second to the present because the break we just took was kind of taking a look at the design for a signature that's going to go on the wall of a piece that we'll talk about later today. But you and I, when we had to run out just now to get batteries for this tape recorder, we were talking

about how signatures are applied to work. I thought perhaps that was something you had to deal with, even in the early days. Did you give much thought to the position of the signature and what it's about?

MR. PATTI: Yes. Waiting for my glass — we're talking about looking at things in a macro and micro manner, that the smallest detail was a major element to me in my work. It was so refined in the sense that everything was — the object was a very specific record in response to what I was thinking at the time.

There was nothing in there that was sort of extraneous. There might have been happenstance, other elements that may have occurred that were unexpected, but they were all the result of the original thought process that went into it initially. So anything you would apply to it, like a signature, would obscure, for me, get in the way of trying to understand the work. The signature made it — I didn't even think of signing them, frankly. It never even occurred to me that I would have to put a signature on these objects, because they were, in a way — the early work was like research material for me. And the document was the record that I wanted.

As they became forms, as the terminal forms became these singular objects, in a way they seemed to have a personality of their own and their own uniqueness, and they could stand alone. The connectedness to the work that went before it or after it was somewhat more remote. They had the presence to stand on their own as objects.

If people were curious or interested in them as I sent them out — I entered exhibitions where there was a purchase prize or there was money because, understand, I had little or no income; and anything that I could do to support my family in some way, I would do. So the only time I signed my work was when I sent it out, when it left my home.

In fact, if it wasn't signed and it still was in my home or studio, I would still continue to work on it. I developed ways of reheating the objects and change the forms. So as long as I had them in my possession in some way, I never, I didn't always think of them as finished forms. And as my ideas progress, I can look back at earlier work and see that, geez, rather than make another one, that I could simply reconfigure that shape and save all that time and material and get directly to what I was thinking about.

So a signature was — I think of it now in this stage as somewhat pretentious, in a way, to put on an object. But at that time, in the '70s and '80s, it was something that obscured the intention of the work. So I didn't sign them until they left my home in some way for an exhibition.

MR. WARMUS: Then Corning Museum acquired your work and *Opal Green* from 1976. Tell us, was that the first museum to acquire your work? And then talk to us a little bit about how they found you and how they went about acquiring the work and what that meant to you.

MR. PATTI: Well, it was interesting. There was a group of organized — it was an organization of — there were enough people by 1975 that — and apparently, this had been going on for some time. It was a glass group, a conference.

MR. WARMUS: Like the Glass Art Society.

MR. PATTI: Yes, it's called the Glass Art Society. And I was invited to it or I was on their mailing, I'm not sure, and it was at Corning. And the proximity of Corning to where I lived is reasonable distance to go.

So although they've held a number of these things all over the country, I attended only this one that was reasonable distance from where I lived that I could make it, because it was an expensive proposition to do.

They asked to bring a couple of examples of your work. I brought two pieces, the green piece — and the name of that is what?

MR. WARMUS: *Opal Green*.

MR. PATTI: *Opal Green.* And the other piece was the *Folded Gray* piece [1976]. They're both in your book. They represented, those two pieces represented — *Folded Gray* was the earlier work that was a direct relationship to my architectural interests. The *Green* piece was the result of, by then, probably two years of work with these — I saw as autonomous forms, where these objects could exist on their own. I didn't just stop and break one from the other. The gray work or the folded form with this particular form, it wasn't an even break. My work is a series of transitions.

I was simultaneously working in both directions, on the folded gray, opaque, Vitrolite types. The green that's in that vase form is a Vitrolite material. That's the interesting thing, when you can maintain in your work several ideas and how they interchange. The Vitrolite as a glass reappears in the green form, but as a different color and in a very different form.

That period of work marked the beginning of a change in direction of my work in that. And Corning acquired that piece.

An interesting aside to that: Because I didn't have finishing equipment — I only had equipment in my studio to sort of make these basic, these forms. So there's an opening where air enters the object, and up until then, all of them were very rough, irregular shapes because of the apparatus that I attached to these objects.

So when I went to Corning, I knew Corning had glassworking equipment there. I went to the foreman in the glassworking studio at Corning, and I asked him if I could — I was watching them work — if I could grind and resurface that shape, that I wanted to exhibit this object in the exhibition they were going to hold for people attending this conference.

He brought over other people, they looked at the shape, and they were afraid to do it themselves. They couldn't quite figure how all these different types of glass could be in one object. And it was thick and thin. There's portions of it that are one-half inch in thickness, and there's areas of it that are only one-eighth inch or one-sixteenth inch in thickness.

The idea that you could control the interior and exterior surface, I had achieved this, but I did it with different combinations of glasses. That piece is unique in that regard because it's fully realized with that intent.

So anyways, I was allowed — when the students — and this is the funny thing. When the students went around and were looking in through the window into the workshop and into the Steuben facility —

MR. WARMUS: Wait, we wanted to clarify that, although Corning has a studio now, at that time you would have been working at the Steuben glass factory.

MR. PATTI: Yes, it was the factory. That when the students — there was a viewing window as you paraded by or walked by to look in at the workers. Well, I was in there, and no one knew who I was. I was in there working on the grinding and polishing machine, finishing the opening of that piece so that I could present it better where they had this formal display of all the work.

Then I went back out in the conference. And many of them thought that I was, like, a Corning employee, because they saw me working on the glass inside the factory. This was a curious thing. And even today, I enjoy this wonderful relationship with Corning. I've never lost my admiration for Corning, their intent and the people that have been involved with it. They've been very significant in my career — this interest between art, technology, science. I always was comfortable with people in Corning.

MR. WARMUS: Talk a little bit about the actual mechanics of how your work was acquired. Which curator or which director at the museum saw the work? And how did that happen?

MR. PATTI: It's somewhat vague to me now. I can't remember everything. But I know that — I'm not sure — if it was a committee where you were not a part of it at the time. Tom Buechner was director of the museum.

MR. WARMUS: That would be spelled Thomas, T-H-O-M-A-S and Buechner, B-U-E-C-H-N-E-R?

MR. PATTI: You have to realize now, I had never been in a formal glass environment like that. I had never attended a conference of artists with all the people working in glass. I had never seen — I had no background in the history of glass in that environment. But it was a very immersive experience. You know, I had just come from Savoy. I managed to get there, which was not easy.

And a wonderful thing happened: that Corning acquired my work. And they didn't just acquire it, they paid for it, they bought it. So I was able to leave Corning — what I saw was, to leave Corning, go home with actual money. It was an interesting experience for me, because I had never expected during that period of time to sell the work that I was making.

MR. WARMUS: And that was the first museum to acquire your work?

MR. PATTI: That was the first museum. It was my first museum experience. Realize that everything, and even today, the thing that I value the most is sort of this — I don't even want to anticipate what the next thing might be. I love the serendipitous quality of the surprises, the anticipation, the expectation that happens in the art world. For me, that's how I have to think. I don't want to think about what I'll be doing tomorrow. I want to take care of it today, and tomorrow will take care of itself.

MR. WARMUS: In '77, you had your first one-person show at what was called the Contemporary Art Glass Group Gallery, and it later became Heller Gallery. Talk a little bit about that.

MR. PATTI: Yes, it's interesting. Bill and I are here talking about this, all these people that were formative in my

career are still alive today in 2010. And I'm proud to say that I'm still active and friendly with these people. Tom Buechner and I are still close. He's keenly aware what each one of us is doing. My dealer when I started — Doug Heller was my first dealer and is still my dealer today.

But back to this. I went back home after Corning acquired that piece. It wasn't just that Corning acquired my piece, but the whole acceptance of glass was becoming established in the craft world and was moving into the art world in general. There was this formal acceptance that artists could work with glass and that it could be looked at as an art commodity in some way, that it was a valid artistic expression.

For me, that happened when Corning, surprisingly to me, accepted that work — not that I didn't think my work was important enough to go in a museum, but the fact that I could sell it, that there would be an exchange, that someone would buy it, want it, archive it for what it was and that that cycle would be completed in some way.

I continued to work. It was not too long after that, within a year or two, I was still struggling in Savoy with part-time jobs, doing my work —

MR. WARMUS: So when you had the show there in '77, the Museum of Modern Art purchased a piece, *Untitled 1976*. I don't recall if that was from that show or later, but it was *Untitled 1976* from the Banded series.

MR. PATTI: Well, that's important. The interesting thing is my relationship to my dealer, which was established before that work was acquired — that I met Doug Heller. I walked up and down Madison Avenue with work, trying to sell it in the city. Someone had said, well, maybe you should take your work to New York, you can sell it. Sienna was now born, I was raising a child, another one was on its way, and trying to figure it out.

And I walked into the Heller Gallery, and I had a few examples of my work. He didn't know who I was at the time. Paul Hollister was in there. He was a writer, one of the few people writing on glass at the time. He saw my work. Doug Heller took some on consignment. I wouldn't let him take the work. I didn't want to leave it there alone. I didn't know who he was or what was going on in the art world. I said, well, if you're going to take the work, I said, you're going to have to pay me for it.

And Doug said, okay, and he gave me some money. Again, I went back home, took care of the family. Doug presented the work in his gallery. He hadn't sold anything, but Doug said there was a lot of curiosity about my work, and that he thought that if I could clean up all the work that I had been working on the last few years and that if I could make it presentable in the gallery in some way that he would give me a one-person exhibition, that he thought it would best articulate my ideas in glass.

So 1977, it was the first exhibition of my work, public exhibition of my work. It was interesting because all these young people in glass came in from schools, and their teachers came to the exhibition. And museum directors came and curators came. The Museum of Modern Art contacted Doug and was interested in a work. The curator was out of town at the time, [J.] Stewart Johnson. Penelope [Hunter-]Stiebel was the director of 20th century decorative art at the —

MR. WARMUS: Curator.

MR. PATTI: Curator.

MR. WARMUS: The curator of 20th century —

MR. PATTI: — curator of 20th century decorative art at the Metropolitan Museum. She came to the exhibition. I designed this beautiful announcement, one postcard which featured what I thought was a significant expression of the exhibition, a singular piece. The Metropolitan Museum acquired that.

MR. WARMUS: In 1978, they acquired *Banded Flair*, which was made in 1977.

MR. PATTI: And the next piece was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in the architecture and design department by Stewart Johnson.

MR. WARMUS: It was around this time that I became aware of your work, because I had been working at Forum Gallery in New York City. Tom Buechner had said I should see this show and look at the work. Then a little bit later I became the curator at Corning and I remember being really excited about the Solar Riser pieces, the very early ones.

MR. PATTI: Those were the earliest.

MR. WARMUS: I know that we've talked a little bit about over the years, I think you made mention that although your work remains, I think, very abstract, there is perhaps maybe what is a spiritual element in all of the work and in the Solar Riser series. The Smithsonian is also interested in whether religion or a sense of spirituality

plays a role in your art. So it might be a good moment now to talk a little bit about that.

MR. PATTI: Yes, I think there's a sort of meditative component to my work. I think artists are fortunate that they have the ability to find a way to express something deep within themselves. Sometimes we often aren't able to define, but we're able to create it and produce it and express it in some way.

I think a lot of my work has what I would call a spiritual component to it. I think people confuse my idea when I am very serious. When I talk about my work, I talk seriously about it. They think I'm talking about the glass aspect of it, the material side of it. But in fact, I'm talking about some quiet essence in the work, that if it possesses that component, it always seems to stand apart from other work.

Because I see that and sense that spiritual component, for me, the essence of it, is that I always found it very hard to make a lot of work because most of the work I make does not have that quality. So it wasn't that they just met a certain technical level that I would keep them. It's that when my work has what I call this sort of essence or spiritual component to it, it's when it has its own value that allows it to exist for me.

It was never important to make *more* objects; it was more important for me to make objects that had meaning to me. It sounds very selfish in a democratic world, but they are objects that I make for myself. I feel like I share them, and hopefully they give of themselves, these objects, to the people that own them or that view them. But the primary requirement, if you can say that, is for me. It's personal.

I always thought that I would personally talk about it in some almost religious way, I could look at that as almost iconographic symbols for some — representing a spiritual force within myself.

MR. WARMUS: By 1979, the Corning Museum had chosen *Banded Bronze* [1976] which you made in '78 [sic], for the cover of the "New Glass" exhibition, which opened at the Corning Museum and then traveled to other museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum [London] and so on. At the same time, the Museum of Modern Art bought another work of yours, *Solar Bronze Riser* from 1978.

So this period represented a time when you had gone from being sort of unemployed and unclear of what would happen to a point where several of the country's leading museums had acquired your work and you were occupying a prominent place in the museum exhibitions. What was your reaction to all that? Was it simply happy or thrilled, or how would you describe your sense of that period of time?

MR. PATTI: Well, I looked at it as almost a survival component. I felt that a lot of the burden of — you know, I had no teaching job. I was doing part-time jobs. I would work, raise enough money to then work in the studio; it was work six months outside, of getting resources together, and then working in my studio for a couple of months, or working all day and then going in the studio at night working.

And again, you know, I had children, I had to provide heat and shelter for the family. I had thought up to then that that was going to be the course of my life, that I was going to be just doing part-time work and then pursuing my artwork whenever time allowed for it.

MR. WARMUS: You mentioned that — this sounds like it's off the track, but it isn't. You mentioned when I asked you about taking family vacations [when you were a child] that you didn't do it because your family couldn't afford it. Now at this period in time when you have your own family and some degree of success, did you take vacations then? Did you travel? Or were you still not able to do that?

MR. PATTI: I still wasn't able to do that because when you're living in an environment like Savoy with the long winters and the conditions, and when I had children, it was difficult to take the family. I would have to take the children with me. And I did. I did. I traveled to things that I thought were important and relevant, but I tried to bring Marilyn or the children with me if I could.

MR. WARMUS: And the other child we were mentioning, who was born in 1979, is Scarlet Flora, born on May twenty-second in Savoy.

MR. PATTI: I know that my work was selected for an exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art, and it was an important exhibition, of course, to have my work included in it. And I can remember, you know, packing up Sienna and getting in the truck with my wife and going to the museum for the opening and standing there next to my work. When there were important events, you know, of course, I would try to be there if I could. But I always thought my work represented me. If my work was there, I didn't need to be there. It wasn't important that people knew who I was, but it was important that people saw my ideas in glass, that they saw these objects.

So I didn't attend many of these outside glass things. I wasn't able to join — the glass community was a varied group. They were a very bonded group of people. I had already finished school. I hadn't studied glass in school. I

had already begun to establish a family, so I was a bit outside of that. But I was comfortable with them as people. I enjoyed them a lot, because we had so many things in common through working with glass.

Apart from that, they seemed to be very fluid and flexible, and they could go and do whatever they wanted to do. And the teacher traveling all over the world, and they had access and exposure to all kinds of things. But for someone working in what I call as a studio artist, the real studio artist, it was very difficult, very limiting, very confining, very little exposure to what was going on in the glass world in general.

MR. WARMUS: Also in '79, you purchased what was described as a non-working dairy farm in Plainfield, Massachusetts. Is that where you were living —

MR. PATTI: Yes. With the success of my work in the marketplace, able to take the financial resource and to move to a — we were living on a highway. It was a small house right on the main road in Savoy. We were able to move to — we bought a property in the next town called Plainfield, which was a dairy farm. I converted the barn to a studio, working studio. We developed a garden and were able to be fairly self-sufficient there.

MR. WARMUS: You moved into the hay barn as your studio, is that right?

MR. PATTI: Yes, I converted the hay barn as a functioning studio, what I still have today, still use it. It's basically what it was when I started it.

MR. WARMUS: By 1980, you had your first museum exhibition at the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum in Springfield, Mass. [sic] Tell us a little bit about how that came about.

MR. PATTI: Well, Springfield is about an hour [from] where I live. I'm not sure how exactly I was invited to do that exhibition. I was approached, I think, and the curator director talked about having a one-person exhibition. The exhibition was around a major conference of people interested in contemporary crafts. It was bringing all these people — I never attended any of the events, but I'm aware that there was that event and my exhibition taking place simultaneously.

It was the first really broad, comprehensive look at my work outside of a retail gallery space. I was able to bring in other kinds of objects and ideas that were not for sale, but they gave another look at the work that I was doing, and they produced the first catalogs that described my work to that date.

MR. WARMUS: And it was at that time that you went to the Vienna World Crafts Council conference?

MR. PATTI: Yes. My world was changing rapidly. I was interested in spreading sort of the gospel as I knew it, related to glass. I was invited to Vienna to speak at the world — the meeting of the World Crafts Council. There was a lot of interest in my work in Europe. And when I arrived there, I was really surprised at how many people were familiar with my work and that were looking forward to hearing my talk and seeing it.

They were very knowledgeable of what I had done and what I was doing in forms and the techniques that I had developed. I was surprised at how fast communication in this art world, this glass world, traveled, that they knew things within weeks after I had done them.

MR. WARMUS: It's interesting that that, really, '80 period was a period of travel for you. You won the first prize in '81 at Glaskunst '81 in Kassel, Germany. That's G-L-A-S-K-U-N-S-T and Kassel, K-A-S-S-E-L.

In '82, you had traveled to Czechoslovakia to meet with artists working in glass. You had also gone in '80 to the reception at the vice president's residence for Mrs. Walter Mondale's Washington home, honoring the new glass exhibition artists. So it was a period when communications were intense and you were doing a lot of traveling.

MR. PATTI: I was doing a lot of traveling. And because I didn't have all these part-time jobs, I became more focused. I could travel, I could do what I loved to do and talk about the work, talk about ideas, meet people, look at new possibilities. It was a great opportunity.

In a way, it was like I had gotten a teaching job. You know, I was out — when I gave a talk, it was like lectures. [Laughs.] It was often bizarre experiences.

MR. WARMUS: You had a one-person show at Holsten Galleries in Palm Beach in '82. And in that period you received the General Electric sculpture. Now, as usual, we're coming down to the last eight minutes on this tape. I know that the General Electric sculpture played a big role in your work because it was a change of scale from the smaller glass pieces to the larger pieces. This was a site-specific piece for the plastics division in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Would you like to talk a little bit about that, please?

MR. PATTI: Yes. A person named Glen Hiner was the president of GE Plastics. I was selected from a group of artists to build and create a sculpture for the atrium lobby, the entrance of GE Plastics in Pittsfield.

This was a pivotal experience, looking back on it, my career, because it resolved a lot of things that I had not done, but always had questions about. What if I had gone into industry, what would my work be like? What are the conditions dealing with art in an industrial environment as it existed at the time? To have access to the most innovative technologies of our time that a company like General Electric could afford.

So I was selected to produce the work, but I made a couple of conditions. One was that I was to work in the facility, produce it in the GE Plastics facility in Pittsfield, and that I have access to GE personnel and technologies worldwide.

They actually enjoyed the idea that I would want to do that, because I think that inherent in the process of me working there or working on this piece, that Glen Hiner saw that — certainly in Pittsfield, having an artist of my type in there — that they themselves could benefit from that experience. I don't think he separated the idea of searching and researching, that he saw the common relationships of discovery that take place in the science lab or the artist's studio.

So it was a unique experience, very difficult. I've done similar things, but never the same way because my body and mind wouldn't be able to endure the experience. It was very difficult.

MR. WARMUS: Why do you say difficult? What would be an example?

MR. PATTI: Because they are two separate things. That searching that an artist does and self-reflection and the need for satisfaction within the process is difficult. The artist gives themselves the commission when you're an independent artist, which was all my experience up to that time. But when you're given a commission, you give some of the decision-making in that creative process to people outside of yourself.

That project, it took two years, but there was a possibility that I could have worked on it for four years or five years. But if a building is going to open at a certain date, then you better wind down your creative process and have that delivered on the steps at the entrance of the building at that time.

MR. WARMUS: Now, we're running a little low on this tape. But the piece is called *Genic Doran Divider-Sentinel*, 1982 to '84, and it was commissioned by General Electric, but after that building closed it was acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston.

Tell me what the words "genic," G-E-N-I-C, "Doran," D-O-R-A-N, "divider-sentinel" — those four different words — break it down in two minutes or less. [Laughs.] This is the quiz show we have, Mr. Patti, for you on Sunday morning from the *New York Times* puzzle master. And give us a little bit, a word clip or two, about each of those words, *Genic Doran Divider-Sentinel.*

MR. PATTI: I won't resolve all of it, but I'll give you clues to it. It's *Genic Doran Divider*. "Genic" refers to genetics. "Doran" is Greek. "Divider" is that it's created bilaterally symmetrical; the front and back are matching parts, they're identical. It's easy to make one part, but when you have to make two matching parts or multiples of things and have them line up and fit, it's quite another story.

What industry does well is replicate things — through the machine, in technology, in the logic that's used. You can make multiple parts. But in the handmade process, conceiving things, there's often just the appearance of similarity between things, there's a lot of uncommon elements within that shape that don't match.

This was a very difficult thing to make, this piece of work. It combines several competing technologies, in this case —

MR. WARMUS: We're going to have to pause now and start again with the next disc. This is the end of disc number four, January 19, 2010, Tom Patti/Bill Warmus interview.

[END DISC 4.]

MR. WARMUS: This is the interview between Tom Patti and William Warmus for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is disc five. And it's still January 19, 2010 at about twelve-fourteen in the afternoon.

We're continuing where we left off with a discussion of the *Genic Doran Divider-Sentinel* from 1982 to 1984. Okay?

MR. PATTI: Yes, the word "sentinel" is the sense of this guardian that protects this technological source enclosed in this tabernacle type of space. Even driving up to the building from the exterior, it occupies the lower central portion of the curved arch. So it functions as this, for me, almost a religious space, sort of an icon to technology I see housed in this vaulted environment.

It's interesting. I was able to bring to bear on this project the glass experience. This is all made out of GE's

polycarbonate plastics in combination with marble, which is at the base, and steel and aluminum. The piece resolves a lot of aesthetic issues for me.

MR. WARMUS: You can keep talking.

MR. PATTI: But I wanted to incorporate, not just GE, but a lot of the social conditions that were happening at the time.

MR. WARMUS: For example?

MR. PATTI: For example, in the base there's two metal rods. Those rods are part of the Phalanx anti-aircraft system that's on board the Navy ships as the last line of defense for incoming enemy aircraft. Those are the barrels of a Gatling-like gun. These are solid. They're not bored out.

GE was manufacturing them in their military aerospace division, which was near the General Electric Plastics facility that I was working in. I was able to obtain these two potential barrels and use them, incorporate them into the base of the sculpture.

I also was able to — if you look at a cross-section of the sculpture, you would see all the plastics that were developed up to that date, plus cheap plastics that they were developing — I had taken the plastics they were working on in the laboratory, and with simple testing and with people that I worked with there, was able to develop them for a laminating technology that GE had developed for making bullet-resistant glazing.

Windows and buildings, often high-security environments like a prison, a jail, environments that needed to be protected in some way or to prevent entry in some way — what they manufactured there were clear glazing products, clear windows.

In the course of developing this sculpture for the lobby, I had taken the laminating technology that they use and combined it with other things that I had been working on. That represents the turning point in my career, in the work that I was doing at that point. From 1981, I continued to work with glass, but parallel to the glass I began to develop large-scale laminating technology with a focus on energy-absorbing properties.

MR. WARMUS: So was the work at GE the beginning of your interest in these laminated materials?

MR. PATTI: Yes, because I no longer needed to fuse glass to build a sandwich or assembly of information, but I could reduce it to a narrow plane, but a broader surface area and actually create even a more complex system of components, all encapsulated within that thin-skinned surface.

So in 1982, I began to do that work. After I left GE, I was thinking, well, maybe I'll go right back to my glass work. But in fact, the experience was so intense and I had made certain discoveries; I was able to make a continuous surface six feet in width, 12 feet in length. And to be able to encapsulate in that multiple colors of infinite range, other kinds of materials, all laminated between two basic sheets of transparent — or whatever degree of transparency I wanted — within that sandwich.

So for me, and relating it to glass, it was like eliminating a lead line that had existed for centuries in stained glass. You could put up a large panel of a transparent material or a material that could filter light to the interior of a space, and it could be viewed symbolically or architecturally, to seal off that environment. But it was a monolithic panel. It was, for all practical purposes, one piece of construction it was viewed at. It was no longer a process of assembling. And there was no longer, quote, "the art of technique" to create the work.

So I saw that as a significant breakthrough. And the fact that was it also bomb-blast-resistant, that it was energy-absorbing, that if the building failed in any way, that this window would still exist in some manner, that it wouldn't fracture. It lacked all the vulnerability that glass had.

MR. WARMUS: It could be hurricane-resistant.

MR. PATTI: It could be hurricane-resistant. Since 1980, most of these projections that I had thought about and the potential for this work had been realized. It's now mandated in a climate like where Bill and I are having this conversation, in Florida, the new hurricane laws demand this type of glazing in high-rise and residential structures, because it's also shatterproof and it protects the building envelope. You don't create the void when the glass is broken and then it destroys the house.

Also with the threat of terrorism, we realize now in the early part of the 21st century, that it's a vital component as a security barrier in things. So though I couldn't define exactly what was going to happen, I had this sense that these properties were unique and that somehow they would be called upon in my lifetime.

So I took that on as a major focus within my work. And when I left GE, I immediately began to build my own

facility because I realized I wasn't going to be able to work in there, although Mr. Hiner offered me my own facility, within a new building they were developing at General Electric, to carry this work on. I expressed my appreciation and told him that I needed to do it within my own studio environment.

MR. WARMUS: We've been going in chronological order, but now we're coming up to, let's say, the most recent periods of your work. I think because we're discussing the laminated glass panels, it might be a good time to ask you to summarize some of the commissions that you've had since then up to the present time in laminated glass. Talk about a few of the high points. I assume that most of these were commissions; that's why I used that term.

MR. PATTI: Yes, it's interesting. Most of the earlier conversation has been about the small-scale objects because they clearly document the growth of my career.

MR. WARMUS: We should mention that by small-scale objects, we're talking about objects that could actually be held in your hand. I'm looking at some dimensions of pieces that are sort of in the four-by-three inch, three-by-five inch, three-by-four-by-five inch size. So those small pieces were what you might call tabletop or hand-held pieces, correct?

MR. PATTI: Yes. In 1982 after I finished the GE project — I had this insight, but the insight came through the work that I had been doing. It was a result of that object-making, the *Genic Doran Divider*. It was that I had a need always to make the work with my hand. I thought that through the artist's hand-mind connection that I could realize those ideas I had been working on for 20-plus years.

So the scale of those works fit to my hand. It was a weight that I could physically — I had broken my back in the process of building my studio, so it was very difficult to hold an object greater than three, four, five pounds for any period of time. So in the course of making all those, they were all objects that I made myself with my hands. That was very important to me. Again, it wasn't how many I made, it was what I made.

As long as I made it myself, I could always decide when I could start and stop that relationship; that I could destroy. I always wanted to be in a position to destroy that object, to turn back or to make a change in that object.

By 1982 and working in General Electric and needing other people to make these large-scale works and the exposure to these new technologies, I had learned to work with other people. And I recognized that to bring to bear on what I wanted to do, that I was going to need a new facility, that I was going to have to raise a lot of money to buy the equipment, that if I was going to want to, again, not make it necessarily all by myself, but that if I was going to have access to it and the continuous making-of-it process, that I was going to have to raise a lot of money to do this thing.

So with Marilyn's help, we sold a work, we conserved in areas and rented a building to establish this — to bring this equipment in. The equipment that I bought was salvaged military equipment.

MR. WARMUS: Tell us the location of the building.

MR. PATTI: It's in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

MR. WARMUS: On which street?

MR. PATTI: It's on Federico Drive, which is a business park, an office park, with some industrial buildings and large commercial spaces. So I rented a building with the idea that, well, maybe five, 10 years of this and I'll resolve this and move on.

But at the same time, I received another commission from Owens Corning Fiberglas in Toledo, Ohio, to do their new world headquarters. With the money from that, I was able to establish this facility in Pittsfield.

MR. WARMUS: That was in 1992.

MR. PATTI: It was in 1992. So I had rented the studio space, put the equipment in there and began to work on it. Then I received the commission from Owens Corning, where I was able to apply the work that I had developed in that period of time on that, the technology and the resource I brought to bear on the Owens Corning project.

And I worked with Cesar Pelli, the world-renowned, well-respected architect, on the Owens Corning, what I call the Owens Corning project.

MR. WARMUS: That's Cesar Pelli, spelled Cesar as in "Caesar" and Pelli, P-E-L-L-I.

MR. PATTI: That was another two-year project. I worked very closely with Cesar Pelli and his associates on the

project. An interesting thing was happening, not through any plan of mine, but I was now getting exposure directly to architects and to architectural practice.

My work now — I had always been on the outside of my work looking at it. For the first time the feeling I had was that I was on the inside of the work looking out. I was making large, clerestory windows in buildings that I could walk through. I made doors that I could open the door of the work and enter this. It was like going into the work. You'd pull it open or slide it or remove it one side, go in and look at it from the reverse direction, move further into the building and see another component of my work.

So I would imagine myself inside of one of my objects, one of my pieces, how I began to see the work. I was fortunate that I was the only artist on these projects. There were many areas of the building that I could explore as potential for the kinds of ideas that I was developing at the time.

I also had wonderful access to Cesar Pelli and his facility and the way he was thinking about the building. We shared these ideas, and I was able to better understand what the process from another person's point of view was.

So it began to be somewhat collaborative. But in the case of working with Cesar, I had complete range of freedom to do the work as I pleased. It was a very healthy relationship of artist/architect.

MR. WARMUS: Just a couple of corrections and additions here. Cesar Pelli, the "Cesar" is spelled C-E-S-A-R. The studio that you bought was in 1993. And it always interested me that the high-pressure, 18-ton oven you used was actually used by NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, to develop graphite exterior for the stealth bomber. How did you find it and come by that device?

MR. PATTI: I bought it from a company that sold military and commercial surplus equipment. I was looking for a device where I could control the atmosphere inside the oven, that I could remove the oxygen because it was combustible, that I could raise the atmospheric pressure and temperature inside the oven. I wanted to create the experience that it was like working on another planet, and that materials in this environment would behave in a unique way than what I was accustomed to on earth.

I bought this tool, and then I began to take it apart and modify it for the interests I had. But it was initially designed and made to prototype the stealth fighter bomber, which was of composite construction, and it had designed a fuselage and it was very successful in doing that. But the government program was over for that stage of their project, and the machine became available on the market.

I bought it and then modified it. I brought in an engineer. We discussed the potential to do what I wanted to do with it. I had it inspected. It's a very dangerous machine to use. If something went wrong, it would remove the building from the site that I'm on and probably the adjoining buildings. It's under full pressure; it's like a bomb. It's a tremendous energy load. I can compress over 2 million pounds per square inch on the interior of that oven.

MR. WARMUS: So it was in '93 that you had your first one-person show at the Galerie Internationale du Verre in Biot, B-I-O-T, with Serge Lechaczynski, S-E-R-G-E, Lechaczynski, L-e-c-h-a-c-z-y-n-s-k-i. And we talked a little bit about that before.

You also visited Italy for the first time. In '92, you had made what you call a pilgrimage to Israel with Marilyn and Sienna, and in '93 to Italy for the first time. Can you touch on those two trips just a little bit, please?

MR. PATTI: Yes. Israel was interesting. I was invited to speak at Bezalel University [Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem] —

MR. WARMUS: That's B-e-z-a-l-e-l in Jerusalem.

MR. PATTI: — at the university to speak to the artists working in glass and to the school in general. And I was invited by the school and by a glass patron — it's his wife — Irvin Borowsky and —

MR. WARMUS: Laurie Wagman.

MR. PATTI: — Laurie Wagman and Irvin Borowsky.

MR. WARMUS: I-r-v-i-n B-o-r-o-w-s-k-y.

MR. PATTI: It was a fascinating experience because I was sort of able to connect the sort of spiritual interests I had. We did a pilgrimage there at the same time that I spoke at the university. And interesting, at the university, I was offered a teaching position there, which I would have loved to have gotten 15 years earlier, but by this point it was not probable.

It was that and meeting Serge Lechaczynski — it eventually became the deal that now represents my work in Europe. I was so impressed with Serge and his interest in my work and how he represented it that we made an agreement that he would be my only dealer, other than Doug Heller, outside of North America. And he's still my dealer today.

MR. WARMUS: Then you also went to Italy on that trip.

MR. PATTI: And I went to Italy for the first time. We went up through San Remo, up in there. I began to see all the recognizable faces that looked like my elementary school. I got to know where they all came from, because I recognized all the facial types and body types from all these different areas of Italy that I traveled through. It was just like my old neighborhood. It was a great experience, and I still look forward to going into Italy.

MR. WARMUS: It was also during this time that you started to do a little bit more involvement with public boards and so on. For example, in '93 you began a seven-year term as a trustee at the Norman Rockwell Museum [Stockbridge, MA]. In '97, you had a three-year term on the board of directors of Berkshire Plastics Network.

And you started doing consulting with General Electric, some consulting with PPG Industries and with Solutia, S-o-l-u-t-i-a, in 1999, culminating in '99 also with receiving the outstanding achievement in glass award from Ervin Glass. That's just to round up for this interview some of the public giving-back that you were starting to do to various communities. Anything to say about that or add to that?

MR. PATTI: Only that it seemed to bring together all the things that my interests had been for a period of time, my idea of sharing things, supporting the arts in some way that I could do it. Being asked to be on the board of the Norman Rockwell Museum — he has since passed away — it was a way to preserve his legacy.

The fact that I had known him and that he helped a neighbor, a regional young person develop a career in the arts, that he took the initiative, and we had stayed in touch while I was in school and I had seen him afterwards, that he was always concerned how well I was doing and so on. To be on that board, I was honored. It was an honor for me.

At the same time, all the technology, my interests in art had been established. People started to recognize what I had done over the years. Also because the work was, I believe, visionary at the time in laminating and composite technology, and I began to exhibit it and people started to know about it, that companies began to develop in these areas.

Solutia was looking for ways to market some of their technologies and laminating products into the architectural market. I was brought in to do some work for them.

General Electric was looking for innovative ways of using plastics. I was able to help with the design and testing of those products in my facility. Because of the experience I had there, the experience I gained from working with scientists, technologists, engineers, and so on, I was able to embrace that in my facility.

I was able to make contributions into areas that I found interesting, that I didn't distinguish from artwork as clearly as many people might. I saw these as — I could pursue creative solutions. Although I did see them as two separate things, I thought that the artist was fundamentally on the same path as being able to make discoveries and do creative problem-solving as a scientist.

MR. WARMUS: Then you had increasing acceptance of the laminated work. So you did in 2000 the *Spectral-Luma* — L-u-m-a — *Ellipse* for the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. You had a commission with Ann and Graham Gund called *Spatial Boundary* [2001] . And in 1999, you had done *Carolina Rotunda Lites* — L-i-t-e-s — for the University of North Carolina law school [Chapel Hill, NC]. So would you like to talk a little bit about any of those commissions?

MR. PATTI: Yes. They were all interesting. Malcolm Rogers became the director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, a significant museum with significant history. They had collected decorative arts, but my work, although it was in other museums, was never in the museum in Boston.

Malcolm Rogers wanted to change that and he invited me to the museum to talk to me about what I would like to do, what was possible. There was an exhibition that was at the museum some time before. It was called "Studio Glass," where I had my small works, but also I had done some work on the sidelights of an entryway into the exhibition with my large laminated glass panels for that "Studio Glass" exhibition.

He was intrigued by that and wondered about the possibilities of could I do something for the museum. The new wing of the museum, the [I.M.] Pei wing that was done, I believe, in the '60s, was an area that I cited, that possibly that wing of the building that I could do the entryway into the major gallery on the second floor of the building.

He provided the financial resources for me to be able to do that project. And that is still installed today.

Graham Gund, an architect in Boston, who that gallery is named for, his family name on it, the Gund Gallery, is a well-recognized architect. He saw the entry doors that I did for the gallery and while he was building his new home, he asked, would I develop the entry to his home that he was designing. So for that year, I worked in, I think, very successful piece, because there's no guarantee in this kind of commission work. But I think it was very successful. I did the entryway for the Graham Gund residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

MR. WARMUS: Okay.

MR. PATTI: The other interesting piece was for the Museum of Craft and Design in Charlotte, North Carolina, where I was able to use the —

MR. WARMUS: The Mint Museum.

MR. PATTI: The Mint Museum of Craft and Design in Charlotte, North Carolina. And I worked with Mark Leach, assistant to the director there, and developed a wall between the — it was a mixed-use building. So the museum occupied a portion of this space but there was a public lobby that went through the building, so it was an ideal condition for what I hoped my work would always find, this relationship between protection barrier, a translucent and transparent surface that could protect the interior environment, which was the museum, but would also provide a barrier, protective barrier, to the general public access through the building.

This piece of work is probably 20 feet in width and 20 or 30 feet in height. It was installed in the original building, is now being re-installed in a new building. I reorientated the piece now; it's on a different axis in their new museum, which is called the Museum of, I think, Art and Design in Charlotte. Now one side of it faces the, I think, the auditorium, and the opposite side faces offices and walkway sections in the building.

So the sort of multipurpose function that artwork can take still intrigues me. And it's interesting that it's art that it becomes a component of an architectural space.

MR. WARMUS: The most recent commissions, to continue forward, some of the most recent ones were the Morton Square in 2004, the Roosevelt [Avenue] Intermodal Station in Queens, also in 2004, and the *Miami Rain* project, the Marquis commission, M-a-r-q-u-i-s, in 2009.

MR. PATTI: Marquis. [Correcting pronunciation to "Mar-KEE."]

MR. WARMUS: Marquis, sorry. I'm thinking of the glass artist, Dick Marquis. The Marquis commission in 2009. Talk a little bit about those for us, those three, the Morton, Roosevelt, and *Miami Rain*.

MR. PATTI: Well, as my work got more public— it was interesting. It went into the museums, but it became a component of the museum instead of an object of the museum, which was interesting for me.

It had this sort of double purpose. They would put a label on it. It was the wall of the building, and yet it had this dualful [sic] function, that it would function as an independent object of art and it could function as an interior architectural component of the building.

I kept looking for situations where that would reappear. I was asked to do many projects, but a lot of them were just —

MR. WARMUS: To stop you for one second and interrupt, one of the smaller projects you did that I've always loved, that is sort of an inside-outside, mysterious piece was the window you did for your daughter, Sienna's, gallery when it opened a few years ago [Sienna Gallery, Lenox, MA]. It had this sort of atmosphere in it, which when you were farther away, it looked foggy, but when you got close it became clear. Can you talk a little bit about that piece before we continue? I'm sorry to backtrack a bit.

MR. PATTI: It's what I call "sight-line specific." Depending on the viewer to the window or the entry line, sight line, into the building, it would become clear, transparent, or appear opaque at times. It happened as you moved, as the observer actually physically walked past a space or moved. It wasn't unlike what I was trying to do with my smaller work, where you would just move vertically and look at it — because it was in layers. And those layers would open up, close, or compress, depending on your viewing angle to them.

MR. WARMUS: There could be a very slight adjustment of angle, right? You might only move up or down an inch.

MR. PATTI: A fraction of an inch.

MR. WARMUS: Yes.

MR. PATTI: A fraction of an inch. And you would discover it as you moved closer to it. So the proximity of the viewer to the work. But they functioned at hand's-length, at arm's-length, because I made them for myself, for my eye at my hand length. That's how they were conceived.

But on this larger scale, I was able to animate the viewer, and the distance became much grander. It became an element of the work. What is the viewing angle? How far away do you see the work? When do you see the work in the course of moving towards it or away from it? And so I was able in Sienna's gallery to explore that.

Because Sienna represents artists that work with contemporary jewelry, it also allows you, as you get closer to the window, the viewing angle gets greater. So from a distance, the gallery, you see very little, but as you get closer to the gallery, it's like the curtain is drawn open. It exposes a few objects, to many. You sort of discover the interior, you discover the artwork on the inside.

MR. WARMUS: It's one of those objects that's almost impossible to explain without seeing it. It's like a picture window and it looks steamy. But as you get closer, there's sort of an opening, as if the steam had cleared in a circle, and it opens out —

MR. PATTI: I always had a security concern for the gallery, because the objects, because of theft and robbery there; so it performed this optical feat but it also provided security for the gallery, it was one continuous surface in the gallery. It eliminated the vulnerability of all the smaller windows that were on the opposite side of it. I just clad that area and put that over all the other windows, the small windows.

A lot of opportunities opened up when the scale of my work opened up, directly related to architectural structures. I looked at many opportunities and selected those that I thought were going to move my work and my ideas forward and that I could continue to experiment and explore ideas.

MR. WARMUS: Thanks for elaborating on that. The next one would be the *Light Monitor* from Morton Square and the Victor Moore building for the Roosevelt Intermodal Station in Queens. Those are large-scale works.

MR. PATTI: Right.

MR. WARMUS: I'm just pointing them out in the book.

MR. PATTI: Yes. It's interesting. When this book — these are renderings of it we're looking at in the book. This is just before the works had been completed and so they exist in the rendering stage. These renderings are created by my son-in-law, Leonardo Quiles.

MR. WARMUS: Spell that, please.

MR. PATTI: "Quiles" is Q-u-i-l-e-s. His first name is Leonardo, and we call him Leo.

MR. WARMUS: And while we're at it, the book we're looking at it *Tom Patti: Illuminating the Invisible* by William Warmus, with introduction by Donald Kuspit [Tacoma, WA: University of Washington Press, 2004]. That's the book we've been referring back and forth to.

MR. PATTI: This is a fascinating building. It's called Morton Square, this first project here. It was great because I'm always more comfortable working in proximity to my studio. Pittsfield is located about three hours from New York. So I didn't feel that traveling would be an issue in trying to do this kind of work, because I needed that kind of continuous connection with the site that I was working on.

Anyway, it's an entire city block. I was able to, with the architect Philip Koether, design a sort of art program for the building that starts from outside of the building. If you walk down the street, above the townhouses in the transoms and in the doorways, I developed a way to encapsulate a number for each of the townhouse doors.

I developed this technology all in glass, where the letter form is inside the window. Above the window is a large square that becomes sort of the insignia for Morton Square. It's light-transmissive because each of the townhouses has a chandelier or a light fixture behind there, so they're all back-lit. The entry has this backlit component that I knew existed, so I provided the artwork filter as the entrance of each townhouse.

And of course, they're laminated with this impact-resistant technology that I was developing. So they provide security for an urban environment — that was also an important component of it.

I designed the Marquis, the entrance to the townhouse, the steel structure I designed and the glass that went in it. The glass was designed not to transmit light but to reflect light. The lighting source is actually in the floor or the pavement under the marquee. The material is highly reflective, so the light is directed above and then reflected down onto the floor space. So it becomes the entry into Morton Square.

Then in Morton Square I did work on the desk, the wall, the back wall. But the point that I'm working on the interior, is that it can actually be viewed from the streetscape. So although you're not in the building, the location and the color and the type of glass that I used, it has the ability to express itself beyond the site that it's actually in. So a pedestrian can actually visually engage with the interior of the space in some way.

Also in there is a significant component that I made. I don't know if it would be called a chandelier. It's a hanging sculptural component for the lobby of the building. It sits next to incoming light from the West Side Highway that comes from the west. It's four sections, semicircles of laminated glass that encapsulate a stainless steel cable five-thousandths in diameter, made of 19 strands that I actually laminated within the glass component.

That wire is attached to a ceiling spring component that stabilizes the entire structure. [In] most of the ambient light conditions, when you look at it, the object appears to be floating in space because these thin wires are not seen.

Later in the day as the sun moves over the structure and these thin stainless-steel cables pick up the light and reflect the light, you see this sort of web of taut, reflective, linear elements that become a cylinder of light that connects to the glass that's reflecting this sunset of light. For me, it's very successful because it's successful technologically. I developed something that I believe has never been done before in glass or laminating technology, the idea of putting a cable suspension system encapsulated inside of a glass component.

The other, the aesthetic component, that the thing just — integrates well to that space, and the way it engages itself with or without light in that environment. There's also lights above it that illuminate the glass and the material I have within the glass.

It also has a material that Bill just described in Sienna's gallery that's located in Lenox, Massachusetts. As you move around this suspended sculpture, it opens and closes its transparency, as its sight lines are changing.

MR. WARMUS: Transparency and opacity.

MR. PATTI: And translucency, all three. It changes from the sight-line access that you look at. So when the sun is set in the back, it appears to conduct the light all the way around the surfaces of it, and it glows, it's quite beautiful. It has a presence that it can exist, by itself.

The subway station on 74th Street in Jackson Heights in Queens, I worked with the architect Bruce Hall on this. It's a complete redevelopment of the subway station. Over 2 million people a day pass through this station. I did what's called a head house, a major piece that overlooks the neighborhood, that lets light into the turnstile area and the connection area between the trains within the building. It's a large structure. I did seven triptychs on the windscreen on the platforms where people meet the train, get on and off the train on their journey.

These windows in the head house, looking at that from the community side, from outside the building, they reflect daylight, and become a blue-greenish color to the community side. On the interior, they become red, magenta, shades of amber and blue on the interior space. These colors will describe the space as the arc of the sun moves across the building.

In daylight, the reverse happens. They become reflective on the interior and light-transmissive in the evening. So in the evening, they're quite beautiful. They project a red-orangeish color into the surrounding neighborhood. In the evening in the interior, there's a cool, reflective glow to the windows.

These were made from a high energy-absorbing composite that I developed for an urban environment. These are bomb-blast-resistant windows. Because in the early part of the 20th [sic] century, around 2010, the country — when you're reading this and listening to this in the year 3000 — we are deathly afraid that terrorists, domestic or otherwise, will threaten these public buildings with significant pressure loads from bombs, homemade or otherwise.

MR. WARMUS: We're coming down close to the end of disc five. There will be one more disc after this, which will be sort of a review of things we've left out from this, in the car on the way over to look at the *Miami Rain* project, and then we can talk about the *Miami Rain* project when we get over there.

One thing I'd like to ask you about at this point is, we've spent a lot of time laying the ground for your career and talking about the smaller-scale work and now talking about the large-scale work. Do you continue making the small-scale pieces as well?

MR. PATTI: The small-scale works are really, they're more investigations in things. I don't exhibit them. I sell them. They're more private things. It's part of an ongoing process, so I don't want to commercialize them, I don't want to see them exhibited in galleries and so on.

MR. WARMUS: We're talking about the small pieces that you have sold, correct, in the past?

MR. PATTI: Yes.

MR. WARMUS: Like the Solar Risers.

MR. PATTI: Yes, yes. They evolve. I'm not making any of the work — I'm not making any of the Compound series, the Solar Risers.

MR. WARMUS: Those are all complete now, the series.

MR. PATTI: Yes. Those resolved themselves. The work has been a process of evolution, and there is no need to make — they just resolved themselves.

MR. WARMUS: But you're still making smaller scale.

MR. PATTI: Yes, I'm still making small-scale work. I haven't exhibited it. I rented a warehouse where I store the work if I can't keep it in the studio, where I put it on a wall; I look at it and study it. I'm working on a series now for almost 10 years, and I continue to work on it. It is small scale. It's actually 12 inches by 13.5 inches, and they're all exactly the same size. I use that sort of modular size to work on it.

MR. WARMUS: And they're glass objects?

MR. PATTI: And they're glass.

MR. WARMUS: Laminated glass objects?

MR. PATTI: Some are laminated, most are laminated. I have a couple of projects going on like that. And I've been working on tables.

MR. WARMUS: I saw one of your tables at Heller Gallery a few months ago, maybe it was in April.

MR. PATTI: I just started to exhibit them. I was working on them for about five years, and just started to exhibit. Doug Heller had an interest in showing them to the public and exhibited three of the tables there.

MR. WARMUS: The metalwork is beautifully put together.

MR. PATTI: Yes, thank you. Yes, they're steel, which is powder-coated. There's a facility which does powder coating next door to me. They allowed me to develop my own colors and pigments and stuff. They would colorize the steel.

The interesting thing about the tables is, the tables evolved because I got to — I recognized that much of the glass I was making was better-looking. I preferred it on my glass table. Instead of in a vertical position, located as a window or an opening or in a door or something, lying flat on a table was more interesting for certain glasses and ideas that I had. The table came from the idea that it was a perfect place to put them on that axis to be looking down at the surface or seeing it move away from you below eye level, instead of always looking up at it.

So the table idea, it's not that I wanted to make tables, it's that it sort of came together, the idea. It was the most interesting way for me at the time as a vehicle for expressing this idea of seeing a plane of glass or a surface of color in reflected light on that axis.

MR. WARMUS: We, again, are coming down to the last four minutes of the tape. You mentioned the word "color," and that's something I wanted to ask you about in your work in the interview — what kinds of colors you've used, the role of color in your work.

MR. PATTI: Yes. Before GE, my colors were all subdued. That was, I think, some of that — what I think of as a sort of spiritual component of it. There was a sort of a mood to those pieces. It was very intentional to work within a very narrow range of values.

All those glasses — all the glasses I've used in my work represent the height of glassmaking, sheet glassmaking at the time, commercial sheet glassing that's used in popular, common architectural applications.

So the earlier work had the grays and bronzes and the dark greens. Those glasses were the innovative glasses at the time. As energy conservation emerged in the '70s, '80s, and '90s, bronze glasses, gray glasses were looked at as an optimum product for energy conservation. So I incorporated that as state-of-the-art glass in my work. Plus, in a way, it documents the time I live in and the world around me, which utilized these solutions to these

major problems that existed.

It was through glass that people were trying to resolve some of these critical energy issues. I could see the social conditions that were around that prompted them. I incorporated them as components into my glass sculptural forms.

I'm always looking for new, innovative conditions around glass or materials to talk about those issues — social, environmental, aesthetic, the way we see.

When I went to GE, I had cut myself and I wiped myself with a piece of paper that produced this red color, this bright red color. I had plastic made, produced 2,000 pounds of a red plastic —

MR. WARMUS: When you say you cut yourself, was it on purpose or accidental?

MR. PATTI: It was accidental.

MR. WARMUS: We only have one minute, by the way, on this disc.

MR. PATTI: Okay. But it was the introduction of plastics at GE. The accessibility to color was greater than it was with glasses for me. Realize, I was getting only what I could find in the Dumpsters early on and so on.

So I began to work with color. That experience with color, two years at GE when I left, that's where the red pieces in my small glasswork came from, those experiences from GE, working with the GE plastics. Then the red and orange reappeared in my small glassworks.

MR. WARMUS: I'm afraid we're going to have to stop now. We're down to under a minute. This will be the end of disc number five, the Tom Patti/William Warmus interview in Miami Beach, January 19, 2010.

Tuesday we will have one more disc. We'll be starting up in the car and then continuing over downtown at the skyscraper. And then we may be done.

[END DISC 5.]

MR. WARMUS: Okay, we've now moved from the house to the Toyota rental car and we are leaving Miami Beach and are driving over to — is it, Marilyn, is it —

MS. PATTI: Biscayne Boulevard, Miami.

MR. WARMUS: Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, for the *Miami Rain*. Is that the name of the tower?

MS. PATTI: No, the Marquis —

MR. WARMUS: The Marquis.

MR. PATTI: The building is the Marquis. And the title of the work on the north and west façade is the *Miami Rain*. The work titled *Miami Rain*.

MR. WARMUS: What we thought we'd do on the way is over is we'd have the Tom Patti book that was written by William Warmus and with a Donald Kuspit introduction. We're just going to look through at images and talk a little bit about images and details, so it's a sort of free-form discussion toward the end of the interview process.

I love the George Erml details. He did a great job of photography for you. It was very beautiful.

MR. PATTI: Yes, George photographed my work —

MR. WARMUS: And that's George Erml, E-R-M-L, photographer who died several years ago.

MR. PATTI: I'm not sure exactly when, but George came to photograph my work for publication-quality artwork. One of the requirements that I had early on was that he come to the studio, photograph them in the studio because I didn't want to send the objects out. I was afraid something would happen to them. And I wanted him to look at the work the way I saw the work. He and I set the camera up and I would adjust the camera and the sightline. He would set it up and then I would readjust it. And he would look through it as I would see it.

After a few sessions like that George got very comfortable. He began to see the work the way I wanted it seen and the book is a good documentation of the collaboration that George and I had in photographing the work.

MR. WARMUS: One of the things that — as you well know — is that I've become very interested in the ocean and the world underwater, and one of the reasons is because the diving is a little bit like being in a block of glass.

And I think some of your pieces have — some of the later works, like the Lumina series, have a sort of feel of how light behaves underwater or in a thick medium. It's one of the things that re-attracted me to your work after I began diving.

MR. PATTI: Yes, that's an interesting observation. That's what art is about, too. You know, some people make references through direct associations with things and that's their entry into the art world. They recognize experiences or associations with a work, around the work that they have in real life.

Of course, for me it's not an issue of water. The fact that it is for you, that's good that the work is communicating to you on many levels.

MR. WARMUS: You did the one piece which was done outdoors, I remember, that was flat glass, mirrored glass and water.

MR. PATTI: Yes. We talk about the small scale and it seems that by 1980 I then changed to large-scale work. But in fact, I've continuously done large- and small-scale works, depending on the ideas I was working on at the time and the opportunity to do them. *Survey Slider*, 1985, incorporated large panels of glass, black glass.

It was enamel glass so it had a very unique, reflective quality to it. It incorporated glass as an element in the foreground of the work. It's interesting, the way you see — have an association with water and you see that in the glass. What I saw was that you could put the two materials next to one another and if you create it — in the right condition, people wouldn't be able to distinguish them, even at full scale, life scale.

It wasn't just in looking at a drawing. It wasn't at a small or remote component of it, but that it was something you could walk up to, walk around, and touch. I was curious — it became really interesting: I would observe people; they would have to put their hand in the water before they actually believed it was not glass, that it was so glasslike.

The glass was black, appeared black in the pool. The reflecting pool that I created had a black liner in it and I raised the level of the water right to the edge of where the grass came out of the ground. So it looked like the water or what appeared like water to be set right on the surface of the grass.

It was very intentional to create that illusion — sort of a visual conflict of materials, because what would happen is each may appear the same, but they were subject to the environmental conditions differently. If it rained, the water component of it would — the droplets of rain water — there would be this spray above the surface of water.

But on the glass part, they would ricochet off and spread much differently. And if the wind came up, of course the glass wouldn't move at all, but the surface of water would communicate the direction and the quality of the wind at the time. So there was this sort of —

MR. WARMUS: Reaction to the weather.

MR. PATTI: — very organic sort of relationship that this work had to the environment. It was quite beautiful. The black glass was set up to reflect the background in the sky at very specific angles. If you stood to the back of it you would see — if you looked at the glass, it would reflect what was back behind you. So you were looking forward, but you were seeing what was behind you.

In this case it was a mountain range which was over towards New York state in the Hudson Valley area. But the interesting thing was if you were to look at it directly, it looked just as a mountain range, but when you looked at it in the reflected glass it looked like a Hudson River painting.

MR. WARMUS: Yes. I remember that was very beautiful. What was the title of this again, so we have it?

MR. PATTI: *Survey Slider*. And *Survey Slider* means that it was a survey; I did a survey of the topography of the site that it was on and the angles of the glass are the passing lines of the ridge's angles. So it corresponds to the topography of the site; it's very site-specific. The other angles reflected the sky, so you would look down at the ground level and see the sky above. You would get all this juxtaposition of landscape in a very unique way. Planes overlapped, so you would see the foreground of the sky and the mid-part of the sky in the same view. It would look like they were cut with scissors and pasted up.

Now we're approaching the building —

MR. WARMUS: Let me ask you one question before we approach. Where did that piece end up? Was it ever acquired by anyone?

MR. PATTI: No, it was — Storm King [Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, NY] was interested in it, had contacted

me on condition. But we never pursued it and it was taken down and I cut all the glass up and used it for other works. All the works, all my large-scale work up until the mid-to-late '80s was all recycled into other works. Almost all the large-scale work were outdoor pieces with glass on the landscape.

MR. WARMUS: Now we're at Northeast 15th Street and Biscayne Boulevard, U.S. 1. We have come across the causeway from Miami Beach and it's a beautiful day here in Miami. We're approaching the sculpture that Tom has been working on.

MR. PATTI: And we are looking across the — Cesar Pelli designed the performance arts center, down in Biscayne. And across the way is the Marquis, a 67-story high-rise condominium, hotel, restaurant.

MR. WARMUS: Marilyn, you said the hotel is opening today?

MS. PATTI: Yes.

MR. WARMUS: Okay.

MS. PATTI: [Inaudible] — nearby RockResorts —

MR. PATTI: The north side is the artwork, is specifically —

MR. WARMUS: I see it now. I can see a little bit of it coming out the edge.

MR. PATTI: See both these signs.

MR. WARMUS: Oh right, and here too.

MR. PATTI: This side, Bill, between — the crash walls are both sited to be seen from the performance arts center and the pedestrian street level.

MR. WARMUS: Will we be parking in the parking garage that the work is attached to?

MR. PATTI: That's a good question. I don't think so.

MS. PATTI: [Inaudible.]

MR. PATTI: It may not be able — we may not be able to access it. They're working in it. You can't get in.

MR. WARMUS: I think this might be the time to pause, since we are just parking right now. Or are we going to be?

MS. PATTI: Do you and Bill want to get out and I'll park across the street?

MR. PATTI: No, we'll get out from over there, Marilyn.

MR. WARMUS: I'll pause.

[Audio Break.]

MS. WARMUS: Okay, we're recording now in front of the sculpture in front, meaning about a city block away, and the Metrorail is going by us. Go ahead, tell me — just start where you were at.

MR. PATTI: Well, we were talking about the angle that — there's two reasons for the angles. One is the environment that it's set in. Everything is at 90 degrees or right angles. I wanted to introduce a diagonal into this environment because the intent was to create a piece that was a gateway into southern Miami, into the Arch District of this area.

I wanted to use that key, use the other architecture that existed around it to be the counterpoint to the diagonal. The original concept was to screen the entire building, the three sides, the exposed sides, with the glass and an aluminum louver. And the glass was a blade to be set at 63 degrees between every six foot six inches of the louver around the entire building.

This would allow — that was the maximum angle to prevent a sightline into the building, to see the lights and the automobiles and everything in the evening, that angle I figured out.

MR. WARMUS: The reflections onto it, to me, look like windows themselves. They look like you are looking at blue windows that are tilted at that angle. What degree is the angle again?

MR. PATTI: Sixty-three degrees.

MR. WARMUS: Okay, they look like 63-degree windows, the louvered windows —

MR. PATTI: So it started from that original idea, the title to that one was *Miami Light Wave*. Between the combination of the economy and sight conditions and so on, I redesigned it, remade it. And this was the most appropriate condition to keep the 63 degrees and then to use the exposed stucco area of the building.

MR. WARMUS: Okay, let's move around. I've got to check something out here.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]