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Oral history interview with Anna Valentina Murch, 2010 May 21-22

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Anna Valentina Murch on May 21, 2010. The interview took place in San Francisco, CA, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the GSA Archives of American Art Oral History Project.

Douglas Hollis reviewed the transcript in 2018. 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.This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anna Valentina Murch on May 21, 2010, for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project in her studio in San Francisco, California, disc number one.

Hello, it's beautiful to be here in this lovely space that you've had for 30 years you were saying?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's an extraordinary studio. So you've been working out of this space really since you arrived in the States?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, when I first arrived I sublet different people's places and then found this Project Artaud through Southern Exposure Gallery. I was told to go to that and then met some of the people that were living here and they said there was a studio that someone was going away I think to Europe for a couple of months.

So I looked after their studio while they were gone, moved to different studios and then finally got one of my own. It's an artists' cooperative. You have to be a member. It's limited equity. So when you sell your space, you sell it back to the wing or the building and the people in the wing decide on who the new person is that comes in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So it keeps in the hands of artists and it keeps a community. It's mostly performance people and visual artists. Some are writers, but mostly that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think it's a very interesting experiment that began in about '75. I came here in '76. I think it was actually '73 it began as a group of performance artists wanted a place and then they couldn't quite manage all the rent themselves. It was an old American Can Company. There were no walls, because it was where the machines and everything were. So first of all they put up curtains and then they actually put up sheetrock. [They laugh.]

Then what happened after about five or six years, there was a fire in the building. We had to have insurance because we were renting it. There was a fire in the building and the money for the insurance came and instead of people using that to get someone else to do the repairs, people in the building did the repairs and then they went to the bank and said, "Well, can we buy it?"

So they began paying and of course the building was owned by Pacific Pipe then and Pacific Pipe never believed that a bunch of kind of hippie artists would possibly keep all the payments going.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So they gave them the mortgage and it became a live-work space for everyone. What happened was we had to come up to code. There were all the planners and everyone that came in and what ended up happening, the ordinance for live-work changed in the city of San Francisco because of what we did.

If we hadn't been—at that time, there were certain people that were renting warehouses that were thrown out of those warehouses whereas because we actually were paying the mortgage or therefore theoretically owned it,

we were able to stay, meet all the requirements and change the ordinance that allowed this whole area really to be developed as live-work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, and you were saying that over the past 30 years—and it's true, it's become—well, it started as an extremely unusual space and it's true today as the city has changed. It's amazing that this space exists for artists in the city.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: What a wonderful community to have been part of for 30 years.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure there were ups and downs.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Oh, it's been—it's based on anarchy in a way. Everybody has their own opinion. Getting consensus is sometimes difficult.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But I believe in the spirit of allowing artists to have somewhere to live and work and to agree and disagree.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I think that's been great. It's gone through a lot of different—we actually paid off the first mortgage but unfortunately because of the earthquake that happened, there was some seismic damage in that and we had to have that redone. So we had to take out another mortgage for having that done.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that in 1989?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, but by the time everything got sorted out, we only got that done a few years ago. So it was a long time getting that organized and getting money to be able to pay for it and actually getting all the work done. But that's all done now but now we have a mortgage again unfortunately.

MIJA RIEDEL: And how many artists are in here?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There's 80 studios and there's about 100 artists. It's a whole city block.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely—so the Theatre Artaud itself?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The Theatre Artaud, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And there was Southern Exposure. There's a Theatre Yugen. There's a Jewish theater. There's a print shop. There's a print shop. There's several different groups that are in here on the ground floor and then visual artists as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Marvelous.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So it's a bit crazy but I think it's great and the spirit of it and I wouldn't have survived if I hadn't been here. The rent was much more reasonable than anywhere else and in a way I see them as my patron.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: If I hadn't been able to—especially at one point when I hadn't—when I was doing a lot of shows and I was able to be a little late with my rent and all that, which under any other circumstances I wouldn't have been able to do whereas they were always completely supportive and give everyone a little bit of slack.

It's much stricter now but I don't think I would have been able to do the work if I hadn't had a space of my own that I would be able to work in at a reasonable level of rent.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's an extraordinary thing to say. The ceilings here are—how high are these ceilings?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Fifteen feet.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, so the space for you must be really especially critical given the scale that you work at.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, right, but also a kind of mental space that it gives me, having a lot of light and space and being able to have a view. There's something about that is really important. One of the reasons that I came to San Francisco was because of the quality of light.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I thought it was just so beautiful and it's a beautiful place. It's really international. There was a lot of very experimental artists in the mid-'70s and so it seemed as if it would be a really great place to be able to work.

MIJA RIEDEL: So this is where you came—you came to San Francisco intentionally when you came to the States?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, but I'd been to the States several times beforehand. The first time I came was in '68 after one year at college. There was a student exchange and I came over for a summer. There was a whole plane load of English students that came.

When we arrived in New York and spent three days in a hotel having a kind of orientation about all the issues that were happening in America and New York and race issues, political issues. It was actually fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And then I rented an apartment with five other English students and worked there for a couple of months and then went to Washington and Philadelphia and Boston, but it gave me a real sense of America. When I first went to New York, I thought I was quite sophisticated. I thought I'd been to a lot of countries in Europe and lived in London and I arrived in New York in complete shock.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs] Really?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, it seemed—one, it was really hot.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, what month of the summer?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think it was the end of June.

MIJA RIEDEL: And sorry, this was 1970?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Nineteen sixty-eight. It was a very explosive year.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my goodness, yes, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was hot. It was dirty.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I first of all thought how can anybody live here and then after not very long I just thought it was one of the most electric, exciting places I'd ever been. The art I saw there was fantastic. So I thought, no, this is really—it's bizarre but it's a really energized center of creativity here which I thought was fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Well, I want to get to all of that but I don't want to move us out—[inaudible]—for not covering the earlier material first. But that was such a nice segue from where we are. But let's just go back and cover a little of the early biographical information and we'll get there.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: So exactly where and when were you born?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was born in Dumbarton, Scotland, in December 1948.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what was the date?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Seventh, but I didn't realize it was such—Pearl Harbor Day, which in England wasn't quite such a big thing as it was here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right, right, and what did your parents do? What were their names?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: My father, Norman Robbins Murch, was a commander in the Navy that then when he retired he ran a charity for orphan children and arranged balls and banquets to raise the money to give to the children.

MIJA RIEDEL: How interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There was a school attached to it. It was an old charity that was begun through the textile industry.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Where the old mills, they had—for people that died working in them, the children would be looked after. Then they had a school, a boarding school to send children and what he did, which I thought was really great, probably with some of the influence from me as well, was that he thought it was better if there was one member of the family left, which was often the mother, to try and make sure that she was stable so that the children could stay with her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So what he did was first of all make sure she had her hair done, buy her new clothes, try and get her a job, have her so that she could have babysitting coming in for the children, so that to keep what family there was together rather than split it up even further by sending the children away from school. They had the option—

MIJA RIEDEL: How forward thinking.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: This was in the '50s?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Fifties, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And was he fairly successful?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, he did very well. They always managed to raise a lot of money. He managed to get all the people in the fashion industry, you see, to do all the—they had more money and they had more prestige and all the people in the mills—now, of course the textile industry there is practically gone. But they had a lot of money but they didn't have the same—how am I going to say it—elegance or publicity in the same way that all the fashion people did.

So to bring them together so they kind of enjoyed each other so then they could have these big events which raised a lot of money for all the people that were—and it changed too that someone didn't actually have to die. Even if somebody was divorced, there could be help looking after the family.

MIJA RIEDEL: What innovative thinking.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah, so I think he was a fantastic man, a real humanitarian and very strong-willed, stubborn but gave me—was a really dear friend of mine. We didn't always agree but he respected my right to be who I was. He kind of always challenged me into arguing and said, "If you want to do certain things, then you have to stand up for yourself," which was right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely, great advice for a young woman in the '50s.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. So he was very progressive thinking, I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds like it, and your mother?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: My mother was Russian. She was a White Russian that saw her father and brother murdered by the Bolsheviks. She managed to escape with her mother and sister and they went across Russia, ended up in Siberia, finally got to Harbin in China and then went—then she went to Shanghai and that's where she met my father when he was in the navy in Shanghai.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my goodness, that's quite extraordinary.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So she had a kind of really—in Shanghai, she—again, she was very resourceful because she had to be and she met some—a French woman and together they ended up by designing clothes, which I find in the '20s and early '30s was a fairly interesting, dynamic city.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So she kind of managed to survive that way. Then when she went back to England, she met—my father was gone because of the war and being away sometimes two years at a time, he did the north Russian convoys as well as being in the Pacific. So his career is very intense.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then with her, she met a girlfriend of my father's—one of my father's—[inaudible] [girlfriends –DH]—who was an actress and she said, "What are you doing living in Devon," because she'd gone back to live with my grandmother, my father's mother, in Devon in Dawlish, a lovely little seaside town that was very old-fashioned really, especially after Shanghai.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Even though they got on very well and she seemed to get on quite well in Dawlish. She was very exotic.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure she was.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So she went up to London and began a career in acting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Your mother? [Laughs] My goodness and did she have any success?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, she did. She was in—did a lot of theater and made a couple of films

MIJA RIEDEL: She sounds like an extraordinary woman.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What interesting diverse talents. She was able—your father was supporting the family and so she did that on the side?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah, but at one point she was earning much more money than he was, actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: How interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah, no it was very—I mean, her whole life was very extreme up and down. Then at a certain point, I think she wanted to be on her own. So she didn't want to be with my father any more so asked him to leave. After that, I went to boarding school.

MIJA RIEDEL: What unusual parents. What an amazing childhood before you even started school really.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So where did you go to boarding school, and I'm sorry, what was your mother's name?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Anna Valentina Gordikova.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you have siblings as well?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, first of all, I probably should tell you about the school I went to in London. I went to two, which was an international school, because as well it was the '50s and there was the Cold War going on. So even though she was doing very well, I think she was very aware of the fact—I think it finally—that even though she was White Russian, that some people, Russians were Russians and there was no kind of difference.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I went to the Chelsea Froebel School. Froebel was one of probably the most innovative kindergarten and being in Chelsea as well in London because we lived in Kensington and I went to school in Chelsea. It was a fantastic school for me and probably I didn't really enjoy school again until I went to art school. [Laughs].

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So it was a very creative—

MIJA RIEDEL: This school was an elementary school?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Elementary school, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, so sort of our K to 6, something like that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, I began at two and I left at seven and then at seven I went to boarding school.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, and what about the school was so exciting?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, you were able to—they would tell us stories and then we would act them out. We'd always be making things. I was making sculptures at school and doing paintings. While it was all about being very aware of your space and then there were all sorts of building blocks and different things or we would make things that would begin to represent something else.

But I don't know. Somebody the relation—we could go around barefoot. The teachers could go around barefoot. They were always telling us stories and then we would tell them back the story by acting it. So it was a lot of myths and things. So that's how we knew how to understand what it was that we were doing.

MIJA RIEDEL: That real experiential learning.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Absolutely, experiential learning, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Observing so much through your eyes and through your ears but when you're actually acting it out, you're absorbing so much more. What an interesting idea.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, it was a great school. I had lots of little friends from all over the world. We all got on really well. We had our own kind of funny language where we would use different people's language for different things that sounded the nicest and made up our own kind of language between us.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you'd choose the Spanish word for apple and use it for the English.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's so interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What an interesting—how it must have opened the world for you as a child on so many levels, spatially and—

[Cross talk.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I felt it was great being in London and it was great. In the summers I would go down to Devon and be in the seaside and you could hardly ever get me off the beach. There was swimming and making sandcastles and moats and all sorts of things. That was my early constructionist [They laugh]—building cities in the sand.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds really idyllic.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So that was great and then there was the big shock of going off for boarding school.

MIJA RIEDEL: That happened when you were eight?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Seven.

MIJA RIEDEL: Seven, and that was not at all easy?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The first one was awful because it was—well, I think it was a Catholic school and I thought that I was—my one grandmother was Church of England and the other grandmother who came over to look after me when I was in London because my mother was working all the time and my father was working too—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: —and she was Russian Orthodox. So I'd been christened and baptized in both faiths, if you like. So I thought I was definitely as Christian as you could get.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: [Laughs] But with the Catholics I was like doubly damned.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh dear.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Which was a little difficult and I'd been accepted by people from all over the world but there I wasn't. But luckily I didn't stay there very long and then I went to another international school, which was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that also in London?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, those were both in Sussex.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay and what was the name—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: One was called Tidebrook Place and the second one was called Charters Towers. There was again—it was international and I think the most important holiday of the year was United Nations Day. You see why the U.N. project was so important to me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Of course, of course.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was great. Everyone would dress up in their costumes. All the food would be sent in from all over the world and it was a very—I think again, very enlightened school in the fact that the assembly was done—read by whoever. If it was a Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim or Christian, depending on what were the holy days, that religion would be spoken and sometimes it was just philosophy and not a religious writing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So it was all about looking at all very different kinds of belief and being able to draw from all of them, which I thought was really—apart from that brief time at Catholic school—I didn't really realize that there were such problems in the world because we all got on famously. There was never any problems with different race—

MIJA RIEDEL: So there was no racial tension whatsoever?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: None.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: If anything it was like people—you were interested—if there was someone that came from a different part of Africa that there wasn't someone—oh, and what's the difference between this and that.

There were even people from different—from Iran, Iraq—then Persia, but Iraq and Saudi Arabia and Israel and they all got on. They would tease each other about the fact they had so much in common even though they weren't meant to. So it gave me a real feeling that there's no reason why we can't get on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. That is absolutely astounding. It's certainly one of the most extraordinary childhood stories I've heard.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So that part of it was really great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes and were you in that school through high school, then, through 17 or so?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were there many art classes?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, very good art classes. Also there was the headmistress was an art historian. Every dormitory was named after a painter and so there were—they weren't the originals of course but so whether you're in Vermeer or Van Gogh.

So every dormitory had the paintings of whatever artist in it. So art history and studio art were both acknowledged. I think actually in most English schools there's much more emphasis on music and art, especially than there is now here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, yes, to be sure, I think the American public schools back then—they had quite a bit more than we do now, yes, yes. So do you remember spending a lot of your time in art studios or constantly drawing or building things while you were in school?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, I spent a lot of time. The art department was across the road from the main building and I spent as much time as I could there. In the kindergarten, I didn't do any sculpture at that school. In my kindergarten I did sculpture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really? [Laughs.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What did you build?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I built—I even have some of the reports. My father saved the reports from my kindergarten about what interesting constructions I made out of all these kind of different blocks that I found and recut up and things like that. I can't remember all what they were. I would do these kind of color field paintings. They couldn't understand why they could never get me to draw people.

MIJA RIEDEL: That is so interesting. These blocks you were taking, you would cut them? You would cut the blocks themselves and change them and then build a construction?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's fascinating and color field painting. Had you seen—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And I used to write poetry in kindergarten, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Had you seen—were you seeing a lot of art as a child, at that age?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, in London—I don't know if I saw very much contemporary work but living in Kensington we would go to all the museums because they were all free there. So on a rainy day, at the weekend I would go to museums or if it was nice I'd go to the park.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I did spend quite a bit of time in the park but probably more time in the museums because it rained so much in the winter.

MIJA RIEDEL: From the time you were a child?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So there was that exposure very early on.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you remember what you were drawn to?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: All sorts of things. I think I was more—I think I loved the V&A [Victoria & Albert Museum]. I never liked figurative painting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting, especially for a child.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. I think I might even—I don't know if I saw Turners or not. I don't remember when I first saw the Turners that I always loved. They always just resonated. I always liked landscape but I just didn't like kind of Rubens-esque Baroque overindulgent—[They laugh]—painting. I liked—I always liked icons and Byzantine and Eastern work as well and I think that was probably the Russian Orthodox influence.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure, that makes sense.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So the Russian, the fact that I really always liked kind of this rich, layered, complex, and light reflective elements as well as landscape, I think those are probably rich tiles and textures and fabrics. I liked the science museum too because that was again walking distance.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I just—it was just one of the things that you did. Sometimes my mother would

take me—the few times that she did go out with me, would take me to department stores and I would look around at clothes and things with her. But mostly it was museums.

MIJA RIEDEL: That is interesting. Was it your grandmother that took you to the different museums?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and my father. My father would on the weekends and my grandmother as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, and was your family supportive of your interest in art from the time you were young?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think my father felt there was—he saw all the ups and downs and extremes of what my mother had to do and he felt that it wasn't a good—it was a precarious life and he didn't want me to do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In fact when I left school, even though I wanted to go to art school, he said—he made me go to secretarial college.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. I was too young to go to college on my own. So it was probably the worst year of my life I think. I think I felt this was all I—because I'm dyslexic and so it's like not only it's not what I want to do but it's also not what I'm very good at.

MIJA RIEDEL: Good at, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So the combination was awful. I didn't like the people I was with particularly because they didn't seem to have very much vision for anything. I had one friend that I was at school with who also wanted to go to art school and her father had done the same thing.

So we used to meet up after school and I would go to museums or we would actually sometimes go to the House of Commons because, again, it was like—it was an incredible time to go and watch the debates. So that was always interesting to me as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was your own work like when you were in high school? Were you doing much sculpture? Were you doing drawings?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, it was mostly—I used to do painting and I used to do a lot with pastels.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay and landscapes as you were saying or abstract?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Landscapes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Color field sort of thing.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Actually I didn't get particularly good grades in school. I got okay grades but I didn't get all A's in art at all. I think it's because I wasn't doing what the—even though I liked the art teacher a lot, I didn't—I think she would have preferred it if I had done more figurative work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was never very interested in doing that. I did still lifes which was part of the things that we were set up to do. But a lot of the things I wasn't particularly interested in doing, even though I had to do a lot of life drawing in college. But at secretarial college, no, I hated it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, I can only imagine.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I worked for a year. I worked in London and then—

MIJA RIEDEL: This would have been what?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: This is '65 because I went to art school in '67 I began.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then after a year, I'd actually went and gone out—I got a job in Germany for a little bit by meeting somebody and then I told my father I was going to go on and live in Italy and he said, "Well, don't you still want to go to art school," and I said, "Well, yes, but you don't want me to." He said, "Well, I'll see what I can do." Ironically, he took my portfolio around to art schools and said, "Do you think she's got anything," because he was not—he said he wasn't an expert.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They said, "Yes, we'll take her next year. It's too late for this year," and he said, "Oh no, goodness knows where she'll be next year. Can't you take her now," and they said, "No, we're completely full. We booked this up six months ago," and he got one art school to say, "Well, if somebody drops out," he said, "will you let her come."

He must have got on really well with the principal. He said, "Look, I really want her to be able to begin if she's going to as soon as possible." So what happened was somebody dropped out on the first day of class and they sent me a telegram and I flew back the next day and began art school.

The wonderful thing—the only good thing about doing secretarial course was that I was so thrilled. I mean, it gave me a year to grow up and live on my own, which was good.

MIJA RIEDEL: So where were you during this year?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was in London and I was in Heidelberg. So I came back and I was I think as dedicated as I could be. I didn't really want to do anything else. I didn't need any social life, nothing. All I wanted to do was work. The college was open from 6:00 to 6:00 and then I'd come home after that and work in the attic.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds like a very exciting—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I had to live at home with my parents, which I didn't particularly want to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, especially after being on your own for a year.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. But I think in a way it was good because obviously they looked after me. I didn't have to deal with feeding myself. Also I think it was very good for my father to see how dedicated I was.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you had a whole attic studio, which is pretty extraordinary to have that much space, at that age.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was a funky little attic but as far as I was concerned it was absolutely fine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was just used for storage but I managed to kind of tune it up and make it be all right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Which school was this?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I went to Croydon College of Art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then I went on to Leicester College of Art and then I went to the Royal College of Art and then I got another grant to go to the Architects Association.

MIJA RIEDEL: So did you move from one to the next or did you graduate from the Royal College of Art?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you started at Croydon and spent a year there?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and then the English system is that you do—everything's the Bauhaus model. You do everything. So you do painting, drawing, printmaking, ceramics, fashion, photography, sculpture. You have a chance of doing everything. Then you decide on what you want to specialize in and then you reapply to another college.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and you can only apply to two colleges, your first choice and your second choice.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, so this first year you were just experimenting with all sort of media.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: With everything, yes, which was great. It was fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there anything especially significant about that year that you recognize?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think I got very involved in color interaction and I'd been doing these drawings that became paintings and after I'd been doing them for a while one of my professors took me into the library and showed me the Albers prints.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: First of all, I almost died of shock because I thought I'd invented it all and then after initially going through that, I realized that I had a soul mate and I thought—I said, "Where is he? "At that point he was still at Yale but he was just about to retire and I thought, "I have to go study painting there."

But obviously I never would have been able to do that. I wouldn't have been able to afford it. But I think that was the big—that and being able to get involved with sculpture. I think those two things were really exciting for me. But quite honestly, I actually loved everything. I loved doing photography. They gave us—I was using—we were able to borrow a Pentax camera whenever we wanted. Just the facilities were fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: That actually makes sense when we look at your work now over decades. Your facility in such a variety of media and your comfort level in such a variety of media and willingness to take an idea in whatever direction it needs to go. It's interesting when we think back on what your training was.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That's why I think Bauhaus is very important for me as kind of—not just the work that was done but the philosophy behind it. The same—actually I think in that year there was also a Russian constructivist show in London and that was really exciting for me as well. I loved the idea that they were able to—artists who came out of I'm going to say abstraction, out of painting, were able to think about being citizens of the world and changing the infrastructure.

I've just thought artists belong in the street not in these kind of holier than thou hierarchies and that how wonderful if art can be everywhere, not just for the few. The combination of seeing that and being able to go to all the museums that I did, because they were all free in England as a child, and there was something about all that that was really important. I really felt art should be everywhere or integrated, not separated.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, and access for anyone.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So philosophically I always felt that. I think that's why it was easy for me to kind of—I mean, I was interested in the idea of public art before I even knew that it existed. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, exactly, it sounds like it. Were there any sculptors in particular that you were drawn to or things—three-dimensional forms that you saw that appear as a revelation the way the Albers did?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think I liked some of the minimalist work. I actually—I suppose early on I liked Barbara Hepworth, but not for long.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think I became much more interested in the minimalists. Later I think people that were like Richard Long and Hamish [Fulton] I thought were really interesting because, again, they were kind of—they broke that mold between having to make just the object and it be very much more about the participation and being part of the landscape, rearranging things that already existed. I think I come from much more of a landscape tradition than I do of the sculpture being a person.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that makes sense.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think that's why I've always liked Islamic work as well because they don't deal with

the figurative.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's right. That's right. It's texture and pattern and light and color—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And complexity in one layer on another layer and another, so that all makes sense to me. It's not that figurative—I think that figurative work is very important. But it's just not something I ever felt I wanted to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. It was always an environmental sensibility.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. I think I felt that if there was a person in the painting that meant you couldn't enter it. Someone else already owned that space. But if it was a space, then you could become part of it.

I like the idea that the art and the landscape had a relationship rather than the art being on a pedestal and it didn't have any connection with where it was. I think the early constructivists' work, like Tatlin—I think it seemed more interrelated to me. I'd say that even Dada, the Dada artists—

MIJA RIEDEL: It's an integrated part of life as opposed to something separate—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes or performance or something.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. It's interesting that that is the case from the very start too.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were there any professors that were especially significant or any fellow students during your college years?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. My professor at the Royal College of Art was called Bob Hyde in environmental media and he was fantastic. He was really supportive of me. Unfortunately he died just after I had my show which was really—I mean, it was really tragic because he'd been always very supportive.

The head of sculpture—because environmental media was a kind of offshoot, it was the wild ones—[They laugh]—there were people doing performance and working with sound whereas sculpture was more the object.

He hadn't liked what I was doing whereas Bob Hyde always had supported it. In the end ironically, Meadows, who was the head of sculpture then, was very supportive and actually even wanted me to do the show in Belgium.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But so he went a completely different way after seeing that what I had done worked. But I was really—almost at my greatest moment there was this greater sense of tragedy of him dying.

At least he saw my work before he died. He saw the piece that I'd done finished. But he wasn't well when I had my final review, which I thought, "My God, they're never going to pass me without him being there." In fact everyone was fine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But I would have loved him to see the fact that he—because I had people on my review from photography, from film, from interior design because I'd used all these different departments to help me—you got a certain amount of money from different places. I got a certain amount of money from environmental media and then because I was able—there were certain people every year that were allowed to do photography as a special thing.

They weren't photographers but they were allowed to come and do photography. I'd been able to do that and therefore all the slides I took, and I took thousands of slides, were paid for by the photography department, which was amazing. They were really supportive of what I was doing because I was using all these projections.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to ask what was the project.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, I did two. I took two ones with projections. One began with—I built a pyramid. Do you want to see it?

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure. We'll look at a PowerPoint presentation? I'll try and get a disc so people who are listening or reading this will be able to see what we're talking about.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I built these structures that would—they were flexible and then in this one, like the air would—it would inflate and change. So it was really kind of experimenting in how a space could change. I wanted to work with something that wasn't just a square. I wanted to change the feeling of the whole space.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's so interesting and that's something that is as true today as it was then.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So then this was the kind of pyramid structure that I began first of all inflating, having a pendulum going back and forth, covering it with this stretch fabric and having this big kind of mattress full of styrene balls. It's actually a bit like—I just saw a piece that Ernesto Neto has done recently. It's exactly what I was doing in '73.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So when one person moved, everybody moved. My friends would come and—that was my studio at the Royal College.

MIJA RIEDEL: Roughly what size was this?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was 12 foot by 12 foot base.

MIJA RIEDEL: And then it's what, eight feet at the central point?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No it went up to about 10 feet.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then this is with a series of projections and sound.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: First of all I began with dawn and working as if the light was beginning to come up and work through a kind of natural landscape, going through different scenes and then details of different textures. So you went—you had the vast view and then you went into details of the earth and then you expanded out again. With that I had a combination of I used all the BBC tapes of all natural sounds. So there was kind of synchronized sound with it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sort of birdsong or waves.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Birds or waves or wind or wind in trees and things, so you had this sense of being surrounded by different qualities of nature and—

[Cross talk.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Through light and sound.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Beginning in dawn, and then ending up at night.

MIJA RIEDEL: How long would that transpire about?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think it was about—I think this one was about a 20-minute program and I had six projectors so that each—three dissolved.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was the audience or the participants, were they intended to be inside, outside, or all around?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Inside and they could walk around.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So they could view it from the outside or they could view lying down. It was a really comfortable place to be able to watch it inside. But you were very aware of how much space someone else took up because when one person moved, everybody moved.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs] Did it have a title, the piece?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I called it *The Pyramid,* and this one was a time landscape.

MIJA RIEDEL: Time landscape. Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then this was the second one I did which had 10 projectors and was more like a tent structure. I was really interested in kind of nomadic forms really and that began in the city and actually went through all the details of the city.

MIJA RIEDEL: So the projections are all views of London, it looks like.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Of London.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Railings, underground, it's like all the chaos that is there and then it ended up kind of almost as a kind of an explosion and then going into nature. It ended up actually with just fields of daisies taken from me lying with my nose on the ground so you're surrounded with it. There was a sense of even if we destroy everything, nature will come back and trying to be very optimistic.

But also about how much pollution and how much—I know it was crazy to think about I was thinking about that in 1973. But it was like the chaos and the lack of nature, even though London is full of parks, there's something about the—when I'd gone away to Greece and I'd been on an island with no cars and then coming back to London, I started just coughing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you do that as a high school student or in college?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, that was college.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see. So you just had a really graphic personal sense of—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Now, the environmental movement was certainly very much in full force here in the States. Was it happening in London as well?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think so. I think it always was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I suppose I wanted to find a way in which I could—I mean, it's not political. But in a way, of drawing attention—all I hoped to do was make people aware of what's around them. It wasn't like a big agenda to hit them on the head with but just subtly to make people in a comfortable way—because there was a kind of sensuality in everything. They were comfortable. It was light, projections and it's very seductive.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But at the same way, make people realize that look at all these interrelationships and what choices we have and what we surround ourselves by and is there another way of being able to live or what are the consequences of having this build up all the time, all this kind of construction and all this kind of anger.

There were demonstrations in London but really I think actually my summer in New York in '68 was very intense. There was a lot going on there and it made me aware of just how fragile city environments are I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: So let's go back to that New York trip. That happened when exactly?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: After my first year at college.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I had just done a—[pre-diploma –DH]—which is that first year, and just before I went off to Leicester I went to New York.

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's talk about that trip. Is there anything else in particular about that time? Did you spend the whole time in New York and what were you doing when you were there?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: When I went to New York. I got a job doing temp work. I could still type.

MIJA RIEDEL: For a summer in New York?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. So the secretarial thing came in handy. In the holidays I always used to work doing temping.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I took a temp to earn money. So I met a real diverse amount of people.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I went to the theater a lot because you could get—if you arrived you could always get—especially in the summer I think, you could get theater tickets very reasonably at the last minute.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Went to shows, no, it was just all very exciting.

MIJA RIEDEL: There was a lot of performance, a lot of interesting performance alternatives, theater, dance in New York then—

[Cross talk.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What part of the city were you in?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, we lived in the East Side in probably about number—I think it was like in the 30s I think, 26 I think it was. So it was a very sedate neighborhood actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: You spent the entire summer?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Two months. It was almost two months. I spent a good six weeks, I think, in New York and then in between I did go down to Washington, D.C., and saw the museums there, which I thought were fantastic and went to Philadelphia, which I thought was really boring because I wasn't interested in the old then. I had too much of that in London. I came to America because of the new.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think I also went to Boston for a few days. But I wasn't particularly as enamored with that either.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure, that makes sense, given what you were looking for.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was later when I went many years later but at the time I wasn't.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Was there anything in particular seminal during that trip to New York that first trip do you think or was it just the exposure overall to—

[Cross talk.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think there were a lot of things. I saw—there was a color show. There was one in New York at I think the Corcoran—oh no, in Washington at the Corcoran.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, the Corcoran, right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think there were some other ones in New York. Why do I remember sculpture in New York and this color field painting in Washington? The scale of everything was huge. I just thought it was fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The work, everything, just to see so much contemporary work and modern work I just thought was wonderful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there anything, just thinking about other trips you took around this time, you said you were in Greece.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you there for a while?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: When I went—after I was 13, my father would take me to a different country every

summer for summer holiday.

MIJA RIEDEL: How extraordinary.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I never got birthday presents and Christmas presents but that's what we did, which was to me absolutely fine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: We'd stay in little kind of bed and breakfasts or family hotels and stuff like that. So we kind of got to meet people that were living in the country.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: We went to France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland.

MIJA RIEDEL: What an extraordinary experience to have early in life.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It gave me—he said, "If you get too tied up where you are, you lose perspective and it's really important to see how other people live. It will make you more appreciative of what you have," and he was right and how to change it or make it better.

On my own, I went to Spain and I went to Greece a couple of times and I went to Turkey. Then later I went to Egypt when I was teaching and then I came back to the States. But Greece was more about nature and the ancient.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And the same with Turkey actually. There was something about wanting to combine ancient and modern. Then later, I think I was very interested in combining, I'm going to say, man-made or human-made or industrial-made and natural. So that it's not like all one or the other. How can these things kind of work together.

MIJA RIEDEL: That makes a lot of sense, in relation to your work.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think that's what I've always been really interested in. So Greece was really about being in nature and being with water. I love swimming, the beaches—

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you on the islands there?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I went to Athens and then went to different islands on the boats. It was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. How extraordinary to have had all of these experiences so early in your life, to have that exposure to that variety, as you say, of ancient and modern, all those different ways of looking at space and thinking about things, looking at art. Now were you in museums, did you visit museums in all of these places?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes, yes and I think it—I think it was all really very much part of my education. I think that's why I always want to travel now, even though everyone says, "Here, how can you go away when you're working and you're going away for more than two weeks," but it's somehow, I need it somehow.

Maybe it's because I had it. I feel even when I did—I had literally hardly any money and I didn't have a car, when I could I would go back to—from here I went back to Europe and I went back to see my family and friends in England and we'd try and go somewhere else because I felt it was really an important thing for my—

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds like travel has been truly important.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Very important, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, especially formative and continues to be.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is it something that you have tried to do then, repeated throughout your life?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: To maintain that, pretty much annually or biannually?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, when I first came, I couldn't travel for—until I got my green card and everything for a couple of—it was almost 18 months, almost two years and then I went back. Then I would go back every 18 months. But mostly I've gone back at least every 18 months and usually often every year.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Or if I haven't gone back to Europe I've gone to Australia or we went and we had an artist-in-residence in Brazil. So I've always tried to do something.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely, to keep that thread of diversity and new perspectives.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, right.

MIJA RIEDEL: We'll pause this here.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Okay.

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MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anna Valentina Murch on May 21, 2010, for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project in her studio in San Francisco, California, disc number two.

As disc one was ending—we were just talking about travel and really the impact that it's had on your work. I'd love for you to finish that thought.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, I think that different things that happened was that even though there was real difference in the way people were living in some ways, that there was a kind of primal sense that we all had a kind of humanity about us or a sense of humor about us. Because I can't speak any languages and the fact that it never stopped me going anywhere and I always managed to kind of communicate in some way.

Somehow I think that there are some things that we all share. There are some—I love the differences but there is also a kind of human connection of what we appreciate or what we care about.

If it's the landscape or good food or the way the light comes in or the way things grow or the way we can share things with each other, that I think that there's a lot of things—I suppose I'm always looking in my work of what things will resonate beyond one kind of person.

So rather than making it so specific that it's only accessible or someone thinks of it as, "That's about my culture," and other people will say then, "It's not about mine," what elements are there that we can all share and maybe they're about natural phenomena, maybe they're about qualities of light, maybe they're about the way you walk by water.

There's something about sequences of places that people have promenaded and been in that they might be slightly different in each situation and in each culture but there's something that we all share in some ways and I think that's what I've been looking for, even by the fact that my family all had very different belief structures but they all had a sense of ethics.

Even though the way they—I was more interested in the way they lived than what they were claiming to be the reason why they lived that way. There was something about the way they actually—the ethics of how they lived their lives I think was the most important thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Your family?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Can you say a little bit more about that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, like the difference between my two grandmothers, one English, Devonshire English country farmer's daughter and my other grandmother who was—and she was Church of England—and then my Russian Orthodox grandmother who came from a White Russian family, was never meant to work, had come from—her whole life changed dramatically.

They were both, you would say, religious and they both had a code of ethics about the way they lived. But they both respected each other and respected the fact that I would have input from both of them.

I thought, well, if they can do that and they don't even speak each other's language—my Russian grandmother could speak French but her English wasn't very good—that why can't we try and find ways of people connecting

rather than just what separates them, dwelling on that rather than what separates them.

MIJA RIEDEL: It was a fairly powerful lesson very early in your life.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you grow up speaking any Russian or French at all?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But then I lost it.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's interesting too because I think growing up with different languages that early in your life too can give you multiple windows into looking at the world and multiple ways of looking at the world.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Very interesting, the travel component, just the diversity of cultures and how that has been so significant on so many levels.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think so and a lot of the places I went, too, is it's very much about walking, then more than now. But it was the way people—in the evening I remember going to whether they were Basque villages or little villages in Greece or in France, in the evening people would promenade and in Rome, and everyone would meet each other.

Therefore the spaces that they promenaded were really important. I think some of the best conversations I had with my father and with my family after, like, Christmas lunch or evening at the weekend, we'd always go after lunch. We'd always go for a long walk and it was in the walks that there was these kind of philosophical conversations about directions and what's important.

Therefore I've always thought of place and walking as being the context or the stage for ideas to come out and conversation to happen and connections to be made. I think that's why I wanted to make spaces where those kind of things could happen.

So one's trying to make these sequences that allow an engagement of conversation or even if you're walking through them on your own, you're allowed to be able to think differently in the process of thinking rather than sitting in one stagnant place.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right and so the very subtle changes in light or in water or in sounds that function on our way of thinking, or on our thought process or on how we're feeling without our necessarily even being aware that that's happening.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Interesting, that's very insightful, and the necessity of walking, being part of it and moving through it. As it changes, one is changed as well.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think the other thing that I didn't realize was different about the way I think is that I always presume that there would be public space; in London, all the parks were open, and everybody had a sense of ownership, even though they didn't own them of course.

But it was our right to go there, play there or walk there. Going into Devon, with all the public foot paths, you can walk over any private land. So there's no sense of really this not being allowed. The beaches and everything were always available and accessible to everybody.

So the sense of having access to land and being able to walk, whether it's a park, a garden or even farmland that has public pathways, all the lanes. I felt that that was—well, of course one has access to that. I didn't realize actually as much that that's not the case here. It took me quite a time to realize that not only is it not accessible but it changes the way people think about public spaces.

MIJA RIEDEL: How so?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because I think they don't think it's theirs. They think they have the right to be in a restaurant because they're paying for it but they think public space is just for people that don't have anything, that public space is for those that don't have anywhere else to go.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. So there isn't a sense of a community space, it sounds like if it's not something you're paying for.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right, I think that that is changing and I think that there are spaces now. That's why in so many public spaces they want to have—I'm going to say retail or buy coffee or something like that because then people feel comfortable.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting, or if they're having lunch, it's a space where they can sit.

[Cross talk.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Lunch, exactly, you can sit but whereas like in Hyde Park everyone brings picnics and everyone—so they can have Sunday lunch out there or in France you sit by a river and they even bring out their own tables and chairs and everything and can almost have a banquet but in a public place where other people are doing the same thing.

So there's a sense of privacy. You have your own group but you can share that group. It's like the French parks nobody bothers you if you're a young woman sitting on her own.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Whereas often here you become vulnerable. I think there are now a lot of community parks and things that have happened and I hope some public projects have helped that where people feel more comfortable being in a public space. But I think it's not natural for a lot of people. New York is different. I think there everyone has that accessibility. Everyone finds those little pockets and parks.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting, so you feel a difference in the New York sense of public space versus the West coast sense of public space.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because they walk more.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, that's certainly true.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes and they have less space.

MIJA RIEDEL: That is true. That is true. Interesting, I'll have to think about that. How and why did you decide to continue on to grad school?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Oh, well I couldn't believe—one, I never really thought I could survive by being an artist, make a living by being an artist and I didn't know how I could survive and do my own work. So it was like really having borrowed time. I felt therefore if I wanted to go on, I had to go on to graduate school. At the time there was only the Royal College of Art.

There was a few places at the Slade and that was it. It was the only graduate school. So there was no choice. Either you went to the Royal College or you didn't and so I was thrilled when I got in and loved it. The other thing I think too was the fact that I felt—I think I said before that I loved my Froebel School and then really didn't feel as much at home.

The second boarding school, the international school, was great but I felt I didn't—I was never kind of good enough. I would lose a mark in every exam for my spelling effort, every spelling mistake. When I think about it it's amazing I got through at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, yeah because the dyslexia, they weren't sure—it wasn't diagnosed back then.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, and so when I went to art school I felt nervous because I felt, well, am I going to be good enough, whatever. I was amazed that people actually—and I was very shy—people came up and started talking to me. People liked what I was doing and my tutors were fantastic. I just thought—they brought me out, not just in my work but in my being and made me feel whole really.

Therefore, I felt well if I can do that for anyone else, and that—so quite early on I kind of wanted to teach because it's not just making artists. It's making people full people and that's what I thought was so incredible.

I see that with my students today, that not only do they become more confident in their work, but they become much more confident as human beings and become much more generous and more open and have more confidence in the way they talk to people because they've become so excited about their work. They've become excited about life.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So that happened to me and therefore I thought, well, no, I kind of wanted to be able to teach and if I went to the Royal College there was also more chance of that as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: So that would enable you to make a living and make your work.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes, because I never believed that I would be able to earn any money from my art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. When we were at school, we were actually told—I think my first—every school I went to, "You don't realize how hard it is." Even at the Royal College, it's like, "You are the chosen few but do you realize even with this, we're expecting all this from you but even with that, most of you will not survive."

They were very direct about it, which was great actually. We all worked—we all got grants and had our fees paid but if we slacked, we were out. We all knew how privileged we were to be there.

MIJA RIEDEL: So the work ethic was established. If it wasn't there already, it was established then.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, absolutely. It was really—so we were there—my second college, we could be there from 9:00 in the morning till 9:00 at night and at the Royal College we had 24-hour access and usually in the evenings there were lectures or films. So it was just like basically you went home to sleep and that was it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Now, this being the final two years, were you focusing on environmental art at this time?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, it was called environmental media although that was the kind of odd—so I was taking photographs for the projections. I did some installations that were just with colored light, not with projection. But mainly I was building these kind of nomadic tent-like structures and then using projections and sound.

MIJA RIEDEL: So then that—then your undergraduate final projects were the tent?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, that was my graduate.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, that was your graduate?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: My undergraduate I was making these rooms. I built these kind of geodesic structures.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I actually did these kind of inflatables and these almost PVC structures and growing crystals inside them and all sorts of things like that. Some of them were building actually rooms of different color.

Some of them were with colored light and some of them were using—I used projections as color not as—and that all began because I'd been doing these color field paintings and at school we were told to document our work. So I was taking slides and was kind of putting them in the projector and looking at them and always being in too much of a hurry.

I tripped on the cord of the projector and it swerved around the edge of the room and I suddenly thought, "Oh, this could go 'round a room," and that's what started me off with colored light. Then I made paintings that were just to be photographed as color and I used projectors as kind of areas of color around a room.

I made a room that was eight foot by—I think eight by 12 foot one of the rooms was—which I covered so I had a ceiling and everything and I used projectors around it. Some of the other ones I did after I made the framework I used different colored fabric so that I was making these color fields of fabric as well as projection.

I built a geodesic dome. I had to build these pieces vacuum-formed so the color changed as I went through. That was only a model. I couldn't make that large. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you looking at different buildings at the time too? Were you looking at architecture?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, I was really interested in architecture and used to go over to the architects' library a lot. Their building was kind of across the way from us and so I got to know a lot of the architects as well.

Buckminster Fuller came and gave a talk, which was—because I knew the people that had brought him in, I got to meet him, have tea with him. He was fantastic. He gave—the whole college was full. All the rooftops were full. They had to do it outside because so many people came and he talked for, I don't know, about six or seven hours straight.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my goodness.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, he was just fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: What a wonderful experience.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes, no, he was absolutely wonderful and again, architecture is being about a living system. It's all about living systems rather than elements of sculpture. So I was always very interested in architecture. I got inspiration from it. I think it's because I wanted things to be around me, surround me, rather than be a separate object.

MIJA RIEDEL: Any other architects that were particularly inspiring?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I liked Kahn, Louis Kahn, because I think he was absolutely involved with light. I liked—even though they're very aesthetically different—but I liked them as systems, Archigram and Archizoom, even [Le] Corbusier's first ideas, not his large buildings, later people like Barragán. I don't think I knew about him at college. I don't think I knew about him until after I was probably at the Architects Association.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay and when did you start at the Architects Association?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Straight after.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you graduated in '74?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I graduated in '73 and then I went on afterwards to do a year graduate diploma. It was like a theoretical degree in architecture at the AA. I got a grant from the Social Science Research Council and it was very unusual for an art student to get a grant to go to the architecture. But it was Paul Oliver was head of the graduate program then before he went and went to Dartmouth [College, Hanover, NH].

He had come to see my show and really—and he'd actually one of the earlier ones I did rather than the final one I did. He was a friend of Bob Hyde and Bob Hyde had told him to come because I was interested in that. I wanted to find a way of—I knew I couldn't be an architect but I wanted to be able to work with architects.

Anyway, he suggested that Paul Oliver came and then they said, "Well, we can get you a grant but you have to write a statement." It practically killed me to write this statement. But then they got me the grant and they got me a place at the AA. At that point, there were very few women at the AA.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to ask.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Very, very few.

MIJA RIEDEL: And in environmental media had there been many women?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, I was the only one.

MIJA RIEDEL: You were the only one.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, there was one other woman who was a year above me and I was the only one. I think there were only one or two in sculpture.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was that like? Was it fairly even-keeled?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was actually okay. It was fine. Yes, I'd been reading a lot of Germaine Greer and my friends in my year, if anyone came up and said something that was slightly chauvinistic, I'd go on this kind of—and they actually—it got to the point where they'd chip in before I did just to stop me. [They laugh.]

But they were very—the guys that I actually worked with weren't chauvinistic at all. I knew a lot of women. I had a lot of very good women friends that were in textiles and fashion and painting as well as men as well. So it was a very—again, I knew people in all the departments. So it wasn't—I felt as if I wasn't just with men. I felt as if I had a real nice mix actually and got them to know each other as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did that change then in the architecture?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, that was different. I didn't know any women in the AA actually. Oh no, that's not true. There were two women. At the AA, you could pick to be in a group. They called them groups and I was in actually—first of all I was with—I can't remember his name—who really wanted me to be in his group because he was really involved with technology and he really liked what I did. But I didn't feel any connection with him. As a human being, I didn't connect to him.

So I went and was involved in Keith Critchlow's group, who, Keith Critchlow was a painter that actually also knew Buckminster Fuller and was teaching and was very interested in geometry and proportion. So I got on very well with him.

Then I also became a member of Bernard Tschumi's group when he was at the AA. That was a small group. There were two women in that group. One of them actually, Rosie Ind, who I've lost touch with unfortunately, she was a good friend. Then the others—actually I went to Paris with that group, with Bernard for a week which was great. But mainly it was mostly men.

They were actually quite—a lot of them were chauvinistic. They all presumed I was a first year student because they hadn't seen me before. When they found out I was a graduate student that was kind of a bit odd for them. But mostly after we went through a bit of a banter, it was all right. Some of them I never spoke to again, which was fine.

But mostly—the tutors that were there actually were all fine. I'm trying to think of the head of the graduate program then. I can't remember his name. But he was not just the—there was a Greek architect who was head of the graduate program who was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: We can add it later.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then there was also the head of the whole AA—I've lost his name too—who was renowned and fantastic and in fact gave me a grant to do an installation performance piece at the Cockpit Theater.

MIJA RIEDEL: How wonderful.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah, he was fabulous. Sorry, names are blanking.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's okay. We can certainly add those later.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The amount of lectures I went to, the amount of people I met, it was great. The level of debate wasn't nearly as—was much more critical than the Royal College and some of the—I was quite shocked at how vicious some of them were to each other. But architects can be like that. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So you graduated from there in '74?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Seventy-four, yes, that's right.

MIJA RIEDEL: So what motivated the move to the U.S.? That was in '76, yes?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Well, when I first finished, I got two teaching jobs straightaway, which at the time for a woman to get two teaching jobs in two different colleges was pretty unusual.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was this right in London?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, one was in Epsom, which is just on the outside of London. The other was in Salisbury. So I did one—I would go down to Salisbury, catch something like a six o'clock, seven o'clock train and get there by—I was there by nine and then I taught from nine to six and stayed overnight with someone else that was teaching there and then did the same the next day and then came back to London.

Then I had a day off and I would go down and teach in Epsom for a day. All art schools were from 9:00 to 6:00. All studios worked from 9:00 to 6:00 and we'd have kind of one day of liberal studies and there were studies in the evening.

So it was a lot of work but it was great. I think what was fantastic to me about it was especially—well, both places—but especially Epsom was working with the other people that were teaching. We'd have that one day a month. We'd have a meeting where none of us would teach. We'd all just get together to discuss the students and to discuss the projects that we were giving them. I learned so much from them.

Then at lunch time, even when the days I was teaching, we'd all go down to the pub at lunchtime and discuss what was happening. So there was a real sense of community and dialogue, which was rather than, "Oh, she's just the beginning person. We can't—she's not important enough."

It was never like that at all. They were very generous and open and interested in what I had to say and really helpful. I learned so much from them and what they were doing as well. So that was a very positive experience for me. So I really did want to go on teaching. Then that began—

MIJA RIEDEL: What were you teaching?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was teaching—it was—[3-D concepts–DH]. It was like the first year, which was great because you did everything with them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then you saw amazing shifts.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: One project was a performance project. Another one was a drawing project. So it was kind of like everything—I think it was every two or three weeks you'd change what you were doing with them. That's what we did in Epsom and in Salisbury it was slightly different.

So the curriculums were different. But no, it was fun actually. It was an awful lot of work. But I really enjoyed it. It was great. Then the teaching was coming to an end. Everyone—because I was the last one in, I knew I was going to be the first one out.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did those early experiences help you formulate any thoughts of your own about teaching?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Oh yes, certainly.

MIJA RIEDEL: I would imagine.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I don't think—when I started—the first teaching job I had here was at U.C. Berkeley and there, they didn't seem to care what I did. No one ever even asked me for a syllabus.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's unusual.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah, it was very casual. No one really wanted to know what we were doing. The head of the department at the time said, "Well, if you need to go and see"—he met all the temporary people as a group, said, "If you need to go to your gallery, don't worry about it. Just go." It was just like the whole attitude was so different it was like a different planet. I mean, I loved the students at Berkeley. I thought they were fantastic. And there was no connection between the part-time people and the full-time people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Much more stratified—not at all that sense of collaboration you'd had.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. So if I hadn't had the experience I had before, I think I would have been quite lost. So it gave me more confidence to be able to do it even though I was doing classes in a very different way then, because I was doing a kind of beginning sculpture class rather than a bit of everything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Were there certain basic principles that you formulated that translated throughout or if not, then did it at least give you the ability to work in a variety of media in a variety of different ways?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. I mean, I think I took—in some ways I think the overall class—I still do a beginning sculpture class, which has changed. I used to give I think twice as many projects—no, more than that—than I do now. Now, I spend longer on fewer projects. They began out of the things that I'd been taught when I first began. I can go through the syllabuses if you'd like.

The first one—how I teach now is the first one I say I want people to make a gift for a blind friend and that I want them to consider inside and outside space and to begin with something that they can hold in their hand. They first of all work with clay.

I say it can have no top, bottom, no pedestal and so that if you give it to someone, that they can have the same experience. Think about an experience that you want to pass on and it's what it feels like rather than what it looks like.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So they have to work in the round because so many people are kind of caught in an image, of what an image looks like, so that's the first—and when they do the first clay pieces and I say they can never collapse anything or destroy anything until they've made at least five others.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because when you're doing a drawing and you turn the page but when you're sculpture you squish everything up and at the end of the session you feel as if you haven't done anything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So even if they don't like them, at least they know that they've done something and they can see that they've actually improved.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, and see the relationship.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: And get a sense of a series.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That's right. Then they start working with doing them out of chicken wire and then covering them with plaster and then doing a plaster piece that I call additive and subtractive that they cut. They make a block and then they cut it. So it's the same principle but they're using that principle in slightly different scales.

Rather than the hand, the other one becomes their arms, something as big as their arms. But they're dealing with inside and outside space and dealing with not necessarily making it look like a horse or a dog—[They laugh]—which is when they first come in that's what they think sculpture is.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: To get them to really think and feel about what something three-dimensional is like.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The second project I get them to do is to define space with line which is really like drawing in space and the two sides—again, it's like one project leads to the next. There's two components. One is that they draw space with line. They can use wood, wire, metal, anything that they want really.

We provide wood for them and things like even pipe cleaners and all sorts of things that they can do something messy and not particularly beautifully finished but they can find a way of actually drawing in space. So they define the space with line and then the second part of it is that they make a module out of line and then by building lots of modules together, they make something which is bigger than the sum of the parts.

So again, they have a sense of building, collectively making something that has a rhythm or a form in it that is bigger than the first component, the building block. But the building block can be made in any way they want. So they—two completely different ways of constructing things. They learn how to use the woodshop. They learn how to use hand tools and the woodshop.

One of them has to be made of wood. The other can be made of anything else they like. They've used all sorts of crazy and wild materials. But again, it gives them a sense of building and being able to control gravity. Again, no base, it has to work in all directions.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting, and these basic projects or ideas for the projects evolved out of your own very early teaching experience.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting, yes. So I'll move us on to New York or to San Francisco and your arrival here in 1976.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Had you been to the West coast before?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, in '69 I went to—when I went to my new college in Leicester and everyone said, "Well, what did you do in the summer," and I said, "Oh, I went to New York," and everyone was like, "[gasp]," and one of the friends, very good friends, I made said, "Well, would you go back to New York next year, can I come with you?" I said, "No, I don't want to go back to New York. It's great but there's other places to see." She said, "Well, would you go anywhere else," and I said, "Well, I'd go to San Francisco."

I mean, I think most Europeans have this very romantic idea of San Francisco as being this very kind of European kind of city, very beautiful, international and everything like that. So I did. I came with her and some other—another friend of ours actually who was—that college I think she was leaving, came as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: So this was '69?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Sixty-nine, so San Francisco in '69 was quite wild.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, I'm sure.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Full of music and everything. It was fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you were right in the city?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What part?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Actually it was like Hyde—it was above Union Square. I think it was Hyde or Powell, maybe I'm thinking Powell Street. It wasn't really a good neighborhood to be in but we didn't know. It was just the first thing we found. It was reasonable.

There was the three of us and then there was two architects who were also had been at Leicester and they shared the apartment with us as well. So it was a big apartment. It was great actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you working?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I worked doing temping.

MIJA RIEDEL: Amazing.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: See, it kind of got me by actually and then the three of us—three women—set off. We spent two months in San Francisco and we got the Greyhound bus pass and we started off on the Greyhound bus and couldn't stand it. So we decided to hitchhike.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my goodness.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So we went—we were called the three Amazons. I was the shortest. We were all kind of long and thin.

MIJA RIEDEL: And how tall are you?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I'm 5'8" and everywhere we got picked up by families and different people. We stayed in people's houses. We had the most—I mean, I thought New York was fantastic. I thought San Francisco was great.

But going to—I mean, really in the middle of nowhere—we went to the Southwest. We went up to Yellowstone, then went all the way down, back down to L.A. But all the people we met were absolutely fantastic, all different walks of life, all different ages.

MIJA RIEDEL: Picking up three English women.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Extraordinary. Those were the days.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Those were the days. I mean, when you think about it—when I got to L.A., I had a friend, a couple I knew in L.A. who I'd met in Europe and they made me promise that we wouldn't hitchhike through the South.

One of the architects that we knew worked with an architect in an office in San Francisco who was from Texas and he said, "Oh no, if you go through the South, you have to stay with my family." So I think his family was in—I think they were the ones that were in—I don't know, El Paso. We went to El Paso, Houston, San Antonio and maybe one other place.

Anyway, they kept on telling us about the next family on and we could stay with them. The interesting thing is all these families had—like the one in El Paso, he was one of 16 children. They were farming. The mother was absolutely beautiful. I didn't believe she had 16 children. She finally had a little girl they called Babe.

She said, "I don't have to have any more now." She said, "I've just been wanting a daughter." But one of the things when we were doing to stay with her, she said, "no, no it would be wonderful to have three women around," and all the sons of course loved having us around.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There were all these outhouses, little buildings for all the children.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where they would sleep or play?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Like real houses, little houses. It was a big old house and then there were all these smaller houses for all the boys.

MIJA RIEDEL: Like little cottages?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Like little cottages.

MIJA RIEDEL: How extraordinary.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: On the farm, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And they lived there?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And they lived there.

MIJA RIEDEL: How old were they?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, one of them was—this one was the oldest one so they were probably 18, 17, 9 and 10. I mean, it was like—

MIJA RIEDEL: And they each had their own little cottage?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They each had their own little cottage.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs] I've never heard of anything like it.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, it was amazing. So one of the cottages we stayed in, it was like three or something in each one. They had their own little bathroom. We stayed because there were some that were away. So we stayed in the one where some of the boys were gone. But it was great. Then we went to the next place. I can't remember which order we went in.

MIJA RIEDEL: But you weren't hitchhiking?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, we went on the Greyhound bus and they picked us up from the Greyhound bus station.

MIJA RIEDEL: What an amazing network to travel around.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and all the mothers were fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: I bet.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They said, "Oh, what's three more," because all their sons too were bringing—they'd say, "Oh they'll bring their girlfriends," and so I don't think I went to a dinner that didn't have at least 12 people at it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my goodness.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That's what I mean—the generosity of spirit was unbelievable. I thought Americans were just the most open, warm, friendly, great sense of humor, lively—these people—it's one thing being in the city but being in these other places as well, no, they were fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: How wonderful. You really became a member of this family.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds like in some ways a sort of repeat experience as you had with your father—[inaudible]—with all these family members.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you arrived in San Francisco. You spent the summer here and then you began to travel?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Two months and then the third month traveling.

MIJA RIEDEL: Then did you just stay on?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, no, then I went back. In '69 then I went back to college.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I didn't really think anything more about it. Oh, one day I'll go back. I think America is really amazing. Then every year after that I went to somewhere in Europe and then it wasn't until I finished college and that even after I got the first teaching jobs, I was told that the chances are that we're not going to be able to employ you next year, right?

But then another thing happened which made my decision to come to America was I had this incredible free education which I felt—I still feel eternally grateful for especially when I see how much money students are paying now. It's just outrageous. They're in debt for the rest of their life.

So I wanted to give something back. This probably shows how naïve I am. I wrote a letter. I didn't have a telephone. Very few of us had telephones in any event, students anyway. I wrote a letter to the Ministry of Environment and said that—I gave him my background and said that I'd like to be an artist-in-residence and I'd really like to help make public spaces.

I got a letter back asking me to come for an interview. They were absolutely fabulous. They really liked the work I'd done. They were really excited about my ideas and they said, "Yes, and we can give you a little money."

It wasn't very much but no one was making very much money at that time. So it didn't really make much difference. Then I thought, "Well, this is great." So I was going to stop teaching and do this.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where would you be located?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In London.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then I got another letter saying could I meet then again for lunch. I met the head guy for lunch and he said, "Look, we've been talking about it and thinking about it." He said, "You've got so much energy and you're so excited and enthusiastic." He said, "We want to have you around because you'll be good for us."

But he said, "In reality, do you know we'll never be able to do any of your ideas," because the economy was terrible in the mid-'70s in England. There were strikes. There were blackouts. There was the Irish bombings going on. It was a really bad time in England. The economy was not in good shape at all. It was the Labor government and they really had some wonderful ideas but they didn't have the resources.

So he said, "Look, if you want the job, I definitely will let you—definitely we'll be delighted to have you," but he said, "You know what I think you should do," and he said, "You need to do some of these things. You need to go to America." It kind of freed me. I tried to pay back and they said it was more important for me to do it somewhere else than not to do it at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: What an extraordinarily generous gesture.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. So it kind of freed me. After that I started applying for teaching jobs in America, in California actually. I didn't know where half these places were. But I did get interviews in College of Marin and —well, it was then CCAC.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So the next summer—it was in May when I finished —I think I came over and had some interviews and they actually both wanted to hire me but I think when they realized how much work there was in trying to get me a working permit, they just couldn't deal with it.

I decided well then maybe I'll come over anyway. That year I worked in a youth club which again was all city run. But they had these areas where kids from I guess seven to 18 could go there after school and so there was a kind of clubhouse. They could buy tea and some things to eat.

MIJA RIEDEL: Like an after school program?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Like an after school program.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was kind of making—it wasn't like teaching. It was like making art available. There was someone else that did music, someone else that did performance. Sometimes we all did things together. It was great. It was wild.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But actually compared to a lot of things—I mean, like full moons they go a little crazy. But mostly they were actually quite good kids. They were a mixture of Irish and Jamaican, some Cockneys. But it was in Kingsway near Kings Cross Station. So I used to work there in the evenings and then went out to—so after I knew that they weren't going to deal with the immigration—

MIJA RIEDEL: Visas.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The visas and stuff, I decided to go out anyway and see what I could do from being there because I knew I couldn't do it from being in England.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: When I arrived, I met one friend whose father was a lawyer and he said, "Oh, you've got to have a lawyer," and I said, "Oh, I can't afford a lawyer, I've got a friend," or whatever, so he had a friend who was an immigration lawyer. So I spoke to him and he said, "Well, the best way for you to become—to be able to work here is if you"—he said, "You're an artist."

He said, "There is this thing called third preference, which is being a specialist in the arts and sciences, or sciences. You don't have to have any money. You don't have to have a job. But you have to be unique and give something to America that will benefit America."

MIJA RIEDEL: How extraordinary.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I said, "Okay, well what do I need to do to do that?" He said, "Do you know people? Can you get letters from people that are important to say that you are unique?" [They laugh.] I said, "But of course, we're all unique, right?"

MIJA RIEDEL: This is the official U.S. policy?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. I don't know if it still exists. I think it does still. Again, I thought what a fantastic country. They want you because you're different and you're going to add something special.

MIJA RIEDEL: That nobody is doing here.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right. So I got letters from everyone I knew in England and I went round to different galleries and museums and teaching institutions here and got letters from them and I got it.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was it that you were bringing?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, I was bringing this kind of—bringing this interest in all these different fields together. So it was like a kind of environmental sculpture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were any people talking about public art or environmental art?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, no, environmental ideas of bringing together art and architecture, art and interiors. So it was much looser than that but it was a new way of thinking about art.

MIJA RIEDEL: And integrating it into the fabric of life.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Integrating it, yes. So I didn't know about public art. I had this dream about what I wanted to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: And they presented you with a visa?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. So I got a green card and what was so wonderful is when I went to the swearing in in the office with the lawyer, he said, "I know that at this point you want to be an artist and that's what your chosen field is.

But if in the future you decide you want to do something else," he didn't say —he said, "That's fine." He said, "You are still welcome in our country," and I just thought, "What a fantastic place this is, right?"

MIJA RIEDEL: How wonderful to hear about this experience given that the state of immigration now.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: All your immigration stuff now, I know. I know.

MIJA RIEDEL: This is really a welcome and unique story, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Friends of mine said, "Oh God you're never going to get it. This is ridiculous. You should just marry somebody."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I said, "I don't want to get married. I never want to get married," and there were some friends that had—they weren't my boyfriends but they said, "We can marry," and I said, "No." Then they said, "Well, just ask the lawyer. Ask the lawyer if it's better for you."

So I said, "Well, no I can't." Anyway, I went with one of my friends and I said, "Well, I'm engaged at the moment,"—[They laugh]—and he said, "I don't think that's a good idea." He said, "I think we should keep to what we're doing." I said, "Oh, thank you very much." So that was my engagement.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was pretty much over.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was relieved. I didn't want to do it that way. I wanted to be—and I didn't want to stay here illegally. It was really important to me that I did it aboveboard and directly. The other thing I should probably mentioned which was, again, interesting is that I got—why it was able for me to stay was that I had a—what do you call it—an indefinite multiple entry visa.

I had been working for the Women's Free Arts Alliance, I mean, for nothing, but in London, and we had a space and we arranged shows and were also bringing in women from the local community that knew nothing about art. We had a food—we had them kind of buy food so they could see art and there'd be an exchange and all that.

It was great. It was bringing together people that were artists and people that weren't artists. I told—when I went to get my visa to go to America, I just had it written on my résumé and the women who looked absolutely very severe and I thought, "Oh, she's going to be very difficult," and she asked me about it and I kind of got—obviously enthusiastic about it.

Then she just stamped it—I didn't even realize that I had anything that different until I got to the lawyer in San Francisco and he said, "God, how did you get this," and I said, "I don't know. I didn't ask for it." So because I said I wanted to go to America to see what was happening there and because the women's movement was so strong in America as well—

MIJA RIEDEL: Who was it that stamped this?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The person in the office, you know, you go to the American embassy and you present your papers and, "Can I have a visa," and she just stamped it in my passport.

MIJA RIEDEL: And she was the one who gave multiple entry visas for an indefinite period of time.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: It was a different time, wasn't it?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. But most people didn't get them. I got it. But other people that were—that sometimes would get three months, six months, whatever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, what you said resonated with her somehow, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and what it meant was that I could stay—it made it easier for the lawyer to have me have an extension to be able to then apply for change of status because I had that visa. So everything was done completely aboveboard. No, it was fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's a stunning number of synchronicities in this story.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. You see, I was meant to come to America.

MIJA RIEDEL: Clearly.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So we'll pause here because the disc is about to end, and we'll pick up then in San Francisco.

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MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anna Valentina Murch on May 21, 2010, for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project in her studio in San Francisco, California, disc number three.

You were talking about why you moved to San Francisco and it wasn't because you weren't loving London or loving England, but please—

[Cross talk.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, I really felt that there—England was going through a really difficult time and I felt that I had really good friends, I loved London, but I felt that there was no way—I couldn't see in any foreseeable future that I would be able to do anything that was my own work or anything near the dream of what I wanted to do. I felt that if I stayed, my spirit would die and that my kind of desire for doing things would die because I wouldn't have the opportunity to do them.

So after kind of being given permission to leave in a way, I felt, well, okay, this is something I've got to try and do. I kind of love the American spirit. It seemed as if people rather than giving reasons why not, people would say, "Oh, that's interesting," or, "Oh, someone should try that," or, "Oh, I haven't heard of that before."

They were optimistic or always kind of excited about hearing about new ideas. I thought, "Well, let me try and see if I can do that." When I left, I had to be prepared. I sold everything I had and I had to be prepared to not come back. I think in some ways—friends of mine talked to me about it.

They said that maybe the reason that I found it easier to leave than they did, that because already I had a history of my mother having to leave Russia and having —China and going to England and her sister had gone to live in Switzerland.

So there was this sense that when things get really bad, you can—what they had to—well, they didn't have to leave but they had to leave and that I had to leave not because I wouldn't survive in England but there was a survival that was physical but my mental ability to be creative was going to be stifled. That's why I wanted to come to America.

It seemed to me as if I'd been across most of America and I loved New York but it was almost too much like London and I wanted a place that had a combination of nature and city in a way. Also I probably should say that I was often quite sick in England.

I had very bad lungs and I got bronchitis a lot. I had a collapsed lung twice. So I thought probably I'd die in New York—[They laugh]—whereas the climate in San Francisco was much, much easier and I'd be much healthier and have more access to outside, not the horrible cold winters.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I thought that would be better. Also there was at the time when I arrived there was an openness and there was I'm going to say a kind of alternative art scene that was really interesting. There was a lot of performance going on. There was installation.

There was the California funk, which I was not interested in but they were nice—they were interesting people and they were kind of curious about what I was doing. It was completely foreign to them. But there just seemed as if it was more art for art's sake. I was never really thinking about selling commodities.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So therefore to be in a community where artists were interested in exploring very different things seemed to be a very exciting place to be. There were lots of alternative galleries. I got really involved in Southern Exposure that used to be in this building. So there seemed to be for one's spirit a really wonderful creative atmosphere.

MIJA RIEDEL: What a wonderful place to land.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So early on, you showed quite a bit in galleries. What were you showing?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, I was showing installations.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, actually the first show—this is ironic—the first show I had was in—no, I did Open Studios that was part of this building but I had a piece in Southern Exposure.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that was your first exhibition?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That was my first, yes. Then the second show I had was actually in New York. What had happened was I met two—the women in this building—there were two of them, neither of them live here now. Nora Chavooshian and Robbin Henderson and they were concerned about the fact that everybody thought the work in San Francisco was kind of all figurative, especially the women's work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They wanted to have a show of other work that was in Northern California that as much more about space, installation and I went—and they thought, even though I hadn't been here very long, they thought my work fitted in really well.

I went with them and we met an incredible amount of different women in this area and Nora managed to get—she had some friends in L.A. She ended up actually moving to L.A. before she went back to the East Coast and we had a show at the Women's Building.

MIJA RIEDEL: In New York?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In New York. In the process of—this is kind of—in the process of putting that show together, we met someone called Julianne Frizzell who lived in Palo Alto and had a sister that lived—well, was married to someone in Connecticut.

So she said, "Oh, what a great idea that we can have a show," and she took our work. So it was Nora, Robbin, me and her, took our slides to New York to Max Hutchinson Gallery in the winter and said, "Would you have a show of four California women artists?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Where was this gallery?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In Soho and he said, "Yes." This is kind of—Julianne had never done anything like that before. It was just like this fluke really, right?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Did he show a lot about installations?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, he didn't. He showed sculpture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So we got—we had the show and it ended up I think by being before we ended up by doing the show in L.A., we did the show in New York. I didn't have any money at all. Friends of mine lent me the money to buy plane ticket.

So a friend of a friend, I could stay in New York while I was doing the installation. There was also lent money to get the materials. I mostly used re-found materials then. I did—this is actually the piece that I did—the first piece

I did in Southern Exposure, which were these—I became really fascinated with the ground when I came to America and what was under the ground.

Rather than working with projections of real materials, photographs, I ended up by actually using the real materials. All these things, apart from the glass marbles I found, I dug up the sand, all the mirrors I found. The salt I got from the Bay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They gave—I managed—they said I could dig it up from the salt flats and they also gave me different kinds of purified salt. You go there and you're excited about something and people—that's what happened in the old days. It was really fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then the other third—*Floorscape*—

MIJA RIEDEL: People responded. So these frames that were built?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Frames were built, yes, of glass mirrors. So you've got continually—you could see above and below and each one was filled with glass marbles and the final one was aluminum shavings that again was left over from one of the factories that was around this area then before they all got converted. In New York, I did this series—

MIJA RIEDEL: Did the piece have a title?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I just called them *Floorscapes*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There's the salt and that's the aluminum. Then in New York I did this piece, *The Silver Maze*, which kind of represented to me the feeling of what America was. It was like going through a silver maze but full of holes, full of holes and full of reflections. [They laugh.] So you could get lost.

MIJA RIEDEL: That is very interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There was this wonderful old man that lived in the building on the first floor who had been doing a lot of—he'd been kind of troubleshooting displays and he was in I think his late 60s and maybe even 70s then. He was half paralyzed but still would make things and he had all sorts—he had a studio probably four times as big as mine which was full of all these different materials and different things.

So what I would do was say to him, "Well, I'm thinking about doing so and so, "and he'd say, "Well, I think I've got something like that." I've actually still got some of the silver paper that he gave me, reams and reams of silver paper that I used for this piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: What is—now, is it a light projection on the background too?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That's just reflections of the silver. So it's on the ground but it reflects the whole space with these kind of almost patterns, like water patterns of light.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, so they're just perforated silver?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, these are mirrors, little silver mirrors.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, little silver mirrors, okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So they're glass mirrors.

MIJA RIEDEL: What are the dimensions?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think this was about 14 foot square. Then next to it I had these treasure boxes and they were all made of things that I found, apart from the marbles. I did actually cut up the Plexiglas and made the boxes. That's where the money—I spent money on. But all the other things, even like the plastic prisms, I cut up, all the bubbles, everything. They're all materials that I found and recut and reused.

MIJA RIEDEL: What are we looking at? What are the materials?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I did the sand, salt and aluminum. Then there were Plexiglas prisms and these are

different marbles and mirror, shattered glass. So all elements that were discarded but somehow to me ended up—it's like one person's rubbish is another person's treasure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was amazed at the amount of waste here. I couldn't believe how much—what people threw out. It was just amazing to me. So it was a kind of a gesture of rather than being really critical of it, it's just showing what could be made from all this leftover material, these treasure boxes.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's interesting how reflective and how light either absorbed in or reflected by all of these materials are.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and one of the things that I think I've been constantly interested in is how things absorb, reflect, or transmit light and that's because even if something is small within itself, it's how it actually begins to affect the whole atmosphere that is really what I'm trying to do, the whole ambience.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: People think of some of these things as objects. But to me they are objects that are actually transmitters and it's about what happens in the space and the atmosphere that's really important. They're just a means of getting there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right and it's interesting too with the title *Treasure Boxes* how you convey that meaning with subtlety and with some sense of humor too. But there is a subtle and indirect political and social commentary certainly that runs through your work, and you certainly feel that too I'm sure.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I feel that. Yes, what generates it but it's not—I hope it's not heavy handed.

MIJA RIEDEL: No, it doesn't feel that way. But it's one of the layers.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think you can do physical things in beauty rather than in showing the horror. I think there's too much horror.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, casting it in the frame of a treasure box, yes, gives that positive spin.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So these are some of the—this is with salt and then this was in my studio before I had all my tables.

MIJA RIEDEL: So this is actually this space?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what are we looking at?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: This is a piece that I did actually for the Women's Building in L.A. which is waves. Again, the things that inspired me—when I came to San Francisco, up until then I really had mostly been working with artificial light. When I came to San Francisco, I started working with sunlight. I just didn't have enough of it in England.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs] Not so much of it here but I guess there's more.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: More, more, much more.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And just having access to the ocean so easily, I just thought it was so amazing. So again, this is all Plexiglas mirror that was off-cuts that I recut. So I made these waves of Plexiglas mirror that again make all these light patterns and reflections by the sun coming in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely and was this piece titled as well?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Just *Waves*. I have very simple titles really, and I did this piece and then I took it down to New York—I mean, to L.A.

MIJA RIEDEL: L.A., so this would have been late '70s?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: This was what, probably '77.

MIJA RIEDEL: So fairly early on, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. So that shows you—and then I started going back. I had to start working here to earn a living and once I got my green card and I was able to—I got different jobs. First of all I was doing display for Macy's. I was actually terrified of doing it. I didn't think I could do it.

First of all, it was done in Hillsborough and then downtown. But I just—I got to the point where I really just didn't want to do it anymore. I did it for about a year. I paid off all the money I owed and saved a little bit. I thought, "Well, okay from now on I'm just going to do freelance stuff and whatever comes along I'll do."

If it was painting houses, lighting for fashion shows, decorations for big parties, flower arranging, setting up exhibitions, I mean, I made actually even these figurative sculptures for Wilkes Bashford, someone introduced me to someone and said, "Oh, well you're a sculptor? Can you make these forms that we can display our jewelry on," and I said, "Oh, okay." When I say—it was interesting because nothing lasted.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I had time between to do my work. It was living hand-to-mouth very much and I lived very, very frugally but for me it was better than having a—I mean, I did it—having a nine to five job that would control my life.

So I did that for a while and this was actually the first—the day I handed in my notice to—and I was doing lots of kind of temporary little exhibitions in different places around the area. But the day I handed in my notice, I got offered my first one-person show at Center for the Visual Arts in Oakland. I came home and found a letter. Isn't that—again, it's like sometimes you feel things are meant.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: A synchronicity in some way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely, absolutely, what a wonderful validation because I'm sure that was pretty terrifying to take that step.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, but I felt that nothing would happen unless I did, in the same way that when I left England I felt I've got to do something to change the situation. If I just wait, nothing will happen. In fact, in England people told me, "You don't know how lucky you are to have had the teaching jobs you have and everything and you can't expect anything to happen for 10 years."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, I thought that's absurd. It probably took 10 years here.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to say—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I didn't realize I kind of left all my pedigree behind. People here didn't really quite understand what the Royal College was or the AA was or anything like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine, right, so any of the—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In a way it was kind of freeing. It's like all of a sudden my label doesn't mean anything and they're accepting me for who I am now.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what you're doing.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And what I'm doing, which was nice. But it was a wonderful confirmation to do that show and there I began working with- I'd been interested in the ground and I started really, the kind of tectonic undercurrents.

Probably I'd gone through my first earthquake, which I never experienced before. I just became really interested in the energy under the earth and did this series of three pieces. I worked with a sound artist, Gordon, I can't remember his second name now, and by moving my materials around, he helped me record them. So each one of these had a set of speakers buried in it. So not only did they transmit light, they transmitted sound.

MIJA RIEDEL: And these are floor installations?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Floor installations. Each one was eight foot square. This is with rocks and cellophane and light and these were a series too that were about the ground but also me trying to say is it possible to use kind of artificial materials or human-made materials and natural materials together? Can they coexist?

So this was—there's a netting over the black rubber squares. The other thing I thought was that the interesting thing that happens is that what I thought was so great about San Francisco was that there was a lot of activities in the cracks. It's like there was enough structure here but all the interesting stuff was happening in the cracks. So this one was with coal and red fluorescence. Again, coal being a very strong symbol for me but I'm sure a lot of people didn't even know what it was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure, what it was.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: This one with pumice.

MIJA RIEDEL: And titles for these pieces or for the show?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, they were all under the *Tectonic Undercurrents*. So the three became one installation.

MIJA RIEDEL: And again, one of the things that's interesting to me about this is how very much this is now being influenced by the site itself or by where you are.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah, right. They were standalone objects and they weren't being influenced by the space they were in but they were being influenced by the overall context of where I was living, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Absolutely. Then I did another piece later at New Langton Arts—well, it was then 80 Langton Street—which—then I felt if the infrastructure won't give the actual structure breaks, and so I did this 32 feet of cracked concrete. I never really got very good photographs of it. It was suspended over these blocks. So it was like this floating floor over the concrete floor.

Then I put glass beads in the crack and there was light emitting from above. But also a spot framing projectors, theater lights, on it and there was a smoke machine. So it looked as if the piece was being cut by a shaft of light. There you get some sense of it. But I never got really good photographs of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: What year was that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That was in about maybe '81.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, and does this piece have a title?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: *The Crack*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think it's interesting to see Goldsworthy's cracks.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, exactly.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Very different. Mine was much rawer than his.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But that whole sense and I did actually certainly for the Arts Commission there was a kind of outside thing where I did the concrete and I had grasses in between them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Just as a temporary piece outside. But before I had a chance to photograph it, people stole all my grass.

MIJA RIEDEL: You're kidding! They stole the grass?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They stole the grass. I used nice grasses. I bought all these little nice grasses. Anyway, so this is again another one of the things that I was very interested in was the sense of how can you

define a space with light. How can you cut a space in half with light? How can you make the light fill the whole space? So these were some of the ways I had in my studio of playing around with light.

MIJA RIEDEL: So these were all studio installations?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Then I did another piece which was at Works in San Jose, an alternative gallery, which I called *Runways* and this came from a series of dreams really of, again, traveling, flying over places and thinking about have you been there, have you not been there, what exists, what doesn't.

So this one, I don't know if you can see it, is it dark? Can you see it? Just the impressions, it's almost as if these runways, something has taken off and there's just the impression of something there. This one had a sound in it and these two had sound running between them. This one is as if something is beginning or just left.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's a sense of things being dispersed as if by wind.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Then this one, it's in the process of leaving with the mirrors.

MIJA RIEDEL: And these were all again in your studio?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, these were at Works in San Jose.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, these were at Works, okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So this one was 18 feet, 16 feet, 18 feet and I think the smaller one was 14. So they were all proportional. Each one got longer and longer.

MIJA RIEDEL: So this would again be early '80s?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, about 1980 I think, yes. Then I guess—I don't have *Edges* in here, all right. It's one other one I'd like to show you but obviously I didn't have it in—maybe I've got it in here. This is an abandoned building in downtown Oakland and it was part of Pro Arts' site, I think the first series of site pieces that they did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was an old abandoned—I think it had been a department store. So what I did, I wanted to do all three floors but I could only afford to do one and I made all the lights. There was so much grime on the windows that they almost looked like scrim.

So you had a sense of this kind of different kind of colors of—different colors of warm light from this past era of not knowing what had been there and just illuminating the empty building to make you realize what a beautiful building it was. It even showed all the terra cotta. It illuminated the terracotta tiles on the side.

MIJA RIEDEL: Now, when you say you made the lights, what do you mean?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I made them out of tin cans. They were all—because I couldn't afford to buy the lights.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I got tin paint cans and wired them. They're all—I mean, with a strong cable and so then I could project them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. I think that's interesting too because it makes me think of something that you said about your work is that the idea comes first and then you figure out the technology to make it happen and it seems that that's been true from the very start as well.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, because I wanted to use theater lights and the power was too much and I could have borrowed some but I didn't know if I could borrow them for long enough and the power they used was phenomenal. So I thought, "Well, no let's see if I can do it another way." I think what was interesting about this piece was that after it was all finished, they actually rented out the building.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs] That is interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Isn't that great? Because it drew attention to it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it's all dark. What we're looking at is a very dark structure but then with these beautiful warm red interior lights, yeah. It looks very welcoming.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Do I have one—no, I don't have one of the outside here. But so you could just see it glowing from the outside. I was doing all sorts of kind of temporary projects. This one at Battery Hill 129 in the Headlands, which is a military—was an old military base.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They had nukes there. It was just a very simple piece. I used flares, the car flares, and I scored it a performance, and that people ran—two runners ran from west to east lighting the flares and then what was incredible was—I called it *The Sound of Burning Rain* echoing in the tunnel.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's wonderful.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I didn't ask permission, only lasted five minutes, the parks people didn't come along. We cleaned it all up nicely. No one ever knew it happened. But I managed to get a photograph. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So this is actually at the Headlands?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In the Headlands. You probably have been out to—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh absolutely, that's an incredible—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Tunnels.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And it was in a show actually of site pieces at U.C. Berkeley. But it was just again just a simple gesture. I wanted to do things outside or I wanted to do things in public spaces and how could you get practice, right?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: How could I find out whether things I did actually worked in public spaces? So that's why I started trying to do these things, some with permission and some without, just to see what—I think I learned a lot from doing that. I picked a lot of sites that were like forbidden, abandoned and condemned sites because I wanted to bring places back to life.

I felt there was so much stuff everywhere that we didn't need more stuff. We actually needed to find a way of almost rejuvenating or bringing back a place that had been abandoned. Would you like some water?

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure, I can get it though in a minute. That's fine. Thank you.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I did these kind of practice pieces and I'd write poems about them. So this was one of them. There's one of my friends.

MIJA RIEDEL: So this is the running piece?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Running piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I called it—

MIJA RIEDEL: *Sound of Burning Rain*, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and then I went with some friends to the Southwest and I took a whole—in the back of the car I took lots of different bits with me. I took all these glass tubes. I was really interested—I'd done a whole series of pieces about edges and so this is in White Sands, New Mexico.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I defined the edge of this sand dune really, white sand dune.

MIJA RIEDEL: What year was this?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That was again—it might have been '80 or '81. So it made you more aware of what was there. What I wanted to do is what are the most subtle ways to make people aware of the space as it is rather than making you look at what I have done, so that kind of relationship. So even though they're really simple pieces, I think they still have that kind of philosophy in them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, there's a framing quality to be sure.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And then the light as well. What was the title of this? Did this have a title?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: What did I call this? I can't remember what I called this. I've got it written on the—

MIJA RIEDEL: So would you go out to sites and set something up and sometimes other people would be there and sometimes not and you'd photograph it, document it and then you were done?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Take it down, yes. I'd spent the night in White—the three of us. Normally you can't camp there because there's missiles and things that go off. They do all these special things because there's a military site right there. It was the night of a full moon and they said it was okay for us to camp.

MIJA RIEDEL: The military said that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, no because it's the White Sands National Park.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was just beautiful. I didn't get very much sleep because it was like the moonlight was unbelievable.

MIJA RIEDEL: I bet.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So first thing in the morning I set this up before anyone was around at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: It almost looks like snow.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: At first I thought it was.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Then took it all down, didn't leave any footprints, nothing.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to say there's nothing visible at all and again the waves of the sand.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and the way they reflect in the things and then you also get the horizon. This is the edges. So my whole sense was really about trying to find an edge or what is the edge, how can you define a fine edge between past and present, future.

I realized nothing is ever that kind of—nothing is ever that defined. Everything is kind of blurring into each other. So in this piece it's all these mirrors at different five—this piece is at five degree angles, 10 degree angles. Another one was at five degree angles. They grew out of the building.

MIJA RIEDEL: Which building?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: This is the Kaiser Center in Oakland.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They let me—the curator had let me—there was three artists doing things. We each had an area to do it. They let me go in and put in—this one had salt in the middle and coal on the outside.

MIJA RIEDEL: And the title of this?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: *Edges*. This is *Edges*.

MIJA RIEDEL: All of them, the pieces themselves.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah, and this one is shattered glass and shattered slate. They kind of invert and reflect each other but they also invert everything that's around them and they grow out of the fins of the building.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's very interesting, that blurring of interior and exterior space, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, which is what I've been interested in doing since—

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: This was just a piece I did in my studio, again with mirrors and sand, just to see how—I was really interested in the mirror not for reflecting oneself at this point but really for reflecting and making you aware of the space.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There's something about you see it differently. Maybe I've always been kind of interested in that sense of internal—I mean, psychological internal reflection as well as external physical reflection and how those two can kind of play together.

MIJA RIEDEL: You've talked about that repeatedly in the work of how you want it to have a very sensory experiential quality but there is also the sense of a psychological, an implied psychological journey as well.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, which I think I've always been—again, it's difficult to talk about but I think I've always been interested in that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did this piece in your studio have a title?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: This is the same piece, the *Edges* in my studio playing around with light.

MIJA RIEDEL: It looks almost like a—it feels very skeletal, very much like a skeleton.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, it's like a backbone.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, exactly.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. So, again, how can you with simple means fill a space with light and shadow. Then the other thing is I've always been interested in rhythm, like the rhythm of water, the rhythm of sand dunes, all those ripples and then I started making these stain—I started doing these stainless steel pieces actually when I completely ran out of money and had spent a lot of money on doing these shows.

I really, again, had to kind of knuckle under and work more. I managed—I found some of this stainless steel screening material and I went to the place—actually it's not very far from here—Flynn & Enslow, my patrons—[They laugh]—and they used to leave out—they let me take all their scraps.

So I was able to kind of use this material. In the end, I ended up by buying stuff and all the rest of it. But first of all I was able to do things when I had nothing, which was absolutely great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I wanted to kind of hold the rhythm of almost like what happens with clouds, what happens with water, what happens with ripples and the way they are and the way they hold light and the way they cast shadows and that the shadow and the shadow maker become one. This was a series that I did which was really—I call them—they're all about different states. I saw them all as verbs, not nouns, because they're all in the process of being—this one was actually *Rising*. This one's *Colliding*. This one's *Soaring*.

MIJA RIEDEL: And are these steel?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They're all stainless steel.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So each one of them had its own—I did another whole series in copper. I did some ones that were floating. But they were a way of me being able to—they were in a couple of different shows. I had a show at—there was a curator, an academic as well, Frances Butler, who is a fantastic artist as well in her own right, who used to teach at U.C. Davis.

I met her at a party in Berkeley and she said to me, "Well, what do you do," and I said, "Well, I'd like to make gardens of light and shadow." Little did I know that she actually did that. So normally at a party you don't—I'm always a bit shy about knowing what to say. You have to do your spiel quickly and I've never been very good at doing any of that.

Anyway, so we had a really interesting conversation. She ended up curating a show about shadow and some of those pieces were in the show with shadows.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where was that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That was—where did they have them. Oh, one of them was at U.C. Davis I think and another one was at the Gensler.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, the architects?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and then where was the third one? I can't remember now.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I also showed them at Mincher/Wilcox Gallery in San Francisco. I had never intended to show them in a commercial gallery. I was on the artists committee at the Art Institute and the curator then who was—sorry, I've forgotten.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's okay. We can add it.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Came to my studio and said he wanted me to put something in their auction and I said, "No, no I don't have anything." He said, "No," because he saw all these stainless steel pieces. He said, "Can't you make a little one of those," and I said, "Well, I suppose so." I did and anyway three people bid on it and someone bought it.

Michelle Mincher came and wanted to ask me if I'd show in a gallery and I said, "Well, no I don't really think I can. I don't think they're the right things to be in a gallery." Well, she kept on calling me every week and I talked to some friends of mine and they said, "Don't you realize people have been dying to have a show in a commercial gallery and you're turning one down and why don't you do it?"

So I ended up doing it only if I could—she gave me the key and I could go in and do the installation and light it and then she could come back and see it.

MIJA RIEDEL: And she agreed?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: She agreed, which was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So when was that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That was later. That was in '84.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Well, then too, I want to talk about the mid-'80s because it seems like such a dynamic period for you. There was the Djerassi residency in '86, the SECA award also that year, 1986, and a show at the Museum of Modern Art. There's something else.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Again, Art Park in '88.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: SECA was '87.

MIJA RIEDEL: Eighty-seven, okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: *Staged Garden* was '86.

MIJA RIEDEL: Eighty-six, '87. What an extraordinary two or three year period of time.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That SECA award, did that have an effect, a dramatic effect on your career?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah, I think so. I think first of all the reason why I was able to do that was I got a teaching job in '84.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I taught at Berkeley first of all and I think it gave me more stability than I've ever had.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It gave me a steady income and I had more time and when I say—more money than I'd ever had before. So I think that all made a lot of difference.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It really did, to me being able to do work and at the same time I was kind of—I'd been doing all these temporary pieces and I was kind of beginning to be known locally. Then what was interesting about Djerassi was I made the pieces which are the photographs over there, the *Ways in, Ways Out*. I made all those pieces at Djerassi.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh you did?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, in the three months residency, which was great. I never had access to equipment before in America. So that was apart from Serra letting me use his saw downstairs. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So you had a fully—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There was a shop.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh there was a shop?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I was able to make all the doors, burn the threshold wood, which I never would have been able to do in this studio. So it was fantastic and I had three months.

MIJA RIEDEL: You had a break from teaching or it was during the summer?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, it was in the summer. That was in the summer, and *Staged Garden*, I worked out that proposal in one Christmas holiday. Then there was a delay from when that actually happened. They hadn't got the money through and then it happened in '86.

I think that's when it happened, yes, '86. That was a fantastic opportunity. That was the first outside piece I'd done, apart from all the rooftop pieces that I did on this roof and on all other of my friends' roofs. But they were all temporary, literally fleeting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where did *Staged Garden* take place?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In the Art Commission gallery. There was an annex, open space next to the Art Commission gallery. So it was in stone's throw of the—I don't know if I actually—I can show you pictures of that but I don't think I have any on here. It's within reach of City Hall. So it's a backdrop for City Hall.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, yes. So that mid-'80s, they seem like they were a very pivotal significant time.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I had a lot of help. I could never have done *Staged Garden* on my own. I had done a set, theater set, for Jim Dickson, who was in the stagehands union and did lighting for the stagehands union and his wife was a curator and writer who had liked my work and written about my work. So he met me through her.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was her name?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Joanne Dickson and then he asked if I would do the stage set for him. It was for [*Cradle Will Rock*]. They made a film about the making of the film. I don't know—it's a fantastic story. It was in kind of WPA Theater in New York and they closed the—because it was too political so they closed the show. They all—the cast all sang it from the audience.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Of course it was never actually put on Broadway again. But we did it at the Victoria Theater and I built the set. Huey was also a very good friend of Jim's and I made the model. He built the set. I painted the set and then I worked out the lighting for the set and then Jim programmed it into all the computer stuff.

It was really through doing that that I had an opportunity really to meet Huey and his friend Tommy. They said, when I was doing *Staged Garden,* I called him and said, "Can you look at this model and do you think this would work," and he said, "Oh no, this is great," because it was a competition. He said, "If you get this," he said, "I'll build it for you."

MIJA RIEDEL: How wonderful.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Which was fantastic and he said, "But you don't have enough money for materials," and he said, "You need to send it to Beronio, the wood company." They gave me a grant to get the wood. No, that's what I mean, what was so wonderful about that project was that I got so many people helped me.

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems like there has been a very important community involved in your work from the beginning. The community may change but that does seem to be true.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that it doesn't happen in isolation.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, none of the work that I've done has happened in isolation. I've always had a dialogue or if it's been people to talk to about it, people helping me with the structure, colleges helping me find extra money to be able to do it. Okay, we don't have it in this department but if you say—if you go to textiles, they'll give you the fabric. If they didn't have it, then if you go to the resource center, the research center, maybe they can get you something.

So it was always ways of figuring out how to do it because if I'd been left to my own devices, I couldn't have done it. I wouldn't have had the resources. I didn't have the money. I didn't have the contacts, nothing. But I asked questions and got people interested in the idea and therefore they were able to help me.

I think that's what happened all the way through, which was fantastic. In the old days, I used to help other people, help with their projects as well. So it was always kind of reciprocal. We were all in the same boat. I ended up by having to be in performances, which was awful for me. [Laughs] But they were helping me hold the other end and so I was able to do that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But we all worked together to make it so we could all do our work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Does that center very much around this building?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It did in the early—when I first came here I thought it was absolutely fantastic that we'd have coffee or breakfast in one person's studio. Maybe we'd meet for lunch one day in someone else's or we'd meet for kind of wine at the end of the day in someone else's studio. So we got to see what everyone else was doing. Unfortunately, all the people that were my friends mostly have left and unfortunately it's my fault. I'm not as involved now as I was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you teach.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I teach. I've got—

MIJA RIEDEL: Schedules.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I haven't got to know all the new people and now I treat this place as a sanctuary in a way. When I come here I don't really want to see anybody.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I just need a bit of space on my own. I'm sorry about that because I feel that this is still a great community. I still go to building meetings. I still do some things. But no, I don't participate nearly enough.

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems as if it has also—it serves a valuable purpose, especially for artists when they're just getting started. Now, you have so many other venues available, so many other options, opportunities that your attention is pulled elsewhere. But it's wonderful that this still exists.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It is fantastic that it still exists and I wish there were more places like this. They might be cantankerous and difficult and I won't say it's easy or that things—decisions are easily made. But the whole philosophy and premise of the place is really, really important. I mean, I think there are very few places like this.

MIJA RIEDEL: There are very few, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And fewer all the time it seems.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, I think so.

MIJA RIEDEL: Shall we talk about Artpark and *Memory Station* because that to me seems like such a wonderful example of the coexistence of the man-made industrial material with that natural material.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, right.

MIJA RIEDEL: That I think was '88.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah, this is the Exploratorium piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: And this is 1990?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Nineteen ninety, so this isn't actually in—the slides aren't in chronological order.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, we can talk about this.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: This one, well, maybe we should stop and I'll change the—I'll show you the other slides first maybe. Well, I'll just show you these few slides. The interesting thing about the Exploratorium—

MIJA RIEDEL: And you were in residency there for over a year, yes?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Over a year.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's an extraordinary community itself.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was fantastic. What happened was I did *Voyages* first and there was the piece—one of the rooms in there had one drop of light, one drop of water falling.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: You can only see light because there's something to hold it. So with this one—in the dark room there was this one drop of light, one drop of water happened every kind of 10 seconds, and you could see. It just looked like a point of light dropping. I can show you a video.

MIJA RIEDEL: I've seen images of it, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: What I was—so actually Peter Richards from the Exploratorium asked me if I would be interested in doing a residency at the Exploratorium and whether I'd be interested in using water and I was. So there'd be lots of drops of light.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I thought that would be fantastic and worked on that for quite a lot actually. But the problem was really that there wasn't enough way at the time of being able to recycle the water and I didn't want to do something where we would waste all that water. The other thing that happened was the person that was helping me, Barry—and I can't remember his second name—he was killed in a plane crash, the Lockerbie plane crash.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh dear.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So that was really tragic. He was a fantastic person and everybody adored him and there was kind of everything kind of went on hold a little bit. One, they had to find somebody else to work with me. I was like really upset about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Of course.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So that became problematic as well. But also then I wanted to find a way of holding that rhythm of light in a very different way and I started getting very interested in chaos theory and there was one of the most exciting things about the Exploratorium was meeting all the other people that were there.

MIJA RIEDEL: We were talking about all the people at the Exploratorium. Who was there at the time?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Paul Doherty, who was a physicist, and was absolutely fantastic in the fact that I was able to ask fairly simple questions and he was—I was interesting to him because I asked odd questions that made him rethink about his relationship to physics.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was just a wonderful interaction. I thought it was absolutely great, absolutely great and I learned so much from him.

MIJA RIEDEL: There are such parallels between research in science and research in art.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Many people have talked about that.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Earlier, after Barry left— died—initially they put me working with Ned Kahn, who was my assistant, who was a lovely guy, very shy then —wouldn't speak. So I spent six weeks talking to him and asked him—telling him about all these different ideas that I wanted to do but none of it actually really came about and it ended up by him not ending up helping me build anything because he got a commission or something, so went off.

But I sometimes think that I gave him a private graduate studies. It's fantastic that he's done so well but he was very different in those days. He was just absorbing, absorbing and he tried to help me a little bit but I think he was more kind of couldn't believe in how many different directions I was going in rather than helping me actually get one of them done.

MIJA RIEDEL: Going, right, let's pause for just one moment while I change the disc.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

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MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anna Valentina Murch on May 21, 2010 for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project, University of San Francisco, California, disc number four.

We were talking about your residency at the Exploratorium.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: This was 1990?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Ninety, yes. I think that I was meant to have done it earlier. Then I came back. They put me on hold for a while, and then I came back. And in the end, I worked with Nick Bertoni, who was great. And there I was really interested—I've been interested in chaos theory and rhythm. And I began dealing with these kind of chains, really.

And then, by dealing with [motion], they went from being sine waves to more chaotic waves. And one of them was a piece that had a tension wheel on the bottom so it almost found its own equilibrium, so it made just one big sine wave. There was another piece. They were all about 30 feet high. The other piece had three together, that interacted with each other, so it caused a kind of chaos in themselves.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sorry. What was the material?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Like bead chain. Bead chains actually weren't strong enough, so I had to get

stainless-steel beads that were drilled and then put them onto a cable so that I had to make my own bead chain that was strong enough to deal with the—

MIJA RIEDEL: The weight, and the length.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: —the weight and the—[length –DH]. And then another one was on a bungee cord, so it changed its own momentum. And I think what was interesting to me was just seeing how all these different rhythms began to interact and interface with each other. We've had some scientists come in from Santa Cruz and they have said how much my—actually, my work was too chaotic for them.

[They laugh.]

But I saw it as something about really being about really changing—you're changed by your own momentum. So even though there's a kind of scientific reason for all of it, there's also—as human beings, we—our rhythm changes by what else interferes with us or interaction that happens. So it's kind of a parallel thing, going in both directions.

I think—I've met Frank Oppenheimer before. I don't think he was—I don't think he was actually there by the time I was a resident, but I had met him before that and I thought he was fantastic.

On the whole, I think it's changed now. It might have changed back again. But all the people that were there were interested in meeting the artists. Paul DeMarinis was coming in and out. It was just a really exciting exchange in the most casual, relaxed way possible. I thought that was all—it was great.

In a way, it was very—it was difficult working there because of the noise. For me, I mean, just with all the kids screaming and this and that. It was easier in the evening. But also there was an amazing amount of energy there, so that part of it was really great. It was really great. It was a very good experience for me.

MIJA RIEDEL: And how long was the—was that a temporary installation?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And how long was it there for?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Probably a couple of years, I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: So early '90s. '90 or '92.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, I think Frank had died maybe in the mid '80s.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That sounds right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: But I've heard from everyone, especially in those early years, just what a dynamic space it was, and certainly the number of artists and scientists passing through there with some extraordinary talents.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was a wonderful place. And even though, when I was there, they were going through this whole shift of reinventing themselves without him—it was like losing your father.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And so "What do we do?" But even in that time, I think they were all—and I'd been to some conferences and things before then there where I'd met him. And actually, when I first came to San Francisco, some people I met, they said, "Oh, you should go to the Exploratorium."

MIJA RIEDEL: Of course. That would make sense.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And so I went to the Exploratorium and I met him. And he said—he really liked my work. He said, "Well, I have a project for you." And he said, "I want you to do something with the ceiling."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And I actually didn't go back because I was too busy trying to deal with, you know,

immigration and this and that. But it's ironic that many years later I started doing things with ceilings.

MIJA RIEDEL: Isn't that interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But at the time, it was like, "Man, that ceiling is huge up there."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. But it had extraordinary potential.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What an incredible, yes, opportunity. How wonderful that you could do it years later.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. But, I think it was a great place.

MIJA RIEDEL: You wanted to talk some more about *Voyages* at the [San Francisco] Museum of Modern Art?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was a couple of years earlier, maybe '86, '87—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. It was through that piece, really, that I got to do the piece at the Exploratorium. And that really began—how can I say—that piece really began—what was great was the SECA committee had gone to see *Stage Garden*. And I had—and then through that I had won the SECA award. Graham Beal was the curator at the time, who was fantastic. And what he said—normally what they do with SECA is they go and pick the objects that are going to be in the show.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So it was all work that had already been done. Graham thought it would be much better if I did a new installation. That had never happened before. And so—

MIJA RIEDEL: For you or for SECA or for both?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: For SECA.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think one other time they'd done something like that, someone had done a new body of work. But, no, they'd never done—one, I was the only one that year.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Normally they give it to four or five people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was the only one, and I was able to do an installation. So it was breaking ground in —

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: —in different ways. And what Graham said—and I said, "But I don't have any"—you know, it was like, "I don't know how I'm going to afford to do it." And he said, "Well, we have money for insurance of the work. But as your work is not going to be insured, we can give you the money for the insurance," which was, I think, about $5,000, which for me was, like, unbelievable. It was huge. All I had to do was give them receipts.

MIJA RIEDEL: How fantastic.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And so I came up with this idea of wanting to do these three rooms. He said any space that I wanted. And he thought about that when I said, "Yes, this is what I'd like to be able to do, three rooms." And by *Voyages*, my —there's a kind of relationship back—I mean, in a way too—this was a kind of—that whole period was a time of, I would say, personal introspection as well. I think I've always had that. But in public projects, you're allowed to do dwell on that a little less.

And a couple of things that happened when I'd done *Memory Station* and *Ways In, Ways Out* at [Kala Institute, Berkeley], as I did in Djerassi, I'd been working—I'd been thinking very much about memory. And one of the reasons I think why it became really critical was, one, I was realizing I was relying more and more on my

memory of England and my past, and I wasn't immediately able to go back to places; and two, my father had Alzheimer's. And I saw this brilliant, extraordinary man know that he was losing his memory.

And it was very—that's another reason why I always managed to go back every year to England, because I had to—you know, when I say had to see him, I wanted to see him; and because the person I knew was disappearing. His body was there, but he was disappearing.

And so, as a navigator and a sailor, I had a kind of sense of thinking about how you navigate through life and the choices that you make and the different ways of thinking that you have. And that's why the piece is really about different ways of thinking. And this "waiting room," I call it, in the middle of *Voyages* was really about looking at which direction do you go. Do you go to the light or do you go to the dark? The main entrance to the rotunda was blocked by these lead gates; again, locked gates, again, with naval connotations or sailing or river connotations, and seeing everything in a haze. And in that kind of gray room of pacing back and forth, almost like *Waiting for Godot*—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: —you just see fragments of yourself, or fragments of what's around. You don't see the whole picture. And how do you make the decisions that you make? How do you decide on your directions? So in the white room, you know, I made these huge doors that were lined with lead, one made of silver leaf, the other made of copper, but walking over the bridge and then having a moat.

So the moat of water almost was like circular thought. And the light coming from this hidden room that I managed to find, so the window of light illuminates this very bright space, acoustically very bright space, as well as visually bright. And because I had all the pebbles on the stone, I had to —on the floor, and I had a kind of wooden platform underneath it, the sound vibrating of you stepping on the stones was brighter than it would have been.

So you're very aware of your presence in this kind of circulation of water. And I think of water as the unconscious as well. And so it is about this kind of method of thinking. And then when you come back out, almost as if these big doors had closed, then they become these sealed separate things but they've been opened up.

In the dark room, there was a kind of copper door which had been kind of changed by heat and hammering, almost having kind of the rhythm and pattern of rock on it. And you went in, and the floor was full of pumice, red lava rock. And the well—outside of the well was full of red earth.

I suppose I always had a very special place for red earth, because that's the earth of Devon. And what was interesting to me about the installation is people put their—left their hand marks in the red earth.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And they took pinches of red earth and put them into the well, so that the well, which was inside, was framed with these layers of glass consecutively going in in a kind of hexagonal shape, because the rooms were actually hexagonal. So I was working off the shapes that were there. And then this one drop of water fell from the ceiling as kind of drops of thought rather than circular thought.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And so always a kind of—in a way, they all became kind of the beginning of this notion of centering devices, of ways of thinking about where you are in a bigger context of things. And I think it was a really important piece for me, because I was able to—I think it was the most elaborate, important installation I had done.

The fact that it happened to be at the Museum of Modern Art was also important. And I—it gave me a chance of working, in a way—the pieces looked—even though it was a temporary installation, there was a physicality about the doors that made them appear solid and permanent, even though they weren't. And so, again, it was bringing back very ancient materials, very primal materials of lead, copper, silver—

MIJA RIEDEL: Volcanic rock.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes—all those basic elements, and saying, how can you bring these together to remind you of how you can think about your thoughts, but also about what's happening in the planet and the resources that we have available, the materials that are physically around.

So I think it was a successful piece. I think it was psychologically a very important piece for me. It was—and I did the whole thing in three months, which was crazy to build it all in that amount of time. But I think it was a very important piece that I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds like by far the most complex piece you've done to date.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And a pivotal piece.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And then, ironically, I did do the piece at the Exploratorium after that, but I never really did anything else in San Francisco.

MIJA RIEDEL: That is interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, that SECA award in many ways opened the door for a whole new exposure to the whole country.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes. And, you know, why was it? Was the fact that it was in the museum? Was it that I won SECA? Was it the slides? I never really know. But it really led to an awful lot of other projects. And, you know, I think one of the first projects I got after that was the St. Louis Metro project.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting, yes—which was huge.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Huge—one of six artists involved: Gary Burnley, Alice Adams, Jody Pinto, Michael [Jantzen]—I can't remember Michael's name now—which was—oh, and Leila Daw. She was the local artist, and so was Michael. It was—what was exciting about that piece was it was the first time, really, that I had the opportunity to do what I wanted to do right from the very beginning, which was to change the infrastructure in how we—in the public space.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], in a very large-scale, visible way.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Which was fantastic, working with the bridge engineers to do the piers for the bridge.

MIJA RIEDEL: A really interesting detail you mentioned on the phone, too, is that the artists were selected before the architect.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That's right. That's right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Which is really interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And it was funded by an NEA grant, the artist design piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: This was '90—the early '90s, '90?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think I got it—I began, actually, in '88.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Eighty-eight. Should I have gone back to talk about *Memory Station* first? I should.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure. Let's talk about *Memory Station*.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because I did that before—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: —actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, right, because *Voyages* probably opened the door for Artpark—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, actually, I'd already done the proposal for—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: —*Memory Station* before I did *Voyages*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So they all kind of interconnected.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And even though—and I did *Stage Garden*, the proposal, probably at least a year before I did it, at least a year. I think I did it probably in the winter of '84, but didn't get to do it till '86. So they kind of overlapped.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, really a dynamic time.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But I think they do work as one continuing group.

I'd heard so much about Artpark. A lot of artists I have the greatest respect for have been there. And I kind of wanted to—I mean, applied, and, much to my surprise, was asked to do a proposal. And I went out in the winter and found this—where the retaining wall met the natural strata of rock, this crack, which was really interesting for me about how things can happen in the cracks.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And I thought, "This is the site."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And how can I bring together nature and structure? And is it possible —rather than this prying apart of these two walls that don't want to connect, how can I do something that brings them together? And so that was my overarching idea; also that that place had been where the tram line had gone.

And you see I became more and more interested in history and memory from the other projects and because I think I was getting more and more surrounded with California, where people really don't have that much history. So I became more and more interested in looking at history as well as memory, and not realizing how important it had been in my life before. I had always wanted that. Maybe I was getting a little older as well, but wanting always new, new, new, and now, actually, no, I want to embrace the old as well as the new and remember that in context in some way. So context became more and more important, I think.

And in *Memory Station*, the tram line that used to go along the gorge and to see Niagara Falls would go—it was exactly where—why that retaining wall was built. So I wanted to do something that became a kind of station or waiting place. Now the people that would use it were the fishermen. When I was even there in the winter, I met some fishermen that were going down to the river that were walking through there. So I thought, "Well, no, no, it's still a pathway. It's not—it's a little bit out of the beaten track of the main Artpark areas, but it's still connected."

And so I arranged these blocks that was the scale of the blocks of stone that were used in the retaining wall and filled them with the rocks that had fallen from the gorge and put them in the area or strata of the different color gradations that had been in the gorge.

The other thing that I began to think about was, in fact, thinking about architecture and thinking about the structure of architecture and what makes something stable, and what do we really count as being stable? And if —and I think mainly I was thinking about this because Artpark is—a lot of Artpark was a kind of toxic dump. And so what's underneath it is unknown.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And I actually don't think the area that I was in might have been that toxic, but you're not allowed to dig in because you never know there. So what I was interested in is, again, thinking about what's under the surface, what's being reflected, and what are the foundations that we think of as stability.

And that's why I did all the cornerstones of—they're stainless-steel mirror, they're not mirror, so that—because if the foundations—if the cornerstones aren't stable, then the building isn't stable. And then I had all the mortar be of glass, because, again, if the mortar isn't stable or cracks, then everything can fall apart.

So again, kind of metaphorically or thinking about what are the elements that we think of as being part of our environment, what are the elements that we think of as being stability in our architecture, and just rethinking about whether they are or they aren't, the kind of threshold, the fallen threshold, making you think about what's under the surface. All the tiles I made of all the fragments for the flooring. So trying—again, there's something about what I've always wanted to do is kind of bring together all the neglected and fragmented things and make

them have a life again, make them have a wholeness. And I think it worked.

The interesting thing that happened when I was first doing the project, every—I had all the cages made before I got there, and I would go and collect or pick out the stones that I wanted. And I had two assistants, a young man and a young woman, who would pick up with a cart, pick up the stones and bring them down to my side. And I would put them in the cages.

When we first started doing it, I couldn't understand what was happening to all the rocks. They were all disappearing. And then I found, when I got there—yeah, I had gone and had something to eat and I'd gone back to the site, and there was this kind of gang of young boys that were throwing all the rocks over into the river. I said, "What are you doing?" And they said, "Oh, well, it's great. We can throw these in." And I said—but I told them what I was doing, and they said, "Oh, alright then." And I said, "Can you just let me do a bit, and you can see if you like it," and whatever. Anyway, they never threw any rocks over after that. And what was really interesting, it never got graffiti'd, nothing. They used it as their little hangout. The fishermen used it and this gang of young youths used it as well. And they really looked after it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Isn't that—well again it talks about the different groups of people being able to come and use the space for different reasons.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That it speaks to it. And it does have almost an ancient secular temple quality to it. It feels almost like an old Greek ruin or something. It has that—it has a quality to it that's—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That's old as well as new. Yes, and the same with *Stage Garden*. Everyone said that looked like a Greek theater.

MIJA RIEDEL: And there's something very threshold but also very frame-like, and the framing almost of that crack and the framing of the meeting place. It makes me think of that great Greek sense of temenos and those spaces created, just sort of—wait for auguries.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: It has that kind of energy to it.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. And I was really interested in Greek memory theater.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I thought that was just fantastic. There is something about—I remember things because of where I've been. I remember conversations because of where I was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly. Exactly. Interesting, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But it was—no, again, it was a wonderful opportunity. I met -the other artists that were there were great. I think it's—

MIJA RIEDEL: Who else was there that year? Do you remember?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Gómez Peña. Peter Richards was there, actually, the same year.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Amy—what was Amy's name? I can't remember all the names of the people that were there.

MIJA RIEDEL: But again, another community.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: I would imagine fairly collaborative? Not in terms of working together, but—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, I think we were all kind of—I would say we were all doing our own work and very focused, but we'd get together for dinner sometimes. And there was a real feeling of support. The hard thing about it was, as everyone finished, they left. And so, you know, we never had a big kind of final celebration of everyone finishing together and doing that. But it was very—it was very—it was very supportive.

MIJA RIEDEL: Does the piece still exist there?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No. No, no. I mean, I got some pictures of it in the winter. They kept it up over winter.

MIJA RIEDEL: I saw it. It was beautiful, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And then, no, they had to—what is interesting is they—I said, "Well, what did you do with it?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Oh, some of the people that came—some of the fishermen said, "Well, you can't destroy it." They said, "Can we take it and put it in our church?" which, of course, they never did. I mean, that never happened. But I thought, "What an incredible compliment." Whether it belonged near their church or whatever is another matter, but something that they obviously really valued.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They were willing to have my work connected to that, which is, I think, an incredible honor—

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: —which is great. No, they just threw it into the river. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They probably got those little lads to help them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Those boys. Exactly. They threw it in the river.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They threw it into the river. They didn't—and I thought, "Well, what interesting ruins someone will find at some point."

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. And why—do you know why? What an interesting thing to do, to throw it into the river.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, it was easier than getting it shipped out. It wasn't as far to throw it. Oh, they got a forklift and just drove it to the edge. They had to collapse it a little bit to be able to—I don't think they could move it in one piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, the weight of that, it would be—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, because it was huge; because we had, you know, rebar going all the way up through. So it was really sturdy to move them.

MIJA RIEDEL: And was that part of the—was that part of the protocol there, that the pieces had to be destroyed?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Had to be removed, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see. Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because then they had to make room for the new ones.

MIJA RIEDEL: The next ones. Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And I think it's really sad that it doesn't exist anymore.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Really sad.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because it was an incredible laboratory for so many people for so long.

MIJA RIEDEL: Every artist I've spoken to who's spent time there, who's been there, has had really profound experiences or things just—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. No, it was a wonderful place. And I think those four works all worked together

very well, *Ways In, Ways Out* that I did at Djerassi but showed at Kala Institute. Again, they gave me money. They were fantastic. And, first of all, when they wanted me to do something, they wanted me to do something with the screening pieces, hanging screening pieces. And I went down to Djerassi and I said, "Well, no, I really want to do something completely different." And I called them and I said, "Can I do it?" And they said, "Yes." They didn't know what I was going to do. I mean, just to have—the main problem was trying to get a photograph for the announcement, because that had to be done before the piece was built.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I made this little tiny model and photographed that. But, I mean, I think what was so great in those years was people had faith in you and they had faith in what you'd done before, and they allowed you to—every show I did, every installation, even the very early ones, they gave me the opportunity to do a new piece. And I didn't have to do a proposal and say exactly what I was going to do, because often I only had a month or two to do it. They had enough faith that I could do it.

And when I stopped doing temporary installations was they started to want more information on permanent projects in this time. They wanted to know a specific—exactly what you were going to do, exactly how long it was going to take, exactly how much money you were going to spend. And it was like they wanted it so pre-planned, and three years in advance, that it wasn't that interesting anymore.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And I was actually having more opportunity to do things in permanent projects.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. So there was a real shift.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: When did that—do you remember when that started to happen or when you noticed that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That happened after I got—after I did SECA. I was asked to do, I think, one in LA, but they wanted this big proposal. And I don't know if I ever gave them one in the end. There were all kind of competitions and proposals.

MIJA RIEDEL: Took the life out of it.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: So then that was really between *Voyages* and Artpark and the Exploratorium residency Djerassi, Kala. That was the grand hurrah of the temporary installations.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Yes. I got paid, and *Stage Garden*. That was at the Art Commission Annex, which, again, they don't do anything there anymore. So I had a chance to really—I had more funding. I had more help. And I think I showed —even though they were all temporary, I showed that I could do things that had enough physicality to show that they could affect upon the place.

MIJA RIEDEL: And they all happened in a very condensed period of time.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes, in a couple of years.

MIJA RIEDEL: Two years, right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And I think that's what—and then when I started sending slides in, I started getting permanent projects.

MIJA RIEDEL: And was then St. Louis the first—St. Louis was the first one. Was that—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The first big one. I actually do remember I did two other small ones, one for a Caltrains station—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: —in Santa Clara.

MIJA RIEDEL: Santa Clara.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And I did another one in Puyallup, a school in Puyallup, which were very small and great, actually; again, treated very well. But the first real big one was the St. Louis. And it was very exciting to

be able to work with the other artists.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The first thing we did, when we went to the building and there weren't even tables in by state, they gave us a set of plans. And the first thing we did is rip them apart and lay them out so we could actually see what was happening.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And the engineers came in, and we put together—and then we put together boards of photographs and images to show what would happen in each place. So you were actually walking around the whole open office space seeing the right of way as a form and with images next to it.

And the engineer said, "Oh, I didn't realize it kind of did," because they were always looking at one piece at a time. So that was—

MIJA RIEDEL: This goes back and forth to the important details and in a much bigger perspective that you talk about.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and so that was a really great thing to be able to do, I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was it a fairly smooth collaboration among the artists?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. I would say there were—I think we all got on despite our differences. And they split us up quite early on. We'd always get back—well, actually, the wonderful thing that happened was they divided us up. Jody and Michael were in what they called systems. Leila and I were in the bridge. Leila was doing all the retaining walls, and I did the underground stations.

And Gary and Alice were doing—working with Todd—the architects. There wasn't the architects—the local architects. It was another design architect, in New York. They were working on the canopies. But we all got together to talk about the canopies. And when we would all come in at the same time and meet with our different groups, and then in the evening we would talk to each other about what was going on.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So we knew more about the project than any of the engineers. They were saying, "Well, did you talk—what's happening in the systems?" or "What's happening with the architecture?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because we continually—I mean, we were all even—I mean, Leila and Michael were living there, but they would all have dinner with us. So it was like literally around the clock. And we would discuss how things would interface and work together, which was really great.

MIJA RIEDEL: So did you really relocate to St. Louis, for how long?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, no. I was going back and forth. I'd go for about, like, sometimes a week at a time, sometimes just for a few days.

MIJA RIEDEL: And how long—over a period of how long?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think it was mainly about a year, and then it changed. And it went through—because, first of all, I was involved with the design, and then I came back and I was involved in the right of—the master plan for the right of way. Then I came back again and I was involved in *Light Passageway*, which is under the hospital. It was kind of three phases.

MIJA RIEDEL: How extraordinary to have artists involved in that, a project like that —

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —from so early on.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, it was great. And there was something that happened that stopped the contract going. Everyone—when everything went on —began—and I remember going into a meeting and there was, like, a hundred engineers there. There was Ann Ruwitch, who was the public-art coordinator. And I think at one point Emmy Pulitzer came. And quite honestly, I don't think that project would have happened if it hadn't been for her,

beginning—she had an incredible amount of political clout in St. Louis, and respect, of course.

And she had determined that she thought it was a really—and a lot of people didn't want the public art—the Metro system at all. There was a lot of fight against it. And she really helped to push it happening and get artists involved and get the NEA grant. I think she actually came to one of the first meetings with the engineers, so that she was showing her support. You know, you don't mess with her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But then the only women there was her, Ann Ruwitch, Jody, me and Alice. There was, like, a hundred men in the room. But actually, they—the engineers were fine. The local architects were very difficult. They tried to waste our time. And by the time they—I worked with one of them, who was actually quite good. And by the time all their hours had run out, and he would meet me on Saturdays. I would come in on—I was teaching Monday, Wednesday; I'd fly in, I think, that night, and then I'd work on Thursday, Friday and stay Saturday and work with him, because he wasn't officially allowed to work with me because his hours had run out. But he realized it was actually working quite well. The engineers were much better.

MIJA RIEDEL: And so it sounds like half of the artists selected were women.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Women, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. And the bridge engineers and the tunnel engineers were both great. There was never—

MIJA RIEDEL: And they were all men.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: All men.

MIJA RIEDEL: No women at all.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No women at all. Very respectful. I can't remember what happened. There was some kind of legal thing, like it was a lawsuit or their contracts couldn't go forward. Something was on hold. And so in the time that everything was on hold but we were still going out, the engineers were under contract but they didn't have that much to do.

Leila and I worked with the bridge engineers and worked on the idea for the bridge. And the image from the bridge—and what was great was, with all our things, that we would come up with ideas and then bring them back to the rest of the artists, and they would kind of say, "Yes, this is great." But with the bridge—because I was working on the tunnel stations. There's the arch. The center shape of the inside arch is what we made the bridges that carried the Metro to the airport.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, I've seen visuals.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. And the engineers actually were really excited. They said they hadn't been so excited or thought about engineering in the same way since they'd been at college. You know, they were really excited about the idea of trying to do something special rather than the lowest common denominator. And we kind of empowered them to do that. And I thought how much has been beaten out of them, which is really sad, actually.

The other thing that they were very—the bridge—the—it was a different—Brooker did the bridge. I can't remember the name of the engineers for the tunnel stations, and the Cleads [sic/means Eads] Landing. And they were so thrilled to be working on the Cleads Bridge, because it's one of the most beautiful old bridges, and to repair it. And so it was wonderful to see them do that.

And they were very—I had a conflict with the architects. The architects wanted square beams and square—which I thought would make the ceiling much heavier and bring it down. And the ceiling wasn't that high anyway. And I wanted it to kind of be more arch-like, which went with all the other—the tunnel [situation ?]. And the engineers were really kind of helpful with that. I remember Michael helping me make a model that we showed. And then it was like, "Well, which one do we do?" We ended up by doing one that was much nearer to mine than to the architects'. And the engineers liked it much better as well.

And that was a kind of turning point with the architects. Then they started to be a little better. But they were kind of furious that I'd gone off with the engineers on my own to kind of work things out. But the engineers were really receptive, interested, and very supportive, very practical, but great. I mean, like, when it came to lighting—and we were trying to do everything on a very low budget. I mean, there was no money for art on this project. The only money was for our design fees.

And one of the things that I suggested was that the lighting of the Cleads Landing, which was all this old limestone, would be lipped with kind of the sodium vapor light, so you bring out the gold wall color. But with the Cleads Landing, the bridge over the water would be lit with metal halide, so it became blue; so all very utilitarian lighting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But you had a sense of demarcation and passage through it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So there were lots of things like that that were very simple. They didn't cost them any more, but made a difference, and they probably wouldn't have done on their own. Bringing in—I wanted—all the foundations of St. Louis are made of limestone. And I wanted to carry that through in the foundation of the Metro stations, so they actually used—the quarry had nearly closed. And we used the limestone from—the local limestone—to do all the platforms of the Cleads Landing and the two tunnel stations. So again, there's a sense of old connecting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, and the history of the place.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The history, exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The thing—and it sounds so ridiculous, but persuading them not to use old fluorescent fixtures, but to use T-8s and electronic ballasts. They said, "Oh, we can get these much cheaper." "No, no, you've got—things are changing fast. You're going to save energy. The quality of light is going to be much better." So it was dealing with very practical things as well as looking at the overall concept and design.

MIJA RIEDEL: And also a sense of what was available now technologically.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Yes, exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems like that was something constantly being brought in as to what was available now; and if it wasn't available, perhaps how you could make it.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, actually. But, no, I think it was—it was frustrating, because I'd say 90 percent of what we wanted didn't happen.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But compared to what they had at 30 percent design to get the federal funding, huge; huge, the difference—much better system.

MIJA RIEDEL: So were you fairly happy with the final project, or it was better than what it would have been?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was better than what it was. I think I'm much happier with it now, knowing—and they kept on saying to me, "But don't you realize what we've done? This is extraordinary what we've done." And I was still disappointed that certain things didn't happen.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right. What are one or two things that you would have—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The lighting in the Cleads Landing; they took out the lighting I'd put in and put in just fluorescent. You know, just—it was such a beautiful—they took out—you know, they opened up the arches. And it could have—with not very much more money, the light—it could have been the most beautiful station. The lighting is terrible. But -

MIJA RIEDEL: Could it still be—could it be adjusted now?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, I'm sure it could. Yes. And now you could use LED lights and get it to be—and put them in a different place so that up-lighting the ceiling rather than seeing those raw bulbs. So I mean, things

like that, of course, could be changed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it's wonderful that they're not—the changes that could be made, that would need to be made to make that level of difference, are possible without too much effort or alteration or money.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Yes. I think one of the saddest things that Leila had to suffer with was—because she was doing all the landscaping in the park-and-rides, and they took out all the trees, which was terrible. And she'd gone to a lot of trouble. There was one retaining wall where, you know, to keep the rock face and have the retaining wall around it. They blasted the whole rock away and put in just a retaining wall. I mean, there's—but I think losing all the trees was very difficult because of all the landscape.

MIJA RIEDEL: That seems to happen repeatedly, just the trees—go.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. And, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: It just creates such a barren—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And it gets hot there in the summer.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Do you think logistically that they just had—they need to remove them, or it just—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, it was just money, just money. It was literally—and they said they could come in afterwards. I don't know if they did or they didn't.

MIJA RIEDEL: Which is so interesting, because, as we're finding out now, if you leave those trees, it has such incredible environmental benefits in terms of how it cools the area and what it does to the air.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That's right.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you cannot, with small trees, replace those fabulous old ones.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So I mean, economically, there are now, as I'm sure you're aware, have all those amazing tests that show the actual economic value of trees.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That's right. That's right. But we did a lot.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. So maybe somebody who's listening can change the lights. [Laughs.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: And then it will be significantly better. [Laughs.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That would be great.

MIJA RIEDEL: So it was just a couple of years after the St. Louis Metro system was finished; it sounds like '93 that you began to work on the Denver airport? I know we have the UC Davis courtyard, but we'll talk about that tomorrow with Doug.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So I'm thinking the *Sky Dance* piece at Denver.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that the next major piece?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, I think probably it was. Again, that was very exciting for me because it was a big tent. After all, I began doing projections on tents.

MIJA RIEDEL: Actually, I want to ask you one more question before we leave St. Louis. Sorry. You did a crystalline landscape underground there that was all recycled glass, if I'm not mistaken. Would you talk about that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting you used recycled material.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: After we finished the main design, then Leila and I and Austin Tao Associates got together to do the master plan for the right of way, which was all the different things that could happen along the right of way, which none of it really got implemented, unfortunately. But conceptually it was a very interesting notion, because it went through—I saw it as going through the history of the city from the old town—you know, the downtown theater district, the industrial section, and then into Forest Park, a very nice area. The museums are out there.

But what did come out of it was the hospital—that there was this area that, when you left the kind of theater district, you went through under the hospital. And then after you went under the hospital, you arrived in Forest Park, which is all green and beautiful. And under the hospital was—all kind of people were living there. It was all derelict. It was kind of bits of old concrete, rubbish, garbage. I mean, it was awful. And they were afraid that people wouldn't ride the Metro because they'd have to go through this unseemly area.

And the hospital was great, actually. They gave us the money to do this piece. And because I had worked with Austin so much before, what we decided was that—you know, he said, "Look, you come up with whatever you want for that." He said, "I'll deal with all the plants." What we decided is, anywhere where there could be daylight coming in, we'd put native plantings. And then there was one area which we kind of—I put these kind of stainless steel, two layers of mesh screening that hid the parking garage. And there were these areas of concrete which were lit. We used metal halide lights with colored filters on them; so fairly low-tech but energy-efficient.

And then where there had all been just rubble, I wanted to put this kind of crystalline landscape. And I wanted to use some kind of—well, we didn't have that much money, actually. And so I called Spectrum Glass.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, yes, of course.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And they—and there was a guy that dealt with burying, getting rid of all the art glass that they couldn't use, and they used to bury it. And I said, "Well, you know, what—you know, what if I—can I have that glass?" He said, "Well, sure." And he said, "Actually, it would be cheaper to send it to you than for me to bury it." And all—I mean, he got paid for taking it away. We had to pay for the transport but we didn't have to pay for the glass.

MIJA RIEDEL: How fantastic.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So a whole trainload of glass came to St. Louis.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it must have been the most extraordinary colors.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. And then the whole thing was keeping our fingers crossed, because, you know, I got the ambers, but, you know, it was like was I going to get enough blue? And luckily they made mistakes with the blue and I got—well, we didn't know until the very end that we have enough blue.

MIJA RIEDEL: And were they sorted by color?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did they sort them by color? Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They'd make a batch of blue, and then if it didn't work, they'd smash it, and then he'd have to take it away. And so I finally got enough of all the colors I'd wanted.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it must have been just—have you seen it?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, yes, I did see it. It looked great. Then I went and we used metal halide lights. I worked—again, I worked with Bob Banashek. He was an electrical engineer who'd worked—he did all the electrical stuff for the hospital. I mean, he probably did it for very little, but he was excited about doing it.

And I made a big model, which I packed down and then shipped out to St. Louis and set it all up, because the model was as big as this table—[laughs]—because, you know, you can only smash glass up so big. They had to have a sense of what it was. I photographed it and everything as well. But they all really loved it. And they worked out a way—then it was like, "Oh, maybe we should have it set in concrete," and then, "Oh, but if somebody does walk on it, they'll cut themselves more, so it's actually better that it's loose," and then made these kind of almost terraces to hold it in place, but you can't see the terraces. And what I did was really echo the foundations that were above.

So that's what made the delineation. You were aware of what was above and below by the stratification of color. And I had blue in one direction and kind of golds in the other, like a kind of Doppler effect. And I wanted all the

columns underneath to be reflective. And actually, I didn't get—I didn't do that, but they got—Ann Ruwitch went out, and so did Austin and his partner. And they got some friends of theirs to all go out and they got bags of glass beads and they put, you know, glue on them and flocked the columns with glass beads that became more light-reflective.

MIJA RIEDEL: How clever.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, it was a real—you know, I think it was about $100,000 to do all of it, $130,000, which is nothing—nothing for that huge amount, the screening and everything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So again, it was people working together to make something happen, which was really fabulous. And what ended by happening is the train drivers ended up by slowing down to go through the tunnel because all the kids liked it so much.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And it became, rather than a place that was frightening, a place that was actually a really wonderful gateway into nature. And I think the fact that it was art glass that couldn't be recycled was really interesting. Now, of course, they're selling that glass for a lot of money. [Laughs] But I'm delighted, actually. But I think it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Because it's not being buried. It's being used.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It's not being buried. It's being used, and people can see the beauty of it. So it was a really great project. Unfortunately, a few years later—I don't know, maybe—so, when did I do that? I did that in about '80—I can't remember—no, '90—

MIJA RIEDEL: Early '90s, maybe?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I had it—no, it was in the—it was the late—must have been early '90s. And it probably lasted six or seven years. And then they decided they wanted to use that area—to extend it—to make a tunnel and have more parking under the hospital. So it went. And I unfortunately didn't have a chance to do the new project. They gave that to—what's his name?

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure you have photos, though.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes. And I actually think that was a very important project for me. And actually it was—even that was really—the landscape architects really liked that project. They even—I submitted it. There was a conference, and quite a few of the speakers talked about it, because it was what landscape—rather than, you know, these perfect places, it's like "How can you"—it was perfect in the extension of my old work, which was the forbidden, abandoned and condemned, and bringing something back to life. And I felt really good about being able to do that, which was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Very simple project but I think had a major impact.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, and again found recycled, cast-off materials, incredible light sensibility.

Any other thoughts about that particular piece? And when you say it was such a significant piece for you, what did you take away from that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I took away from the fact that you can do something with those areas that people think should just not be noticed. And they're there, and they take up incredible amounts of space, and why can't they be extraordinary places? They're like—they're cathedral in scale, quite often.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: —underpasses and all that. And they're usually the part of the city that nobody wants to go to. They think they're dangerous. I mean, there are practical reasons why a lot of bridge engineers or deck people don't want anything covering them up so they can see if there's any leaks or any damage or

anything. But I think there must be a way, with lighting and something, to make these really interesting spaces rather—

[END OF TRACK AAA_murch10_1755_m.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anna Valentina Murch on May 21, 2010, for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project in her studio in San Francisco, California, disc number five.

We were talking—we were winding up the conversation about St. Louis and you were talking about saving these dead spaces that can be cathedral-like in size and converting them into something extraordinary and how that was a wonderful opportunity to do that.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, I'm interested in all those places that you travel through and that you basically might want to just get to the other end. Airports I think are a real good example of that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: When I had a chance to do the project *Sky Dance* in Denver, there was this incredible kind of déjà vu if you like because there was this big tent that they wanted me to light and I had begun at college doing all my nomadic tents that I'd use projections.

So I thought, "Great, this is absolutely meant," and I wanted to do something rather than using projections of images, I wanted to have some kind of way of making it a calendar, making it a place where you actually could begin to feel the quality of the air that you were about the fly through.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So in some ways, having a kind of dawn to dusk idea of how the light changes from the color changes and also the amount of weather that they get there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: All the storms, the clouds that come over. So you have a real sense of the atmosphere that you're about to fly through. Also because people might end up waiting a long time, that there's something that's kind of calming and mesmerizing. So you got the feeling more of feeling the different quality of light changing rather than just seeing images.

So it became this kind of atmospheric quality that was there and managed to get artifacts to make these. When I first wanted to do the project, I went round to the lighting fairs and I said, "I want something that does what a theater light does but is made of metal halide [ph], is energy efficient," and everyone laughed at me. Finally I got a lighting company to make these lights that were metal halide. They called them Murch lights.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's wonderful.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That were kind of screens that had different filters of different colors so they would mix to give an overall wash. I think the irony is now that there's an incredible amount of companies that are doing it. Now, with LEDs too it's become something that's possible. But at the time when I did this, there was nothing else like it in energy efficient lighting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Didn't even exist.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Didn't exist.

MIJA RIEDEL: It was invented for your specifications for this project.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. So what I did too is get these projectors of having these clouds so that you really got the kind of not just the color but you got with these two glass discs that were going in kind of relationship to the other, you got this sense of these two layers of moving clouds across the ceiling, again this kind of atmospheric quality, which worked quite well.

I think that really gave me an opportunity to work with lighting, which I hadn't been able to do for a while. We managed to get enough foot candles and I think that really led to me doing another piece which was *Skytones* and that was for the Seattle Symphony.

That was a lobby, kind of an outer lobby of the symphony. It was also like the Third Street arcade. It was meant to be a public walkway. Third Street is also a big main bus artery in Seattle. So I wanted to do something that had a presence outside on the street as well as inside in the lobby. A lot of people in Seattle thought the symphony was really expensive and it wasn't accessible.

I really wanted people to think of this as a kind of a really fascinating space that maybe they could have access to. Then if they went inside, that maybe they'd go to a concert, rather than thinking it's just an elitist place that they don't have access to. So often there's more than one idea behind what I'm trying to do.

What was great about that project was that I was able to work with the architects and they wanted something in this space. What I was able to do was design these kind of niches so that they were almost like dioramas so that the edges were curved in both directions. So you really didn't have a sense of where that space ended. It was only about three, three-and-a-half feet in depth.

But because of the curving of it, you had an illusion of not knowing that depth. I used energy efficient lighting. I used a Lutron dimming system that they had for the symphony and just had an extra layer of dimmers put in to add to the overall controls that they had.

MIJA RIEDEL: Perfect, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I used electronic ballasts and fluorescents with dimmer electronic ballast and T8s and T5s. They were at the time the most energy efficient fluorescents you could get and I had special filters made for them with these different colors.

So the color moved not just from below to above. So it went from the golds to the blues but also it went from east to west so that the light went in gradation. So if you look at a sunset, it's not the same intensity all the way along.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So each color was different. What was great, I worked with a Lutron technician to do all the programming. I'd write the program and he'd put it in the computer. I think the overall thing that I wanted was—the technical side of it, I wanted something that was energy efficient and maintainable.

Apart from that, I don't really want anyone to see any of the technical stuff. You couldn't see any of the fixtures or anything. If I hadn't had the opportunity to work with the lighting designer who designed the lighting for the whole outer lobby with down lights so that there was enough available light for people to see and eat dinner or have drinks and she was very sensitive. I'd like to put her name in.

MIJA RIEDEL: We'll add it.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: All right. The fact that I worked with her made all the difference because someone could have ruined my piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So what ended up by happening which was great was not only could you view it from the street, but you could view it from inside and you could feel the whole ambience of the whole space changing. It was a kind of putty color, neutral color and so the whole glow of the space changed depending if the blues or the golds or the more amber colors that came in.

So you get the whole ambience of the space changed. So when people were having drinks or dinner before the symphony, they had a chance of being bathed in this sequence of continually changing light and I saw again metaphorically the difference—the kind of connection of waves of light and waves of sound so that they're being prepared in a visual way for the sonic waves that were going to affect them when they go into the symphony.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I had really good feedback from people, actually musicians in the symphony, which was very nice, as well as the public.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. What were some of the comments? Do you remember?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Just that it was a really relaxing place for them to go and they felt that—the people in the symphony liked it because they actually could have a break and a rest and especially in Seattle it gets dark about three o'clock in the afternoon in the winter and it's often grey and it rains sometimes for more than 40 days.

So there was this thing about bringing light into a place that can be very grey, especially in the winter. So I felt really good about the piece. It's still working well. They're maintaining it. They're caring for it and I feel it still works and has an idea of what it was when I first intended it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Two questions. Had there been a significant evolution technically in what was available to you now—this is 1998 I think for Seattle—compared to what was available when you designed the *Sky Dance* for Denver?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was a different notion. I couldn't have done—fluorescents would have never made that kind of—I could never have done that kind of flow with fluorescents.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, the technology had changed. But I think what I was able to do was the best thing about *Skytones* was I was able to plug into their dimming system.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to ask. They already had a much more sophisticated—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: They already had a kind of theatrical system.

MIJA RIEDEL: So they had a very sophisticated lighting system in place would have been the difference.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, where I had to put in all that for Denver.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right, so that was—made I'm sure all the difference, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Shall we stop here for today?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Is that all right?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, perfect.

[END OF TRACK AAA_murch10_1756_m.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anna Valentina Murch at the artist's home in San Francisco, California, on May 22, 2010, for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project. This is disc number six.

I thought we would continue our conversation today starting with a conversation about *Confluences*, the Seattle piece.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: This piece began in 2006, did it?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, it was actually quite a fast-track project.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. I was asked to—I went—they interviewed several artists for the project. I got the commission. What was really interesting about it was that it was the King County office building where all the administrators for the social services were housed in this one building. I met with several of the people that worked there or were going to work in the new facility and what I was impressed by was how dedicated they were to their work.

Some of them were involved with the environment. Some of them were involved with water, some with health plans. They all had their own centers but often there was crossings over. So they actually met and mixed with each other.

The one thing that they said to me is, "Please don't do a piece about all the angst and all the difficulties that we have to deal with. We know all that very well and we want something that's uplifting, something to take us away from all the trials and tribulations that we have to conquer every day in our work." So I worked on an idea of these different centers and came up with these nine centers that were really rippling off each other.

I call it *Confluences* and probably because I'd done a lot of work with water. But I wanted to have a sense of these different motions or eddies flowing around each other and around the ceiling. I had been asked to do something for the ceiling and asked to do a hanging piece. I thought it—I didn't want to do something that was just hanging from one point.

I wanted a field of experience that you actually walked under and 'round. It was a very strange lobby. It was very narrow and very long and very high. So I wanted to kind of make an experience that you walked under and through to get in and out of the building.

The developer who was in charge of the building association for the city was really great, a fantastic woman, who said, "What do you need?" and redid the ceiling so that I could attach elements from any point and allowed me—changed the light—they hadn't put in the lighting system yet. They were waiting for me to come up with a design.

So they washed the walls with fluorescent lights and also put in for me all these MR16s so I could light the piece. The piece is as very much about light and shadow as it is about form. As with *Skytones*, Seattle in the winter is pretty grim, getting dark at about three o'clock and this is north facing so it never gets any sun in that lobby at all at any time of the year.

So I wanted something that was light and airy for the people and used—it was a fairly small commission. I worked with Fabrication Specialties, that are really great fabricators and was able to do this field of swirls, if you like, out of perforated steel that was just painted white.

So they almost look like—I wanted to look as ethereal and transparent as possible but still have a sense of motion and activity. The motion really is through all the moiré of the two different elements coming together. Each one is a different arc and a different angle of repose.

So each layering of shadows is different. So there's a simplicity but also a complexity with the way the layers all come together.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right, it sounds—it's interesting that this was happening roughly at the time that you were working on Miami too with that sense of all those slightly different angles of repose that seem extremely simple but that come together in a very complex way.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Technologically, was this as demanding?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, it was actually very easy. Well, first of all I made a model. I can't work on the computer. Well, I can now. But I made a model and then I redrew the pieces so they were more accurate and then remade a model out of the cut pieces that I made. I tried at one point to do a three-dimensional model but I didn't have the flexibility of making a real model.

So then I made a real model but then I was able to collapse the real model and put them back into CAD so the pieces could be—because each one of these arcs was a different diameter and a different shape. But they were all being able to be cut on a laser—a water jet cutter. So it was actually quite—again, it would have been something that you couldn't have done before that technology came in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But it became very simple to do and then when they did the installation, they took my plan of the ceiling, actually blew it up as a large drawing on the ground and then with a laser pointed up they knew exactly what points and where to put it. So the computer actually helped tremendously in making it because we could—and because I used such a fine perf because it was inside, I didn't have to deal with it being vandal-proof because no one was going to walk on the ceiling.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There was no edging that was necessary, just the edging that attached it to the ceiling, which had a kind of plywood behind it so we could make attachments at any point. So it was simple, yes. I couldn't have done it 10 years ago when the technology didn't exist.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. It sits in—it hangs in the lobby above another piece called *Rotation*.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What's the relationship between those two? How did they evolve?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, there was money left in the overall building budget and so they asked me to do another piece and at first they hadn't wanted me to do anything with the ceiling, on the walls. But I said, "Well, can I do something on the wall?" and they said, "Yes."

I actually used one of the initial drawings that I'd done as a kind of—to get in the feel for those kind of rotation patterns, hand drawing, and then converted that into a computer drawing. So it's almost like a map of what happens on the ceiling.

It becomes—it's almost like a light box but it's stainless steel cut with many—I can't remember exactly—about 500 or 600 lines, score lines, and they're all different widths and lengths. There's LED lights behind. The LED lights are at the back of the four-inch box and then there's a layer of quite thick diffusion Plexiglas and then there's an air gap between the front plate.

So you're not quite sure where the light is coming from. What I liked most about that piece is that as you walk past it you get a kind of movement mirage of how they begin to interconnect. So again, it has that sense of light and movement and it's a different way of activating the wall, especially for —there's a little waiting area where there's a few seats.

For those people that are actually not walking but are actually sitting, they can sit there and look at the wall piece as well as look up at the ceiling. So there's a relationship back and forth.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely. Shall we move on to Miami [*Water Scores*]?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Because that is one of the longest pieces from start to finish, 10 years right?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And one of the most complex pieces too and another one that was really very much dependent on technology.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really pushed the edges of what technology can do right now.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, how did that come about?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, initially I was asked to send in slides. I heard nothing for six months and then I found out I was one of 12 people that were selected to be interviewed. Then I went to Miami and was interviewed for the project and then because they were running late in Miami with all their—the panel couldn't meet again to make a decision for another three months.

So then finally they picked I think five of us to do projects, a couple of people from Miami—three people from Miami, one from New York and one from San Francisco, me. I was the only one—everyone else were painters. I was the only one that—they wanted me to do something for the lobby and initially actually something for the bridge.

But I was very concerned that there really wasn't enough money for both projects. But they wanted me to work on both. My idea for the plaza really came from where the place was situated, which was very close to the water's edge. It once had been the water's edge and the local stone there is this stone called oolite, which is very soft. It's got a lot of—it's a marine limestone. It's got a lot of little shells in it.

I wanted—well, maybe I should backtrack a bit. First of all what I wanted to do was really think about the beaches and the way water was moving around Miami. Most people think about Miami as being a beach place or a holiday place. I wanted to do—I had this kind of notion of bringing together sound and kind of the rhythms of sound and the rhythms of water.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In the bridge project what I had done were these kind of swirling shapes that almost looked like music lines that were moving as arches around the bridge.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In the plaza, what I was interested in doing is working with these ramps. What had happened was because of all the hurricanes and storms that they have, they're not allowed to have an entrance to a new building like that which is on ground level. It has to be up a certain amount because of all the flooding that can happen.

So the landscape architect, Diana Balmori, who I had gone out to New Haven to meet and was great, we had a discussion about what the plaza was. After the initial beginning of getting the project, they had wanted me to go and work with her and see what kind of ideas that I would come up with.

She had done these incredible ramps taking people from the street up to the Performing Arts Center, which existed of symphony on one side and opera on the other. The other thing that was very difficult about the project was there was a main road running through the middle of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Everybody wanted a plaza that would have a cohesive whole but with a road running through it, it became much more problematic. Anyway, Diana had designed these beautiful ramps to bring people up, as well as stairs, to the entrances of the buildings.

I thought rather than having these kind of troughs of—where the water feature would be that maybe they could also become ramps which became almost the memory of these beaches around so that each one of these ramps had a different angle of repose and a different rhythm.

I think another thing that's run through my work a lot is being concerned about systems and rhythms and making people more aware of their own internal rhythms and the rhythms that are around them. The extraordinary thing about oceans and rivers is they have their own rhythms as well. We have our own rhythm and to kind of deal with the synchronicity of those things.

So I came up with these three-dimensional patterns which I actually made out of—my first model was out of Plasticine and then I did later ones out of plaster which began to show these different rhythms. Initially in the idea I had first of all thought about doing them as scores in stone or concrete and I did some trials of running water down it. But the effect wasn't interesting enough.

So I ended up by doing these much more three-dimensional models. I knew they'd be more expensive and difficult but the whole look and sound was so much better. Initially, the whole piece was going to be made of—I was going to make these form lines. I was going to hand sculpt all these different ramps and then have the molds made and then they were going to be form lines for concrete.

What ended up happening was—and everyone kind of approved it and said, "Fine," but what ended up happening was that everyone wanted me to do the bridge project and that before I went into too much development on the plaza said, "No, no, the plaza can wait. You've got to get the bridge bit going."

So I worked with an engineer on making sure that the structure for the bridge would work and they said—the whole thing with Miami was kind of hurry up and wait, hurry up and wait. After waiting all this time, then all of a sudden it was like you have three weeks to do the engineering of your piece for the bridge or we can't do it.

At the time, I found someone in Seattle that could do 3-D modeling. I'd made a physical model. They scanned my three-dimensional model and it was one of the first times that that was possible, to be able to do that. I had an engineer working on what kind of infrastructure one would need to be able to hold these in place, the braces and everything.

Then by the time we actually got it finished and I got it done in time, they said, "Well, actually it's still too late." By that point I was so disappointed I said, "Okay, then what happens with the plaza," and they said, "Well, we'll wait. We have to wait a little bit for the plaza." I did actually call back in a month and they said, "Well, we're not quite ready yet," and I said, "Okay, fine," and then I didn't hear from them for at least I think it was two or three years.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my. And this is the most extreme experience you've had in terms of a project deadlines.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Because most people—things have changed but you've been kept in the loop all the time. But it was never quite this kind of wait. It's like mañana, wait and then everything has to happen immediately and all the rest of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So of course when they called me again and they said, "Well, the good news is we're still wanting to do this." I thought that this might happen. I thought, well, eventually they'll have forgotten about it and then all of a sudden they'll say, "Oh dear, we haven't got anything for here. What are we going to do? Oh yes, I remember now, maybe we're going to do this water piece."

The wonderful thing that happened, and this is the first time I've ever known this to happen, the architects that were César Pelli and Roberto [Espejo] was the architect that I worked with, what happened was first of all why it

had all gone on hold for so long at this time in between was because in the time that the initial design happened and then the initial concepts happened, everything went on hold because Miami didn't have enough money to do the Performing Arts Center.

But they built a stadium in that time. Then finally they got some money and it was a joint venture between the Dade County and also private development or private funders. Initially it was going to be a stucco building.

So it was a really—for such a grand event, it was a very reasonable building. Apparently what happened as that some of the stakeholders or some of the main collectors in Miami had talked to César Pelli and they said, "Well, is this really going to be a state of the art building," and he said, "Well, no," and they said, "Well, what does it need?" He said, "Well, it would help if it was made of stone, if it was faced with stone."

They said, "Okay, well then let's do it," which meant the whole engineering of the building had to change to hold the stone. But it meant the whole cost of the budget went up and it meant the public art project budget went up.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So after having the building go from being concrete to stone, it became much easier for me to change materials for what I was doing. I think the other interesting thing that happened was I went—they finally got me to go back to Miami to look at the site. I said, "Well, if I can do it in another material, I'd really like to use travertine."

The architects first of all said, "No, you've got to use granite. Water features have to be granite." I said, "Well, what about if you look at all the fountains in Rome and they've been there for quite a long time now, they're all made of travertine." The travertine is a marine limestone which is several million years older than oolite but it's in the same family.

So I thought that it worked very well in that way. It reminded you of what was underground but it was in a much more substantial material.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Also as much as it was expensive to use travertine, travertine was much less expensive than building it in granite.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, perfect.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because the material was less expensive and the cutting of it wasn't as expensive. Then I went through the whole aspect of okay, how do I actually do this. One of the things that César Pelli and Roberto were really good at was then making it from being outside the project to then beginning to be inside the project and them saying—what had happened first of all is actually the art program had suggested that I work with a contractor in Miami.

What happened there was there was kind of a discrepancy about who was going to design the under-ramps that the piece was going to go on top of. There'd been a fight between Roberto and Eduardo, the contractor and the architect, and they had a standing fight that actually I'm very glad I wasn't present at that meeting. [Laughs.]

So the art program said, "We definitely can't work with him again," my contractor there. So then who was I going to work with to build this piece? So what happened was the architect—there was a whole group of people from the symphony and Dade County that were going out to Miami to look at the stone for the building. They thought this was a perfect opportunity for me to come as well and for all this group to go around.

The stone contractor on board could work with me on it and they set up through their Italian connection for me to meet—I think it was five contractors, stone manufacturers in the Carrara area, and for each one of them to give a bid on doing this project. Before I went out, I had made the model and I think I had begun working with—I can do basic CAD VectorWorks. But I can't do 3-D modeling on a computer.

I wanted to know—I talked to someone about doing Rhino or different kind of programs and none of them were complicated enough to be able to do what I wanted to do. I'd done the plans and the layouts and I'd made three-dimensional models of each section but not a three-dimensional physical model of all of it. I can't remember the name of the program now.

I called this one software company to find out who would—that everyone said could maybe be able to do this and convert it to a three-dimensional CAD machine. I called them to find out whether if they knew anyone that I could work with.

MIJA RIEDEL: So just to clarify, you've designed something that you don't know exactly—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: How to make it, absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Or if it even can be made.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, I mean all I know is—I mean, I know that it could be done if I made the forms.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I know that now there are now 3-D CNC machines that can make different things. What I didn't know is that whether someone could do 168 feet that continually changed in stone and what kind of program that would be. So I knew it—I mean, I knew enough about what was happening in technology to know that if you put the pieces together, well why not.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But the fact that it hadn't happened before, I thought, "Well, good, this is a great possibility of it being able to happen." The person that was the representative for this software company said, "Oh," Kevin Richards said, "Well, I'd really like to work on this," and I said, "Well, okay and so let's try." So he did a little piece for me, just a little section.

MIJA RIEDEL: This was—sorry, which software again?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I can't remember the name of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, we'll get it.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Now they've been taken over by someone else. But I've got the name of it all. So he made a small model of it, I mean, a small section of it in 3-D and I went out to Italy. Every one of these five people said, "Oh yes, yes, of course we can do this. It's easy," right? I said, "It's got to be done by," I think it needed to be done within a year. "Oh, we can build the whole of New York in a year."

MIJA RIEDEL: Sounds like Italy.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. It ended up actually by this one company having the—they were the smallest company but actually I liked them a lot and they ended up by being able to do the project because it came in at a reasonable price.

But then we had to go through converting all of it into these 3-D CAD—or no, these drawings—which even Kevin, being this complete computer young whiz, the software that existed couldn't do it. So he was continually going back and forth with his—with the engineers for the program to change the program to be able to do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's fascinating. That is fascinating. So you were evolving technology as you went.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: How interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It was fantastic. So then he managed to be able to do it. we had a website, like what do they call it, an FTP site to be able to—so they could—it took him like two days to download them onto the site and it took the Italians two days to get them off the site.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There was a kind of difficulty first of all between the Italian computer young whiz and the American computer young whiz and they wouldn't talk to each other. I think the only way I got them to talk to each other is when first of all when I went out to Italy, I had—sorry, I can't remember his name either now—him in the office in the stone yard and I got Kevin on the line.

First of all, one of them would talk to me and then in the end after like half an hour of them not talking to each other but talking through me, I actually said, "Well, why don't you talk to each other?" [Laughs] It was on speakerphone and we actually got them to talk to each other.

MIJA RIEDEL: What had been the problem? Just some kind of personal glitch?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think the thing with all these projects is that you can—it doesn't matter how brilliant everyone is, but it comes right down to it, personality.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, simple as that.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: And egos and when you get sometimes male egos, they don't necessarily always—you have to find a way of making them feel comfortable with each other to be able to work, "Oh right, it's my fault, oh it's his fault." It's like they go back and forth about what's happening.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But in the end we actually got them to communicate to understand what the problems—there were some problems with holes in the programs and things had to be done a slightly different way. But all those things got resolved, which was amazing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Extraordinary. So you're evolving the program here in the States and over in Italy is there a program? Can they understand what's going on as it's being evolved?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: There's a different program, which it had to go through this engineering program. Because his program could do the software and I could get—when I was doing the pieces, as much as it all looked great on the screen, I got sections of it made in styrene here by someone because I wanted to make sure that three-dimensionally, it actually physically worked.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I did the tests on the water on the three-dimensional styrene models and plastic models before we had them cut in stone.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were these some percentage of the actual?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, different sections.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because I wanted to make sure that—and even just the way the edge was done made a real difference to how the water flowed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure, absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So there was all that going on simultaneously. The model making company that usually made kind of widgets and things for—like they'd make a three CNC model of something like a cell phone container and then it would be sent to China or somewhere to be produced.

But they made all the prototypes. But they'd never done a—so they were used to making lots of little prototypes and I was only asking them to make sections that were two foot by 18 inches. Each section was that and then you'd join them all together. But that was the biggest thing they'd ever done.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But it was good for me to actually have someone near at hand that I could work with to get those first prototypes made.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think the other—what was always interesting to me about all these projects is how much all these people, the personalities and the involvement of the people. If they treated it just like any old job that they can just cross off the list, none of this would ever happen and I think I've been very lucky to work with people, and maybe it's my enthusiasm and the ideas that I have. I always talk to people about the ideas that I have and what it's part of rather than just giving it to them cold. I give them some background so they can become part of the project. So everyone, it doesn't matter what they're doing, has a chance of becoming part f this project. So they buy into it. So they might end up by spending more time on it but they feel a commitment to the project. I think this is what happened all the way through in Miami.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's also something I think about that kind of cutting edge element to a project that certain people find incredibly compelling and so they will step up to the plate because they're intrigued.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: One of the interesting thing about the fabricators for Miami, when I went to visit their yard when we were visiting the five different people, I saw these pieces of stone cut that were really beautiful

shapes and I thought, "Oh these are really great. They're wonderful. Where are they going?" He said, "Oh, somewhere in California." I said, "Oh, really? Where is it?" "Oh, we're not quite sure," and they were the sonic dish that architects—

MIJA RIEDEL: That was going into Fresno?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, Fresno, exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh my goodness.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's wonderful.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So there was that wonderful connection there as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely and you had no idea they were coming from there.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, when we asked who was fabricating, they said, "Oh we're having it fabricated in the States." Well, they didn't. The people that were meant to fabricate it couldn't do it because Antonio was one of these people that if things were really difficult and odd, they would send it to his shop. It was the smallest but he was absolute expert on doing very difficult things.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was the name of the shop? Do you remember or his last name?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I can't remember.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where is it located?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: It's in Pietrasanta, just outside Carrara. But, no, they were great. Then I went out—again, the wonderful thing about this project was that I had to make several trips to Italy, which I didn't mind at all. One of the trips I saw the first samples that they cut and they cut two different samples.

One sample had to be a prototype that was sent back to Miami to test the water before everything else was installed. Then there was the other pieces that had to come later. They had cut one piece, which was the smallest section. I think it was a 38.5 foot piece on the symphony side and they cut that absolutely beautifully.

But the piece that was the sample for the—just a prototype really—they cut it too fast and if you cut things very fast, the quality isn't right. I had trouble persuading Antonio that the quality wasn't up to it and he said, "But it's not even going to be a part of the permanent piece." I said, "No, but it's the first thing they're going to see and it's really important it's done right."

The young man who was doing all the computer, he did it in a different way. He had what he called a robot. I've actually got a video of it moving back and forth.

MIJA RIEDEL: It would be interesting to include that at some point, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: He said, "No, we did it too fast because we were coming out." They redid it and resent it and it was perfect and every other part of the project was perfect, which was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: That says something in and of itself.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Maybe it would have been perfect anyway but I wasn't willing to have that be the sample that everyone saw first of all. The other thing that I thought was very interesting about the project was with the stone, was that even though it was all done by computer, all the finishing had to be done by hand.

Again, I think that's what the Italians are really good at is all that kind of very careful finishing. So the joints of where things came together were absolutely perfect and the finish on top and everything. So the craftsmanship was great. I also worked with I remember Titan Stone were the contractors who did the stone on the whole building and Paul Lavasseur was their building manager and he was absolutely fabulous.

When I had first began on the project and had been discussing whether I could do it with stone, because I was going to have just carved ridges in stone rather than a form, I had called him and asked what the protocol was for getting in touch with stone people, that he would get in touch with or should I go through him and he said,

"Oh, don't worry about it. Just get in touch with them directly."

Because it went on hold, I never did. But he remembered me from that first conversation several years beforehand and he was really great to work with. So I was very lucky in the end that the people that I—with all the craziness of the Italian and the stone manufacturers and everything, they were all very proud of working on the project.

The benches as well were another travertine—marina travertine, which I really had much more of a vein running through it which came from one place in—another part of—actually both the quarries came from Tivoli. I even went out to Italy to pick up the blocks that the stone was from, which was great. Then they made those.

Not only did they make them perfectly but I wanted the veining to look as if, even though they were in sections, four-foot sections, I wanted it to look as if the veining was connected. The seats are kind of very soft curved, big soft round edges so that you can sit on both sides and that you can hear, depending on your distance from the water, you can hear the sound of water very more intensely or less intensely if you're wanting to have a conversation or not hear the water or be away from people.

As well too that kind of meandering quality, the rhythm and flow of water, which is apparent in a lot of projects, I wanted that to carry through as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's a real theatricality to this space too, which is so appropriate for the entrance to this, both the ballet on one side and the symphony on the other, is it?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes. I wanted to connect them. Again, I changed the lighting so that there was up-lighting. We did a mockup for the lighting. One of the lighting designers on the project had put them—I just did them slightly, so before they put all the cans in the wall, they were slightly different angle. We had to get them so they raked up completely to cover the whole wall but weren't at such an angle that you couldn't see the light coming up-light from the ramp. So there was this kind of balancing back and forth. But it became this kind of color of water as the kind of welcoming color for people to be walking up and down the steps in the plaza.

MIJA RIEDEL: In the end, was everything realized pretty much as you had hoped?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes. The one part that I never felt—well, the part I never felt quite comfortable about was the plaza paving. I felt very sad that Diana couldn't get stone for the plaza. It was brick and it should have been stone.

I think that was a big—the pattern wasn't exactly the pattern—wouldn't have been the pattern that I would have designed. But I think it was—if it had been in stone, if it had been in travertine or two different kinds of granite, a light granite and a dark granite, I think it would have looked beautiful.

But I think that that material, the brick didn't work in the context of everything else. I think what was amazing was that in the end the architects changed the steps to be the same color. It was a kind of terrazzo that was the same color as the travertine so that it connected.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, exactly.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: The platforms above that were going to be a different material became travertine. So they ended up by changing their design to work with my water elements because they—I mean, it kind of made sense to them as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, you wanted the continuity.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes, which I thought was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was the problem with the brick? Why was Diana not able to get stone?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Money.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, finances.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Which I think—in the final hour they didn't do that. We almost got it but we didn't, which I think was a great disappointment for me and for her I'm sure as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: But with the exception of that, it is as you envisioned it?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes. The only other thing is they could have had a little bit more water on the large side, not water but a slightly larger pump. But I think it still works. The workmanship is exquisite and they

changed all the sides, the walls against, that was all now travertine. It had been kind of a mosaic brick. So all that became a seamless kind of one uniform shape and color, which I think made it read as a whole.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, in the visuals it certainly looks that way, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In the visuals, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds as if this was a really satisfying project and one that comes closest to your actual envisioning of what you wanted.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Shall we move on to *Arroyo Suite* because that is another one that seems to have had a large level of success?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: This one was in California? In Southern California?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, in Southern California.

MIJA RIEDEL: L.A., Century City, is that right?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes. Yes, there's a percent for art there, even in private buildings, and Tamara Thomas was the art consultant. They brought in I think it was at least six—she was probably the best art consultant I've ever worked with and even heard of. She was absolutely fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: What in particular?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because what she did was really engage the client in a whole educational process before she brought the artist in. So by the time they met—so she showed them an incredible amount of work, discussed the work, narrowed it down, narrowed it down, they had a sense of knowing what choices they could have, narrowing down the possibilities of what they had so that by the time they met the artist, they were really excited about what the possibilities could be.

MIJA RIEDEL: Got you.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: She interviewed six—I think there were six of us that were interviewed and then miraculously I got the project. I was really thrilled about it. The interesting thing about it was that—sorry, when I get tired the first thing that goes is names.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, we can always add those.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Okay. The architect, Johnson Fain, was fabulous and Mia Lehrer was the landscape architect. Everything had kind of been designed and the architect said after I got the project, "Look," to the landscape architect that was there as well, "Look, let's be open to whatever Anna wants to do in this space."

It was a very—again, mostly when you get brought into these things, you get brought into very difficult situations. This was a kind of alley, if you like, which was kind of a back plaza which was between a 12-, 13-story high-rise building, the highest rise building that was going to be in Century City, and I think a six-story parking garage on one side and another parking garage on the end.

So it was really a very closed space and I thought of it as being a canyon. Therefore I thought of it as being a canyon that maybe could reference a canyon that was a more natural canyon in Los Angeles.

But maybe I should go back a little bit and say when I had my first meeting with the whole design team and the developer, that Scott Johnson said, "Let's be open about what Anna does. We don't mind changing some of the architecture. Mia, I want you to be open to changing the landscape," and she said, "Fine." He said, "Fine."

So then I went away and starting thinking about it and I thought about this place as being a kind of canyon, an arroyo, and being evidence of what—in Los Angeles you often get these kind of debris flows which kind of carve out areas of the landscape.

Yes, I'm from Northern California and Southern California takes out water and there's a kind of association where they don't really—they're not as environmentally conscious. They may be now but they definitely weren't then and to kind of remind them of the preciousness of water. The wonderful thing about L.A. is people can reinvent themselves and anything is possible.

Actually, one of the clients in the building, the main client was MGM, which Scott was really great about. He said, "I don't want you to meet them," and the developer didn't want me to meet them. He said, "They'll want you to put lions there or something. Just we'll keep them out of it. Do what you want to do."

So what I thought about doing was this almost the memory of water. So it was like carving the arroyo. The space was over a parking garage and there had already been planting on either side. What was great from the developer's point of view was that I was able to take not just the art budget but also the landscape budget and combine them to really address the whole space.

So I turned the walls that had been retaining walls for the trees—the only thing I couldn't do was change the placement of where the tree wells were. So what I did is change—make a kind of retaining wall which has kind of a curvilinear flow to it and I wanted it to be reminiscent to the stone. It would have been far too expensive to do it in stone.

So I did it—I worked with Shaw and Sons, these fantastic concrete contractors, and did a stratified wall. I went down when the pour was being done. I'd made all these models with all the different—so each strata had a different aggregate and some of it even had kind of mica in it so it had a sense of looking like the strata of all the cliffs of California that were around there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So as if it had been carved by water and then there's this kind of more metaphorical ribbon of seating in stainless steel which also became a bench that people could sit on. That led you to these vessels that were these kind of water bowls.

Again, I think one of the main inspirations for the piece was thinking about the old geology and thinking about the first inhabitants of the land, who actually were incredible stewards of the land and knew how to work with all the natural systems. They didn't leave that many marks because they were so careful, not because they didn't have any culture. I think that's where the mistake has happened in the past, not necessarily now.

So I wanted to honor them for what they had done and the people and the culture that they represented. So I made these bowls that each one of them had a different feather pattern that came from the different baskets. Each one was, again, at a different angle of repose and had a different shatter pattern.

So each one of them sounded different, so that when you walked through you could hear—I wanted to use water in the most minimal way. Yes, being inspired by a lot of Islamic gardens, by places like Alhambra where you don't need that much water but it's the quality of a little bit of water that makes it very special.

As you walked through this kind of linear plaza, you could hear sonically, almost in quadraphonic, the water coming from different places and as well when the water is turned off you get these beautiful mosaics of these different granite tiles in two different levels so that it forms the chatter.

At the end of the walkway, there are these flutes that are reminiscent of the fish traps that become a kind, again, a kind of symbol of what those are and they become a kind of—an entrance, a gateway into what that space is. So with all these projects I'm interested in these layers building on each other.

So you're getting these sequences of different elements that connect to each other. Each one works on its own but collectively together they begin to make a story. They begin to make a sequence of events that makes you have a kind of reminiscent.

It's dealing with the old and yet trying to do it in a very contemporary way, making you look back but also making you look forward, making you think about now more than ever the preciousness of water and how important it is and making you not just think about the old baskets but making you think about the ideology.

Yes, I don't know if any people will think about all the things that I think about when I'm doing it and I think even if people don't, that they work in formal ways, but I suppose I'm hopeful to give people an opportunity to be able to think about what some of those ideas might be. I think it's wonderful that so many of the Native Americans made decisions not for what was immediate but for what would work in seven generations and how wonderful if we could do that now.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think it's interesting too how you took the Native American elements that you mentioned: the fish trap and the feather pattern, and in scale they become so much larger than one would ever see them. The fish traps are almost the size of small trees.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: [Laughs] Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And the patterns are so much larger than—they actually were larger than life. I think it does bring

attention to them to a whole different degree, whether you know what they're referencing or not. When you talk about them in that sense, it makes even more of an impact I think.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So I feel very good about the project.

MIJA RIEDEL: The lighting of that piece was very important too, the way the fish baskets are lit, the way the perforation through the seats, the curvilinear seating that throws, casts beautiful shadows, gives it almost a dappled quality to the light there.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right, no, thank you. That's what I wanted to do and again I worked with Teal—I can't remember the name of the company. But she was very—she suggested having light under the bench or having LED kind of dots of light. But I wanted it much more subtle than that. I wanted to see the illumination and the shadow, not a line of light.

The up-lighting, so we managed from one of the roof of the garage to down-light the walkway and that's why you've got all the shadows not just during the day with the sun but also at night and up-lighting the fish traps and also down-lighting them and having a spotlight on each one of the bowls so that there was kind of in a way a kind of minimalism but also a theatricality in the lighting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So because people were working there late at night, that it was a place that people could walk back and forth and sit outside there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Also, that piece I think is a very good example of the importance that you give to creating a sequence of spaces, the sense of a sequence of moving through different areas is I think especially pronounced.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and I use what I could do in each area. I couldn't have—they had to be different because of the areas but I like the idea of being able to make—that each one area all the same. Quite honestly, if I hadn't worked—the other thing about that project was the contractors were fantastic.

Dinwiddie, Hathaway Dinwiddie were the contactors and it was the same contractor—Don, who was the project manager for them—was the same contractor who had worked—this is again a kind of interesting loop—had worked with Richard Meier on the Getty, did the contract there. So we had that connection as well. No, they were great to work with. They cared about quality as much as anyone else. I think—they called it the art canyon. [Laughs.]

But no, I think the developer was very open, very supportive. Everyone was. Tamara was absolutely fantastic. It was actually one of the easiest projects I have worked on in the fact of coordinating and working with everybody.

The only slight difficulty was that the person that was doing the water ended up by not being as reliable as everyone else. But everyone else was superb. I'm very proud of it, as I was.

MIJA RIEDEL: We'll pause here.

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ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Actually, we did talk about the—

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anna Valentina Murch on May 22, 2010, for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project at her home in San Francisco, California. This is disc number seven.

So let's move on to the equally long, in terms of Miami, project that was almost as long in time, though completely different in evolution, is the GSA project that you've been working on since 2001 I believe for the U.N.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: U.S. mission to the U.N. in New York.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That was something that kind of came out of the blue. All of a sudden I got a telephone call I think from Susan Harrison saying they wanted to—I was one of the artists that they wanted to

interview for the U.S. U.N. building and I was absolutely thrilled. I couldn't believe it. I went out and I met Susan and I met Gwathmey-Siegel. Charles Gwathmey was the main interviewer there. I thought he was very—we had a really interesting conversation as well as him really understanding my work I think.

Much to my delight, I got the project. He was very open to me doing—they wanted me to do something in the outer lobby and he wanted me to do something—there's often this kind of mixed agenda. They wanted to have two main entrances and they wanted me to do something that would divide the space so people couldn't get through.

What I thought was really wonderful about Charlie was that he said, "Look, take your time. Don't worry about it. Just come up with whatever you want to come up with." I came up with an idea that—what I was trying to think about is what can I do.

All these extraordinarily important people that are making decisions about our future that go in—there are all these special meetings in the American embassy for the United Nations, these private get-togethers.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: What can I give them, any kind of subliminal information that will make them think about what they're about to talk about. The one thing that I was really interested in was what does not deal with borders.

What is it that we all share and that can't be controlled by borders and I was thinking of air, water, light and therefore somehow to draw attention to those invisible elements. The first project was really—came from thinking about lots of water drops and that if I could do this series—the ceiling that they have is a coffered ceiling, curved ceiling.

I almost thought of it as kind of a cave and the notion of these kind of stalactites, stalagmites, these kind of elements that were falling like drops of water into pools of water in the ground. First I wanted them to be real pools of water and there would be drops as well.

Then they became these catenary structures and instead of having pools they became almost like lenses. So they began to reflect, like mirror lenses of actually a dark granite that in New York there is a very dark, black granite that is in that area, so as if the ground is coming up and these drops of water are coming down.

The project got approved and the wonderful thing about it was ironically that everything was included in the construction documents. It went out to bid with the building. In the time I think from when I got—I think it was before 9/11. Was it after I got the project or was it just—

MIJA RIEDEL: It says the conceptual design was approved in March of 2001 and then June—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So it was before 9/11.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Everything changed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: All security, everything got put on hold. So there was an incredible wait before it even went out to bid. By the time it went out to bid—and the drawings had to be redone because things had to be even more security-oriented than they were before and more top secret.

By the time the project went out to bid, it came back and my part of the project was more expensive than the initial art budget. There wasn't even enough money for doing all of what the architecture was and combined with that, there was a Calder that I think had been owned or had been given by Calder to the State Department and had been housed somewhere else and had been offered back—offered to the U.S. U.N. building. So how can you possibly compete against a free Calder?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. [Laughs.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: So my project disappeared. I was of course terribly disappointed. There was still some of my design fee left because I'd held that back and the money I had spent on all the engineering hadn't been paid for and I was holding all that for when the construction was happening because I knew I'd have a lot of work to do then.

So what I asked was, was there a chance of me doing another piece in the building. What happened was that I

had—what different sites were available and I really liked the site of what I call the inner lobby, the inner drum after you've gone through all the metal detectors, the outer lobby, all the metal detectors and then there's this inner drum which is a really beautiful curved space with a stainless steel screen and stainless steel elevators.

There had been a niche in there which I'm not quite sure, some information or information was going to be there. I said, "Well, can I do something in there?" To me it looked like a potential window. There was no natural light. There was nothing natural in this space. It was completely controlled, all hard surfaces.

What I wanted to do was in fact keep to the initial concept that I had but really think about what image can I give that could inspire people to think about the qualities that don't allow borders and water was one of them or the landscape is another. All the way through my career, from going back to—I've always kind of taken photographs of the site.

I've always taken photographs for myself and I've always used photography as a way of holding moments of inspiration. In the last few years, when all the big projects were over, I went back to do more and more photographs just for me that had nowhere to go. It was just like to be reabsorbed with the elements that are really important to me and I had done a whole series of photographs of natural places.

One of them had been a lot of lakes and bodies of water because it seemed to me that a lot of the natural landscapes were dissolving and disappearing and that I wanted to somehow hold those precious moments before they disappear. I proposed doing one of these photographs for the GSA.

At first it was whether it was going to be a piece actually on glass, an image on glass that was backlit because I wanted it to be almost like a window into another world. Then in the end I decided that I would do it as a tapestry because there was nothing soft in this space and again, tapestry is one of the oldest forms. It dates back further than oil painting.

So there was something very classical about it and now tapestries can be done in very—with a jacquard loom. They use the computer so there's a kind of real modern aspect to it as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Such a multicultural aspect to it as well too, yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and so I proposed doing this, went again to another meeting and had it approved. The installation, the tapestry is made already and it will be installed in July. So it will be raked—the lighting will be raked onto it. So you won't see the light fixture.

It will just be illuminated as a kind of very—it's probably now the smallest commission I've ever done but to me it's actually one of the most important because of the place it's in and as a very simple gesture in a way to remind people of the beauty and the fragility of the landscapes that are eroding, as with global warming and everything else, and just hopefully as this kind of very delicate reminder of how beautiful these spaces are, rather than showing the horror of the erosion, to show the beauty of these landscapes that we need to care for.

We need to care for them collectively as a way of bringing us together. So that's the kind of overall gesture behind what I'm trying to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's interesting. That piece is interesting I think for a couple of other reasons too. The first that comes to mind is I can't think of a single other piece you've done that's involved a tapestry.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: But what it does that is very similar to your other work is it again pushed sort of the technological edge. You had to send—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: To Belgium, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: To Belgium to have the tapestry made.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's some—there are new digital programs that allows for a very complicated new form of weaving, yes?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, that's right. It's an old system because the jacquard looms were the first computerized system. But now there's a kind of new way of doing it where they can do these really complicated woven weft and weave connections. No, I picked the colors to be used in the palette. There's 250 colors that collectively the threads make up.

No, I mean, so again it was a fantastic learning process for me, trying something new, which was very exciting as well. The imagery is similar to the imagery that I'm interested in and the content I think connects to other works that I've done.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's an extraordinary texture that goes from extremely dense tiny weave to much more open looser and there's a layering as well. So all those are elements that are reminiscent of your work—

[Cross talk.]

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Again, something that works from a distance and when you go close up, you get a much more visceral sensory quality. The physical and sensory qualities of work, as well as the ideas, it's trying to bring all those things together, not so that you see them departmentalized but they become one experience. I think that we do—our sense and the sensual quality of things inform us in a way that as well as our—so it's combining right and left brain in a way is I think what I've always wanted to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: That makes sense.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because I think when something is—I think it's beautiful. I hope other people think it's beautiful. I'm very interested in beauty in my work because I think if you can make something which is haunting or holds your attention and has a sense of beauty or of the sublime, then people will spend enough time to pay attention, they maybe they start thinking and then maybe you can make them not think about the possibilities of what something could be rather than one specific agenda.

If one can help make people begin to think about things in a new way, if we can all continually be opened to thinking in a new way about ideas or possible solutions or how we can work together or how we can care for the environment, I think we have a better way of coexisting and surviving and enjoying life. I don't see why we can't aim for all of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: When is that piece due to be installed?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: In July.

MIJA RIEDEL: So July of 2010 it should finally be completed.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Which will be very exciting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Will the general public have access to that? Can the general public visit that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I'm not sure. They have to go through all the metal detectors.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I don't know if they'll be able to go. I think they will. I think they will. What's interesting is it's the lobby where the two—visitors and staff will both go into this inner lobby. They go in through different entrances.

But then they're in this kind of rotunda shape that then they go up into the escalators and other rooms. But I presume that people will be able—it's not as public as if it had been in the outer lobby where you'd be able to view it from the street, but I think people will be able to see it.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's also one of the few commissions you've done that's an interior commission.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes and I actually wish I could do more interiors. I think they're—I liked all—the potential what I'd like to do most actually is the connection between inside and out. By doing things interior, you have an opportunity to be able to do things that don't have to quite deal with so many elements and so many vandals. It doesn't have to be kick proof.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: That part I think therefore you can do things that are a little bit more delicate, which would be nice to do. Do you think I could briefly talk about the *Cycles* piece in New York?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, let's talk about that, absolutely, the Queens Civic Court, yeah.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Queens, which connects—really came about—I guess that was about '90, a commission. It was not—to me, again, it was exciting to be in New York. It was my first courthouse and as well it was an extension in some ways of *Voyages* that I did for SECA as a way of thinking of centering devices.

Connecting to what I've said about I was interested in how—it's a space you can't actually get to. It's an exterior space but you can't go out there unless there's an emergency and there are emergency doors as an exit. But it was a dead space that the architects had to have because it was too near other buildings.

So it couldn't be high-rise at that point. But what was very interesting to me was that you could see it from very different points of view and I wanted to do something that could be a calming effect. To me, going to court, whether you're being chosen for the jury or whether you're going to be a witness seems to me it would cause a certain amount of anxiety.

So how do you make people think more calmly and think about asking the question of what is truth, how many different ways are there of seeing the same thing. So I used a kind of circle cycle idea and showed it in very many different ways. The vessels that were in the ground were really came from my reading about old Roman law and the old water clocks.

So again, they're kind of a symbol of that and the labyrinth is another way of thinking of journeys and pathways and possible ways to get to the truth or another destination. The wheel is just spinning with air currents, almost a kind of another symbol of power and judgment. This top, a top is a kind of child's toy but spinning and changing and there the reflection in the mirror continually makes you relook at the environment you're in.

So all of them are kind of about cycles or circles and relooking at that form but seeing it in very different ways. I think that nobody could go out there but they could see it from the stairs, from where you go in for being a juror or for waiting to go into court. They collectively make one piece but you can also see them in separate sections.

But what was nice is that I had control over a complete space and I was able to do something where all these separate sequences collectively make a whole. I mean, why I think I'd like to do something interior is because one can have more control over the lighting, more control over a kind of atmosphere and be able to do something that is experiential.

MIJA RIEDEL: Shall we talk briefly about teaching because we haven't touched on that at all and you've been teaching throughout your career.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: You taught at Berkeley for how long?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Two years.

MIJA RIEDEL: Two years and that was in the—

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think I began in '84.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay and what were you teaching there?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I was teaching beginning sculpture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay and you also taught at the San Francisco Art Institute.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, that was for about two-and-a-half years I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that sculpture as well?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Sculpture and an inter-media seminar and I think I did a graduate seminar as well there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Since '92 you've been teaching at Mills.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: I guess we don't have a lot of time to go into great detail, but what changes have you seen in that time, in the time that you've been teaching, in curriculum and what are some changes that you have tried to bring to your own courses?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Well, I think what's always been important to me is to try and do projects or

assignments that are provocative topics or ideas that have an interest for me and an interest for the students.

So I usually—especially with the seminars and the graduates—I change them depending on what's happening, the shows that are happening or the things that are current at the time. One of the things I always want to do is—there is an old system of teaching where you show people what you do and you make them do it and then they get so fed up with it that they end up finding their own voice. I've never been like that. I've always been—

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that your experience in school?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: No, it wasn't actually but it was what I heard that was happening. That's what was happening at the Art Institute when I was there and actually in a certain extent in Berkeley. But it didn't happen in England when I was teaching there. It was more team teaching and much more collaborative. What I've always been interested in is having a kind of—trying to make the students aware of their conceptual ideas and their physical manifestations and bringing both those things together and so that they're working on things that are of interest for them.

So if their personal experience or things that are very much of concern for them in the culture at large, they're bringing their own voice into every project that I get them to do. So I have a kind of complex agenda in a way.

I want them to learn, especially with sculpture, I want them to learn skills, especially young women. I don't want them to be penalized by not knowing certain things. But then when they know those, they can work in any field or any material that they want. They can use hair or steel, wood or light. It doesn't matter as long as they're working on ideas that they like and that are provocative for them.

I think the interesting thing that I really like about teaching at Mills is it is a liberal arts school. The students are very intelligent and they have a lot of resources from their other curriculum that they can draw from into their physical work in sculpture. I think I'm a kind of odd mix between being really interested in conceptual ideas but there's no point in having a great conceptual idea if the piece doesn't work in a real physical way.

So unless it has a physicality, a materiality, a sensory quality, it doesn't matter how great it is to read about it. You have to actually have a presence of the physical piece to make the piece work. So I'm trying to get them to use both sides of their brain.

I feel actually very optimistic through teaching in the fact that a lot of young people are really concerned about the environment, are really concerned about communities and as much as I'm getting older and they're getting younger, I feel that the dialogue between us is good if not better than ever.

I feel actually quite excited about when these young people grow up that they have very—they have a really good ethical sense that I think they will bring into the society, which is a nice thing to see because I think in teaching, or teaching people about art, the context of the art world, the history of art is really important.

But it's also I think important that—I think it was Laurie Anderson that said that ethics are the aesthetics of the future. I think that artists have to be ethically based as well as conceptually based as well as being very aware of what the physical object or image of their work is about. I think I'm asking too much. I'm asking too much of myself as well.

But one tries to bring a kind of hybrid of all these different things together. Some projects, one takes a little bit more dominance than the other. But I think it's trying to interweave all these issues that I think are important into a work.

MIJA RIEDEL: What are you working on now and what would you like to work on that you haven't yet?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think I'd like to work on spaces that people will—even if they're infrastructure projects, there are spaces that people can potentially spend some time in rather than just quickly pas through. I wish that they would—I wish that there would be an opportunity for—one of the things actually I would really like to do is places where people—sanctuaries, quiet spaces.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, I wondered—have you done any?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Not really, no. They're often places you walk through and public transportation—they're mostly places that people don't consider and therefore let's try and make it as bearable as possible and you try to make it into something very special. But it would be wonderful to have the opportunity to do these kinds of sanctuaries.

Initially I always wanted to do gardens of light and shadow and kind of internal spaces that had that that then you could move from an internal space to an external space. Bu they were about peaceful contemplative spaces rather than major activity. By contemplative, that doesn't mean to say you can't meet there and have a

conversation there, but a place that is not so much about how you get through it as quickly as possible.

But you could actually stay there for a while. I think that's something I would really like to do and something that has an interior as well as an exterior. So I see the gardens as being a garden of light and maybe objects but also a garden of objects and using physical plant material. I love the use of water. It becomes more and more difficult but I think it's a very special element.

But it's got to be done right and it's got to be maintained, as with lighting. I think to be able to do very special places with lighting and lighting becomes problematic because of the amount of foot candles you need in a public place to walk through. So you can't do the most delicate or ambient situations quite often because people need really high light levels.

As in a symphony, you can't—if you hear sound and you've got a drill going on outside, you can't hear the sound probably. If you've got too much ambient light, you can't see the effect of the light quality that you want. So those are some of the things I would like to do if there's a possibility for them. At the moment I seem to be working on a lot of infrastructure projects, which is very exciting. One of them is a bridge, which I'm working with Doug.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is this the one we were discussing in Oregon?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Willamette Bridge, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, Willamette.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Which would be great. Whether they'll end up by having the money to do the special things that we want because we want to do a kind of living breathing bridge that the lighting responds to the rhythm of the water under the bridge and the movement of the tides so that there's this kind of rippling of light across the cables of the bridge from what point people see it from a distance and walk across it.

When the economy is as it is and the world economy, not just the American economy, and it's so fantastic that we're having money for infrastructure, can there also be money for doing infrastructure in a special way, not just in the most—I'm going to say economic, but not the lowest common denominator. That's the question I ask. I hope there is. It's important to have those elements in there and let's hope we can do it in a way that's energy efficient.

Now with new lighting, LEDs and new lighting systems, they don't use as much energy. I think one of the things that both Doug and I are really interested in is being able to use ways—finding ways of gaining the energy to power our works or power what's around it so that there is a kind of ecological system that is visible.

One of the little projects I'm working on in Oregon is a design. It's a live-work hall of residence. They have—it's a LEED building. It's very interesting now that that's beginning to happen more and more. So I like the idea of being able to do something, being able to show the infrastructure or show a part of the system that's dealing with water collection.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Another project I hope to be working on, it's been approved, but we'll see if the money and everything goes through, is a general hospital in San Francisco.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was the other space I would think your work would really resonate, besides sanctuaries, would be a hospital. It seems perfect. People will be there. They need an experiential space for contemplation

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, and so you have a place that you could do something which is about a kind of—not just a physical healing but a mental healing and not just for the patients but for the people that visit the patients.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Because they're going through an incredible amount of stress and anxiety as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Which hospital is this?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: This is General Hospital. I can see it from here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, San Francisco General?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes, they're building a new trauma center.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: But again, they haven't allocated very much money for the actual plaza area. So we'll see.

MIJA RIEDEL: I know you'd like to do a project in England.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is there any possibility of that?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Not that I know of. I would love to. But now I think it becomes more—there was a couple of things that we were—one in Liverpool, another one in the Thames estuary which actually I don't think ever happened in the end. I don't think they got anyone to do anything there. With the lottery money gone, I don't know. Yes, I would love to do something there. But one hopes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Any final thoughts?

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: I think it's been interesting that I've been able to—I mean, it's incredible that I've been able to do the projects I have in this country. I never would have had the opportunity to do them in England. Even the projects that happen there now are very much not as integrated as what I've been able to do mostly. I think they're beginning to do that now. I hope to be able to go on doing them.

I also hope to be able to have a little bit more time for myself to be able to work on all the ideas that are kind of beginnings that occasionally be able to go through into projects. I wish that all these projects were—they're getting to be faster and faster track, that they're wanting you to come up with ideas quicker and quicker.

I think that the agencies are shortchanging themselves because it gives you an opportunity to do a new work but also go deeper into yourself and into what's around you to be able to do a work.

If you ask people to come up with an idea too quickly, they don't have the ultimate opportunity to do that. So I would like the privilege really of being able to spend more time on something on those early stages as well as—because it's usually hurry up and wait and then you can't change it.

It's the early time when you really need to do the deep thought to work things out into a certain kind of way and then yes of course you need to carry through a project to make sure it's done properly but they're shortcutting that first stage which I think is a big mistake.

MIJA RIEDEL: It makes me think of the conversation you and Doug were having earlier about the importance of that conversation.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: That seems that's such an essential preliminary aspect of a work that has all the layers and operates and functions in all the different ways that you would like your work to work.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Right. There's a problem about coming in early because everything could change. But I think it gets you involved with the architects and the engineers, landscape architects, and the people that are in that area. I think you can end up by doing more by that interactive collaborative process. I enjoy it.

I've learned so much from the people I've worked with and as much as sometimes might be nice to be able to control something completely, I think as long as you can work with people that you have respect for and they have respect for you, I think the results are usually the better for it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Thank you very much.

ANNA VALENTINA MURCH: Thank you. You've been absolutely great.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's been a complete pleasure.

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