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Oral history interview with Jerry Rothman, 2010 August 30-31

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Jerry Rothman on August 30, 2010. The interview took place at Casa Luna Quebrada in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project For Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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 Jerry Rothman at Casa Luna Quebrada in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, on August 30, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is card number one. Good morning.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Good morning.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's wonderful to have found you down here.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, I'm glad you found me too. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So, Jerry, let's start—since your career has been so beautifully documented in that book by Susan Peterson—[*Feat of Clay: Five Decades of Jerry Rothman.* Laguna Art Museum, 2003.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—which we'll certainly talk about at great length, but that ran up through, what, 2003 or so?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, about that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, let's talk about your relocation to Mexico, when that happened, and what you've been working on since then, and then we'll go back and talk about some of your earlier work, okay?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Okay, that would be great.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, when exactly did you relocate? And let's talk about that—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I don't know exactly—within a year after the show.

MIJA RIEDEL: It must have been 2004, 2005?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Four, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Something like that. We moved—we came here to visit my friend Mayer Shacter. And we had been looking for a place in northern California—[inaudible]—and we could find nothing that we agreed on.

MIJA RIEDEL: You and Kathleen?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Me and Kathleen. But this place, we said, "This is great." So we decided we were going to come here.

MIJA RIEDEL: What about it appealed to you?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, just the place, the quiet nature of it, all the people, all the craftsmen available. The price of things at that time were very reasonable. Since then it's not so reasonable. But it worked out well for us because we moved when we decided to do it.

And I met an architect—oh, Mayer introduced me to an architect named Luis Camareno—Camarena.

Am I talking into something?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, if you can speak up a little bit I think we're okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I think you'll find I'm hard to record.

MIJA RIEDEL: Just move that a little closer.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I'll just hold them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. No, that's fine; you don't have to hold it. The mic should be okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Okay. And Luis Camarena. And I talked to him about it after I spoke to Mayer about leasing the land. And so we—I went back to the States and designed the house. And I continually sent Luis drawings, and then Luis corrected them or did what he wanted to do, and we came to some compromise about things. And then we built this house. And—

MIJA RIEDEL: And you were saying it's, like, 6,000 square feet between the house and your studio?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, well, two levels. The bottom level is 3,000, and the top level is 3,000.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And it's a good studio. After I got the place built, it took me about a year before I could—like I say, actually, when I got here, I was building the place, and while I was building the place, I was trying to develop the clay bodies with the material here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So I did that, and I developed a very good clay body. And—

MIJA RIEDEL: Because could you—could you work—could you create the zero-shrinkage clay here as well?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I could have.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But I decided not to because I couldn't—I got down to about 8 percent shrinkage with firing, from wet to fire. And I figured that was good enough—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—because the availability of getting stainless steel was very difficult.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So I dealt with what I could do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But—

MIJA RIEDEL: So you were going to work on different kinds of pieces that didn't require those steel arches.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah—well, no, that's—well, they're really good if you're going to do all this cantilevers.

And so, anyway, so I built this—got the clay body, and that worked out very well. I met a woman named Blanca Garcia, who has a small—has a studio in San Miguel, and she was very helpful. She helped me to find the sources and so on. And I—you know, and I got these clays worked out. And now she uses the clay body, and a lot of other people use the clay body [laughs] because i t's a relatively easy clay body to work with.

MIJA RIEDEL: And is it—again, is it primarily for sculptural slab work? Is it for—[inaudible]. It can be, in other words, multi-purpose.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It just works well for everything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It has a lot more grog in it than they're used to, but once they got used to it, it was just, you know, like anything else. It was very good.

And so, I decided I wasn't going to glaze anything anymore, and so that makes life easy. I didn't have to worry

about glazes or development, so I just—so I started to work. And I started to make it while I was building my studio. And so I worked in her studio and made a series of small pieces. [Background noise and voices.]

Well, I got through with that and I got into my studio. Well, it took me six months—well, a year to get it really straightened out and to get the kilns built and et cetera. And then I started making stuff. And I—

MIJA RIEDEL: What sort of things did you start making?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, they were very influenced by Mexican folk art. I made devils and demons and strange people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Devils and—sorry, I didn't catch—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Demons.

MIJA RIEDEL: Demons, okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Then I started to make people of another kind. And I did a whole series of these—not a whole series but a reasonable number. And I decided I wasn't going to sell, or try to sell, because, you know, some of the pieces I would have to get at least—I would have to get at least $10,000 for it, American dollars. And that would be very hard in Mexico. Let's see, that would be 100,000 pesos or more.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, I decided, "I don't care; I don't need to sell them, so I'm just going to keep them." And I built the sculpture garden here to put them in.

MIJA RIEDEL: Beside your home?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, right next to my house. And then so now I'm just in the process of making more sculptures to fill up the sculpture garden.

And it's basically been a lot of fun and very—a lot to learn about people and materials and so on. And it didn't—it wasn't—somehow that went relatively easily. And so, within the year I was really working.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, this is something I think you've—you certainly have done throughout your career, the relocation to Japan and that—it was Japan—[inaudible]—relocation at one point to the Bay Area, and the Bay Views pieces. So it's not something that hasn't happened before.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. And is there a way you think of the pieces that have happened down here in terms of Sky Pots or the landscape pots?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, yes, I—well, I think they're really influenced by Mexican folk art. The Mexicans, just like the Japanese, didn't think that. [Laughs.] They didn't think my work was Japanese. I was influenced by them. And the Mexicans don't think my work looks like folk art either.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So it's just the way it goes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I'm really looking forward to seeing it, because I haven't seen those pieces at all.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I will continue doing that. And, well, the pieces are so very large, with just some—well, not very small, but small 20-inch, 30-inch pieces.

MIJA RIEDEL: You say they're very large now. How large do you mean?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I guess the largest one is one piece that's about five feet sitting down.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: If it was standing up, it would be eight feet—or 10 feet tall.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But it's a sitting position, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: So a good size, five feet.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, yeah—five, six feet. And I was planning to make some really big ones, and then I ran into this little problem I have. And so, I'm trying to readjust to that and figure out how to work it this way. And it's—well, it's been a good time. In the interim we took a trip to India.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And we went to India and—

MIJA RIEDEL: When was that?

JERRY ROTHMAN: That was last year. Then this year we went to Rome. But last year—

MIJA RIEDEL: You went to Rome?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, Rome. Yeah. And that was pretty amazing. I mean, it's just amazing what those people do with living.

MIJA RIEDEL: Are we talking about India?

JERRY ROTHMAN: India, yes. Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And where were you in India, and was there anything in particular that was—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, we were in northern India.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And it was funny. There was all kinds—I went to different places, and everyplace I went they had a little story art of dead sculptures that were made out of reeds—tied reeds together, bundled to make basic forms, kind of like they make straw men here, the scarecrows. And on the top they were covered with plaster, and they were very finely finished. It looked pretty amazing.

I almost switched to plaster. [They laugh.] But anyway, I almost switched that, but the problem is getting those kinds of reeds that they had. We don't have them here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So that doesn't work. Too bad.

But it was a very clever way of making things. And so, I learned a lot in India, you know. I was just amazed to see how skilled they were. I mean, the folk art paintings that these guys just knocked out by the zillions, beautiful little paintings, and big paintings. I have some at home. And they just do it, that's all. And they don't worry about this or that or the other. They just—it'll happen.

And then there are the high-class artists who do miniatures, who spend incredible amounts of time on this thing, and they're just like—they're like the miniatures that they were making thousands of years ago, incredible detail, incredible—and they were—but the funny part of it is, is that they—well, not the funny part—well, yeah, the funny part [laughs] is that the guys who were folk artists were a lot more creative than the guys who were the high-class artists.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And they have a real academy and have a real formal way of doing it. The results were, you know, fantastic, but they weren't—no juice. The folk arts guys, who just did this stuff, had a certain amount of life to it that these other things didn't have. But I guess that's the way it always is. Yeah. And so, I—

MIJA RIEDEL: You say that's the way it always is. Do you think so?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, sure. I think that you—well, I remember they had an international festival here—in California a while back. And Garth Clark was involved in it. And—

MIJA RIEDEL: What year would this have been, do you think?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Sometime in the '80s, late '80s. And, you know, they had the musicians and the dancers and the so on, who did ballet that was based on folk art. And they just—it was very beautiful, but it was—but all the juice was gone.

And I went to India. I saw—I was lucky to have met a lot of very interesting people, which took me to a lot of interesting places. And their formal dance was fantastic, but it wasn't as interesting as just the people dancing.

And so, the same thing was happening with the international festival, where they had musicians and dancers and artists—painters. It was the first time I really got to hear John Cage in the flesh. And I thought that was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. I'm trying to think what festival this could have been that included music by John Cage, and Garth Clark, and ballet and—

JERRY ROTHMAN: I don't remember.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But anyway—

MIJA RIEDEL: Where did it take place?

JERRY ROTHMAN: In the Los Angeles area.

MIJA RIEDEL: In the Los Angeles area.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. In the '80s.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, it must have been the '80s. It couldn't have been—yeah, maybe it was in the '90s. Who knows?

MIJA RIEDEL: It was like an international arts festival.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And it seems like that repeats itself wherever you go. The folk art starts out by being art, and then it gets formalized into something else. That's another kind of art that I don't find as interesting or as beautiful. But that's just me.

And so, I think it's that way here too. I think the people who do folk art and really are folk artists are just amazing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is there anyone in particular that you can think of in this area that comes to mind that—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yes, Tonalá.

MIJA RIEDEL: Tonalá, the ceramics town?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. There are three or four guys there, five guys, I guess, who are doing great work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sculptural, functional, those painted platters, that sort of thing?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. They're not really functional. They're supposed to be. They're vessel shapes somewhat, but they're really individual works of art. And that was kind of like when Ken Edwards came here for a little while, and he took all these painters and had them paint on stoneware.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ken Edwards?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. That was way back in the '60s.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And the stuff was very popular all over the world—still is, I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I know that Tonalá has had an incredible ceramics history. I'm trying to think who wrote a

book about it, in probably the '50s. And that's outside of Tlaquepaque.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. It's a huge village—well, a small village. It was—but it was practically all potters.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, well, that's all changed [laughs]. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: A lot of potters.

JERRY ROTHMAN: A lot—well, there are a lot now of guys that have—they're called folk artists, and there's actually books that are published about these guys. In fact, a couple of them were over at Mayer's house the other night. He was arranging for them to apply for the international folk art festival that's going to happen in Santa Fe.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And—

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, we'll have to see if we can find their names. Maybe you've got their books at your house or something.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, well, Mayer does, that's for sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But, you know, they're very impressive.

MIJA RIEDEL: What about the work impresses you? We talked about the juice. Anything else? Is there anything particularly—

JERRY ROTHMAN: The juice.

MIJA RIEDEL: The juice, yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, that's—I think that's what impressed me the most. I mean, really—well, it's like Alice Neel, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: She did portraits, but they weren't really just portraits—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—in the traditional sense.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And anyhow, yeah, they just impressed me with their facility and their willingness to do things and to try things and to play around, kind of like Frida Kahlo, not like Diego Rivera, even though Diego Rivera did some amazing easel painting.

Anyway, his murals were all right but they were just—you know, they weren't [inaudible]. [José] Orozco was different but—

MIJA RIEDEL: So, what are you working on now? You're working on some very large pieces.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, well—

MIJA RIEDEL: Three you said, I think.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I'm finishing up these three.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Are these part of a series?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, no—well, maybe—no, I think these are individuals. Before that, I made this series of stuff.

MIJA RIEDEL: When?

JERRY ROTHMAN: From two-oh-nine [2009] to two-ten [2010]—in two-oh-nine [2009] and two-ten [2010]. This is two-ten [2010], isn't it?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Yes. I started—

MIJA RIEDEL: So what was that series?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, it was just Folks Of A Different Kind.

MIJA RIEDEL: Pardon?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I called it Folks Of A Different Kind.

MIJA RIEDEL: Folks of a Different Kind. Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I've got those all done, but I'm—now I'm working on a new series.

MIJA RIEDEL: And these were figurative pieces?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Yes, they were figurative pieces. And the things I'm working on now are more or less figurative. There's one that I made in two-oh-nine [2009] that I'm just getting finished now called Hanging On. That was a political commentary. I do that every so often.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. Yeah, well, what can I say? I'll think of something to say. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Maybe I'll have some questions for you after I actually see them.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, maybe so.

Well, it's been a very good experience, and I am—

MIJA RIEDEL: How do they compare to the earlier works, to the earlier political commentary works, the earlier social commentary works of the earlier 2000s, the earlier figurative work, the Leda pieces?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, in the '80s, '90s—'90s I guess it was. Yeah. Well, they're different. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: [Telephone rings.] Are they free-standing figures or are they more along the lines of the pieces that are embedded in columns?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, they're more or less free-standing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And what are they commenting on?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, what are they commenting on? Well, just life. I haven't figured out that one out yet.

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems like some of the earlier pieces really were commentary on the legal establishment.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, that and other things. You had banks and then it goes down—[inaudible]—and the arrogance of the system. But these are just commenting on Mexico, I guess.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it must be interesting to be in Mexico where art has had such a strong role of political commentary—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—coming from the States, where that wasn't necessarily the case. Have you felt that influence at all in your work?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, it might be. I don't think so, though, because I was still—well, you know, I'm a little older—I'm a lot older now, and you take a different attitude towards things.

Political commentary—you know, there's nothing—I'm not that involved with the system here or with the real problems here, so I just—the commentary is just on what I understand, and I really don't understand that much, obviously. And so I'm not sure.

I guess the big thing was, well, was that—these are not prejudiced. Mexico has a real class system, and they have a, you know, color system. And I sort of objected to that, and I guess I was commenting on, you know, funny people—people who look funny may be just fine. I'm not sure exactly what, but I'm never sure until a long time later.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you've talked about one way that you work is to take an idea and just explore it, explore it, explore it until you've reached a piece that you feel is really—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—expresses exactly what you want it to, and then perhaps you're done with that line of thinking. Does that feel like that's still true?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I don't think—I don't think I think anymore.

MIJA RIEDEL: You don't think you think anymore? Interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Laughs.] In other words, I just let it happen. I start with the clay, and something is influencing me, but I don't know exactly what. And I start doing it, and it starts to evolve something. And when it evolves and things are made, I know more about it.

I found out drawings don't work. And anyhow, I like to make drawings, but they're drawings. I don't try to make drawings of objects. Plus, you know, you really can't.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And, yes, I just do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is that a shift in your way of working? Did you used to approach it with a very specific idea, and now it's—

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, I never really had—some things I approach with a specific idea, and some things I just let happen. And—

MIJA RIEDEL: Can you give me an example of one and the other?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, on that political series that you know about, that was very specific. I thought about things and what pissed me off [laughs], and I just made things to make that point. But I guess not that many things—I'm not as bothered by as many things, plus I don't know enough about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did the landscapes or the Sky Pots, or the cityscapes, the Bay Views, did any of those have more—just an evolutionary way of developing?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No. Well, yes, they were just influenced by where I was. The Bay Views was because I was living on the Bay—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and I was looking out at the clouds and the hills every day and I just—and that's what it was.

And there was Leda series, and that was just influenced by the fact that I went to a show once, and I saw that *Leda and the Swan* was being made by everybody [laughs] at one time or another. And I said, "Well, what the hell? Why not?" So I just decided to do *Leda and the Swan* because I had nothing else to do. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, by then you had that fabulous clay that could do probably anything in any direction, and it was subject matter that seemed to make sense to you—I mean, very sensual and figurative.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, see, that's why it's good to speak to people like you. [Laughs.] You know, I guess that's about what happened, and then I just enjoyed it. I guess as you get older, you're more into just having a good time. [They laugh.] Yes, really, that's what it amounts to.

And, well, it's—yes, I've been more about having a good time this last 10 or 12 years or so than anything else, just doing what I like to do and enjoying it, and discover things and let them happen, and find out from what happens what's going on.

I don't think anymore that an artist can really know what's going on until he's made it, or she's made it. And then you look back and say, "Oh, yeah, that's what that was—that's what that was all about, but do I really want to do that again?"

And so, you know—well, what's interesting is I really haven't made that much work in my lifetime.

MIJA RIEDEL: You haven't made that much work—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—in your life?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. I'm doing my—

MIJA RIEDEL: Really, do you think that?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I don't think I've made that very much. And it kept on changing. So—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And then I wasn't going to stop that. My contemporaries, you know, Paul [Soldner] and Peter [Voulkos] and all those guys, said, "Well, Jerry, you've got to do something that people can identify," you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But I said, "Why?" I didn't do that. That's like poor [Philip] Guston. You know, when he was—he was actually a very traditional painter to start with. And when he started doing this Abstract Expressionism, he developed a style which was very salable, I guess. Marlborough [Gallery, New York City] would use him, took him on and took all his work on, paid him a stipend and so on. And then he started doing a sort of a San Francisco comics. You know, those sort of figurative things? It looked a little bit like that.

The guy who drew the—I can't think of his name. Well, he made comic books. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Are you thinking of R. Crumb?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Crumb, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And it was a little influenced by Crumb, but so what? [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And they were great paintings, these big, huge paintings of just—they had everything about them: humor, power, you know, calmness. And Marlborough usually wouldn't show them, because they had their whole warehouse full of this Abstract Expressionist stuff, and they didn't want to—they didn't want to hear about it, because they had a market they were making and that's what they wanted.

Well, Guston by that time said, "The hell with that. I want to do this." And that's what he did. I guess he had enough books by then and didn't need other books, you know. And I'm not sure that doesn't happen—you know, even Michelangelo, in his later years he made what the Italian critics at that time thought were unfinished. I don't think *he* thought they were unfinished.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that's been a huge issue in your own experience, to be sure. I mean, in some ways it seems like you were able to—you very specifically chose to do what you wanted to do and to not continue to produce something along certain lines. And I wonder if that—if you had also set it up so that would be financially possible—

JERRY ROTHMAN: I did.

MIJA RIEDEL:—by teaching and then having the production work.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's right.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you had an incredible at least dual if not triple or quadruple sets of careers.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, well, I—

MIJA RIEDEL: The production work and the designing of dinnerware, starting early on, industrial design.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And then there were sculptural pieces.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, well, that worked for me, having the shop that was paying for itself very well, and paying me and everyone else, making a living and having enough time to do my own work and having a big studio that this production work was paying for. And that was just fine [laughs]. Yeah. And I—

MIJA RIEDEL: Really, in many ways, you bought yourself a whole lot of artistic freedom.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, which I think—I don't know how everyone feels about that. I think that an awful lot of artists—an awful lot of artists wish they could have that freedom, and when they found something that sold, they grab onto it. That's essentially what prints are all about, you know. [Laughs.] And so, you know—and, you know—but you can't blame anybody for doing something that makes money, because everyone has to eat.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what about—I'm just curious because your career has followed multiple different trajectories. What about that was so compelling to you, to just—when an idea came, to drop what you had been doing? I mean, in some ways it makes total sense. You'd explored it, you were done with it, you moved on to the next.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's—yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Pretty much it.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. And so, I didn't—well, I kept on having a challenge, which I like very much. I like the technical challenge, the aesthetic challenge, all those things. Now, in clay you can do that, and there's almost no limitations to clay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you aren't kidding. It's true.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, you know, I started making—I started being a painter for a little while. I dropped that because it was too limiting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's talk about that concept of limitations in clay, because one of the questions that's on this list that we should address is the strengths and the limitations of clay. And there's a wonderful quote in the Susan Peterson book where the point is made that you have really—you say there are no limitations to the material, that the material is really multifaceted.

And you have gone on to explore it through the wheel, through slabs, through figures, the zero-shrinkage clay that you came up with, and then the ferro-ceramic. You've really stretched that material in more ways than just about anyone I can think of, aesthetically and technically.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I just brought it into the twentieth century. All the people I knew were working in the eighteenth century or the nineteenth century. And I said to myself, "What the hell? There are so many things that you can do." And I didn't invent any of the technology; I just put it together, you know?

And so, you know, I said, "Look, jet airplanes have metal in them." And so I found out that they have—stainless steel, certain numbers, has a constant duty cycle of 2,000 to 2,500 degrees.

MIJA RIEDEL: Has a what cycle?

JERRY ROTHMAN: A duty—a working cycle. It doesn't distort. It's usable up to 2,000 degrees.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So I said, "Well—"

MIJA RIEDEL: Perfect.

JERRY ROTHMAN: "—perfect." I had no-shrink clay—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and so—

MIJA RIEDEL: And you already had the no-shrink clay. Is that correct?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. That's correct.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But the only problem is that the expansion and contraction of the metal was different from the clay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so I tried to solve that problem. I also—and, you see, that meant that I really have to figure things out. I had a—[inaudible]—was making a stainless steel armature, put the clay on so thick, and so on and so forth. And I really didn't like that. I liked the freedom it gave me in form, but I didn't like the—well, the aesthetic limitations—I had to think about it. I didn't want to think. I just wanted to do it and see what happened, what would grow from it, and with that system you really couldn't do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: But the zero-shrinkage clay, it was especially strong, wasn't it, with the fiberglass fibers—chopped fiberglass in there? Is that what made it so strong?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, the steel is what made it so strong.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, so the fiberglass had nothing to do with it.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yes, the fiberglass had a lot to do, because fiberglass cut down the shrinkage.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And it melted in the object.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So it didn't lose any of its physical strength.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So that actually made a very strong material.

MIJA RIEDEL: But it was much harder—it doesn't operate as, quote, unquote, normal clay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, it's less plastic. Well, you have a lot of fiber in it and you have to deal with that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. And I guess I just didn't want to be that disciplined. I'm getting less and less disciplined as I get older. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: And so, was that one reason why perhaps you moved on to the Bay Views is you didn't want to be bothered with all that structure?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Besides where you were living.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, yeah, because—yeah. The one thing about clay is that there really are no limitations except for size, but that is no limitation either if you use it right.

And so, I decided I wanted—and also, that fiberglass, it [couldn't be ?] damaged. And the fibers—you know, the fiberglass would break down in the clay and stuff—very fine particles. I had them on my hands, and I had to start

wearing gloves. And I imagine I had them in my system too.

MIJA RIEDEL: I bet. Yeah, that fiberglass can be nasty.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I decided, well, that it wasn't worth it. And that's one of the reasons why I never want to tell anyone what that was, because I would feel responsible, you know? That's the only thing I was ever secretive about, because if you tell a bunch of kids that, they just go "pfff—"

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—with no question at all, and they would have gotten sick.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think it's an interesting segue to talk also about the intersection or the parallel trails between science and art, something you've mentioned in the past few—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, well, that's been going on forever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, but you, I think, are especially well positioned to talk about it at this point in time in your personal experience of it. You were interested in science as a child.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Yes, and I still am.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But, yeah—well, think about it. If you think about the artists you think about in the Renaissance, and you think about Leonardo da Vinci—

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—you know, he was more of a scientist than an artist. He wasn't a great painter, but he was a great inventor. And then there was Michelangelo. Well, I guess he was just a great artist. He used all of the latest things available, but they were all proven.

But, you know, in the twentieth century, materials became a very natural thing. That's why you have so much—so many changes in the twentieth century in the kind of work you make, because of the materials available. You can go to the junkyard and get some hexagon-cell fiberboard—you know, like beehives. And they were surplus, and you took—and you could do anything with it. It was strong, easy to work, and easy to put together.

It was all due to the material available until the twentieth century. Well, no, there really was none of that stuff available. That's all a miracle of chemistry, and that kind of chemistry wasn't available until the twentieth century.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And, you know, people worked with iron, then in bronze and so on and so forth, but it was still all the same stuff, essentially.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, really, technology—twentieth-century technology is a formative cornerstone—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—of your way of working.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I think of most people's way of working. You look at what's going on with, you know, fiberglass, foam, et cetera. I mean, you know, the only problem with that stuff, it kills you. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: A little drawback.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But if you're careful, you can—I mean, go to Las Vegas. Those huge sculptures they've made there out of fiberglass and foam. And they've had these, you know, really good artists doing that. And it was all right. I mean, and they moved and they spoke and, you know. I mean, it's hard to beat that.

And you look at the—when you read the magazine called*Sculpture*, or something, and this guy—I mean, this great, big, heavy-set man, and he used foam and fiberglass, because foam is so easy to form.

[END CARD 1.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Jerry Rothman at the artist's home and studio in San Miguel de Allende,

Mexico, on August 30, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is card number two.

So let's move back and just cover some of the early years briefly. As you said, this is all fairly wonderfully well documented in the Susan Peterson book, but—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, okay.

MIJA RIEDEL:—let's just get this down on disc. You were born in New York, yes?

JERRY ROTHMAN: New York, 1933.

MIJA RIEDEL: November fourteenth.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Fourteenth, yeah. And my parents—I went to an art school for a very short time. When I was about, oh, 12 years old, I went to Sadley [ph] Art School at the—what was the name of place? It was a very famous school in Brooklyn. Oh, well, I'll think of it. And then I went there for a while, and then my parents decided to come out to California.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Your father was a clothing designer. Is that right?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, he was a—well, in a sense, yes. He was a—he made pleated—he made—in the '20s he made those pleated dresses with lots of embroidery and stuff, and he designed all that. But of course when the Depression came along, no one was spending that money, and he stopped.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, he had to do something else, and so he started a cleaning and laundry business, had a small plant, and it grew. Then the Second World War came along. He was located in Sheepshead Bay, and the Coast Guard came in and used Sheepshead Bay as a base. And there's—all these guys had all these uniforms that needed to be washed and pressed, all these blues. And so he—so it was, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: His name was Hyman, yes?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, Hyman.

MIJA RIEDEL: And your mother's name?

JERRY ROTHMAN: It was Rose.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And it turned out to be a very good thing for him, all these guys that had—all these uniforms that they couldn't do anything else but send to a cleaner. And he was very friendly with the guys in the Coast Guard, and they all liked him, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, did you take art class as a child? Did you visit museums?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, yes, I visited—I think that's why I was—that's what I did when I went downtown. I went to the museums when I was a kid and just looked at stuff.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there anything in particular that struck you as a kid?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Right now I really can't think of that. I'm sure there was, but I can't name it. Well, I just liked going to the museums. And I went to—the only museum I didn't go to was the Modern Museum [Museum of Modern Art].

MIJA RIEDEL: The Modern you did not go to.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I did not go to.

MIJA RIEDEL: Why was that?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, because—well, I don't know.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you went to the Natural Science Museum, the Natural History Museum [American Museum of Natural History], the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art]—

JERRY ROTHMAN: The Met and so on, but somehow I never got to the Modern Museum. I don't know why.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Maybe because I had no one in my family who was interested in that, who thought that was art. And so, most likely that was why.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And also, it may have not been easy to get to. I don't remember.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Well, the Met and the Natural History Museum are on opposite sides of the park, yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, but also they had railroads—train stops, tube stops right on—you know, there.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see. I see.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You know? And you can go to them and go to Macy's and Gimbels just by getting directly off the train.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You didn't have to walk anyplace.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so maybe that was one of the reasons I could go downtown and all of that. It didn't bother me because I was—anyway, it didn't bother my mother.

So I never got to the Modern until I was much older. And I just thought—I was impressed. I just went there, and there was all this stuff all these people had done, and just, you know—I didn't exactly say "Wow, wow," but I said "How?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: How?

JERRY ROTHMAN: How? Yeah, how? And I have—[inaudible]—science, the [Hayden] Planetarium, the Science and Industry, the Met. Well, I can't remember them all, but I used to go. And I went, oh, at least twice a month. And I just—

MIJA RIEDEL: That's quite regularly.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, I went regularly. And I also went to Macy's and Gimbels. And that was an experience in itself. And, yeah, I was—I don't know why I did that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Then in '46 you moved to LA—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—which was a complete change.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Totally different. It was a—you know, it was a culture shock. I didn't understand, you know, the kids or the culture. They were all into—no one was into reading anything.

At school, I started out in the junior high and then the high school. And I couldn't find any museums. I guess there was only one museum and that was the one in—the one where the Coliseum was. What was that park on Figueroa?

MIJA RIEDEL: Was the Getty there yet?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, no, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was way before the Getty.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Way before the Getty.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: There was only one real museum there. And it wasn't the—[inaudible]—because—except for the Red Cars, there was no easy access to anything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so the Red Car, they'd stop pretty close to—what's the name of the park? I can't think of it. Anyway, next to the Coliseum, and the museum was next to the Coliseum. It was not that—it was a building that—they had a museum of science and industry. They had a cultural place I know that honored the world in different years and so on. And I went there but not nearly as often I did in New York. And—

MIJA RIEDEL: How did you—sorry. Go ahead.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Go ahead.

MIJA RIEDEL: How did the—how did you become interested in furniture-making and how did that—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I came out here. Every junior high had shops. In New York that was a rare thing. If you—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, yes. If you wanted to get involved with that, you went to an industrial school.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But here—so if I went to a school, they had shops, and so I liked that, and so I started making things. And I started making things in wood and so on. And then I—and I liked that.

So, when my father started the business on La Cienega Boulevard, which was then the heart of the decorator trade, and there were lots of cabinet-makers making stuff. I just walked around, and one day I walked into a shop, and the guy was named Jose—[inaudible]. And he was really—I was really impressed with what he was making.

And I went back to his shop, I talked to him, and I went back three or four, five, a half-dozen times, I don't know, and talked to him about it. And I said, "Well, can I get a job here?" He said, "No, but you can be an apprentice."

MIJA RIEDEL: You were what, 13, 14?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Something like that?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Something like 14 or 15. So I agreed to work for him for nothing, just as an apprentice.

And I worked for a while, and I liked that really well. The only problem with it, there was so much repetition, because—for me. For him it was very important. He made—if someone had asked him to make two chairs, he'd make a dozen chairs.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: So it was the same effort to make—in a certain sense, to make—the next 10 chairs took no—all the set-ups were the same, the jigs were the same.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So once you made them, he made these—the chairs. And that—and I wasn't very good at that part. I was very good at setting things up and making things the first couple of times, but after I got around to the twelfth one, I just—

MIJA RIEDEL: You'd had it.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. But I learned a hell of a lot. He was a very good furniture-maker. It turned out—he worked for the—he knew the Huntingtons [Henry Huntington] and, oh God, all those people in Beverly Hills.

MIJA RIEDEL: And at that point did you think you might become a furniture-maker?

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's what I was going to do. And I was going to high school about that time. That was at a place called Fairfax High. And I took art. And it so happens that the guy who was teaching art was a Frenchman who knew about furniture design. And it was part of his training, how you make patterns and how you make

drawings and so on. And so I learned how to draw full-scale furniture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Can I close the door?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Sure. Sure you can. Down the middle. No, no, no, the middle door is—you have to—it's lower. There you go.

MIJA RIEDEL: There's still enough breeze, I think we're okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yes.

Yes, so I learned with him. I learned a lot about process in making things, and that helped me a great deal. So I just learned how to work with tools and machines and so on and so forth. But I really wasn't cut out to be a furniture-maker, because you had to—I got bored with it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you studying painting and sculpture in high school? You said there was—you'd started to talk about—your art teacher there was French.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, no. All I did was learn how to draw furniture—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—in the full-size patterns and so on, which is very—requires a lot of skill, you know? And they taught me how to make one line, and that was it. And so I could draw furniture patterns and so on and so forth very nicely and make them.

But then I—well, I stopped—well, after I was through—[inaudible]—I was about—I was 17 or 18 years old, and I went out and got a job—a guy who—was a guy who repaired—who did furniture finishing and repairs on antique furniture. And I knew how to do that, so I did that for a while. But that's a dead end. I see that to be a really slick furniture-maker and make some money—because I met some guys, one called Tom Huntley [ph] who was a maker of modern furniture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Tom Huntsley [ph]?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Tom Huntley. And he's a really good guy. And I was, what, 16, 15 years old. He was a really good guy, and he showed me what it was all about. It was totally different from making traditional furniture, and it was much easier, you know, in some ways. In other ways it wasn't. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: How so? What would you say the differences were?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, look, it was all straight-line stuff. So you had to make—you know, you get all the joints just so and have them come together just so, and make straight lines with no bumps—[inaudible].

When you made traditional furniture, you know, it was always some sort of a curvilinear form. You know, if things didn't come together exactly right, you made them come together. You can change them a little bit. This stuff you had to do it right in the first place. Otherwise you lost all—you lost the show.

And so, that was also then—but I didn't really work for Tom; I just hung out with Tom. And at that time I was starting—yes, at someplace or other I started to go to a good art school.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was LA Community College?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, that—yeah. No, first I started with—yes, it was LA Community College. I was 18 or so. And I went there, and I studied industrial design.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And there was a guy there named Anderson [ph]. What was Anderson's first name?

MIJA RIEDEL: Webb [ph], I think. Yes, Webb Anderson.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Webb Anderson, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And we got along really well, and I started making some very interesting things for him, which I had no idea what I was doing, but I made this book, about a hundred pages, of transparencies.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I made these transparencies, and I had them on a grid system, and I put just different things on them. And then I made them so you could hang them—so you could hang one on top of the other, and you can keep on creating a new space, new way—

MIJA RIEDEL: I do know what you mean. You apply one part—segment on top of another.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, but they weren't permanent. They were movable.

MIJA RIEDEL: Pardon?

JERRY ROTHMAN: They were movable.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, exactly.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So you could take this one off, put that one on and so on. And through that way I learned a hell of a lot about graphics.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I still—I did, didn't I? [Laughs.] And then—what else did I do there? I made some sculptures out of wood. That was—was that before or after? [Inaudible]—before or after.

MIJA RIEDEL: There was an Art Center school too—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yes, I went to the Art Center school for industrial design [Art Center College of Design?].

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And about that same time I was going to—well, I was also in this program at the LA—Los Angeles City College.

MIJA RIEDEL: City College, right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And that was a—well, it was another course in industrial design. And then, when I went to the Art Center school, in that—there I met Billy Al Bengston and Kenny Price at LA City College.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I was taking pottery class for industrial design.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And they were really wild, free-thinking guys, and I was much more conventional. And they told me that I should go and see a guy named [Peter] Voulkos, because I was really—I was doing things there that nobody else seemed to be able to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I was throwing big pots and decorating them and so on. And they said, "Hey, you should go see this guy Voulkos." So I went to see Voulkos, and Voulkos said, "Well," he said, "come back in about a year." [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So you brought him a few pots to show him what you were working on?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, right, exactly. He said, "Come back in about a year."

MIJA RIEDEL: And this was—he was at Otis [College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA] now, yes?

JERRY ROTHMAN: He was at Otis now. And I went back in a year and he said, "Okay, I'll tell you what. Why don't you start in night school with Harry McIntosh?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Because Harry was working there. And so—

MIJA RIEDEL: That's Harrison McIntosh, yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Harrison, yes. And he was—I really impressed him because I started throwing these huge pots and making these shapes that were very angular and straight and so on and so forth. Then he said that—he spoke to Pete, and he said, "Pete, do you want to see what this guy is doing?"

And so after taking one course in night school for one semester, Pete said, "Oh, well, you better come to regular school." [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: That's pretty quick—pretty speedy work. But I think the Harrison McIntosh segment is interesting too because he certainly was extremely prolific as a designer—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—of dinnerware, and did a lot of work with industry.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So that was a somewhat probably fortuitous meeting. Was that in any way influential to you?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I don't know, because at that time I didn't—oh, this is from Jun too.

MIJA RIEDEL: Jun Kaneko—

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so I just went, you know, the regular—[opens letter]—do you want money or what? I don't know. No, it's just another thing. I guess Jun keeps on sending stuff, because he used to—he worked with me when I was in Japan—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and then when he came to America—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And when he came to America—. And anyway—.

MS. RIEDEL : I definitely want to talk about that.

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Inaudible.] I mean, it's amazing what he's doing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: He comes here every year to work in Veracruz.

MIJA RIEDEL: Does he?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: In Veracruz in Mexico?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, and there's a fellow he met there, sure was an incredible promoter. So he met a man there who had a building, and he got space in the building for a studio and a pottery shop. And so he comes every year and he—in the beginning of the year to get away from the winters.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Inaudible.] I haven't heard from him maybe—[inaudible]. Well, maybe not. I don't know—[inaudible]. So anyway—

MIJA RIEDEL: So you were on your way to Otis to study with Voulkos.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, Otis. So I went to study with Voulkos. Voulkos, you know, I got to him. And it was great because he did—he wasn't, in quotes, teaching anybody anything. He was doing it. He did it with them. And either you got it or you didn't. That's his way of teaching, at least for the people he had there. Then it turns out that after six months or so, I was essentially running the shop.

MIJA RIEDEL: Because you had incredible facilities with the kilns for one thing, yeah?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, no, I knew nothing about kilns until I got—[inaudible]—guy named Matt Kalin [ph].

MIJA RIEDEL: Matt Kalin?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, he was a kiln builder there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: He also made potters' wheels and things like that. And Paul Soldner, who was there, and John Mason. Who else? And Ken Price, and not—Ken Price came later—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—Billy Al Bengston. And Janet Rosenthal [ph]. And who else? And there was another guy, who was a really nice guy [laughs] but he worked with Carlton Ball—

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and then he came to Voulkos, and he still wants to make stuff like Carlton Ball.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, boy. [They laugh.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: So at any rate, that was interesting. [Laughs.] But anyway, he was a good fellow, but—

MIJA RIEDEL: Was Henry Takemoto there?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yes, Henry was there, sure, sure, sure. Henry came in [inaudible]. I looked in the back room and I saw all this interesting stuff, you know, and I said, "Gee, who's making this?" He said, "That's Billy Al Bengston." [Inaudible.] He said, "You come here and look at this." And what Billy was doing was copying Pete. [They laugh.] That's not a bad way of learning.

MIJA RIEDEL: Not at all.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And he was skillful. [Inaudible.] And—[inaudible]—and I just did what I did. And the—

MIJA RIEDEL: What did you get out of that?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I can't—I learned about—[inaudible]—because they had this—[inaudible]—kiln they couldn't get to work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I said—[inaudible]—"Can I use this kiln?" [inaudible]. Pete said, "Sure." He said, "No problem. Go right ahead."

So I went right ahead, and I got it up to bisque temperature, which they could never do. I looked at—I heard the burners and I looked at the fire, and I adjusted the secondary—it turned out that they were having too much secondary air come in, so I would—which I didn't know what to call it, but I put in these bricks and a few other things to it, and played with the dampers. I spent all night doing it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But I got it to fire. And they said, "How the hell did you do that?" [laughs] because they had been trying for months to figure out this kiln.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, and I didn't know—I didn't figure it; I just did it. For some reason, I understood it. I don't know why.

But at any rate, then I fired a few more times. I fired it up to temperature, except one firing, I was a little concerned about—[inaudible]—I had a month's worth of stuff—[inaudible] it wasn't a large kiln by today's standards. But then there was a very big kiln—[inaudible]—about five feet wide and six feet long and four feet high, something like that. And it was a downdraft kiln.

And I started to load—[inaudible]. Some of the stuff I had made—I was making very big things, but I couldn't make big things that didn't have thin—the bottoms were very thick. I wasn't very good at it, so they had very thick bottoms. And I said—I said, "I'm going to figure out how to make this kiln go very slow."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Pete said, "Don't worry about it. I'll show you how." So, anyway, what happened was—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: It went up too fast.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It went up too fast. Because I really didn't know that much about controls. [Inaudible]. So that was a lesson. He said something funny [inaudible]. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: He was a big reader as I recall. And you were a big reader too.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: You spent a fair amount of time researching things in the library as well as actually working in the studio.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: The engineering of it all and—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, well, I became a big reader out of necessity. I just had no other choice—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—because Pete didn't tell you about—[inaudible]. He let you find out. [They laugh.] That was his system.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And it worked. I mean, you know, it did work. So, yeah, anyway. So I got through—so I learned—I basically learned all about ceramics there in a very short time because of that.

MIJA RIEDEL: And during this time, what were you working on? What was your work like? You had started the landscape pots. You'd started—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—working in a Constructivist manner. It certainly wasn't strictly wheel work. It was—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I did a lot of wheel throwing assemblies, you know, slab and stuff.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I made things like *Civilization* and *A Fine Spring Day*, *Wiyamiya* [ph], things like that, *The Coming Landscape*, which was exploding. Yeah, yeah, I did that—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: [Inaudible]—came fairly early.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. [Inaudible.] Well, there was steel—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Inaudible]—put it around them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I didn't—[inaudible]. And we sort of looked at that and said, "Hmm."

MIJA RIEDEL: They weren't fired like that, though.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, no, they were separate pieces—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—that were fired as well as assembled.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I didn't realize it, but that was very impressive.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. And they were tall. They were, what, seven, eight feet tall?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, no, they were 12 feet tall.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, they were 12 feet tall. Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And they waved in the wind, but sometimes they'd bend. So I changed the steel. What I did was I put these rebars inside of tubes, and the tubes were much stronger—[inaudible]. And I went through that a little bit, and I—[inaudible]—"maybe we'll try and"—[inaudible]. I said, "[Inaudible] shows [inaudible]." So I did some shows, and I won some prizes—and these strange things that people weren't used to seeing—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and I—and then John and I and Paul Soldner had a show at the—

MIJA RIEDEL: Ferus [Gallery, Los Angeles]?

JERRY ROTHMAN:—Ferus, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And that did very well, but everyone was wondering about these things, these ceramics.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was that exhibition like? It must have been—it was really the heyday, the explosion of that [inaudible].

JERRY ROTHMAN: You know, Paul had these pots that were on top of each other, and had all these pots that were—[inaudible]—really interesting stuff. And I had steel and ceramic and so on. And I actually got a review in *Art in America.*

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It wasn't a big review, but it was a review.

MIJA RIEDEL: A very positive review.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, very positive. And so, you know—well, you know, I just kept on [laughs]—I was kind of—I didn't know what *Art in America* was. I was very naïve. I didn't—I just did this stuff because it was fun. I wanted to do it.

And that's the advantage of not having—oh, before I did that, I worked with [inaudible] at City College. He was one of these guys that—[inaudible]—he was kind of—[inaudible]—could make Swedish pottery.

MIJA RIEDEL: Swedish pottery.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That kind of attitude.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Or like who was that—[inaudible]—from Germany that was so popular then?

MIJA RIEDEL: Pottery—Wildenhain?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, Wildenhain.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Marguerite Wildenhain impressed him very much. And so—but I sort of didn't pay attention because, like, I didn't have the skills to do it the way—you know, Marguerite Wildenhain had been a potter for 35, 40 years, and so she had her own skills. I didn't have any skills, so I just did what I could do. And anyway—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Yeah.

What was it about clay that drew you in, that made you decide this was it?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, because I could manipulate it so easily.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I came to the conclusion it was a very plastic medium and you could do anything with it. And people try to tell me that oil paint is much more plastic. I said, "No, it's not. It's two-dimensional. I can't build it up two inches thick and so on and so forth." And I said, "No, clay is really a much more plastic, expressible material."

And that amazed me because—I didn't say it that way because—I didn't use the right language. I said, "Gee, I can do much more with clay than I can do with that," with oil paint. I said, "Maybe I can use"—[inaudible]—convinced about the importance of glazing and so on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Inaudible.] That was something I did on my own.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: He gave me some basic information on how you mix glazes and do formulas, but I said, "That seems ridiculous." So I looked and I found out that you could do it with three points—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and three different materials that you put together. What do you call those things where you have this at one end and that the other and something over here, and then you mix them? And they either become glazes or they become something else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really? I don't know that that is.

JERRY ROTHMAN: What do you call those?

MIJA RIEDEL: Was it a—[inaudible]?

JERRY ROTHMAN: It's a simple way to create glazes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, maybe—

MIJA RIEDEL: So some silica, some—[inaudible]—something like that.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Maybe. I don't—I think I—[inaudible]—but I just figured it was the easy way of doing do it. I was trying [inaudible] the materials. And so I got some really interesting glazes that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And then I started to make glazes and doing that, and I got some very interesting glazes and interesting things. And I started to decorate—and, you know, everyone said I should decorate under the glaze. I said, "Well, I don't know." I started—I tried things over the glaze. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: From the very start. [Laughs.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: And that was very good. I mean, under the glaze was good. Over the glaze was good. It was just a different effect. And I just kept on going, it was lots of fun. And it was just fascinating.

And from there—it was really silly, but there was a fellow in Japan—[first name inaudible; last name Murayama?]—a very good friend of mine, and he was American, and he said, he saw what I was doing, and he said, "Gee, Jerry"—well, not—here's what happened. I found out later exactly. He was coming over for—he was a designer at [inaudible], who was a large conglomerate, who worked under the auspices of a consumer trading company.

And so, this guy was looking for young American people—[inaudible] designers—[inaudible]—

MIJA RIEDEL:—to design dinnerware, to design for the company, industrial design.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, oh, industrial design. Well, I didn't know then that I was in competition with John Mason. Because John Mason wanted that very badly. I didn't know what I was doing, but they wanted me instead. And so I went to Japan—

MIJA RIEDEL:—that was '58, '56?

JERRY ROTHMAN: That was '58, '60.

MIJA RIEDEL: What an extraordinary time.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It was an extraordinary time. I went there, and I worked there, and they just left me alone, and I created some of the most popular dinnerware in the United States. [Laughs.] It was just amazing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, that *Padiomungo* [ph], right? Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, *Padimomungo* [ph]. And I just—I went back there 20 years later, and they're still making the stuff.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were they really. That's pretty extraordinary.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, so—just amazing.

But anyway, and so I designed it for them and I learned lots, but—[inaudible]. And I seemed to intuitively know how to do things. The guys in the factories—[inaudible]—they get to doing something, and that's it. "We aren't going to change this in any shape or form."

Well, I upset a few people in the factories, but the managers didn't mind because it was producing results. And they let me work—and I worked 50 percent for them and 50 percent for myself in these factories. And I just made stuff and fired it in their kilns.

And at that time it was really a relatively crude industry. I mean, it was sophisticated from my view, but in reality it was not very sophisticated.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. When you were saying was a really interesting time in Japan, because it was almost a transitional time from the handmade ceramic pots to a more industrial approach.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Right. Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And Japan had such an incredible history of ceramic [inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: Certainly did.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you were able to see both.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, I pooh-poohed it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah. [They laugh.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: I was 24 or 5.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I was arrogant as hell.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. [They laugh.] So not interested in those little folk potteries at all.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Not at all. And that was the first time I met [Shoji] Hamada and—and who was the other guy who was really good?

MIJA RIEDEL: [Soyetsu] Yanagi?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yanagi, yes. And there was one other guy who made those [inaudible] pots.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, right—what was his name? We'll have to look it up. [Kanjiro] Kawai?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And I got to meet all these guys and to see what they were doing. And it turns out these guys—[inaudible]—they were interested in what I was doing, and I think my approach had some effect on them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Because when I went back, oh, when was it?

MIJA RIEDEL: Now, had Hamada come to see—Hamada had come to see Voulkos at Archie Bray [Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, MT], right? They had already done a tour of the States and—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, and he came to—he came a second time to Los Angeles.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And also the Bizen [ph] and—what's his name? There were three guys who came, and these guys were really outrageous as far as we were concerned—[inaudible]. They were still on the wheel, they were soft.

They would take them, they'd cut—[inaudible]—and put—[inaudible]—that's that, you know? They'd let them dry—[inaudible]. And there were other guys—[inaudible]—the Bizen guys who made these just beautiful little pots, and they depended on what happened in the kiln.

But we used to think it was all happenstance, but it wasn't. It was all planned out. If they wanted a circle someplace, they put a blob of clay on it. And they tied it down with grass, and so on and so forth.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So they did all kinds of, you know, things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It just didn't happen in the kiln.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And when I tried to tell people that, they wouldn't believe me. [Inaudible] keep on turning it. Also, it just wasn't done by happenstance. You know, they made things happen by how they put them in the kiln—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—where they put them, how high up they put the sand up on them and so on, and what they put on them to make—while it was firing and so on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, and they'd use different oxides as well, that sort of thing?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, they—

MIJA RIEDEL: Not too much?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, that's something I figured out. Well, what they did was—is they took a blob of clay or a piece of clay shaped this way or that way, and they'd put it on the pallet.

MIJA RIEDEL: After it was thrown.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah—no, after it was bisqued.

MIJA RIEDEL: After it was bisqued.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, after it was bone dry.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And then they actually tied—[inaudible]—with pieces of grass or big pieces of—[inaudible]—twisted pieces, or just—[inaudible]—of organic material that would melt—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, burn out.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and put them—well, burn up—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. And then they'd put a wet piece of clay on a bone dry piece and tied that on and fired it that way?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, because what it did was, it left them a blank spot—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—with gradations.

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And, yeah—

MIJA RIEDEL: Because then it would fall off.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, then it would fall off.

MIJA RIEDEL: I've never heard that before.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And, well, no one ever looked—I didn't hear it either. I saw what they were—I saw what was happening and how the technique was, and that was the only way they could have done it.

And so, anyway, that gave me the idea to work with oxide on some things, but I didn't—[inaudible]—oxides and made an object and tried to fire it. And it came out all right but wasn't great.

And then I thought of the idea of throwing sand in there and a little glaze or flux and putting that—[inaudible]—plates, and pounding these things into it and seeing what happened. And that just was a tremendous potential. That's what led to Sky Pots.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Inaudible] stains [inaudible]—cobalt and chromium, iron, and so on. I found if you put it on thick, it becomes a one-way thing that comes—[inaudible]—mix it with something. So I got those two basic colors, and I made that, but then when I got here and I started to investigate stains—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and I saw all these fantastic colors, and I said, "Where are these coming from?" And, you know, there was—what was the name of the companies? There were three big companies.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, I remember, that made those stains.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, three very large companies. But they were very helpful. You know, they said, "Oh, yeah, let's see what you"—

MIJA RIEDEL: Sort of like Mayco, but there was another one.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, no, Mayco was a producer of glazes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: These were basic producers—

MIJA RIEDEL: No, I know what you mean. They'd come in colored little powdered oxide.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, except also came in boxes—producers [inaudible]—stains. But after I found out how the stains were made, they were made just like—[inaudible]—higher temperatures. So I started using them—[inaudible]—that way, and that's—[inaudible]. And I revisited that technique three times. Every 10 years or so I saw it again and again.

MIJA RIEDEL: It was the Sky Pots and then with which other series?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I called them Sky Pots, but they became more sophisticated. Well—oh, I know what I can do. I can show you some—oops. I think—

MIJA RIEDEL: All right, so we have some slides here in front of us.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I have a—[inaudible]—but you might want to look—[inaudible]—take a look—[inaudible]—[Hammering in the background.]—

MIJA RIEDEL:—be able to take those, but find some way to get them back—[inaudible]. Right about this time, too, you were starting the potter's business with Larry Shep too, weren't you?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, no, no. That was after this time.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was a little later. Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That was after that. Of course, when I came to the States—to the U.S.—

MIJA RIEDEL: That was back in '60 from Japan, right?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Yes, '60 or '61—and I decided I would go back to school to finish a degree, and my parents agreed to let me stay [inaudible]. That was really nice of them. [Inaudible.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Inaudible] business—here? I said, "Well, you know, it was a"—

MIJA RIEDEL: You know what, let me just tell Kathleen. [Audio Break.] Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So, Japan—

MIJA RIEDEL: You came back in '61.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, '61.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you were going to finish your—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, finish my—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: Pete had gone up to—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley].

MIJA RIEDEL:—Berkeley and you decided to still finish it up, yes?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And, you know, I would have to go through a whole thing up there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And it's—[inaudible]. And so I came back and I made some stuff, and I made some sculptures. But Millard Sheets was there. He was the boss. He said, "What has this got to do with pottery?" He said, "You've got to show us you can make some pots." So I made them some pots, and that was all right. They weren't great pots, but they thought they were just fine. And so—

MIJA RIEDEL: You were fully prepared to make pots after those two years in Japan [laughs]—if you needed to make pots.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, no, part of it is, I brought back this stuff that was very successful commercially, and I used that, I used the commercial in this part of my show. [Inaudible] people were very impressed with me [inaudible] Sheets.

MIJA RIEDEL: Why not?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Who knows?

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, these were completely functional designed pots that were—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, but they were—I didn't bring them back the first prototypes, I brought them the finished—

MIJA RIEDEL: I see.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And he said, "Well, you didn't make these personally." I said, "No, I just made them personally." I mean—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And he said, "Well, no, we have to see some real pots thrown on the wheel." "Well, I made these originally by throwing them on the wheel." I tried to explain that to him. He said, "Well, that doesn't matter. I want to see that they"—so anyway, I went through and I made a few pots. You know, I wasn't going to fight it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—because I couldn't, so I spent the week—[inaudible]—pots. And then I—and then I showed all

the rest of the stuff. At the end of the—[inaudible]—

MIJA RIEDEL: You showed sculptures, you showed functional ware, you showed wheel work, you showed slabs?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I showed commercial design, graphics, magazine—[inaudible]—et cetera, et cetera. I showed that—it was the whole spectrum, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Anyway, that—

MIJA RIEDEL: That's interesting, that for your MFA show there was that huge spectrum of work—of ways of working, of types of work, and it was already present at the MFA show—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—yes, everything that you would really go on to develop.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But, yes, he has a very—he has a very limited way of thinking, but he was the boss. And when I worked with Interpace [ph], he was the boss again—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: At Interpace?

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Inaudible.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It was the same thing. He was a nice enough man; he just wasn't very smart. He didn't appreciate what would happen—[inaudible]—kind of stuff. You know, h e was designing the exteriors of banks at that time. I don't know if you remember them.

MIJA RIEDEL: I don't.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Some savings and loan—they're nicely done with—they're very formal with the mosaic murals and ceramic kind of tiles. Yeah, but anyway—[inaudible]—forgot the name of the bank.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it's interesting because, before you came back to finish your MFA, you'd already had a traveling exhibition in Japan, yes?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Traveling, touring your sculptures, your functional work, your designs work, drawings as well.

JERRY ROTHMAN: In Japan, yeah. But at any rate, that didn't mean anything here. And so I had to make a few pots and show him I can make some pots, and then that was okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you finished your MFA in '62?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I think so, yeah, '62.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it was pretty quick right around there that you started the business with Larry, right?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, that was very, very soon after that.

MIJA RIEDEL: There was also a solo show at the Pasadena Art Museum, right?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, yes. And I—yes, there was—[laughs] [inaudible]—yes, and that was an interesting experience too. But, you know—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's talk about *In Central Park*, b ecause that seems like a complete shift.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. It was sort of a complete shift.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It was really about the same subject, *In Central Park.* I'm not sure if it came before the *Sky Box* or with the *Sky Box*, at the same time. I think it was all being done at the same time but I'm not sure. Anyway, that was about the same thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: But it was completely the scale—

JERRY ROTHMAN: The scale—

MIJA RIEDEL: It was *the* first environmental installation, correct?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I guess so, if—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—if you think I should call it that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But, yeah, it was very large sculptures—some very small sculptures but some very large sculptures, and they're all about the sky and birds and trees and—[inaudible]. That's when I called it *Not in Central Park.*

MIJA RIEDEL: And that was—was that—were you beginning to paint on clay with that, or was that still oxide?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Still oxide. I didn't start to really paint on clay until more recently. [Inaudible]—that Leda and the Swan series, which I did with all the glazes. And it took so long to do it, and it was *so* difficult. I mean, Christ, it took me a month to decorate one of those, or paint them. And I had to remember what was happening underneath.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And, boy, that just—and luckily they really worked out really just fine, but I don't want to have to do that again.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It's just too much of an effort.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think of *In Central Park* as being the first piece that was really—overtly sensual and sexual. Did it seem that way to you too?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, at that time I didn't know—[inaudible]—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN:—until this friend of mine whose—[inaudible]—not too far from—[inaudible] business—he said, "Look, this stuff is really sensual." He said, "Some of it is downright sexy." And I said, "Thank you for pointing it out to me." He said, "Oh, all right." And so then I decided to take advantage of that. If that's what I was doing, that's what I was doing. Why hide it?

And so I made some more—but I'm trying to remember. Oh, there was a piece at the Long Beach Museum—and what the hell did I ever do with that?

MIJA RIEDEL: At the Long Beach Museum?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah—there was a show, and I had a piece in there, which was a—[inaudible]—female torsos—[inaudible]—back and front, and there was a flying penis on it. I didn't know they were flying penises—[inaudible]. [They laugh.] I really didn't know that. I just thought they were forms. That was the first piece I made that was consciously sensual.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But, yeah, *Not in Central Park*, on a certain level I must have realized that, but I didn't really—I wasn't really conscious of it. And that's what—anyway, yeah, what—[inaudible]—I guess some of them are still in Laguna. One of the—[long inaudible section of conversation].

MIJA RIEDEL: And then the figurative work really begins right after that. I'm thinking, for example, of *Seated Mystery Man.* There was just sort of one thing after the other. There was one innovation after another that was addressing sensuality or a change in scale or going figurative. It seems like those early '60s was just an explosion of exploration.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, I think—yeah, I think so. [Inaudible]—what people don't understand, they think I

changed, but I didn't. I just, for a certain number of years I do this kind of thing, then that thing, and then I'd come back to it. And when I come back it's more sophisticated, so it looks like something else, but it's the same thing.

That's actually—I figured out that's actually the way Picasso works. If you look at his work, you'll see he starts—he has three or four basic ways of working, and he keeps going back and forth. But—

[END CARD 2.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Jerry Rothman at the artist's home and studio in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, on August 30, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, card number three.

And we had just started to talk about the work as an ongoing exploration of form in that last—

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I was saying that's a bunch of boloney.

MIJA RIEDEL: All right. So tell me why.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, when you're dealing with form, it's a matter of—one thing always has to deal with balance somehow or other. And that was really—that's what's been going on for centuries.

The kind of form you make changes how you have to do that, but it isn't anything new, I mean this idea of the exploration of form. I mean, you're just doing it, and you have to—and you're forced to do it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Based on the content you're trying to develop.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I don't even know about content. [Doorbell rings.] Based on the form you're developing. And so, now, the form may have a certain content, but then it may not have any content. I don't know. I don't worry about the content until it's done. It may have content, and it may not have content.

But I want to make sure that everything I do works—it visually works, because visually—you know, the real understanding about vision and how we rise up this piece of—how your mind works was sort of explored thoroughly by those Italian psychologists in the 1920s. They showed you, by how you arranged things, you could make something with a totally different feel than it really is. I wish I—I have a whole bunch of slides about that someplace.

You know, you have two lines exactly the same length in the picture, but by what they relate to—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—one looks longer and one shorter.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But when you measure them, they're the same.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So that's what it's all about, how you juxtapose one thing against the other and what happens with that. And so, you know, you made very interesting things or beautiful things or whatever by the understanding you had.

And so, if you're going to make anything successful, whether it be two-dimensional or three-dimensional, you can't overlook that. That's the basic way that your vision works and your brain works. And that's—and when people talk about this exploration of form, I don't really know what they're talking about. I think they're just doing something that works within what they've done.

And so, when these kind of things occur in their paintings or their sculptures, they just compensate by what else they do.

MIJA RIEDEL: So it's more of a compositional issue.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I guess you could call it that, but it's something more than compositional. It's making contact—when you see things that really—you see and they really make contact with you and other people, you see it happening—[inaudible]—artist either is conscious of all that or intuitively knew how to do it.

A long time ago I wrote or said something about that. I said, "The art is in the artist, not in the painting."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, when he does things or she does things that are not common and beyond current understanding, but they work then because they have a real understanding of how you physiologically see and how your eye responds to the different colors played against each other and so on.

And, you know—who was that guy now? The guy who worked with color. They guy who—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, [Josef] Albers.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Albers. That's what Albers was—[inaudible]. You know, you can change any color by the color you put next to it, because the color doesn't mix on the page.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right. It mixes in your eye.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It mixes in the eye. And so, if you're aware of that, which I began to become aware of, then you begin to think—you don't have to worry about all that stuff, because you—if you have an intuitive understanding of that, you'll just do that. You'll compensate and adjust, and they can come out the way you want it to come out.

And that's what I started to do with form and color and everything else, realizing that you have to get to a point where you're so familiar with what's going on, what's happening, that you don't think about it; you just do it. And I think that happened a few years ago. [They laugh.] I finally got to that point. That takes a long time to get there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Yes, it does.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I mean, knowing about it and understanding it doesn't really count.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You have to be able to do it. And the guy who really could do it was a great painter of the nineteenth century, painting all those big hospital scenes and—he was in Pittsburgh. What the hell is his name? I saw a show of his in the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York City], his huge paintings of operations and—he also painted sailboats. Was it Winslow? [Thomas Eakins. Ed.] Golly, I can't remember.

But I saw this show where this guy was an absolute master of color and three dimensions—creating three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface by the use of color, shape, and texture. I mean, his paintings were just unbelievable.

And they're all a representation, all traditional paintings in a certain sense, but in another sense, it was one of the most modern paintings I've ever seen, because he could make these things become—I mean, you go to the movies and they give you these glasses. This guy didn't need any glasses. He just made that happen. Did I get a catalog from that show? I think I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: We can look for it later. We can add that. I can't think of who that was.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It was a very famous painter in Pittsburgh. He painted those guys fighting in the boxing—his early work, boxers. Maybe Kathleen can think of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: But that actually leads to an interesting question about how you work and what your working process is, and that back and forth between 2D and 3D. When you go into your studio, do you have an idea of what you're going to work on? Do you sometimes just start with the material?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Sometimes, yes. When I'm just stuck, I just go down there and play around, and something gets to come. That's the beauty of clay. I guess you could do the same with oil paint too. But with clay, I find it comes very naturally to me. That's why I do it that way. I find that's another way—if you ever—if you've watched these—I mentioned Picasso—you see these films about Picasso and the way he does things—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and you can see that's just what happens.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: He starts this—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and then he says, "What the hell do I have here?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so on and so forth. And because he has reached a point of understanding, he just knows what to do. And sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes he—well, he does just pfff—gets rid of it. But that's what makes him a great painter, because he can do that, and so often he pulls it off. And when he pulls it off, you say, "How the hell did this guy pull that off?" But he does.

And I doubt—I don't know—I doubt very much whether Picasso studied all that stuff, but that kind—that kind of physical understanding, a vision and all the senses, it was a really hot number in the early—or the mid-twentieth century. People did incredible experiments with everything—with people—[inaudible].

They explained how things—in drawings, when you draw something in front of something, it pushes something back and so on and so forth. And they made it very clear—very, very good stuff. I used to teach design with that stuff, because all the rest of it was just a bunch of hokey-pokey, a bunch of esoteric nonsense.

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's talk about teaching since we're here now, a little bit anyway. You taught for—you taught—

JERRY ROTHMAN: A long, long time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, at Cal State Fullerton [California State University, Fullerton] for 25 years.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Iowa before that—26 years maybe. What was it that you taught, and how did you—how did you try and teach it?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, a little bit was like Voulkos taught. You know, I didn't hold everyone's hand, but I did demonstrate more than he did. [Laughs.] But he was dealing with graduate students, like I say, and you shouldn't have to do that.

And I just taught them the basics. And then I demonstrated. I made some forms. I showed them how to make some basic forms—you know, round things, straight things, et cetera. And you start putting that together, you can make something that works.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That was it. And after that was over, I stopped. And I told them about what the clay would do. I did that in two or three lectures, and then I said, "Okay, now it's up to you." And that worked out very well.

MIJA RIEDEL: And would you work alongside them in the studio? Did you have—I know you had a separate studio. Did you do any work at school? Did you just sort of stop in from time to time and see what they were doing?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I did some things at the school, but—that's what Pete did. But I found that—you know, I was getting a much wider age range of kids, so I couldn't—you know, it wasn't all graduate students. But I think Kathleen's trying to tell us something.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Well, we will pause for today.

[END CARD 3.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Jerry Rothman at the artist's home and studio in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, on August 31, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is card number four.

This morning we've had a wonderful tour of your sculpture garden here in Mexico.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Incomplete, but it's—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. And when did that work begin?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, that work began in 2009, oh, sometime in March or April, and it went through to 2010, until about December.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it's August now, right, August 2010—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—so it's gone through—it went in 2009 until December of 2009?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, 2010. Oh, that's right—it's about the same time—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay, about a year.

JERRY ROTHMAN: About a year. And these other pieces were made from that time until the present, and they're just being finished.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, and these are magnificent life-size demons and devils—little groupings of three.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Not little groupings—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—large groupings of three.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, no, these were individual pieces. They have no group.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So the next three will be—this one I call *Holding On.* And then the next one is a male image that—you saw them fire it. And the other one is a female image. And they're going to go together somehow.

MIJA RIEDEL: And will they be part of the sculpture garden now?

JERRY ROTHMAN: They'll be part of the sculpture garden now.

MIJA RIEDEL: And they're in process in the studio. One's actually in the kiln right now.

JERRY ROTHMAN: One's in the kiln right now.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. And these are fantastic. Does the trio of demons—it looks like one is giving birth—does that have a title?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, you mean the woman?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, it's just another person—*A Woman of Another Kind*.

MIJA RIEDEL: *A Woman of Another Kind*.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And the man is *A Man of Another Kind.*

MIJA RIEDEL: It looks sort of like a dragon—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL:—and a dinosaur.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, it may be a little, but by the time I'm through with it, putting the head on it—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, no, I was talking about the ones out in the garden.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, I see.

MIJA RIEDEL: The green ones.

JERRY ROTHMAN: The green ones. Oh, yeah, that's—yes, I guess that's like a dragon.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, and the one next to it is—there's a preacher next to it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: He's sort of—he's a shaman. He's blessing the birth.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And there's a baby.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And there's a female image.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I think they all sort of relate to each other.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But I didn't make them at the same time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah. That's interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I had no idea what I was doing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, because I made the female in this first. And I looked at her, I said, "Well, this is a birth scene, isn't?" And I said, "Oh, yeah," so I made the male image to be a companion to the female image while she was giving birth. And she had to have a midwife of some kind.

And then I made the baby. I made that into a dragon-like thing, halfway in between him and her. And then I—and the preacher, I just—I didn't know—I knew I was making a preacher but I didn't know who it was for. And it was—it was for this.

So I just—and I do these things and I have something in my head, but I'm never quite sure what it is.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And then it comes out this way, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So the three pieces would turn out to be a group.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And does that grouping have a title?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yes. It's right on top, right here. Well, when you're reading it, it's *Folks of Another Kind.*

MIJA RIEDEL: You mean on the back? *Folks of Another Kind.* Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, that's the whole series is that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And that main sculpture, yeah, that is the thing it's centered around.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I mean, I actually started out with the small ones first, but then it all relates to that same—the last one I made with the—[inaudible]—which I didn't know was going to be a—[inaudible]. And so that got together and it relates to it. And that's the way I do things.

I do them on a subconscious level until they all come together, and then I finally figure out what I've done.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's fascinating, because to look at it, it looks as if it were conceived of and created, in that order.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: But it's interesting that it's the opposite.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, it's just the opposite.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, well, as far as I can really tell, most artists really work that way, because, you know, even a person like Alice Neel, who is making a portrait of somebody she knows, or she gets to know, she's really making a portrait of what the person is about, and that affects how he looks. That's what's finally all evolved. And I'm sure she doesn't have it planned out to this, that, and other. I'm sure she gets a feeling about the person and then she does it that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, these are very different—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—certainly than anything you've done before. So Mexico is very much present in this work.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yes, beyond a doubt.

MIJA RIEDEL: And there's another series of three figures, which are interesting because they're all—the're bases or columns sort of from the torso down, and then the torsos and the heads are all hand-formed.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, what happened was I was—I had to wait for these things to dry before I could fire them, and I wanted something to do. So I just—again, I didn't really plan. I just made these heads, and then I made —"Oh, well, that's—that is definitely a politician, and that's definitely a general."

I made the heads first and I put the bodies on them. And then I made the bases next, because it turned out that it was right in line with that same kind of thing. And so, I made a politician and a general, and I made an adjutant, which is—which I didn't realize until I was done with it. [Laughs.] I didn't realize they went together, but they do go together.

It's a funny way of doing things, I know, but that's—I really—I work on this—I don't know anything until I'm done —[inaudible]—but if I knew something originally then I wouldn't do the same thing. I'd be too conscious of what I was trying to do, and the stuff would not come out the same way. It would be more formal. But, you know, when it happens on this level, then it always goes together.

MIJA RIEDEL: And did you intend those three figures, the politician and the colonel, to be—did you intend them as a group?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Because they're all facing in the same way. They're all about the same height. They're all leering in the same direction. It's—

JERRY ROTHMAN: I just did—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—but I didn't plan it that way. But I did plan it that way. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, just not consciously.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It's just subconsciously.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I found out that's the best way to work. Whenever I worry about if I had a drawing or if I had something to go with it or so on, then I would have been really inhibited.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you just start with the clay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I mean, drawing is such an inhibiting thing. I mean, to draw those kinds of images and shapes in a drawing and then—I tried it once—and then try to reproduce them, it doesn't really happen.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, that also explains why they feel so organic somehow. They feel like they've just evolved. There's something about the forms that just feels—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I'll tell you what will happen. Ever since I've been wedging clay, about 30 years or—well, a long time—[they laugh]—I use this Japanese method. And I wedge this clay in the way the Japanese do. It's a very good method, by the way.

MIJA RIEDEL: What about it is different than the way we might wedge clay here?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL: Is it the rolling?

JERRY ROTHMAN: It's the rolling around itself, and you roll a little ball.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You know, I may have 50 pounds of clay, but while I'm wedging, it's 10 pounds around itself.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And it keeps—and you have this—and you build this spiral image. Well, I've always liked that spiral image. But then, to make sure you—you start to re-wedge it again.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So you open it up, and then I saw all these faces and said, "Gee, I should do something about this." And this is the first time I ever did. I used it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so I wedged out the basic—it leaves a basic visual image of a face, and then you manipulate it a little bit, and it becomes the face you want.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And then I start to realize that I can make long faces, skinny faces, all kinds of things, and get some very interesting results, which would be almost impossible to sculpt.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So I just—so at that time I began to have ideas about who it was going to be. This was going to be a politician. That should be a pig-like thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: So I wedged it out, so it—and then after I wedged it out and got the basic thing, I set it aside and I let it dry a little bit, and I sculpted it. Then I became conscious of the shape and the forms I had here, and then I sculpted them to make them work better. But the big trick, which I told you a long time ago, is to make it look like it just happened.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right. And they do.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: They have that feeling as if—it's helpful to hear you describe that wedging experience, because when one looks at them, they have that completely—almost a mushed, wedged feeling to them, but as if you just stopped mid-wedge and there it was.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But by doing that, it's always together.

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, it's the first time I used that—well, I've been thinking about it for years, but I never really—I was never really ready to do anything with it. It must be 25, 30 years I kept thinking, "Gee, there's something there," and finally I saw what it was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, they're very organic, abstracted forms. They remind me of the Bay Views or some of the forms that you've done before, but certainly there's no—[inaudible]—like that.

Do you need to—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, no.

[Side conversation.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, it just worked for this—for some reason it just worked. Most likely I was unwilling in the past to take that chance.

Somehow, as you grow, you say, "Oh, hell, this is all right. Why the hell didn't you do it before?" Things like that. And when I was a young man and I made political statements and what have you, the faces—there was some of that in there, but they were sculpted much sooner.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And they don't have the power that these have.

MIJA RIEDEL: There is something about the fact that these look only partially formed and partially as if they just evolved like this.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And so, I don't know—so I liked that. So I started in the small ones. The faces were made as [inaudible]. I made a bunch of heads that I can tell you about, but smaller ones. And I looked through them, and the ones I thought were going to work, I kept, and the ones I didn't, I threw away.

MIJA RIEDEL: And there are probably a dozen sculptures out there, yes?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Small ones—

MIJA RIEDEL: Some smaller figures, larger figures, and then a couple of abstracted ones with steel rings.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, the abstract ones are part of the BAY series.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. The Bay View series?

JERRY ROTHMAN: The Bay View—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—but that's also—I sort of did those the same way. I sort of wedged out these slabs to see what would happen to them, and then I built things on them. And there's one of them in here that Lavula [ph] has that you look at one side, and you look at the other side, and you can't believe it's the same piece of sculpture. It's so different.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I don't know. I thought it was very interesting. But I don't know how I did that.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that's one of the Bay Views pieces?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, yes. And I'd like to be able to do it again [laughs], but I don't know if I can. It just happened that way. And so—and that's, well, what clouds do. You know, if you look at clouds from one side and you drive long enough to come around the back of them, they're totally different. And, I mean, clouds are just amazing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Yes, the Bay Area is a great place to watch them.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, they really are. So, yes, so I—

MIJA RIEDEL: So some of these forms had their genesis in that series, to be sure.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, sure. Everything grows out of everything else.

MIJA RIEDEL: The color on these feels completely different.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, yes, it is. I was always afraid of—I like color, but I never had the guts to make color that

was really color. But Mexico, you know, just changed all that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I mean, I saw this stuff and I said, "Jesus." I knew the Chinese did that too. They made—I mean, they used, you know, primary colors, essentially, on all their stuff. And they made it work—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—which was pretty amazing. So I said, "Well, you better try to do that, Jerry, see if you can do it." And it works very well. Strong colors are a good thing to have.

MIJA RIEDEL: And are these all acrylic washes on these pieces?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, no, not washes. They're all acrylic paints.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, some of them have—they really have a layering—most likely some have acrylic an eighth of an inch thick someplace because acrylic is a great preserver. I mean, you know, it's better than—it's better than low-fire glazes. I mean, you leave low-fire glazes out in the sun, in the weather, and in a relatively short time they fade out and disappear.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, but the acrylic will hold up.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Much better.

MIJA RIEDEL: And even the darker, smaller pieces that are primarily browns and blacks, that's acrylic too?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. But those—amazing how long it took to make those. Those were a buildup of lots of different colors and textures to get that quality. Now, if you just painted all one color, it's not the same thing.

And that's something I learned in this Black Pots series. I used—everyone thinks they're black until they look very closely—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and some of them are green-black and some are red-black and some are red but they look black and so on, and just because I built them with low-fire glazes. I use a low-glaze, a red underneath. I put a black on top. And then there's a subtle thing happening, but, you know, it's enough to make a real difference.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, and it goes back to what we were talking about yesterday and Albers and just layering those colors.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it makes for a much richer, denser color—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—than just a simple black.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, it's like you're looking through layers of stuff.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I think it works very well, but I try to tell people that, and I say, "Well, that's what you have to do," and no one ever believes me. [They laugh.] I try—when they want to know how I made these sand leaves and put them on, I told everybody. And they were so anxious to do it, but no one could ever do it. I couldn't understand why. All these people—I demonstrate that all the time, and they just—somehow they just couldn't believe that that's the way it was done.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hmm, what didn't they believe, that it was so simple or that it was so complicated?

JERRY ROTHMAN: That it was so simple.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah-ha.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I told them. You know, I told them exactly what I did. I used, you know, different coarse sands or fine sands. You had different results. And I told them that you have to use—it takes a lot of color. It's very—[inaudible]—a lot of stain. And you pile it on, and it's very thick. And then before you fire it, you sort of blow it off and get rid of the excess material, and then you spray a neutral, clear glaze on it, very little so it just attaches it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And that was the Baroque Vessels or the Ritual Vessels or both?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, no, that was the Sky Pots.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, the Sky Pots, okay. Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. But for some reason no one ever did it, and it's such a simple technique.

MIJA RIEDEL: And how high did those fire?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Those fired—well, some—the original ones went to cone 10.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really? It was amazing you were able to maintain that level of color at that temperature.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No—

MIJA RIEDEL: No?

JERRY ROTHMAN:—because when they frit those colors, they take them up to 12 and 13.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And then they re-grind them, and so there's no—if you have a neutral glaze on it, very—[inaudible]—it doesn't affect them at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm just surprised those colors don't burn out at that temperature because you had pale sort of pinks and blues and—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. Well—

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, yeah, I guess that would be all right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, it works, for a simple reason, just like frits.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: They frit a thing to make it—whatever happens to it, and it's now a high-temperature pigment.

MIJA RIEDEL: And I guess the copper and the cobalt can go that high, so—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, it can—well, it can—yes, after they fritted them, it was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You know, they made it into this color, this pink, so that means they can go through at any temperature and survive the same color. They've got a red now that does that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. The trims do—that one. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: So the sculptures that you've made in Mexico, these are firing how high?

JERRY ROTHMAN: These are relatively—they're relatively low temperature. They're—what are they? They're about cone 3.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Because cone 3 is the place where you go and get a real good matrix, but you don't have to go any higher to get the strong piece of clay. At least that's when the glass starts forming. And so, again, I tell everybody that, and they don't believe me. They still think you've got to go to cone 10.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Right. Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: And this sculpture garden is interesting because it's the first installation of its kind that I can think of you've ever done. It's really conceived of as a sculpture garden with multiple—now, true to your way of working, did you conceive of this ahead of time, or has it just sort of evolved?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, I just started it, and I saw all these spots that I—I worked with the existing landscape and put platforms and spots in it that I needed, and now I'm putting things there that they need. You know, it's—

MIJA RIEDEL: There's this wonderful winding path that goes up and down. It changes in altitude, and there are narrow little sections and broader, flat spots where the pieces are installed.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, it's organic. I just had to go with what the hillside was. Otherwise I'd be going crazy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So I found the most logical places to make flat and the most logical way to take the—and nature did a much better job than I did before, so I—[they laugh].

MIJA RIEDEL: When you think about your work, when you think about the earliest pieces we were just talking about, the Sky Pots, some of the early Sky Pots, and then the most recent work, which you're working on right now, what do you see as similarities and differences between the work?

JERRY ROTHMAN: As far as I'm concerned, it's one continuum. I don't see—I just see a continuum. I don't see any real differences. And similarities, I don't see much of that either because when I look—you know, when I look at some of the earlier forms I've made, I see all those forms in here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Some of those cityscapes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: You can almost see it again in some of those wedged faces.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, and so I just see that—so I just see that as a continuum of some kind. But most people, they have to see something recognizable. You have to have a sign on it that says, "This is a follow-through."

MIJA RIEDEL: A follow-through.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But I don't make that—I don't have any things that I stamp on as follow-throughs. What else can it be? I mean, I can't all of a sudden jump from this to that with abandoning all the knowledge I had before. It just doesn't happen.

And so I just continue and just—it's a continuum, not obviously but—it's like I was talking about Picasso. You can see from the work he did in the beginning to the work he did at the end, you can see the relationships, in the way his forms and—

MIJA RIEDEL: What do you see as the relationship between some of the—say, the political or the social commentary pieces, and then pieces like the landscapes or the Sky Pots, the Bay Views?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, in a certain sense they're political too.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hmm.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You know, they're talking about the Bay Views and how the Bay is now, and what it might be. And what it might be isn't very encouraging. And the forms—you know, the forms of clouds are so similar to so much abstract sculpture in the—well, in every one. They may be not conscious of it, but you look at clouds and all you can do is see shapes. And, you know, they're in there.

I don't think there's very much—well, I believe if it doesn't exist someplace, you can't do it. And all the forms that come out that people do come from someplace in their experience or from nature, what have you. But when they live in—when you live in an environment, how can you avoid the forms and shapes in the environment? I mean, that's what makes sense to you.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, yes, the transitions are the same as other forms. A cloud makes transitions much like

you make transitions on your body. Everything in nature is essentially the same: trees, people, animals—everything. It's made with the same stuff, the same material. Clouds are the same material you are.

And so, therefore, the result of how it's put together has to reflect the materials. You know, your human form is so much like a tree, it's unbelievable, you know? When your muscles need supporting, the shape changes into depth. You're just like a tree.

And you essentially—well, the one thing that makes the body so much different—not only our bodies but any body—different from things that are stationary, and trees, is that you're a mobile, tension—tension and rigid construction. So you can move.

But when you come right down to it, a tree has the same kind of thing, has—it starts out with a standard deal, a rigid form, and it throws out [inaudible] another rigid form, but that rigid form is then held in position by sinews, by long chains of things, the same as you are but it doesn't move, that's all. And the shape of an oval—of a tree, when it changes its direction, is very similar to your shape. I mean, it's all related.

MIJA RIEDEL: That makes me think that the one thing—one of the three lines that I can see moving through your—all of your work is a sense of motion and sense of energy, that very few pieces seem completely still. Actually, I'm hard-pressed to think of one. They all seem to be in motion or about motion. The continuum seems present in the work.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Everything alive, it moves. I had a student once who thought if he took a mold off a human body—a very, you know, beautiful anatomy, muscles and so on—and he makes a copy of it exactly with a plaster mold, he would have a wonderful figure, alive. But it was dead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It was dead because the human body is always in motion somehow, and you have to somehow make that obvious. And trees are always in motion. And a flower is—everything. Everything is affected by the atmosphere, by the tensions involved, the wind involved, you know?

And so, you're all part of the same stuff. And once you learn the basic—you have a basic understanding of that, you don't need anatomy. Anatomy is baloney—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

JERRY ROTHMAN:—as far as the artist is concerned, because the artist—or even, I don't know, anybody—what you have to do is be aware of what's—you know, we are built from our hips. Everything, in some way or other, goes back to your hips.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, has a lot to do with weight-bearing, motion—sure.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, as long as you know that, you can invent any muscles you want and make them seem real.

MIJA RIEDEL: Huh. [Affirmative.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's what Michelangelo did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hmm.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I learned that by studying some of his sculptures. You know, the slaves on—whose tomb is that? I forgot, but those slaves that partially come out of the stone and are partially in the stone, they've got continuous muscles that are impossible. Nobody has muscles like that. But he makes the whole thing work that way. He builds a twist in them—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—in their body.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And then he has branches coming off of the twist to the other parts of the body, which all makes sense. And it makes sense in the whole visual panel in relation to what he has them doing. And it all came from the hips. I mean, no one has a continuous muscle that goes everyplace, but those slaves do. They have a continuous line, and that's been broken up and changed and so it looks like it's muscles but it's just—it's just a continuous line.

MIJA RIEDEL: That actually sounds like a perfect description of your work in the long run and your work in the short run too. It's a continuous line that's just broken up and twists in different directions.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, you know, hell, my philosophy is: steal anything you can. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: I think I've heard that from you once before—slightly different language, but yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I mean, you know, Michelangelo learned on the ancient sculpture he saw, and he improved on it a great deal. And then Bernini came along and, whew, he did things [laughs] that—he really understood that. He did all these things that, you know, that aren't possible to really do, but you look at them and they're perfectly reasonable. You believe it because the whole thing is designed around a system that's believable.

MIJA RIEDEL: You know, that actually makes me think of—there's a circular form, or a hoop, that has reappeared in your work repeatedly. I think of very large-scale pieces like *Opal Flies Again,* and then smaller versions like the Bay Views I was just seeing again out there.

Why has that been significant? Why has that reoccurred—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL:—just speaking of systems that—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, that just holds the forms in place. It keeps them in relationships. That big circle, the circle on those clouds—the small cloud forms would have no place to go.

MIJA RIEDEL: But they could have sprung up like that early piece, *Growth* or *Grown.* There could have been steel bars and springing in other directions.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Instead, there is this circular form.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But I'm interested in containing that, because I don't want them to spring out.

MIJA RIEDEL: You want it all contained.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I want it contained in there.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I want something to relate it to.

MIJA RIEDEL: So if you—you know, the whole thing about any kind of form is how it relates to itself within the—even a picture plane. The flat, square, rectangular picture plane is what creates everything. How you relate to that picture plane decides what you're doing. If you're making a dramatic picture or a calm beach, it all depends on how it relates to that picture plane.

If you're making a great deal of depth, it depends on the picture plane. If you took that picture plane away and let it go just away, you wouldn't have anything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. So—

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So that's a kind of a picture plane. You have to have things to relate to. And so that's one thing. I finally got some of my students to understand that. [Laughs.] Yeah, really I did. Well, I used to—I taught drawing for a while, because I was very good draftsman, and they said, "Why don't you teach drawing?"

And I just explained this stuff in the same way, about the picture plane. I'd say, "You don't have to learn a perspective. You have to learn how things relate to the picture plane." I mean, linear perspective and mechanical perspective is a joke. You know, you have to have—yes, you're right, you have to have points out here way beyond—I'd say, "That isn't necessary."

I show people how you can do it just by the fact that diagonal lines in certain directions do one thing and in another direction do another thing. And how you organize them tells them whether something is up in the air or something is down on the ground. I'd say—I taught them, "When you make any form, even if you're making a cloud form, you have to have the shapes in relationship to your picture plane and the things you're doing."

Aside from that, mechanical perspective was a really nice gimmick, and Bernini—was it Bernini who invented that perspective? I think it was. Anyway, very early on in the Renaissance, that fellow who put a mirror up and drew on it, and it was a very simple shape building, and he created mechanical perspective in the Western world.

In the Muslim world, they understood that you see everything as coming from one point to you, and that's what made perspective. You were the one. And so, that's why—that's why he came up with these points. But when you do that, when you draw a perspective, a mechanical perspective, so much is just distorted. You don't see that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You know? And you get these funny, distorted shapes, which a lot of people got used to seeing in the Western world. But it doesn't relate to the real world. This is what relates to the real world and how you see that. And you can't see into infinity. You can only see what your eyes see from a distance and the way—you know. And there's no way you could ever get a piece of paper big enough, or a room big enough, to really do that.

So you have to understand that. These kids came from, you know, from mechanical drawing, and perspective—they know all about perspective. Nothing looked right. I said, you know, "Of course not," I said, "because you're doing a mechanical thing when you're not—when you don't see that way." I try to point out, "You see; you will compensate. When you look at things, you yourself compensate for it. If it doesn't seem right—"

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: "—then you—"

MIJA RIEDEL: Mentally adjust.

JERRY ROTHMAN: "—you adjust it." But where they were sold on perspective by, you know, "This is the correct way you get correct, accurate perspective," I said, "Well, mechanically you do, but visually you don't." And I got that across to a few people, not too many. But, you know, the ones I get this across to, they start to draw in one sense like crazy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. Interesting. So it was a whole other way to approach drawing.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And that—I mean, you know, when you look at some of these wonderful paintings out of the Renaissance that have this kind of unusual perspective, you can see what the guy did. He made shapes that made it work. It didn't make any difference if it was real or not. It made it work visually on the canvas. And that's what they've been doing forever.

MIJA RIEDEL: And is that what you've been working on, do you think, in three dimensions in certain ways is setting them in relationship to each other and then—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I make things work. I don't care about anything else. Once I've got a thing going, the only thing that counts is whether everything works or not—relationship and does the right story. And three dimensions is just a little more difficult than two dimensions, but you're essentially working in perspective, because you have that—because you're dealing with forms.

You know, your arms look totally different on the other side than the front side, and you have to make that work that way. And that's what I've been doing. I've been doing that for a long while. I learned that a long time ago somehow. I tried to talk to Voulkos about that, and he doesn't—he wasn't interested.

MIJA RIEDEL: Voulkos wasn't interested—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—in that whole thing about perspective?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, he—well, no, he wasn't interested in—no, he was interested but he—yeah, well, he's a funny guy. He says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah," and then he goes away and then he does it. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: He does it?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL: Or doesn't do it?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Does do it. There were a few Voulkos sculptures—after that show I had—the first show I had at the Ferus, he started to do some things I was doing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And that's all fair.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Well, yes, I remember him saying something about, "If you have nothing to bring me, I have nothing to bring you."

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so it was great—it was a great thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I learned a lot from him; he learned a lot from the students. It was really worth it. And I guess that's what—I guess that's why that was so good, because he never minded that. And if he saw it, he said, "That's a good idea, Jerry. I'll use that." [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: How do you see—have your sources of inspiration changed over the decades?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, because it's always been everything around me. I don't—art has had very little—actual people's paintings have very little influence on me.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's more the environment.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It's more the environment, yeah. I mean, I like them and I saw them, but I could—you know, it was the first—well, one of the first things Voulkos did with me, and some other—with me particularly. I don't know why. He went to a show at the LA County Museum, in the art museum, and there was a show of all these Modern guys. And he—

MIJA RIEDEL: Painters, sculptors—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, painters, sculptors. He said, "Well, Jerry, what do you think of this one?" I told him. He said, "Hmm." And it turns out that I said all the right things, which he didn't quite understand because I was just a freshman student. And neither did the other guys, you know. And so I just—I just had a different way of seeing.

MIJA RIEDEL: What do you attribute that to? Is it coming—do you think it was approaching clay with a background of working in wood in furniture and assembling things that way?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I really can't tell you. I mean, I can only attribute it to—I was brought up with very liberal parents who let me think what I want to think, and I explained what I thought, and they went along or didn't go along, you know. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Well, that's sort of Jewish tradition. You talk about things at the dinner table, and you talk about what you're interested in and so on and so forth. And everyone talks a lot. And people talk because they have ideas about things. And I didn't necessarily agree with many of their ideas. And I know—yeah.

Well, when—this was a long time ago—when my parents had their store on La Cienega Boulevard, and they wanted to—they wanted to make a change and so on and so forth, I said, "Okay, let me do it, and it will work." And they said—my mom and my dad say, "Oh, no, no, we have to have experienced people." I said, "Well, this isn't going to cost very much if I do it, Dad, because I'll go the machine shop and I'll make all the stuff, and we're talking about a thousand [dollars], $1,200." And said, "All right, for that."

MIJA RIEDEL: How old were you?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, how old was I? I was about 17 or 18 years old.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you were still in high school.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And then I designed this whole store. And that information got into every men's wear magazine and design magazine there was. I was the first one who designed—I designed these round racks.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, that was—you hang clothes off them like this. And, anyway, I—

MIJA RIEDEL: The round racks—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—that all the hangers hang on?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Nobody was doing that?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, everything was straight racks and so on and so forth. And I designed racks to hang off of poles in the ceiling. And they're like this.

MIJA RIEDEL: Staggered.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Staggered, but on top of the poles they were staggered. So you had two different levels, three different levels of things, and you just turned them around and—it gave them three times as much display space, and much easier to display, and it looked interesting.

And so, the men's wear magazines—well, and I—they had big—not promotions but, you know, displays about this, and some guy patented it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, if you don't patent it—if you have good ideas—but my dad, he was dumbfounded, and he didn't—you know, he didn't—my mother was all for it. He said, "Well, we've got it, so I'll wait a little while and see how it works ." And everyone who came in was just flabbergasted and they loved it—so easy for them to see stuff. And you got so much more stuff in the same space—

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and so on and so forth. And so, that—so I actually redesigned how you display clothes, and the industry glommed onto it. And then you saw all kinds of racks coming out based on the stuff I did.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, from a very early age you had a very advanced spatial sensibility.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I guess.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I don't know how. I guess that's true. But it was very good for him. He got lots of publicity, it made it much easier to work, and he started making lots more money. And that was—that was nice for me.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was a good thing.

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Laughs.] He agreed to my going to Art Center School and so on and so forth. And that wasn't cheap then. Anyway, it's a long story.

MIJA RIEDEL: But it started with that basis in industrial design, just making things work—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Yes, just making things work.

MIJA RIEDEL:—better.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, that's right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yep.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that was also a booming time for industrial design.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: It was an exciting time for—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, it was.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, I used to read all the magazines, all the books and so on and so forth.

MIJA RIEDEL: Which were significant to you?

JERRY ROTHMAN: They were all significant because every one had something interesting and worthwhile to say.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you reading, you know, *American Craft, Studio Potter, Ceramics Monthly?*

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, at that time they didn't have *American Craft.*

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: They had—

MIJA RIEDEL: *Craft Horizons.*

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, they didn't have that. They had the ceramic magazine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that *Ceramics Monthly?*

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, *Ceramics Monthly.*

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I wrote an article for that when I was about—well, I must have been 18 years old at least when I had my first show—I showed there first. I wrote an article, and they printed a three-page article of pictures.

MIJA RIEDEL: About the show at Ferus?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's a long time ago.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that is.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But it was 1961 or '2, something like that. And so, someplace I used to have all that stuff. I don't know where it is now.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure it's on the CV. '57 was the show at Ferus.

JERRY ROTHMAN: '57?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, anyway—

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you remember *Craft Horizons* at all, and Rose Slivka was—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, it was great as far as I was concerned. It helped me out. They showed some of my stuff in that. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: *Art in America* we talked about yesterday.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. Yeah, they showed—yep. But later on, for some reason, no one showed my stuff anymore. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: None of the magazines?

JERRY ROTHMAN: None of the magazines. And the reason for that is that they had different writers. And as they changed writers, the stuff all started to change towards the fashion. And the original guys, who were not interested in the fashion, they saw something else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were there writers in particular that you admired or you felt were really significant, made a difference to you?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I never paid attention.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really? Books?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Books—I got in books too but I never paid attention. You know, I figured, oh, you know, it's kind of like—who said that? "Today's books—or newspapers—wrap tomorrow's fish."

MIJA RIEDEL: That's right. [They laugh.] Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I said, well—and so, actually I did very well. I was just—I just lucked out. You know, right on through my whole experience I had, at least once a year, something shown in a magazine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But I was just lucky. Well, I did happen to mean something to somebody, and it just—it was fine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was some of that—when I think about your work, I think about all the different things that you've accomplished in time. I think about the sculptural work, I think about the functional and the dinnerware designs, I think about the technical innovations. I would imagine that some of that press would have been about the zero-shrinkage clay, the ferro-ceramic. No?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. Well, at that time they all wanted me to give the exact formula for it. I said, "I won't do that because it's dangerous."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I said, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: It was the lignite and the chopped fiberglass, is that right?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I said that, "You know, if I'm using it, it's okay, but if a bunch of kids start using it—"

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: "—without any caution, really—"

MIJA RIEDEL: Those fiberglass fibers can be nasty.

JERRY ROTHMAN: "—then everyone would be suing you and me."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I said, "So I don't want to do that." And so they agreed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so—and, yeah. And the no-shrink clay worked out to be no-shrink, but you lost a lot of plasticity because of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And as you were making really big things, that was all right because they were big enough so you could—

MIJA RIEDEL: What about the clay you're using here, these—for example, these demon pieces out in the sculpture garden, the dragon that's so elaborate and so—

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's the clay I developed here.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is it, because that looks incredibly structurally—

JERRY ROTHMAN: It is.

MIJA RIEDEL:—sound.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It is—

MIJA RIEDEL: That's not—does that include fiberglass?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Nope.

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Nope.

MIJA RIEDEL: And no steel armature, no steel structure?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, no, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's just pure clay?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, when I build them I have steel armatures, but I pull them out—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—as soon as I can. So otherwise it would be very hard to keep that much clay up when it's wet.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: So I had armatures in that sense. And I started using armatures for those cloud pieces, but I pulled them out. And I started using metal rods as pins to hold things in place until I knew it would be all right, and out they go. So, yeah. I just found that worked out very well.

MIJA RIEDEL: We haven't talked at all about the Soup Tureens and the Ritual Vessels.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yeah. Excuse me—

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure. Let me pause this.

[Audio Break.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, Soup Tureens.

MIJA RIEDEL: Actually, that's an interesting question too because we haven't addressed yet commissions, and if you accepted commissions or not. I know this wasn't a commission per se, but it was sort of an invitation around Campbell's Soup something or other, wasn't it?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. Anyway, yeah. Well, I used to make soup tureens before that just because I enjoyed making vessels like that. And I made a bunch of them, and I was actually making some money. So I made a bunch of these very large soup tureens, maybe that big around—that big—with handles on them and so on.

And they were kind of nice, and I sent them to the—America House. You know that—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, yes, America House in New York, the shop.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And they said, "Great, and how much do you want for them?" I said, "Well, I have to have at least 75 [dollars], $80 for them." So they thought that was great. And I found out that they sold them for three [hundred dollars], $400 and not telling me about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, that was disappointing—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—for someone who is supposed to support the arts.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And there was another piece that somebody—I had a piece that I sent to a show once, and there was two large sculptures that were using that Sky Pot technique. And one of them they sent back to me, and it never got shown because the jury didn't understand what this was all about.

And there were two of them in the set, but they sent the one back to me, and they kept one. And they kept—and they had it on display, and they sold it for, they say, $1,500. And so they sent me half of that. And I found out they sold it for about $3,000.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: So I—

MIJA RIEDEL: Have you had many experiences like that, or were most of your—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yes, quite a few people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Quite a few?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmation.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, when you're young and naïve—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—you don't know what things go for, and so—and there's—well, I sent things to galleries, and they either—they sometimes, "Oh, sorry, Jerry, but they were misplaced and really"—got broken or something, but I find out later on they were sold. And so, I—

MIJA RIEDEL: But you would be paid for them if they were misplaced or broken. Just, "Oh, we lost it; oh, well," and you were supposed to—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I tell you, I was naïve. That's all. Yes, I was very naïve. And of course I didn't look in somebody's house.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so I—anyway, so I stopped dealing with galleries.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you showed—didn't you show with Garth Clark for quite a while?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, well, he was the only guy who was ever honest about it. Yes, well, you know—and there were several galleries who were very interested in what I made, but then there was always the stuff that, when they asked me to send them the latest stuff, they say, "You know what I want," but I sent them—well, I make—[inaudible]—because that's what they want, and they, "We didn't mean that." So—

MIJA RIEDEL: So, did you show with Garth for quite a while?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And once you found that—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—gallery, you were—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I showed with Garth for quite a while because I was making those soup tureens for quite a while.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And he would sell them very nicely. He sold about 50 percent of them, but the other 50 percent, they're someplace. I sold them by myself. I don't know where they are.

MIJA RIEDEL: You made quite a few of those—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—three hundred or so over 10 years.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, something like that. And God knows what—anyway.

MIJA RIEDEL: And I think those are a really interesting series to talk about simply because they went on so long and they were—they were so striking. I think it was Beatrice Wood who talked about them as one of the first, or the only original American vessel.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's what she said, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, she was incorrect because I was influenced by—was it a tinsmith, silversmith—John Paul Jones—who was that silver—anyway, I was influenced by a revolutionary silversmith, who was part of that—

MIJA RIEDEL: Contemporary? John Paul—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: John Paul Miller?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I don't know [laughs], but I liked the stuff, and I liked the eighteenth-century stuff he was making, and I did a take upon that. So, maybe it wasn't—anyway, the soup tureens, they started because I sent these soup tureens to Campbell's Soup.

MIJA RIEDEL: They were having a competition, I think, yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, it wasn't a competition. It was an invitational show.

MIJA RIEDEL: The invitational.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I sent them—I thought they were wanting soup—I assumed they wanted a soup tureen—I'm serious about it—I made a soup tureen. I mean, I guess they were kind of nice and so on, but they—I mean, they showed them, but they didn't sell them.

MIJA RIEDEL: This was mid-'70s, I think—'75.

JERRY ROTHMAN: In the '70s, yes. But that threw me on to soup tureens because I remembered my grandmother used to have soup tureens, and my aunts used to have soup tureens.

They used to have these cabinets with all this stuff that was functional or semi-functional ceramics for special occasions. Special occasions they brought this all out, so that you'd know that it was an important occasion.

Well, that somehow had died. By the time it came around to my mother, she didn't keep stuff like that. She just thought a soup tureen was anything that held soup. And there was no ceremonial function about it.

So I got to thinking about it and I said, "I would like to make a real American form for soup tureens, or serving vessels." And so I started out with an archaic one, and then I went to a classical form. Then I went into a baroque form. Then I made a modern form. I went the whole steps. And then there were quite a few—you could see it—and quite a few of those sold. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: But they were all primarily that multicolored black, weren't they? No, they were a variety of colors.

JERRY ROTHMAN: There were some that were supported by fish, and some that—no, there was a whole—there was a definite difference. I mean, there was the early stage—I guess I forgot what you call that—but it started out with archaic, and they were archaic shapes and archaic things and decoration, and then classical. They had supports, the soup tureens. They had fish supporting them and other things supporting them.

MIJA RIEDEL: They were all monochromatic, though, weren't they?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: They weren't?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. The ones I've seen were all monochromatic, I think.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, there weren't that many of those early ones, but they were gold or bronze.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Oh, interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: The fish were bronze, and the tureens were blue and things like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But then when I start to get into the modern forms, I had all those rectangular stuff. There was a funny thing about that. They had a museum in the Modern—a show in the Modern Museum and it was about Deconstructionism. And they had one of those soup tureens there as an example of ceramics deconstruction. [Laughs.] And I thought that was the most ridiculous idea I had ever heard in my life.

MIJA RIEDEL: You didn't agree with it.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I don't agree with it.

MIJA RIEDEL: How do you think of them?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, how do I think of them? Well, they just were modern. They had the feeling of contemporary society.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you feel—did you think of them as Constructivist objects?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No. No. Well, in a certain sense, but whether they were traditional or contemporary, they were all—

[END CARD 4.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: And Constructivism is a word someone made up, but I don't think—you know, [Clement] Greenberg made up Abstract Expressionism. Anyway, it's a word. And I just—you know, but he forgot to look—there was—he forgot to look back a ways and see the kind of stuff that was done before—maybe not in the painting, but if you look at the sky of some paintings, you know, they're abstract expressionism.

But he just—but instead of relating it back to what had happened, well, [John] Constable was an abstract expressionist and a constructivist.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you don't—do you—it sounds like you don't think that's a helpful way to think about a new version of something that's happened before.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I think it's a good way to market.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] A good way to market. Okay.

So, in terms, though, of talking about new forms and new ways of working, you don't find those new terms as a helpful way to describe what's going on?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Deconstructivism, all that was, was criticism. That was a new kind of word for criticism. You deconstructed. Well, you know, people have been deconstructing things for centuries, in the sense they're using it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But all these—in our world, there are all these gimmicks that come up—you name it this, you name it that—and all of a sudden it becomes important. The NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] gets a hold of it, and they have something new to use. So they talk about Deconstructivism. What does that mean? It just means taking it down to the basics and building it back up again.

I never—things just don't happen that way. Maybe some guy does something and he calls it Deconstructivism, and all of a sudden it's a new thing, and everyone is deconstructing things. But what were they really deconstructing? And you had this new kind of [inaudible]—

MIJA RIEDEL: It's not a new way of seeing, along the lines of what you were talking about earlier?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No. I think—no, because—well, maybe it was. I don't know. But it seems to me that everyone started to deconstructive—they started take houses and deconstruct the walls this way and that way and around the other way, and so on and so forth, but it was just—it was another way of saying that we're going to find this basic thing again, and I couldn't—I didn't understand it, really. I could never understand it.

And I used to argue with people about that. And I said, "It's just the same old thing but a new word." I mean, you know, you analyze something, you know, and you've deconstructed it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And you try to understand why something works or doesn't work; you deconstruct it. But people have been doing that for centuries. I mean, reverse engineering is another thing. That was another way of deconstructing.

But, you know, we live in an era of media, and media always needs something new to say. Otherwise, you know, it gets pretty boring. So I think—I mean, how long did Deconstructivism last—three years, four years?

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Maybe a little longer than that.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Maybe longer. I don't remember, but it was—you know, by the time it gets—you reverse these, it's over. When some professor is trying to teach someone how to deconstruct something, what—you know, in literature they've been deconstructing forever.

MIJA RIEDEL: But when you look at—when you look at those ritual vessels you made, don't those feel to you very modern and somewhat—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Don't they feel different than a vessel that was made in the Renaissance or—yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, sure, but I wouldn't call that deconstructing.

MIJA RIEDEL: What would you call it?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I was just reconstructing, because I'll do—I'm using these square blocks or rectangular blocks or triangles in the same sense they did in the Renaissance: support something, make it work with it and so on. And that was—you know, this is just the modern era. But the way the supports and the handles worked with the tureen was just exactly the same as the Renaissance.

MIJA RIEDEL: But the appearance is completely different.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, sure. Yes, but that's the modern style, brought about by the culture. You know, and so they call it Deconstructivism. Anyway—

MIJA RIEDEL: But that actually leads to—when you think about your work over time, do you think about it as being part of an international tradition, as part of an American tradition, as part of a ceramic tradition, as part of a sculptural tradition? Do you think about it one way or the other?

JERRY ROTHMAN: It's all those things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You know, when guys were making sculptures at that time, that was that way. They had these things that stuck out and the put blocks on them, steel beams and all that sort of jazz. And so I just, not

consciously, but I just sort of latched on to all that because I was trying to make modern—something that was today's soup tureen. And so, I was affected by today's—[inaudible].

MIJA RIEDEL: But there must have been something about that particular form that was compelling for you because you worked like that on and off for 10 years, yeah?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, but I liked—I just happen to like those kind of forms.

MIJA RIEDEL: What about them?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I like the way the bodies met the—[inaudible]—and how that made a general overall form, and then how you broke that form into a—they're all essentially this, whether there's a straight one like Mayer has or what have you—they were all—

MIJA RIEDEL: An oval, sort of a vertical oval.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Or horizontal oval or something like that. And the question is, that would be pretty boring if you—it wouldn't be very interesting. So, I just started putting these other things on to make it—I mean, to make it modern. I mean, most Renaissance or traditional soup tureen forms fall within that, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: What about that term "Bauhaus baroque"? Do you think that was a good description of those pieces?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, they were—they were referring to—I guess so. They were referring to—yes, I guess that is what they were referring to, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I think it's all right.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think it was Garth who maybe said that. But I think that those—I think that was a wonderful description of those.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I said that, and then Garth took over. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh. Well, yeah. Well, then you—then *you* chose those terms to describe them.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And it's—well, because they were looking for something and I just said that. And so, yes, I guess so. Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that resonates more with you than Deconstructivist because—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—it shows the roots from which they sprang.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, right, because they're definitely baroque.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely, and at the same time there's that very clean, minimal quality as well.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. So—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that's interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, so that's—yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Have you accepted commissions? You have.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Nope. I accepted one commission for the state of Nebraska, and it was really a big deal. I designed a beautiful thing, and I sent it to them in a beautiful book I made. And they wanted it. And I started it, and I got—I got all the basic steel pieces—it was going to be a combination of concrete, I-beams, and steel spheres and things—a sculpture—I mean, representational sculpture.

And I got as far as getting the spherical things made and the two relief sculptures. But when I started to do the rest of it, they said, "We have to stop. We're out of money." And so, I ended up with—luckily I didn't—and they agreed to pay for things as they went along, so luckily everything was paid for, but I had been left with all this stuff and I didn't know what to do with it. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems to me that there was another piece that was a commission. No?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, there was a piece that the University of Iowa bought.

MIJA RIEDEL: What about *You Choose?* That was not—that was not—

JERRY ROTHMAN: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was just a piece you were designing for a competition?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, that was just a piece I was—a series of political things—*Small* [ph] and *You Choose.* You can go this way or that way. You have to make up your mind about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, I never really did. I had that one experience, and I spoke to other people, and Pete Voulkos, he said, "It's really hard to make any money on commissions." And I spoke to some guys who had problems with them, and they said—well, their experience was they were the last one to install, so they were stuck with all the stuff that everyone else didn't do. And they were the last contractor, so they had to finish it, they said.

And so I wrote—so I wrote up a very clear contract with the people that "I will make it, it should cost approximately this much, but I want you to pay for everything as we go along. I don't have enough capital, see?"

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And they agreed to that, and then they can no longer afford to do it. And it's—you know, I guess because it was taking so long. And it was at the time when the Midwest had this great depression, so it didn't get—

MIJA RIEDEL: That would have been, what, the '70s, the '80s?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Sometime in the '70s I guess it was. I wish I still had that book. I looked at the guys from—it must be someplace around. But it really showed—it was a beautiful picture book, all those. They were 14-by-12.

I made this full-sized—one-third-size model. I mean, it was big. One-third size is—the thing was—some of the pieces were almost four feet long, and the actual size of the—it was a space that was—how much was the space—150-by-50 feet. So it was a big thing.

And so I took these pictures of it, and you got—when you saw the pictures, it looked like the real thing. And that's what I sent off to the competition, and they—

MIJA RIEDEL: And it wasn't returned.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No. Well, no, it wasn't. Well, I was never very good about that stuff. I never followed through. I most likely should have, but I didn't. So there's some slides of that in there someplace. But anyway—of the model.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it seems that there was so much going on—you were teaching, you were running a production business, and you were working on your own work. I can see how that might have slipped through the cracks.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, yeah. I didn't want the responsibility. If they wanted to do it, great. If they didn't, I wasn't interested.

MIJA RIEDEL: We talked yesterday about Japan. I know you took a trip to Australia and New Zealand in the early '80s.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that in any way influential on your work?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, because Australia and New Zealand had nothing of influence except for the country itself.

MIJA RIEDEL: The environment.

JERRY ROTHMAN: The environment, yes. That's where I got married to Catherine Bosley [sp]. Those small sculptures up there are hers.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay. She was a ceramic artist.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Unfortunately she had MS. When we started out, she had kind of intermittent MS. Every year or two or three she'd have a bout, and that turned into progressive MS, and then it was all over.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sorry.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, it was very—well, it was unfortunate. She was a very talented woman, a brave one, but she started going a little crazy, which MS will do to you. And so I sent her back home because they—MS is a common thing in Australia, and they actually had special facilities and so on and so forth, taking care of people.

For me, it would have cost me 60 [thousand dollars] to $80,000 a year to take care of her for her life. There was no way. So, she went home and she had a couple of good years, and then she died, very young—42 or [4]3.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness. I'm sorry.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I was sorry too. But by the time she left, I was an evil person. So her family took over, and that was very nice. It was very lucky because I had invested some money in Australia because I found it interesting and we'd be going there.

And so, her brother was a money trader, and he got my $75,000 and he got it up to $300,000. And so that gave her all the money she needed to get a small house and so on and so forth to get through the MS. So it worked just fine.

MIJA RIEDEL: I know you've also spent some time in Turkey. And we talked just recently about India and Rome last year.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, those were just—

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems like those trips haven't necessarily impacted the work the way that Japan or the Bay Area or Mexico have.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, no, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, because I was only there a very short time. And it was interesting and fascinating—

MIJA RIEDEL: But not long enough to really absorb.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, not long enough to absorb. Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: What sort of changes have you seen in the field in your lifetime?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Excuse me again.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

[Audio Break.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: [Inaudible.] Well, I never paid attention to that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I just went ahead and let people do what they do, and I do what I do. And I was—there are many fashions, you know, but I just didn't—I just did what I did. And I didn't really pay attention. It was like this—I knew what deconstructivism was, but for some reason the deconstructivists thought that those tureens were deconstructivist.

So they took it and showed it—and they showed it in the museum as an example of crafts. But as far as I knew—[laughs] you know, maybe they're right. Maybe it was deconstructive. Maybe they're correct, but I never thought of things that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I just—this is what I was doing now and I liked that, and I kept on until it was done. And then, I knew they were done when the last piece I started to make for a show got to be very beautiful and really, really decorative. And he sold them like crazy.

And he said, "Jerry, we sold two or three of those pieces. It was amazing how we did, and for good prices. Why don't you make some more like that?" And I said, "Well"—[laughs] I said, "I doubt if I can. This is the end." I said, "When they start being that beautiful and everyone wants to buy them, it's time to do something else."

MIJA RIEDEL: And why is that?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, because that means you're caught up with the thing you don't want to be caught up with.

MIJA RIEDEL: What's that?

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's the fashion.

MIJA RIEDEL: Huh.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Or the fashion is caught up with you, or something. And if you keep on going that way, that's a trap.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, it's like Otto Heino and his yellow glaze, you know? The Japanese would—I mean, as far as he was concerned, he didn't care because he was making a fortune. I mean, God, he sold those—anything he made that was this yellow glaze—[inaudible]—was sold in Japan for very big prices. And so he was driving a Bentley and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, a Bentley and a Rolls.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and a Rolls, yeah. And that's great. Look, he deserves—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—having a good time, and he just—he bakes some pots once a week and—you know. [Laughs.] But that was all right. But that's—I could end up the same way.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you didn't want to.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No. I wasn't interested. I've had several—I've had lots of experience with galleries who wanted me to make something I had made before, or something I had made then, and it wasn't—or I sent to them, they asked me for stuff, and they say, "This isn't quite what we want." And I say, "Well, what do you want?" And then they would name something. "Well, I'm not doing that anymore."

MIJA RIEDEL: And why was that, Jerry? Were you just not interested in doing it anymore? Did it get to a point where—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—you'd done it and it just—it no longer held your interest?

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's right. That's exactly what it amounts to. I had—a long time—I started at the very beginning and said, "I'm going to make money some other way so I don't have to deal with that." And so I did. And the way I chose to make my money left me lots of time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And then when I got teaching job, that was even better.

MIJA RIEDEL: So the one you're talking about is that business with Larry Shep gave you financial independence.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Larry Shep and business with my second wife.

MIJA RIEDEL: With Jeanette?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Jeanette.

MIJA RIEDEL: With the Rothwoman?

JERRY ROTHMAN: With the Rothwoman.

MIJA RIEDEL: First wife, right?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, she's my—she's my first wife, right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Jeanette, right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Now, Cathy, who was my second wife—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—she always wanted to make money. So we worked something out, and I set something up for her, how to make things. And then she made these very strong designs that were kind of very—had a Mexican feeling about them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And she said—I mean, we had a show in my studio, three people or so, four people, who were making that kind of salable stuff, and she didn't sell anything. And she said, "I didn't sell anything." I said, "Well, you know, sometimes that happens, Cathy, and you just—you know, I may think they're good, you may think they're good, but they're not right for the public." So then you have to try again, something else.

And I wanted to do what she was doing, which was [great fish ?] decorations and so on and so forth kind of things, but she wanted to do something that was really commercial, and she wanted to know if I knew—I said, "Look, I don't know what to do. All I know is that you try things out, and you find out what people want to buy," because that's what it's all about in the commercial market. [Telephone rings.] And so, anyway—Kathleen has it. So, that didn't make her very happy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, did you have sort of a mental separation between your commercial dinnerware, the *Padimomungo*—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, sure.

MIJA RIEDEL:—and then the sculpture that—was there any back and forth between the two, between the sculptural work and the commercial? No.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, no—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—because I realized it was two different worlds. And by knowing that, I could do that. If I didn't know that [laughs], then I would have been in trouble. And so I did that, and so—

MIJA RIEDEL: So then you would really focus on the commercial work, the dinnerware—get a design that was really popular—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—where the people responded to that sold incredibly well—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL:—and then do the sculpture on the side.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, my first wife was a real help, Jeanette. She had a real nose.

MIJA RIEDEL: She was an architect.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So a good sense of design.

JERRY ROTHMAN: She had a real nose for that, and so—and so, the original plates we started out with were those nice geometric designs that she made. And I helped her with colors and glazes to get them where they work, and they sold all right, but not the way she wanted them to sell. She wanted to sell them in gobs.

And so, she said, "Well, Jerry, it looks like what's popular is these animal images, farm images." I said, "Okay, I'll

make you some of those." So I made her a bunch of designs based on French ceramics, papaui [ph], of farm images. You know, this is a rooster, and all that sort of—and that did pretty well. But she said, "This isn't exactly what we need. It's doing okay, but it's not great." She said, "It isn't going like hotcakes." So I said, "Okay, I'll just try making some owls."

So I designed her a bunch—a whole bunch of plates with pigs and cats and this, that, and the other, and that went zoom.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. She said, "That's it, Jerry." But she said, "You're going to have to make them smile a little more." [They laugh.] "Okay," I said, "I'll make them smile some more." And it's a commercial thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so I let her direct me for what they needed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: She said, "Jerry, it's important that they look happy and they're smiling and so on, and they have a cute quality about them." So I made them cute.

MIJA RIEDEL: So this was all under the umbrella of the Rothwoman business?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. She was a saleslady, and she knew the public. I wasn't going to argue with her. Then I showed them different changes and designs and so on and so forth, and she said, "Yes, that's the one." And she had a good eye for that. I certainly didn't.

MIJA RIEDEL: So that was a perfect balance that that production work could go full tilt, and then you could focus on the sculpture to—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL:—to explore what you were interested in exploring. When you were done, to move on to the next thing.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, and of course that required a lot of technique—

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—of glaze development, so I did all that. We were decorating with engobes—colored engobes under the glaze, and we had to get a glaze that [created ?] that to be able—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and that was tough. So I knew some guys who were glaze aficionados, and they helped us out. If I didn't know something, I went to somebody. And once we got that solved, we were all set.

And so, we made all these things that were really—someplace we have—well, I don't know where those are.

MIJA RIEDEL: The market has really changed, though, yes?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, boy, has it changed.

MIJA RIEDEL: How so?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, now it's modern and elegance. It isn't our age [?] modern, but it's modern decorative elements, you know? I could have done that, but she didn't want to start all over again, so we started—but then she wasn't selling like hotcakes anymore and she wanted these other things. I said, "Well"—so I made her—I designed her butterflies and everything else to see what she wanted to try, but that didn't sell. I said, "Look, I think this is a modern market." But she didn't.

So she went out of business slowly but surely. And she didn't do badly at that, either. And so she sold her business and this equipment and everything, and the workshop for a huge amount of money, which enabled her to go off and be a builder—an architect builder and build houses and sell them, which she did well at.

But then she got—these couple, two, three guys got a hold of her, and they owned a big plot of land in San Diego, which was right on the edge of—the cusp of the development. It was mostly slums and so on and so forth.

And they got a HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] loan to tear all that stuff down and put up some modern stuff.

And so they went ahead and they started to do it, and then all the big HUD scams came up. And even though they weren't a scam, they got caught in that. And so it all stopped, and she was stuck with her money hung up in that. But she finally got her money back after 10 years, but think of the interest, but at least she got $400,000 back.

MIJA RIEDEL: This whole conversation started, I think, because we were talking about the ritual vessels selling like hotcakes, and then Garth wants more and you're done with them. Was it the Leda series that followed?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, it was, as a matter of fact.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that's such—so completely different.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, Garth liked the forms when I was making them, said, "They're wonderful forms." But then he didn't like the way I glazed them. He said, "Oh, they're"—that was a problem because they were too erotic for him. The colors were just too much, you know.

He said, "Oh, these purples and these—oh, no, it reminds me of this, that, and the other." And the people who worked for him were also going, "Oh, no, we can't sell these to our customers." He said, "Can't you do something, Jerry?" I said, "No, that's"—"I mean, they're erotic." And I said, "They're homosexually erotic, but that's what it's all about." And he said, "Well"—

MIJA RIEDEL: They're homosexually erotic, Leda and the Swan?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, sure. Sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Not heterosexually?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, heterosexually erotic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And that's what was bothering him. He couldn't admit that, but that was the problem. I said, "Look, the only thing about that, Garth"—and so that was the end of our relationship.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you didn't show there anymore?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, because I had really made those for him because he liked what he saw when they were being made, and so on and so forth, but he didn't think the colors were right. He wanted them to be brown and black. I mean, Christ, this is Leda and the Swan, for God's sakes. [Laughs.] And so I just, you know—so I just—I had lots of chances to sell and I sold a few of them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were they shown anywhere as a group before they were shown at the museum at the retrospective?

JERRY ROTHMAN: As a group, I'm not sure. No, I don't think they were shown as a group. They were shown at different shows. And one or two of them sold at the shows, and that was nice, but then I was off to something else. Besides—

MIJA RIEDEL: I want to talk about the On the Outside Only—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL:—because we haven't talked about that series at all, and that certainly is one of the most sensual, erotic series that precede the Leda pieces.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, [inaudible]. Oh, yes, I know exactly—

MIJA RIEDEL: That was '67 I think was the first one.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, what it was all about—this is a conscious thing I did—

MIJA RIEDEL: 'Sixty-five.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—that was about corporate art.

MIJA RIEDEL: Corporate art.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, and art in general in the U.S. On the Outside Only, these all have nice slick shapes, and then you go inside, and that's really what it's all about. You get married or you have babies, and so on and so forth.

And it's not as clean and neat as all this stuff. And I said, "That's why they're called On the Outside Only, because they're pfft—"

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Because when the people saw one on the outside they're, "Oh, gosh, those are nice shapes." Then went inside and, "Oh, no." [Laughs.] As a matter of fact, when I sent that piece up to the museum, the ladies loved it before they really saw it. And so, I put it up—they put it up at the very entrance of the museum outside.

And a lady went up there and said, "Oh, we can't have this. How can little children see this? Oh, my goodness." And so they took it and they moved it to an inside room. They asked me to do it, and I said, "Oh, no, I'm not going to move it." I said, "I had enough trouble getting it here and helping you guys install it. And why should I want to move it inside?"

And they said, "Oh, well, it's our show, so we'll do it." I said, "Well, you do it, that's okay, but I'm not going to touch it, and you better not break it." And so they moved it into an inside room that was tall enough and just big enough to contain it. You could walk in and just walk around it and walk through it, and it was so much better. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, because it was so enclosed—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, right.

MIJA RIEDEL:—so compact.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I mean, it was great.

And there was a—was it the *Chronicle* then? I think it was the *Chronicle* ran an ad for almost a week, different pictures of this, and they were comparing this to the—and Market Street, at that time, they were having really erotic shows. And they were comparing it, "Is this eroticism or is that eroticism?" And, you know, they asked me what it was all about and I told them.

MIJA RIEDEL: What did you say?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, just what I told you. It was the idea that the world is—that the American art world is going corporate. And anything that doesn't fit this nice, neat, clean, sterilized kind of art, no one is going to buy, or no one's interested in it. And that's—you know, the outside, the ladies like the outside, but they aren't—so I said, "That's what it's about." And it turned out to be I was right about it.

So they printed that and I got a hell of a lot of publicity out of that. I couldn't believe it. Three days running this on the front page.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, the newspaper in San Francisco.

MIJA RIEDEL: The *Chronicle,* yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, when they sent it back to me—when I sent it to them, it was in pieces: six pieces and three bases, and they're all tied down on the truck. When they sent it back, whoever—they didn't take it apart. They just sent it there with three pieces standing up on a truck and tied down, and they bumped two of them off the truck.

And they told me about it and I—they wanted to know if they should just throw it out and pay me the insurance. I said, "No, you're going to pay me the insurance, but I'm going to get the pieces." So the insurance comes and says, "Well, in that case, we'll only be able to pay you half the insurance." That was all right. So I got the pieces

back and I repaired them, and now they're in front of my old studio in Laguna Beach.

MIJA RIEDEL: You did four of those in that series there, yes?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. On the Outside Only, one, two, three, four. The second one was Niagara [ph] and it only had two pieces, same idea. But that one was—boy, that one was unbelievable. It was so sensual; it was so erotic that the University of Iowa wanted me to get it out of there as quickly as possible. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Just too erotic—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Too erotic, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—for a public sculpture.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, they thought so anyway.

So I took it out, and I sent it to a guy in Lake Michigan, who has a big print shop and a lot of space. And we made a trade and I took it out there. And we had it laying down, and I said, "We ought to cover this or something. The rains are coming and, you know, it's going to freeze, and so on, and that can be a problem."

Well, there was a fashion about letting the sculpture weather and fall apart, and I said—and this guy was really into fashion. So he left it there and let it weather. Well, I saw it the first year. I said, "Look, it isn't too bad. I can still put this back together again—[inaudible]." And I made him a little drawing about what it would be and so on. And he said, "No, I don't think so." He said, "I think it's better." It was too erotic for him too.

Then 15 years later we spoke about it again. I said, "John"; he said to me, "Why didn't you ever set that piece up?" "Well, John, you wouldn't let me set it up on your property, if you remember right." He said, "Oh, no, not me."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: By that time he had changed. But his daughter jumped in and said, "Oh, yes, John, you did not want that."

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. He said, "Oh." So by this time—by that time it was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—he had ruined it so badly I couldn't deal with it. So that's what happened to that one.

And the third one was where? I forget where the third one was. Anyway, there were four by who knows where—

MIJA RIEDEL: There was a fourth, right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And are any of them installed outside anywhere now?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, the first one—

MIJA RIEDEL: One at Laguna.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—is installed at my old studio—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—in Laguna Beach. Jeanette, who was living there until two years ago, said it was up there and was in fine shape. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: And are any of them installed publicly in any location?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, no, because everyone thought they were too erotic. And I thought the theme was pretty much what everything was all about, the American way, but, you know—but as long as you have anything that is visually erotic, then you have a problem. So I got this reputation of being an erotic artist, which I guess in a certain sense I was. And so—

MIJA RIEDEL: And it feels completely different down here in Mexico, though, doesn't it, with a completely different sensibility?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Sure. They don't mind eroticism at all. It's all part of living.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's in all the folk art—in all the art.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, you know, the U.S. is a really puritanical place, Calvinist and so on. It hasn't changed. And so that's—maybe that's why they're in so much trouble now.

But anyway, so that's—so anyway, I went and—I know there were two more. Now, what the hell—oh, the third one. Oh, yes. I know what it is now. It's in storage.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, is it?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, right next door to my old place. It's a huge, monster sculpture. It's in six pieces, and each piece is six feet high, or more. The first pieces are seven feet and the next ones are six feet. And in six pieces, and each piece is assembled on top of each other.

But it's been there for—I guess it's still okay. I send the guy—I send him $600 a year so he'll let it sit on his property and take care of it. And so it's there. If anyone wants it, they can have it. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: When you—we've talked about the experiences at Otis, and Voulkos, and we've talked about your time in Japan. When you look back on your career, what do you see as the most significant influences?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, everything. You know, I was never particularly influenced by other artists, but I was certainly influenced by my environment.

MIJA RIEDEL: And when you say your environment, can you be more specific?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, sure. Well, where I live, what people are doing, what their attitudes are. I'm just a big sponge. I just take it all in and it goes out.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, for example, there were gender issues that showed up in the work early on.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was probably related to the '60s and '70s, what was going on.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, right. Right. It was all that was going on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Political issues, social issues.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I never participated personally. Well, I did in the sense—yes, if things seemed stupid to me—the corporate thing seemed ridiculous. [Doorbell rings.] Everything—you know, the organization and all that stuff. And I said, "This is crazy. I mean, this can't work." And of course it couldn't.

And then I remember that America was going to be the world's design company, and they were going to not have to make anything anymore, just design stuff and invent materials and so on. We didn't have to produce anything. And so, stuff was—so the Congress allowed corporations to move all over the place and use these poor countries, and it was to help them out. In the process they made the U.S. a poor country.

And I realized that when it first started. I said it was nuts. But of course no one listened to me. Or I didn't speak to anybody, but I used to notice that. Just like when they—at Fullerton they had—they were—there was a time, I don't remember when that was, but everyone was suing teachers and so on and so forth for sexual abuse. And so they tried to solve the problem.

And the way they tried to solve it is they tried to set up a system where everyone tells on everyone. I mean, you know, there was a hierarchy and there was the next level, the next level, the next level, and everyone was responsible at each level they were at to report things. It's kind of like Nazi Germany.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I said—and I was the only one that—I happened to be in their faculty senate at that time. I was the only one in the faculty senate that said, "No, you can't do this. It's ridiculous. It can't work." And I said, "You know, it's been tried lots of times by different cultures and it just doesn't work." And they all voted me down. The whole senate voted for it except for me. I was the only one who ruled against it.

And then they sent it up to the president, and the president said, "No, this can't work. It's ridiculous." And so they threw it out. He threw it out. So, you know, academics have their problems too. But, you know, anyway—

MIJA RIEDEL: So there's no single—there are no single group of artists, no single environments. It was—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Not—I'm sure there are many, but not that I can put my finger on, because I looked at everybody's work, saw things in it, and I took what I could. I took what impressed me, that I saw was—that's what I did. But I can't say that this particular guy or that particular guy, or something like that really.

But people have influenced me. Voulkos influenced me by the way he did things, and Paul Soldner, just because of the way he did things. But I didn't do things like he did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You know, he had a good approach and he was a realistic guy, you know? And so that all impressed me. And Voulkos was the same way. He was a real—he was a real person and knew what it was really all about.

And so, I got impressed in that sense. And John Mason didn't impress me. He was—just didn't—he thought that if he kept on changing with the fashion, that would be good. But he wasn't—he didn't have the personality to do that. To do that—who's that guy who's a chameleon and changed all the time? That same era? Oh, gosh, I can't think of his name, but he got to be famous, but every—

MIJA RIEDEL: Working in ceramics?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, everything—ceramics—but he was really high in the upper echelon of sales and so on. But he changed continually. If the fashion changed, he had a nose—

MIJA RIEDEL: Schnabel—Julian Schnabel?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, Schnabel didn't change like that. He kept on doing the same thing. He tried to change with the fashion, but he just couldn't do it. This guy—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Jeff] Koons?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Koons, well, he was one of those, yes, that when the fashion changes, Koons changed. And he did it just the right way at just the right time. And he could—there were some people who could do that, because they had the right personality and the right spiel, but there were very few.

But there's one other guy. I can't think of his name. He was really a genius at that. I just can't think of his name offhand. He was in that same era.

MIJA RIEDEL: Maybe it will come to us over lunch.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Good idea. Kathleen?

MIJA RIEDEL: We'll take a break.

[END CARD 5.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Jerry Rothman at the artist's home and studio in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, on August 31, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is card number five [sic].

Jerry, I think we're zeroing in here on the final questions. You're doing a good job of covering the material. A couple of final questions here we should address, the first being the place of universities in the field of American craft, American ceramics—ceramic sculpture. Do you feel there's a particular place for it, and if so, what is the place of universities?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I think the way they're doing it can't—unless you become a really dedicated student and put all kinds of time in, you're not doing anything. The kids go there once or twice a week for two or three hours, and most of them are going there because it's a class—a required class in art, and they think that it will be lots better and easier than taking art history or something. Of course it's not true, but that's what they think.

And so, you know, so they come in and they play around, have a good time. Maybe it gives them a life experience that they'll carry on for the rest of their life. Who knows? But it isn't—but for the other people who really, well, I guess seriously evolve, they're a nuisance.

MIJA RIEDEL: How so? You taught for 26 years.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, because you have to—because the classes are no longer small. When I first started out, it was 12, 15 people in the class. By the time I was leaving, there were 25 to 30 people in the class.

So, originally, out of those 12 people, you had three or four people who were really serious about this. They wanted to learn something about a profession or what have you, and as it went on, it was the same four or five people, but you had 20 people—it isn't—it's not that it did those others any harm, but it didn't—the idea of general education and requiring everybody to do a certain this, that, or the other, it's ridiculous.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were there grad students here too, or strictly—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, no, I had grad students in a separate group. And I always had at least five, maybe eight at a time, but then the other two classes were just general classes. And I didn't mind it. I had a good time with it. But I didn't think it did—I didn't know if it did any good to them or whether anybody else. It seemed like a public service.

I mean, you know, you have to take history, you have to take English, math, basic stuff, but there's no reason why you should have to have an experience in the arts.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that was a requirement?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, that was a requirement. And it was mandated by the state of California. And so, we had—you know, they were broadening what they thought the arts were, but because of the number of students, it made no difference. They have to get classes someplace, and they took the ones that they thought were going to be easiest.

And, you know, it was sort of a joke. Maybe one or two of those people, or maybe three people, four people out of the class, who were some other major aside from art, really got interested. And they worked hard at it and learned some stuff, but I would say the other 20 people—as I said, 25 people or so in the class—the other 20 people just did their time.

And maybe it had an effect on them, maybe it didn't; who knows? The point is that it got in the way of the people who were really interested, and it didn't leave you enough time for them. You didn't have enough time for the others.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, do you see a difference between artists that were trained in a university versus artists that learned somehow on their own or through another institution?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, I think that if they were going to be artists, they became artists. Whatever venue they took to get there made no difference. If they had the basic abilities and the desire, that's what happened.

And maybe they did it through the university, maybe they just did it through—I don't know how, apprenticing, just working, and so on and so forth, you know, taking private classes. There's all kinds of ways of doing it. But I'm not sure—I'm not sure the universities are really—are necessary, the way it's handled.

MIJA RIEDEL: Now, you've had such diverse educational experiences. You know, we talked about it earlier, starting at LACC [Los Angeles City College] and then moving through Art Center and on to Otis, which was of course specifically an art school. Then you had all that time in Japan.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, so is Art Center.

MIJA RIEDEL: Art Center, right. Is there—I'm sure you observed plenty—

JERRY ROTHMAN: And LA City College had a very intensive industrial design program. You have to take a few general education courses, but not the number required by the university.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: The university had a certain problem, and it had to have things like algebra and all this stuff that whoever were the regents thought were necessary for good general education. And that didn't really include art. It included art history.

And so, you ended up having to have some of these students to support your class. And what happened is, is those students came from general education.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And, you know, it didn't create an atmosphere of people working and coming to—and we had to fight for people to come after school, after classes.

MIJA RIEDEL: To use the studio.

JERRY ROTHMAN: To use the studios.

MIJA RIEDEL: So they were closed for a certain amount of time.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, we fixed it up so finally they stayed open until 11 o'clock every night and on the weekends.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But it was really—it was like pulling teeth.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, I can't imagine having a studio program where you didn't have that kind of access to a studio.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, that's the problem. And we were always getting some flak about that: "Why do these people have to learn this way? Are they going to be doctors or something?" I'd say, "They need the same kind of training."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But, you know, academia and the people who teach in academia today are very narrow. They don't have a broad outlook. They have their specialty and that's it. And the few who are broad are very few and far between. And so you have a great deal of difficulty in convincing them because, you know, classes were organized by groups of people from different fields.

And one of the problems was that those people, like in English, for instance, in order to keep their program, had to get students. And the students weren't necessarily interested in English. And they had enough, but you have to take an inordinate amount of English. No matter what your specialty was or what you were going for, you had to have almost half of your units in GE, you know?

I mean, from my viewpoint, if you have some student who is really interested in the arts, he would just find out about you. You wouldn't have to push him to take something. But, you know—and so it got to be a kind of a game.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you have any involvement with schools like Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Island, ME] or Penland [School of Crafts, Bakersville, NC], Arrowmont [School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN]?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, yes, I had some, and they were better.

MIJA RIEDEL: They were better.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, Otis was basically an art school, and you had to take really necessary courses, but you didn't have to take filler courses for the other subjects.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, do you think an art school, then, is really preferable for a serious artist?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, beyond a doubt.

MIJA RIEDEL: No doubt?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Beyond a doubt—now, unless you think that philosophies or attitudes are very important. And, nowadays, too many people try to use science as an excuse for what they do. You know, our society is basically a technological, scientific society. The arts are very—appears to be minimal, where they—like in China where Mao Tung-Tse [sic] wrote in his *Little Red Book* how important the arts were to train people, make them aware, and learn about how—anyway.

And he said that, and then there was a very famous sociologist—what was his name—at the Chicago University [University of Chicago] who wrote a book that was sort of like [Norman] Mailer's book but about capitalism. And

he said one of the important things that capitalists have to understand is the arts.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah. And he said that unless you have some real understanding of the arts, you can't be a good capitalist. That's actually—

MIJA RIEDEL: That's interesting.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I'm trying to think of his name.

MIJA RIEDEL: That seems to have been disproved a few times over.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Let's see now, the Mao—you know, the *Little*—the *Red Book* was easy, but—what the hell was that book? He had several books, but the one that—his last book, this one I'm talking about. Let's see, *The Destruction of Capitalism?* Well, it was something about—

MIJA RIEDEL: Is he an economist? He's an economist? He's a sociologist.

JERRY ROTHMAN: He was both. And he was very—back 15 years ago, he was one of the most respected guys at the Chicago University. And he was—you know, he wasn't on a level with Alan Greenspan, because Alan Greenspan was too much of a—was a promoter, and he wasn't a promoter. But in academia he was at that level. And what the hell was his name? The book was *The Destruction of Capitalism?* Oh, well, I don't have that good a memory. [Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* and *The End of Ideology?* Bell was at Harvard. Ed.]

MIJA RIEDEL: We can look for that. Was there just an article about him in the *New Yorker* maybe?

JERRY ROTHMAN: There might have been. He—I'm trying to think of his damn name.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, we can look for it.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, we have got it someplace, if I recollect. Geez, how could I forget his name? Well, I did. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Has there been a community that's been important to your development as an artist? I don't get the sense there has been, but I don't want to toss out the question without asking you first.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, it depends on what you mean by a community.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, a group of people whose ideas were influential or significant, supportive—however you interpret it.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, I—

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems like perhaps there was a community around Otis—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, there was.

MIJA RIEDEL:—and there was a community in Japan?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I always tended to be a bit of a loner.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, I had that sense.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And I knew people and talked about things, but very rarely did—we did more drinking than talking. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah, so the reputation is true. The rumors are true.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I can't really think of—there was very little serious discussion about art or what was happening. That seemed to be your business, and there was always sort of a joke about it. There were lots of jokes and kidding but no really—nothing with real insight, as I remember. Maybe Paul Soldner was a little serious, but not really.

Everyone was very protective of being the only genius—you know, "I've got this secret, man, and I don't want to tell anybody because that's going to be great," you know, and things like that, which were not true. But anyway, it was that kind of a thing, lots of competition.

MIJA RIEDEL: Have you been involved at all with the American Crafts Council or NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts]?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I went to one—two NCECA things. And that was good enough. I found it too much of a club. I just don't know—I just never did like that stuff.

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems like you've spent a lot of time alone working in the studio or working on your own business, or teaching—

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's right.

MIJA RIEDEL:—and that took up—

JERRY ROTHMAN: All my time.

MIJA RIEDEL: All your time.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. I went to one NCECA—two, one in Kansas City and—that was interesting. The plane we were on developed engine trouble. It was a two-engine plane, a small plane that goes from Iowa City to Kansas City. It's a pretty small hop. And the guy came in with one engine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And we were all, you know, really uptight about it, but he did a fine job. But that was just an interesting little incident.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. That was enough to put you off NCECA. [They laugh.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, no, lots of other things put me off NCECA. Everybody was rubbing everyone's back just because—you know, and they had committees and the committees voted on things, who got shows and who got this and who got the other one, and they did an awful lot of it through buddyship, pals and, you know. And if you were in NCECA long enough, regardless of what you did—you know, it was a like a seniority system. So I didn't—it wasn't my shtick.

MIJA RIEDEL: You spent a lot of time in Japan early on and then in Australia, and do you see American craft—where do you see American craft, and American ceramics in particular, on an international scale? [Telephone rings.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, right now it's tough.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, I guess, do you see the field moving in any particular direction?

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, for about 10 years there, it was very exciting. Lots of things happened. And after—it was maybe 15. I don't know. But then all of a sudden it became, you know—*Ceramics Monthly* used to print all these articles and pictures of things, and all of a sudden everyone made things that were in *Ceramics Monthly*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sorry?

JERRY ROTHMAN: *Ceramics Monthly*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: All of a sudden—that was a very influential magazine—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and the photographs—they showed the things—are what people started to make.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see. I see.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And—

MIJA RIEDEL: So instead of discussing what was being made, people began to refer to the magazine to get ideas about what to make.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. And, you know, things became, you know, very tight as far as craftsmanship was concerned, and people did beautiful work, but there was no real invention anymore. There was beautiful stuff but, you know, what happened to the invention, et cetera, most of it had no juice in it. It was just well made,

nicely designed, and so on and so forth. So I stopped taking out *Ceramics Monthly*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you ever interested in *Studio Potter* or *American Ceramics*? Were any of the other publications interesting to you?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, *Studio Potter*, I thought that was pretty good because it was an individual doing it. And, you know, he had a viewpoint, but at least he had a viewpoint.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And then *American Ceramics*—who was the guy who did that?

MIJA RIEDEL: Michael McTwigan?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Well, Michael McTwigan was a twiggy. [Laughs.] He was just a guy who was a nice enough guy but—we were at an international conference in London, and we were sitting around the table with a bunch of guys, and he came up to us and said—what was it? He said, "Oh"—he said, "have you seen all the interesting Bauhaus stuff that's being done around here now?" He said—well, he said something about the Bauhaus and ceramics and stuff, that he felt was a great new discovery.

He said—and everyone looked at each other and said—well, what could they say, you know? No one was going to tell him he's 30 years behind the time. But that's, you know—he had no—he was writing a magazine, he was supposed to be a critic, and he had no knowledge.

And so, most of us wrote off Michael McTwigan because—but he was the editor of a very—the only really—aside from *Ceramics Monthly*—which, as a matter—*Ceramics Monthly* had a readership of 50,000 people a month, even though—

MIJA RIEDEL: Fifty thousand?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Fifty thousand.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Really, yes. And *Crafts Horizon* didn't come close to that, and neither did *American Ceramics*—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—or *Art in America* for that matter. But *Ceramics Monthly*—

MIJA RIEDEL: Fifty thousand? I find that hard to believe, but—

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, I did too, but they figured that. That's what they figured. And it doesn't mean you have 50,000 subscribers. They had 50,000 readers. Of course, the book was—magazine was passed around so much. But *Art in America* only had 5[,000] or 6,000. And this was a long time ago. I don't know what it is now. And, you know, McTwigan's book had a few thousand and so on and so forth.

So it turns out that *Ceramics Monthly* was the most influential magazine in the country as far as the arts was concerned. And that was—I found that very interesting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that's surprising.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Now I don't know; you'd have to check out with the magazine. That was—God, that was 20 years ago.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, perhaps in the heyday of the clay movement—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—there was a huge subscription—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, well—

MIJA RIEDEL: But do you—how do you see American craft comparing to craft—ceramics in Japan or ceramics in Australia? Do you see it—

JERRY ROTHMAN: I see it in the same way. It's become a craft. There's very little art involved. And—

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you see art in other places—do you see more art in Japan or more art in Australia?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Nope.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Nor do I see it—the whole art world is—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mexico?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, Mexico is one of the few places where they're really doing it. You know, but they're getting—they're getting the publicity bug and the media, the magazine, and the star bug, and so on and so forth. It's starting now. Mayer is helping it to do that. But that's what he does.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mayer Shacter?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. You know, and so—but, yes, it's like he knows everybody is a human being and they want to be on the top of the heap. And now it's—you know. So craft as an indigenous part of the society is passing—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—and pretty fast. But in the States it's already passed.

MIJA RIEDEL: But all that wonderful new work coming out of Tonalá, all those places, you think that that's passing?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Go to Tonalá sometime. You'll find 15 or 25 guys doing that sort of stuff. The rest of it is all—you go to a pottery sale, which they have once a month or something, and the drek you'll see is unbelievable. These are a few guys who are outstanding, and the other guys are—have all started to make things that are going to sell—in quotes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Don't you think that's often the case, though—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL:—that there are always a few that are doing outstanding work and the rest are—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, no. I think there was a time when the people in Tonalá were all potters and did beautiful work, not some—sure, some were better than others, but the level of accomplishment on a broad scale was very, very good. That was true in Japan at one time, but it's not true anymore.

And, you know, talk to Mayer. Mayer is always discovering one or two guys here and there, but there are one or two guys everyplace—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN:—that are being discovered.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But the whole culture is—you know, is "let's make money," which it was in the first place, but there was a level of craft or an expectation that is no longer there, mainly because the culture no longer demands that. And the things that they're selling are in quantity, you know, for prices that people can afford to pay, they're not there anymore.

There was a time when the level of craft was so high and the aesthetic ability was so high—80 percent of what they produced was really beautiful. Now it's maybe 15 percent.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think, though, there was—certainly in Mexico there was a long tradition of basic functional work.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, it was very real.

MIJA RIEDEL: But it wasn't necessarily outstanding aesthetically.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, yes, it was. For a long time it was outstanding aesthetically.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think a lot of those—that a lot of that jigger work that was produced in Tonalá early on—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL:—it was—I mean, it was very functional but not—

JERRY ROTHMAN: The decorations were what counted. They started to jigger things, but they still had that great sense of decoration—that tourist pottery that they made with all those Mexicans and painting on the surface and —

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Some of those are just wonderful.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. That's true.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But you should see what the tourist stuff is now.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I wish it was true, but it's not.

MIJA RIEDEL: How has your work been received over time?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Sometimes—well, with a small portion of the—if I go by sales, I'll have to say very poorly. You know, I never made enough money to pay for what I did out of my work. It helped, but not enough.

But I'm finding out that I—I have people come and see—the other day I was at something, and a guy came up and said, "My name is Steve," he said. Well, first he said, "Are you Jerry Rothman?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "Good." He said, "My name is Steve." He said, "In 1963 or '64, when I saw what you were doing, it changed my whole life." I mean, I'd do it for that. There's no question about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: He found you here in San Miguel?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, in the U.S.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

JERRY ROTHMAN: In the U.S., when he first saw what I was doing. And lots of people have told me things like that, but I don't—yes, so I don't know. I may have had some real influence and some—may have done some good, but I have no idea.

And I don't care, quite frankly, because I'm selfish enough that I want to do what I want to do. And I've worked out a way to do it. And I've paid the price for it, yeah, the way that I want to do it, so now I can do that. I've been able to do that for the last 15 or 20 years.

And so, what do I care? [Laughs.] You know, I'm having a good time. I'm making things that please me, sometimes that please other people. And sometimes people get very angry about it, but they don't have to buy it or look at it.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds like it's the process, the making itself, that is most compelling for you.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, of course. Of course it's the making itself. I find that I'm still learning things in the craft and technique to try and improve my craft and technique. But what I really love is the discovery of things. And I love—I love that I never thought I could paint—don't have representational paintings—but here I did these three things that—these tubes on those three sculptures out there, the ones—well, I painted those on a round surface, and they really work.

And the painters, I don't think they really work. They love those toes. They say, "How did you make those toes?" [Laughs.] And so, through all this stuff I've learned to do that. I mean, I never really painted toes before.

MIJA RIEDEL: This is on *The Colonel* and *The Politician,* those three figures with the—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

JERRY ROTHMAN: I've never done that kind of painting.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, because those are really painted on columns. There is nothing—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes, painted on—[inaudible]—tubes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And so, you know, I'm very pleased about that. And that gives me great satisfaction that I can now do that. I don't understand how I can do it now because I never did it before, especially on a round surface. That was really hard. But, you know, I had the ability to work it out, and I feel good about that.

And so, you know, I don't know if you've ever tried painting something on a round surface and relating it back to an actual three-dimensional object and hope they hold together. It's a real trick. It took me forever to paint one of those, to figure out how that relates, and I'm still not 100 percent satisfied, but at least I can do it reasonably well, and that makes me happy.

I think personal satisfaction in our kind of culture is all you can really expect. Either you're going to be a—either you'll be a hero overnight, maybe you'll become a hero over a long period of time, maybe you'll make money, but that's not guaranteed. And so, but so what else do you have except this personal satisfaction?

I used to think otherwise but—I used to think—anyway, I used to think in all the irrational ways—doing things for the public, getting points across—but, you know, no, it's for myself. It's what makes me happy. I can't—and I get so upset because I can't work anymore. Then that makes me very nervous and jittery, because working was a kind of therapy. It allowed me to, you know, get lost in something.

I mean, can you imagine my spending, like, 20 or 30 hours on those toes, keep on changing them because it wasn't quite right, the color, this, that, and the other? Well, every one of those things took five to six days to paint, because either the color wasn't right, the texture wasn't right. They just didn't work out. And I finally learned how to do it.

The third one was really easy, but with the first two, they were really hard. I mean, you know—and I had to paint the toes with different characteristics. Well, sure, because *The Politician* could not have very athletic toes. He had to have these sort of bimbo, you know, toes. And *The General,* his toes had to be—kind of toes. And the guy who was *The Adjutant,* he wouldn't let his toes show, of course. He was a fop.

So I had to learn how to paint this three-dimensional boot on this three-dimensional surface. And it's much easier to work on a flat surface, and everything worked. And then I found a three-dimensional surface, to make a three—an illusion of three-dimensional object, going around the curved object, you know, that's a cute trick. I can't tell you how cute a trick it is, it took me so long to figure it out.

But anyway, yeah. So that's, you know—yes, that's very satisfying. It can be very—

MIJA RIEDEL: The immediacy of clay?

JERRY ROTHMAN: It can be very immediate and very expressive, or it can be very slow and very boring. It just depends on who you are, though to look at those sculptures up there that Catherine did, she spent hours on those little things, every detail. So there's no immediacy about that.

By the same token, some person who had the right way of looking at it could do it, you know, like claymation. So clay is just—is just what you make it. You know, Michelangelo said, "Clay is an ignoble material. It has no personal character, nothing that makes it something more than it is."

Well, great. That's why it's so good, because everything you put into clay has to come from you. You can't depend on the beauty of the stone or the—you know, when he did his *David,* he knew stone so well that—he had this really bad block of stone that no one wanted. He always said, "You find the image in the stone." That's because he understood the stone.

He started out as a kid 10 years old carving stone, so he could see the only thing you could get out of that piece of stone was this kind of shape. So he took it out in big chunks, because he knew those basic forms were in there, in the grain of the stone.

So it was like the Eskimos who find the image in the stone. He saw things. If you don't go with the grain of the stone, you're going to knock yourself out and nothing is going to happen. But with clay, you have no help. The only character anything has is what you put into it. That's it.

Now, that reminds me. In England, when I was lecturing at the conference in '86, I remember the first half of the lecture—well, there were two lectures. One was when you showed your own work and talked about that, and then there were panel discussions. And there were two panels, huge panels. I was on one of them.

And they started to discuss integrity of the clay. And I said, "What integrity?" You know. And Garth Clark said

that, "You had these people all in the palm of your hand until you started to talk about the clay and what it was all about. And then you lost them totally." And he said, "No one wants to hear that the clay has no integrity. No one wants to hear that he is responsible for what happens in the clay," and went on like that.

And, I tell you, it was—there was such a—there was a real howl of people. They were all ready to throw something at me because I threatened the basic concept, belief system, that c lay is an important materialness and you can only do so much because of the material and so on.

Well, I disagreed with that 100 percent. But they—the greater majority of people there, maybe 80 percent, thought that was true, that it has a character and it has a value, kind of an intrinsic value. Anyway, it was very interesting.

MIJA RIEDEL: And your thought was that clay has whatever one brings to it.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's right.

MIJA RIEDEL: No more, no less.

JERRY ROTHMAN: No more, no less. I say no. You can be a great utilitarian potter, but that's not because of the clay. It's because of you. You would think they would like to hear that. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But they wanted to hear that in porcelain you could only do so and so because of the limitation of the material. I said, "No, you can do anything you want." And so that was—that was almost a riot. I'm serious.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. I can see that.

Do you see yourself and your work fitting into any particular place in contemporary American art?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I never worried about that. I didn't look for that. I just made what I made and if people wanted it, that was fine. But in reality I was just—I was just doing it for myself.

MIJA RIEDEL: Susan Peterson had, I thought, a really eloquent, succinct summary of how she saw your contribution to the field. She talked about your work—you and your work giving ceramics "a broader base, a more diversified product, and a greater sense of the intangible." Do you think that's about right?

JERRY ROTHMAN: I think it's about right.

MIJA RIEDEL: What about it in particular has mattered to you? What has kept you heading back into that studio day in and day out?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, the satisfaction I got out of it. Now of course, in the state I'm in, I'm very nervous. It's terrible. Well, my wife—Kathleen?

KATHLEEN ROTHMAN: Yes?

JERRY ROTHMAN: We have a question to ask you here.

MS. ROTHMAN: Sure, honey. Am I making too much noise?

JERRY ROTHMAN: No, no, no, no. What happens to me when I sit around and don't work?

MS. ROTHMAN: He picks on me. He's not a happy camper.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It's simple as all that.

MS. ROTHMAN: Yes, he has to be making things.

JERRY ROTHMAN: It's a basic—it's a psychological need. If I don't—if I'm not feeling this thing that gives me great satisfaction, I'm a bastard. [Laughs.]

MS. ROTHMAN: And I'm the same way about seeing friends and being social. If I don't get out and connect, I feel terrible. We're very—

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting to me that when Jerry wrote down how you wanted your occupation to be—how you wanted that to be identified, you wrote "maker."

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's right, a maker.

MS. ROTHMAN: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you're happy when you're making things.

MS. ROTHMAN: He makes everything. He made this home convenient. He made two things, one to put trash and one to put garbage, dumbwaiters. He made—he thinks about how to make the kitchen functional.

MIJA RIEDEL: You made the table and the chairs.

MS. ROTHMAN: Yes, but he wanted comfortable.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. ROTHMAN: He wanted people to see each other. It's always for function, not just how it looks.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Because they're functional things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MS. ROTHMAN: That's two places we both agree.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, function really has a place—

JERRY ROTHMAN: Oh, beyond a doubt.

MIJA RIEDEL:—in some of your work.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Well, I consider all those black pots and all that pottery I've made functional but not utilitarian. I mean, there's a big difference between functional and utilitarian. Everything I've made [outlasts ?]—I mean, those funny teapots, people don't think they work, but they do. The reason those legs are curved is you can tip that pot over and it pours tea. I don't expect you to pick it up. I have two handles so you can pick them up easily, but with tea it would be crazy. But the idea is you simply tip—

MIJA RIEDEL: Tilt it.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes.

But utilitarian, it's not that. I mean, think of the hassle it is to wash that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

JERRY ROTHMAN: They're not utilitarian, but they function. If things are supposed to—if things have a function implication and a functional use, they should do that. But it doesn't mean they can be utilitarian—they have to be utilitarian.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you've designed, certainly, both.

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yes. Yes. Well, I've designed in my—the commercial design I did, and someplace in between, and that's why it works out so well. I won't sacrifice the appearance to the function, and neither do I sacrifice the function to the appearance.

So everything I made works—considering what it is—works reasonably well. So I think—I don't think you can separate those things. If you make a chair, it has to be comfortable, or why the hell make it?

MIJA RIEDEL: A lot of people seem to. [They laugh.]

JERRY ROTHMAN: I know a lot of people who do, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

JERRY ROTHMAN: But I can't make a chair as a sculptural art object. That's me. A chair is a chair is a chair is a chair. But it can be an art object and still be functional and still serve as a chair, you know? And that's—I guess that must have been Eames' philosophy too. I don't know if it was, but by judging from what he did, I would say that was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Yes, that makes sense.

JERRY ROTHMAN: And, you know, so when I make sculpture that's only function is to have a visual impact, I want it to have visual impact.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's the function.

JERRY ROTHMAN: That's the function. And so, you know, all the good sculpture I've ever seen did that. It had a visual impact. The Berninis I saw in Italy, which are incredible, and those fountains he made. You know, Michelangelo was an important sculptor before Bernini, but Bernini is—he is hands down a much better artist. But that doesn't mean that—but if Michelangelo hadn't been before him, he wouldn't have come after him.

So Michelangelo is a very important sculptor because he made—he made Bernini possible. I consider Voulkos very important because he made me and other people possible. It doesn't mean that they do the same thing, but the [attitude ?] is what counts, and he made us possible.

He was an incredibly generous man, not in the sense of money but in the sense of his time and his knowledge. He was just very generous. He was a very kind man too. No one seemed to understand that. But anyway, he was too kind sometimes. Anyway, he was a good man.

MIJA RIEDEL: Final thoughts? My questions are completed. Final thoughts?

JERRY ROTHMAN: Yeah, you want to go through this stuff or do you want to—

MIJA RIEDEL: We can take a look at the slides. Okay. Then I'm going to say thank you.

JERRY ROTHMAN: You're welcome.

[END OF INTEVIEW.