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Oral history interview with Myra Mimlitsch-Gray, 2010 June 24-25

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Myra Mimlitsch-Gray on June 23 and 24, 2010. The interview took place in Stone Ridge, N.Y., 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.

Myra Mimlitsch-Gray reviewed the transcript. Her corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. 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 Myra Mimlitsch-Gray at the artist's home and studio in Stone Ridge, New York, on June twenty-third+, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is disc number one. So we've got a lovely day, a little hot, a little humid, but—

MYRA MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It's nice and cool in here in the kitchen. Myra, let's just start with some of the early biographical information. Where and when were you born?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I was born in Camden, New Jersey, in 1962. My birthday is July eleventh, so coming up on one here pretty soon.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Let's just discuss a bit about your childhood, your parents' names, what they did, siblings, what it was like growing up in Camden.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Actually, you know, my technical birthplace was Camden, but I was raised in Marlton, New Jersey, which at that time was very much kind of ruralish. It was the suburbs of Philadelphia, but still there were farmlands to be seen, horses to be seen, and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: Really.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: There were little swatches of woods to play in, but still ten miles from Philadelphia.

MS. RIEDEL: That's pretty close, though, ten miles.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So I'm the youngest of five kids. I have four older brothers.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh. [They laugh.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I was technically supposed to be John Paul, but it didn't work out. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Four older brothers. That kind of explains a lot, don't you think?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I did learn to wrestle at an early age. A lot of people have this idea that the girl would be this precious package, handle with care, and all that. But it was kind of the other way around. I'm not complaining. It was a nice environment to grow up in. But there was definitely more flannel shirts and jeans and less lace in my lifestyle at that time.

MS. RIEDEL: Is there a wide spread between the kids, or were you all fairly close in age?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's nine years.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: My parents were Catholic. They were very productive, shall we say, for that ten-year period [laughs]. And it yielded five kids right in a row.

MS. RIEDEL: What did your parents do?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: My father and mother both were high school teachers. And my dad taught biology and advanced biology. My mom taught earth science and physics.

MS. RIEDEL: And were they teaching in Marlton? Were they teaching in Philadelphia?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: They were teaching in Medford in a school called Lenape High School. And they had met in Temple University [Philadelphia, PA].

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. As undergrad or grad students?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think my dad might have been a grad student at that time. But they met. My mom's educational path got derailed by marriage and then raising the kids. But she found her way back to complete her degree work and then become part of a certification toward teaching, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And they're both high school teachers.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And your mom taught physics.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, briefly.

MS. RIEDEL: That's sort of unusual for a woman back then.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think she was kind of stuck with it. Like, it was one of those situations where there was a leave and somebody needed to fill in right away. And I remember her complaining a lot about being uncomfortable in that role. But she was dutiful, and she did the work to catch up with the content of the course.

MS. RIEDEL: And did she teach that for her entire career?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No. She was primarily earth science.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But as a result of their interests, every single vacation that we ever took had something to do with rocks or land formations [laughs].

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Or, you know, nature or whatever. So we were very much directed in our leisure-time activities toward their research interests.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And what were their names?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: My mom's name is Myra [laughs], and my dad was Paul, Paul Joseph Mimlitsch and Myra Elizabeth Buck.

MS. RIEDEL: B-U-C-K?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Which was probably Buch maybe. Her parents came over from Germany. And my dad's father came from—I think they were, like, from Bohemia or something. Like this area called Borgoland. But it's basically sort of Austrian, German, Swiss neck of the woods.

MS. RIEDEL: And did they both come over as children, or did they come over as young adults?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No, they were born in the States, but their parents were first generation, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And I assume they spoke only English, and English was spoken at home?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: English. But German was spoken when there was the need for the kids not to understand what was being discussed. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Did you learn any German?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I did. Hey, hey, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: That's right. You could pick it up.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: To keep abreast of what was being discussed.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly right. And when you were a child, a lot of time was spent outdoors?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Camping?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes indeed.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: My parents had lived in Newfoundland briefly. My dad, he taught at a Jesuit school for a couple of years. And three of my brothers lived in Newfoundland for that period of time. Then, that was like in the fifties, right? But they always felt that Canada and Newfoundland were amazing places to be, and they made it part of our regular visit to Canada. I had been to Newfoundland once with them on a family trip. But we traveled extensively through Canada.

MS. RIEDEL: What about it did they find so compelling?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think it was just the temperament. They considered it a very civilized culture, and they enjoyed the pace of life there. They were a bit kind of, I don't want to say misanthropic, but they were definitely not as motivated by suburban or city life as they were by a more laid-back pace. And in fact we had done this very large trip. I believe we visited—well, in the sixties we went to the World's Fair in Montreal.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, really. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And we had also gone to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and all that. But then there was a large sojourn in 1972. My dad spoke Esperanto. He had, like, a hobby of learning Esperanto. So he brought us to this conference that he wanted to attend, which was in Portland, Oregon. So to get there we drove.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And we drove through 26 states and four provinces during that summer in order to attend that conference.

MS. RIEDEL: So you would have been what, eight?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think I was ten. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And so it was a van with a tent trailer, and we all slept like logs on the floors and seats of this van as my parents drove us around from state to state and so forth. It was very fascinating.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll bet.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It was definitely the back roads, you know, as much as possible. I mean, you look at a map now, I can see certainly we were on interstates, but we avoided certain popular destinations and kept to the rural climes and also the rock formations or things that would be interesting [laughs], as well as Native American history—

MS. RIEDEL: How interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —and kind of, you know, American developmental culture.

MS. RIEDEL: So historical and geologic.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Geologic history of the area.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Was one of them—earth scientist was your mom's job. What did your father teach again?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Biology and advanced biology.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So very much of a scientific focus, probably a scientific mentality. A lot of research and analysis. Were conversations around the dinner table about science?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. [Laughs.] In fact, they used to bring home the slide shows, the old films, you know, the—I don't know if it was National Science Foundation or who the publisher was of those films. But we would sometimes for entertainment sit around and watch a movie about germs or something. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Did it strike you as an unusual childhood? Did you have a sense that this was not what people were doing all around you? Or did it feel pretty—it just seemed like what was done.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It was interesting because we were, like, not a family of TV watchers, for example. We were not allowed to watch TV pretty much except for what they allowed, which was basically *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* [laughs] and maybe something else of the equivalent of the National Geographic channel would be now, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That's interesting because that was the heyday of TV, too. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I know. It is kind of funny. But my parents were pretty convinced that there was nothing worthwhile on television, and I guess that perspective [laughs] can hold true today as well.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So to gather around to watch a filmstrip about bacteria would be kind of interesting because at least it was, you know, the equivalent of a couch potato [laughs] moment for the family, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That's really interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, they weren't completely, you know, it's not like they were Luddites or complete isolationists or anything. But they just saw that there was more merit for us to be engaged in other activities.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And they were very focused on that?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And that trip you took cross country, was that a big deal for you? Were seeds planted that were significant somehow later on, do you think?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: What comes to mind?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, just the sense of diversity, you know. A lot of people come and visit the United States, but they don't get off the coast.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then there are plenty of people that are United States citizens that never get out—You know, maybe they'll go in an airplane to go someplace else, and they'll get a very specific taste of an area. But they won't know the region at all, for example. So this was a great opportunity to see that. And to understand, you know, quote, unquote, Manifest Destiny or whatever, that kind of cultural development, impact on the landscape and so forth. And then also just in terms of geologic time, really understanding the lay of the land.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you pass through any of the national parks, national monuments, that sort of thing?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. We did the whole Badlands and Mount Rushmore, worked our way up. We wound up in Glacier and Banff and Jasper. Came down the coast. We kind of snuck across Texas actually. We only did the very tip of Texas [laughs]. But of course a big stop was the Petrified Forest and the Needles and Four Corners and all that. Seeing also just Native American culture, so interesting. A range of emotions dealing with, like, seeing people on reservations and so forth. It was a very interesting time, the seventies. And it was kind of a tough economic time.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Tough—resources were pretty scarce at that time. Energy crisis. There are a lot of parallels with what's happening today.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, as a kid to see all that was a big opportunity.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. At ten I would imagine the world literally opened up.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting that they were—that one of the emphases was also Native American culture and the back roads, not the highways.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, I think that that aspect became really prominent in our minds because, again, we were coming from a very, you know, localized experience. And then going out to a part of the world where people dressed different, people looked different, people lived different lives. You couldn't help but be impacted by it. And then when you're traveling across big open expanse and then you finally get to the town you're getting to, and it's basically a ghost town. And, like, who does live there? And the leathery skin of somebody who's, like, worked in the sun their entire lives, with hardly any water to be seen for miles and miles. And that kind of thing was very impressive. I remember being freaked out by Death Valley. [Laughs] Just the name itself was enough for a kid.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But there was this whole thought of, "Well, we have to drive a hundred miles without"—or I can't even remember what the mileage was—but there was definitely "from this point to that point, we're not going to see anybody."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. [Laughs.] So that was a very interesting experience.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Were you drawing as a child?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I had a lot of artistic activities as a child. But some of them were, like, geared toward problem-solving and building. Building actually was a big part of my growing up. For example, when you camp, you build a site. You build a fire. You chip wood, you gather wood. You learn the art of constructing that fire. You strategize the clothesline. Or you figure out what's [inaudible]. So my parents were very much motivated by problem-solving as recreation.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. That makes sense.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. And I feel like that's definitely a part of my life as well.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. [Inaudible] resumes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I don't mind getting my hands dirty, as might be obvious by the profession. [They laugh.] But even just like regularly. I mean, I garden as a hobby, and that's not exactly—it's relaxing but in a very different way. It's very satisfying, but it's physically rewarding, you know. And then there was a period from 1972 'til when I went away for college where we built a house. And my parents, because they were high school teachers, they had summers off. So this large trip that we took out west was also kind of a way to open their—they were scouting opportunities to live elsewhere. Unbeknownst to us, you know. So that trip took us through the area of Pennsylvania where Johnstown had been flooded and Lockhaven and all this area. And then kind of like Corning and, you know, that whole upper left quadrant of Pennsylvania was very interesting to them. And we drove through after that, and it was devastating floods. And then shortly thereafter they purchased property in Tioga County, Pennsylvania, which is maybe 15 miles south of Corning. It's kind of south of Corning and north of Williamsport. And I guess Mansfield State University is there. But the population is very sparse.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Were they relocating or they were looking for a summer house?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Because of their work schedule they initially looked at it as a summer house that they would retire to. So, then every summer, me and my brothers [laughs] got shipped up there with them. We drove up there, and we built this house. And they had gotten plans for building the house from *Mother Earth News*. It's a classic A-frame. And the plans were sponsored by homasote, which was a new material at the time. So homasote was made out of, it was being advertised as this "green" material of its time, you know. It was made out of recycled newspapers.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And you could build a home with it?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. And so they had created all this product line. So there was the kind of the typical homasote that we see like in artists' studios or whatever is like a half-inch wallboard sort of in place of drywall, basically.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But there's all kinds of thicknesses of homasote, and it comes in a tongue-and-groove configuration in various plank sizes and so forth. So this house was made out of vinyl clad so the interior is vinyl. And then the idea of it was that it was self-insulating.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So there are these heavy planks that were then tongue-and-groove conjoined to build the sheathing for the house. And again, it could be the wall. In an A-frame, the wall is the roof at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So in theory it would be a quick project. [They laugh.] But those theories are often debunked. So, yes, every summer basically we showed up there, and the foundation was poured when we got there. And then we stick-built the thing up from there.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you help with that?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And so, you know, of course since I was the kid, a lot of my jobs involved— Well, first of all, a lot of the kids' jobs, whenever my parents had to do some serious figuring or, you know, negotiating about what was going to be next on the list of things to do, or where materials were going to come from or whatever, because it's out in the woods, my brothers and I would go out and gather rocks, you know. So we would build a rock wall. So that'd be, like, some busy work that we'd be involved in. And that of course turned into, like, snake hunting, you know. [Laughs] And then—

MS. RIEDEL: So you actually constructed walls?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Of stone, as a child.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And those were retaining walls for the driveway and so forth. So then another one of my jobs—we all had certain tasks; I was not big at the high-wire work. But I had one brother, Frank, who was very good at crawling up to the peaks of things. He seemed to me [laughs] somewhat fearless in those heights. But one of my jobs was straightening nails. And I've often kind of attributed this experience to, like, [laughs] my first metalsmithing opportunity really, because we used these double-headed nails to build a lot of scaffolding and a lot of rough carpentry in preparation for the finish work. And those nails could be recycled. They just had to be straightened, and then you could reuse them. So I straightened nails.

MS. RIEDEL: Myra, that's amazing.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That was a good job for me [laughs].

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I was probably maybe 13 at that time. But it was a bit of a cultural shock at that moment for us because all of our friends were going to, like, Seaside Heights and Atlantic City and hanging out. And Bruce Springsteen and all this other stuff, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And we had to go up into the woods with no phone, no electricity, you know, no whatever, and build this house. So it seemed a little bit, like, you know, we were being—

MS. RIEDEL: All summer.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: For a year or two.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. But I recognize now that this, you know, was just such a profound learning experience for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And you literally helped raise this house from the ground up.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. It was very funny. Like, we built these A's, which are the framing, the main framing member, and it took us all day to get the first one up. I mean, it was so hard. We had guidelines and, you know, we were just pulling against each other to keep the thing from slipping right over. And it was very intense. And on a slope where the front of the house was exposed, and the back of the house is level. So the front of the house is essentially two-story, you know. That was a little scary. But after sweating it to get this first A up, these two local farmers came by and they said, "Oh, here, let's help." And they were just amazing. These guys could pick up, like, a 24-foot two-by-six on end and just lift it like they were poking, you know, something, you know—[laughs]—like with a wand. And they were able to just really help guide these trusses into place. And, yes, they made the rest of the work—we got the rest of the framing roughed in by the end of that day. It was amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, too, just thinking about your work, how it must have really given you, especially at such a young age, a very profound, personal, up-close perspective on interior and exterior.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, that's interesting. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. I mean you were literally constructing interior as well as exterior.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Or then 'til I kind of go, make that progress from an open-air shower stall made out of one-by-twos and plastic tarp, to then suddenly, you know, having a door on something or a wall or a window. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And it sounds like interesting materials and interesting surfaces, and a variety of textures from the stone to the vinyl. Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. Yes. And there was a lot of staining, for example, of lumber, because it was exposed beams in the inside the house. So we just had this crew, you know, me and my brothers, you know, applying the stain and wiping it with rags. And just like that could go on for weeks, you know. [Laughs.] It's very interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: What an extraordinary experience, especially as a child.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. It was really intense.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it sounds like it. I mean, you're on really a construction crew at the age of 12 basically. [Laughs.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you take art classes as well? Was art something that was encouraged in your home?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I was always taking, you know, in grade school and so forth, I was always motivated by my art classes. And I was a self-taught macramé artist. [They laugh.] As was appropriate in the seventies. I made some pretty horrendous objects back then.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Plant holders, that sort of thing.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And I think that by the time I was, like, 15, 16, I was looking to help out people with craft projects or, you know. It's sort of weird how the crafts are like a natural teaching—I mean, teaching and the crafts are so connected. I mean, information is so directly handed down. And then there's also this eagerness for people in crafts to share information about how to and so forth. And it's not—it's part of the joy of it. So I remember feeling like I wanted to share that information pretty early on. Like even, you know, I don't know, how to tie what knot, or different ways to find the end of a string or something. I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: But you figured that out yourself. You didn't take a class.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No. Well, then there were books and everything on the subject. And you could see. I would study other people's—I'd look at, you know, the classic owl—

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —made out of jute with the wooden beads for eyes or whatever. And I would just study. I remember somebody gave my mom one of those, and I studied it and studied it and studied it. And I thought, "I'm going to learn to make those," you know. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And my grandmother was an embroiderer. So she taught me how to tie, like, French knots and do chain stitch and fancy stitchery and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Really! Your mother's side or father's side?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: My father's side. I didn't really know my mom's folks that well. I never met her dad, and her mother died when I was five. So I have a vague recollection. But on my dad's side I never met my grandfather. But his mother lived to, like, 95 or 96. So she was around for quite some time and even into my marriage and so forth. So it's nice that we got a lot of time together. And I learned a lot about making from her. And she of course was a child during the Depression and had—I remember, you know, the frugality that very much defined her life and her practice and so forth. And this "never throw anything away" kind of aspect. Or be able to reuse and re-purpose things was a very important part of her life.

MS. RIEDEL: And it sounds like your parents had picked that up to some degree, too.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Completely.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Recycling nails, for example. So even today, if I'm doing something that involves a nail, if I can straighten out a nail, I will. You know. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So your grandmother was an embroiderer. And what sort of work did she do? Did she [inaudible]?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, this was just for a hobby, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Like her livelihood was—she actually kind of ran a nursing home.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So the crafts might have tied in to that as well.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes. Exactly. Get the ladies together and do some beadwork or whatever. Yes. So she made your, you know, customary tablecloths and napkins and pillowcases and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you do that, too? So was there a real sense of the work also—seems like there was a real connection between art and craft and function. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I would say, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: With the exception of the owl.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, the owl. [They laugh.] You can probably still hang a plant from it. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you drawing as well? Was there two-dimensional work perhaps in school?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, oh, yes. I mean, actually what's interesting is that, you know, I was very aware of the two dimensions. [Laughs] As I think is often the case in education. It's the three dimensions are reserved for either a better school district or, you know, better facilities, or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But at that time it seemed like 3-D was not that well covered. But I learned it by building walls, for example. And, you know, I had a knife. I was, like, a girl with a knife in my pocket for most of my teenage years [laughs]. And I whittled. Like one of the things that we would do is whittle designs onto sticks for amusement. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like absolutely Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer kind of childhood.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Those sticks would come in handy to flip a rock over before you picked it up.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, at that same time we were all reading *Lord of the Rings* [J.R.R. Tolkien] and this and that. So that kind of fantasy, imagination thing was being spurred on by the absence of TV, the remoteness of outside stimulation, you know, of the urban kind or the electronic kind. And, yes, and just getting together. We still had a community, me and my brothers and, like, the neighbors two miles down the road, whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: All that time in the woods, too. And just it's so interesting—you mentioned the whittling, given the recent quote about looking for that kind of looseness and quality in the work, what, 30 years later now? That's interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, that's funny. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So it sounds as if you're—you said you're very interested in 2-D or very aware of 2-D. You said at some point it was very much like 3-D.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, yes. That's what I was trying to get at, is that, like, in terms of learning art or whatever, I feel like there was a lot more drawing and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: In school?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. This is I'm really pulling. You're making me reach into the dark recesses here. But some neighbor had brought me to, like, an art class. I think it was in Philadelphia. I was really young, like maybe third or fourth grade. And I remember working with clay. And I sculpted a female figure. [Laughs.] And I thought it was wrong to do this because, you know—I recognize it now, I mean, later in life I realized that it was, like, a classic—I was trying to make a classical sculpture, which meant basically a nude figure, you know. And I was really horrified that I'd made it. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: But you wanted to. Did you think that's what you were supposed to do?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That's what I thought it was supposed to be, you know. And I was really nervous about that. And then I would have to say most of the three-dimensional objects that I did wind up making later in high school— Like, in high school you could be an art major.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? In high school!

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It just meant that instead of going to study hall, you could stay in your art class for two periods. So then you were an art major. So you skipped study hall. So as an art major, then my teacher was turning me on to more and more stuff. So that was, like, junior and senior year in high school. And I'm really grateful to her, Charlotte Henning, for turning me onto the idea of the artist as a profession, really. And so she introduced me to, like, gauze, plaster-coated gauze, that could be used—it was a product called Pearl Plaster. She introduced me to, like, wire, making figures with wire. And I made quite the sculpture of deer with wire, which was pretty embarrassing. Also did a lot of trees back then. [Laughs.] She—I would say the thing I'm most grateful to her for was turning me onto the concept of a pre-college program between junior and senior year. And, you know, I went home with this piece of paper to my parents to say, "I don't know. My teacher thinks I should do this," kind of thing. And they were scratching their heads, going like, "Well, gosh, it looks like she wants to be an artist," you know. [Laughs,]

MS. RIEDEL: And where did that come from?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So what was the program? Was it a special program during the summer?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. It was at Carnegie Mellon [University, Pittsburgh, PA], and it was a six-week program. So this was the first time, you know, that I was going away by myself in the summer. I don't know how I got away. I don't know how I got off the work crew that summer. [They laugh.] But, yes, I took a bus from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, you know, and I had to find my way to the campus.

MS. RIEDEL: You must have been what, 16?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Which sounds like nowadays—

MS. RIEDEL: You were by yourself on a bus.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I mean, nowadays it doesn't sound like a big deal. You see kids on planes ten years old or whatever. They're flying all over the place. But at that time, for me, it seemed like a very big deal. So the program was set up that we did two-week intensives in, like, two or three different classes. And then switched and then switched. So we either got exposed to six or nine different studio experiences in that six-week time.

MS. RIEDEL: Wonderful.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It was intense. I worked with clay there, terribly, I have to say. Something I made blew up and might have taken somebody else's stuff with it. [They laugh.] Sorry about that. But I discovered jewelry-making in that six-week period. So I took a class, and I'm so sorry I can't remember the name of the teacher. But it was fun, you know. We learned basic sweat soldering, piercing. We made a ring. I made a belt buckle that was based on *Dark Side of the Moon* [Pink Floyd, 1973]. [They laugh.] So now you can see we've moved into the latter part of the seventies, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So it's like, you know, 1977, I guess, '78?

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds about right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Something like that. Which I know that album's older than that, but that was when my brothers finally could hand it down to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. This was all-day classes from morning 'til five for six weeks?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. It was really intense. So then after that I thought, well, that was cool. But I really enjoyed painting and drawing. And I really thought that I was going to be majoring in painting.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? So you were doing all this 3-D work, but you were still really mostly drawn to the 2-D.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And just before we leave Pittsburgh, did you stay—were there dorms?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, we lived in the dorms. It was the first time I ever, you know, had that experience, and roommates and boyfriends and like, you know, the whole thing, like that. And even though I'd had boyfriends before, but I mean it felt like college, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And were there museums that they took you to as well? Or was it totally studio-focused? Did it open up an awareness of museum collections and the caliber of work?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I actually don't remember a museum trip associated with that. I had gone to museums, of course, with my parents in our travels.

MS. RIEDEL: Art museums as well as science [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I actually remember for some strange reason a memory of being at the Clark Institute. And I was really young, I think. I've heard that I was, like, five. But I was taken by Degas's—there was, like, the ballerina, the bronze ballerina piece, you know.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: On display. And I feel like there was a related painting of some sort. But I was—anyway, I just stared and stared and stared at that thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's like they had to drag me out. I don't know. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So you'd been to museums. This was primarily then a studio focus, the Pittsburgh experience.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. But it was still in the city so you could like, you know, with other people you could find your way around. And we had, like, outdoor movies at the park and stuff like that. So it was interesting to live in a city, too, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it your first extended urban experience?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, that sounds pretty formative at 16.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, it was interesting. So I was at that point then realizing I'm going to college for art, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Were any of your brothers interested in art?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: They all are creative in their various ways.

MS. RIEDEL: I would imagine.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: My oldest brother, Paul—their names, by the way, it's like Paul Carl, Carl Francis, Francis Stephen, Stephen John, and that's why I was going to be John Paul, you see.

MS. RIEDEL: That's really interesting. Something about species and subspecies and genus.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And closure. So they were trying to close the loop for that last one. So, but then they were trying to figure out how they were going to hand down all— Actually there's a funny photograph of us, our kindergarten, you know, the first official school portrait, we're all wearing the same sweater. It got handed down five times. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: They're frugal. But also the idea of, like, what are we going to do with this girl? I don't know, you know. So flannel shirts, like I said. No lace, flannel shirts.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Exactly, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: It's not so bad, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But—I forget what I was going to say. Oh, so all right, then I was going to go. Oh, I know, my oldest brother, Paul, he's a musician. Carl is also a musician—well, he's motivated by music; both of them. They're not professional musicians, but I mean that's what they do for enjoyment. Although Paul is actually making some inroads. But Carl also paints, kind of a self-taught painter. My brother Frank did a lot of, like, illustration kind of work, but completely, like, motivated by fantasy and science fiction kind of imagery and so forth. And then my brother Stephen is a machinist. And Carl's a machinist by profession, but Stephen makes prototypes. He's a high-end, you know, kind of thing, more precise machinery type of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: That's really interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. That makes sense.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That kind of analytical mind. In that way I'd say that all of our creativity is more analytical than emotional or you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Problem-solving.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So were your parents supportive of this idea of becoming an artist?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, when they realized that they weren't going to have much of a choice otherwise. I just had to do it. And they wanted me to go to a state school where there'd be a more broad education and so forth. My father had gone to Kutztown [University, Maxatawny, PA], I think, for undergraduate school. He thought I should go to Kutztown. They're Pennsylvania Dutch, you know. I have family from Allentown and Easton, Pennsylvania. So they enjoyed that part of the world as well, and they wanted me to go to that school. But I couldn't help it. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting that you were—because, I mean, both your schools, undergrad and grad, are specifically art academies. There was no—and I think that's interesting because I don't think that's often the

case, that you were that clear from the start that it was going to be specifically art.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I mean, you know, I had applied to Tyler [School of Art, Temple University] and Kutztown and PCA, Philadelphia College of Art. I did not get into Tyler. But, I mean, it's very interesting how things work. I remember going on the tour of PCA with my dad. And he was horrified by the waste. Like, we went through the sculpture area. And what he saw was just a bunch of stuff, you know. Like, what's all this stuff lying around here? And what I saw was all these very interesting projects.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. Either abandoned or yet to be realized. But I was fascinated by the scrap heaps, so to speak. And he just thought, "Oh, this is kind of wasteful. Why do we have to spend all this money to go to school to make that?" You know. [Laughs]

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have to put together a portfolio?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: What was your work like? What did you put together, do you remember?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I had, like, fussy drawings. I remember that, you know, of course I was very motivated by representational work at that time. And I had a lot of support from my teacher, again, Charlotte Henning, for the concept of a portfolio. I mean, I don't think that I realized at the time that that's what I was doing. Now, in my academic life, the student applicant pool is so much more sophisticated than we were, by any stretch. But I think that she was helping me all along by saying, "Oh, you should try drawing a coat on a chair or whatever. You should study drapery, or you should this and that." So I naturally had a fairly broad portfolio, you know, going in.

MS. RIEDEL: And would she set that up? Were there classes in still-life drawing or drawing from the model in your school?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes. They were there for those people that wanted to delve into it more deeply, you know. Like the art majors could keep an area set up so they could work on it.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting. I haven't heard of people having a major in high school.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I know, it's funny.

MS. RIEDEL: That's an interesting concept. What was the high school name?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I went to Cherokee High School, but it's part of the Lenape High School District.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And but, I mean, like there was no photography at that time per se. But, you know, we see applicants that have jewelry-making, photography, and these types of facilities at their disposal in high school. So I think just the economy of things has changed a lot in time. And also new technologies have made certain kind of conceptual practices more affordable, and people could enter sort of like, the politics of image-making could be discussed very easily with a digital camera now, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But the thing about setting up a darkroom and having to deal with an enlarger and all that stuff requires the facility, it requires a commitment to the space and securing the equipment and all that other stuff. It's just such a very different kind of intellectual space for art in K through 12 now.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It seems to me.

MS. RIEDEL: It's either there and it's flourishing, or it's not there at all really.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That's true.

MS. RIEDEL: And it sounds like the high school classes were primarily 2-D focused: painting and drawing?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think so, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: And the 3-D came primarily from the summer work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And then your own experience building a house.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And just working with your parents.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did you settle on Philadelphia College of Art? Was that a place that you were really interested in going? Who was teaching there? What drew you there?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, it was just simply the interview. I mean, I knew that it was a good school. There was a certain amount of comfort from my parents' side in the sense that at least it was only, you know, in Philly. It wasn't going to be that far away. They could keep their eye on me, you know. I'd come home every once in a while, you know. I could take the high-speed line from Philly and they could pick me up. You know, it'd be not that big of a deal.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So this was really a big—this was a big move for you because you not only were leaving home, you're really going to a very dense, exciting urban environment after really not having that before. So it's not only college and art school, but everything that comes with that urban environment and that exposure.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And again, it's funny that you could live ten miles from Philadelphia, but only go under certain circumstances, you know. So if you weren't motivated to go to the city, you just didn't go.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So when you decided to go to art school, were you already thinking about metal? Or did you have a thought about what you were interested in majoring in?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No. I thought I was going to be in painting, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: You thought you were going to be a painter.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I went there, and I tried to sign up for painting, but it was filled. But there was space in a jewelry class. [Laughs] And I literally just sort of said, "Okay, I remember that. It was pretty cool, you know. I enjoyed that."

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: "And let me try my hand at that again until the painting class opens up."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But, of course, you know, once I got in there and started to understand it more in depth and in context to other work that I was developing and just my adult self that was developing, that it just stuck. I got stuck in metal. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: What about it was so compelling?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, the tool technology, of course, was comfortable to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Hand tools, hammers, these types of things.

MS. RIEDEL: Very [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I could relate to that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I didn't necessarily know how to use them. But, I mean, at least I wasn't afraid to get

my hands cut or dirty or whatever. The torch, of course, is always exciting. But that, too, was very interesting to me. The jewelry aspect, in terms of ornamentations of worth, that was fun. I had as a young kid, I used to like stick pins into my dolls' ears and so forth and make them be wearing jewelry. And I also made macramé jewelry. So like, I kind of had this interest in adornment at that time.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so this afforded me the opportunity to explore that more. Yes. And again, just the analytic skill set. I mean, in some ways I feel like I was a craftsman first.

MS. RIEDEL: Before you were a jeweler and metalsmith?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Or before I might be called an artist. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes sense just given what you said about your childhood so far.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: A sort of pragmatism.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, I didn't grow up in a house with art, you know. My mom had this stuff that you get at the supermarket. But one of them happened to be, like, a van Gogh painting. But it was those things that you would get. Or you could, like, fill up a tank of gas and get a free, you know, [they laugh] picture or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And again, though, getting back to the trip out west, I wish I could remember which state we were in. But there was a Native American doing a painting, and we all watched him do this painting. And of course he has painted that painting a thousand times. He could do it with his eyes closed, whatever. But we were just mesmerized by the construction of this image. And it was funny because he painted and painted and painted, and we couldn't see what it was going to be. And then he turned the whole canvas over, and it was, like, the trail's end, this very symbolic, you know, silhouetted image on horseback, looking out across the plateau, and so forth. But it was just so fun. And there's a great shtick, you know, for a tourist painter. But my parents bought that painting.

MS. RIEDEL: Did they.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I feel like that's the only artwork, like real artwork, you know, that they bought. It was very interesting. And I used to study that painting all the time in the living room. And I'd recognize it. It was a real painting in that I could relate to how the brushstrokes were laid down, you know. It was very interesting to me.

MS. RIEDEL: And for a family in a tradition that was very frugal and very focused on pragmatism, I'm sure the idea of them actually buying that painting was pretty powerful.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, that's true. A lot of the things that were on display tended to be specimens. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Sure. Different types of rocks and pods and fossils, I'm sure. Were there a lot of objects like that in the house? Were there a lot of curious objects?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, they came and went. With that many kids running around, I'm sure there was a lot of control, what came and went.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So who was teaching at Philadelphia when you were there?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, yes, well, the first class I took was with Leon Lugassy. And I don't know what his status is right now. But he was kind of on his way out of the position. Like, I think he was taking a leave or something, or he had— I don't know. He was not as present in terms of the program, I would say, at the time that I was there. But Richard Reinhardt certainly was. Sharon Church and Rod McCormick had been hired as, like, an adjunct and a technician at the time. Of course now he and Sharon run the program primarily. They're the full-time people, and then a coterie of adjuncts. But I would say that basically Sharon and Rod and Richard Reinhardt were the most influential to me at that time. But also other course work. You know, I had, like, a great teacher, Toby Zinman, who taught—introduced me to William Blake and Romanticism and modern theater. I had

been exposed to Freud and turn-of-the-century, like, fin-de-siècle Vienna and some of the thinking, early Modernist thinking through a variety of teachers.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there art history classes as well?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Even though it's an art school, there's a liberal arts component. But it's a lot more—at that time, it was a lot more laid-back in the sense that, I mean, you could do an art project to answer an assignment for certain teachers in certain classes and stuff like that. So it was a little more recognizing this kind of primacy of artistic practice. But in a way, now, you know, as an academic looking back, I realize that, you know, it's nice to have a balance. I mean, there are a lot of people that have a wealth of information because of the broad curriculum that they studied under. So I acquired a lot of skill. But I didn't necessarily have the context for it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. But that's also very traditional for undergraduate school that they really focus on the skills, and then the content and context perhaps come with graduate work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So who was teaching what? And which classes—were there any in particular that really were influential?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, oh, I should also say that I had a great class that was team-taught by Dick Reinhardt and Bill Daley.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: "Conceptual Development" was the name of the class. But also in their hands it was very, very much a lot of analytic skills covered in there. Like a course called Conceptual Development now would have a very different syllabus than it did then, because we were learning how to do exploded views and, like, kind of—it was design-based, I would say, in its ideology. But it was fascinating, and those guys were a hysterical team. Just crazy. Sharon—Rod, I should say, Rod McCormick, was incredible with the hammer. That guy, even though now his contemporary work is really motivated by CAD [Computer-aided Design], his skills as a metalsmith are outstanding. And he had a very— He was kind of, had a hippie-esque quality to his work at that time. He had been art [inaudible] a lot and had been making these kind of free-form things that were very influential to me. I feel like they influenced me more later than they did at that time. But still there was a scale that he was working that was very impressive. And he'd figured out this way to create this, like, hanging structure and sandbags and whatnot. And he was working on this thing outside. And it was just very sculptural.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And had you seen anything like that before? It sounds like everything else had been on a smaller scale up to this point.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. You get into the jewelry thing, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Exactly.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I think that Rod was quietly very influential on the kind of more sculptural side of things. But then Sharon was like—she's incredible. She continues to be, you know, an amazing resource and inspiration for me and a lot of people. She just was—had such incredible expectations, you know, high standards. They all did. But I mean—maybe it's just her nature, but she and I, like, had to lock horns, you know. But I would always have to rise to her challenge, you know, like. She pushed my buttons in very productive ways, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you say more about that? [Inaudible], what was helpful about that?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I learned a lot about respect from Sharon. I mean, you know, like she—I remember I would be working really late in the night or whatever, and I'd be late for her morning class. And in my mind at that time I didn't understand what the problem was. I was getting the work done. But the problem was that I wasn't respecting her authority, and I wasn't giving back to the class by being there at a time when she needed me to be there, you know. So she called me on it. And we ran around the table at each other, you know, having this debate about the value of work and the value of community, in essence, and the give and get that is part of

the richness of academic life. I mean, she just forced me to recognize my role and responsibility in that. In a way, I tell people, "Going to school is selfish. Like grad school, for example. It's selfish time. Try not to get a job while you're doing it. Don't be commuting or whatever. Like just go there and do it because when else are you going to have this time?" It's selfish in that way. But it's absolutely selfless in other ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: "And you have to be willing to participate in full contract of what that means." And I think that Sharon called me out on that, and it was very impressive. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's really interesting given the direction that your career has gone in, such an academic bent and such a university bent that it's not just metalsmithing skills or the craft perspective technique. But the whole academic discipline and community.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's that cliché "life of the mind" thing or whatever. But it is that. But the mind is not just this single organ. It's in context with your body and everybody else's body and everybody else's space and everybody else's everything. And then the fluidity of discourse is so important and impacting. So to be arrogant about it or frivolous or whatever is counterproductive.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I think that she nurtured me into a leadership role. So I wasn't just some punk makin' shit that I felt like makin'. [They laugh.] But I had to try to understand that in a context. And actually I would say that, across the board, my education there kind of set a seed that continues to provide, like, an underpinning to my research today, which is this sort of sense of responsibility to a field, some sort of stewardship, that those things resonated with me through their teaching.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. That's really interesting. And that sounds like a skill and a sensibility that isn't necessarily or frequently a part of undergraduate education.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I feel like some of that could have been the time, the moment, you know. Like, I often describe it as, you know, realizing that I was—not saying that I had this clarity at that time. But in retrospect, I see that I was coming out of Modernism and into Postmodernism. And so people in that moment, we were—like, we had one foot in a stylization and in the formalism and in an aesthetics movement, you know. And then we had this other foot in a criticality and a skepticism and, you know, a deconstruction.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so trying to find that balance. And I think there was, as there is today, some real concern about how what we do would continue to exist in the future.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And for better or for worse, that concern continues to inform what I do. It's sometimes very crippling. It's sometimes very enormous and ridiculous. And sometimes it's just a big burden. But in other ways it's extremely motivational.

MS. RIEDEL: You said there was art history. Were there art historical classes in undergraduate that gave you a sense of jewelry history, metalsmithing history, art history in general?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I didn't get—I'd have to say the craft thing was not being covered at that time, and it's really too bad. So I was looking at a lot of painting and drawing. And I'm trying to remember some specific classes [laughs]. I can't remember. But I do think that the turn-of-the-century Vienna work and Gustav Klimt and all that stuff was really important to me. One thing that's very funny is I remember I hated Duchamp's [Marcel Duchamp] work at that time. I hated Duchamp.

MS. RIEDEL: [They laugh.] That is interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Because the thing that I hated about it was, I recognized that I was the brunt of his joke or something, you know. Like I couldn't understand why he was offending the audience. But that's just one way to look at it obviously.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so it took, I would say, during my time in school, I hated and then loved Duchamp.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So if that four years, you know, can produce that kind of turnaround, you know, it's pretty interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: That is pretty interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, of course I loved Brancusi [Constantin Brancusi]. How could you live in Philadelphia and not love Brancusi. But I loved him for certain romantic reasons. I didn't really understand it intellectually. But Duchamp disturbed me. And I realize that I'm motivated by discomfort in certain ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So Duchamp made me uncomfortable.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And you know, again, moving toward Postmodernism, understood that I was motivated by skepticism or, you know, just questions over answers, I guess, you could say.

MS. RIEDEL: And was your work also making this shift or partially Modern, partially Postmodern? Were you addressing that in the work itself?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I don't think that I was doing anything, like, overtly or with any kind of clarity. Except that, like, I have a piece upstairs that you can see that's—it's a silver; I remember, you know, I made this silver bowl with these steel handles. I was taking blacksmithing. I took blacksmithing with Jack Andrews and Frederic Crist, whose work I really admire. And so I was bringing silver together with steel. And I remember Richard Reinhardt saying, like, "You know, that's a pretty interesting thing, but I don't really know what to say about it because it's starting to be art, you know. It's like heading toward art."

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Laughs] And to bring, like, the sacred and the profane together, I guess, as in highly polished silver and wrought steel, you know, into one piece was from his standpoint kind of sacrilegious, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. But it's also wonderful that as a teacher, he wasn't pushing that one way or the other. He was just saying, "I don't know what to do with that."

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right, right. I wish I had on hand—

[END DISC 1.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I have it somewhere. But he had given me for graduation—oh, I might have it right there. Let me see. A book by Augustus Rose, *Copper Work* [first published 1909]. And we all got—they gave us books, like second-hand books from their libraries when we graduated. And I hope I can find the quote. But Dick Reinhardt wrote in mine—oh, where is it?

MS. RIEDEL: I can pause it if you like.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: What if I can't find it? Oh, here it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Here we go.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: He writes, "Jesus, Myra, stop bitching about all that's wrong in this world and make what's right for you. Work for you. It's a matter of form, proportion, line, mass, direction, et cetera, et cetera. What the hell is it anyway? Nothing but metal. And the man beat on it and made it into art. Yeah, well how come it isn't just crap? Well, Myra, it's a matter of form, proportion, line, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera Add utility to that list, too. But you don't really have to, do you? You do? Well, make sure you really want to. Then you will know what you are doing. And listen, honey, when you know, you know. And believe me, if it's worth it, it's worth it, even the price."

MS. RIEDEL: That's wonderful.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Isn't that cool?

MS. RIEDEL: What a lovely gift to give an undergraduate.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I know.

MS. RIEDEL: Inscribed into a book.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I know, it's so sweet.

MS. RIEDEL: *Copper Work*.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's a classic book, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But the beauty of that for me is that, you know, I mean, he was recognizing my struggle between craft and art and trying to, you know, participate in some concept of the avant-garde, you know, whatever that means. And meanwhile the very concept of that was being eroded at the time, and continues perpetually. Yes. And just that pull—pulling it back to craft, you know, like such a—

MS. RIEDEL: And was the college, was it firmly rooted in fine art? Was it firmly rooted in craft? It had a strong sense of design? How did it [inaudible]?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Oh, it was definitely. I mean Richard Reinhardt used to teach industrial design.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, like that school, and I know without notes in front of me, but it used to be, like, the Philadelphia Museum School. And then it was the Museum School of Industrial Design or Design, and then eventually it became Philadelphia College of Art; and we still got the College of Art and Design for a while. Then it became University of the Arts. So, like, at that time it was like this huge, holistic curriculum. And I think it was very unique when it became that university. But, yes, it had definite strong roots in design. And Dick Reinhardt was one of the people with the Handy & Harman Workshops and so forth. It's worth saying that he was a Marine, you know. [Laughs] And he brought that energy into his teaching completely.

MS. RIEDEL: Discipline, too, I imagine.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. But also like the gentle giant, you know. So he was very fatherly in his teaching, but very stern as well. And he didn't think, you know, he didn't mind saying what he meant. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. What were the other students like? What was the timbre of the whole class situation? Were the other students equally serious?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I had some excellent colleagues. It was five women in my class.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have any men?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: None.

MS. RIEDEL: None?! Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. But there were men in the class ahead of me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And Hratch Babikian was in school at that time. I guess he was probably a senior when I was a junior, or maybe he was two years ahead of me. Also Robert Oppecker, who became like the Colonial Williamsburg silversmith for a while and worked down there for some period of time. And then there were some other people—there were some great artists all around, though. I mean, I had some excellent friends across the board. One of my friends who didn't finish school but is a, you know, she's my best friend now, and we met there. And that's Debby Tappan. She was in painting. I had a boyfriend in painting, and I hung out in painting a lot. So I managed to basically keep my hand in where my interests fed by always taking classes in painting and drawing. I took a watercolor class with Lily Yeh. And I didn't really understand what was going on. And then there was just one, kind of, day where I understood that I had been like kind of outlining things and filling in rather than feeling the brush as capable to describe the form in a single stroke, you know. And she was really important to me to connect shape and form in a weird way. But Karen Saler was, you know, continues to be a great teacher. But she was so profound—had a profound impact on me in my foundation year, Drawing I and Drawing II, you know. She was so hardcore. Really great. A very inspirational person.

MS. RIEDEL: So really it sounds as if those were four years that were extremely valuable, not only for technical skills but for really establishing a sense of rigor, academic sensibility, community sensibility.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Yes. They were big.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then I, you know, had jobs, too, like summer jobs with some jewelers or doing whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you do anything related to the arts?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Like bench work for jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: Really!

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Everybody's got to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: So were you working for a commercial jeweler in the area?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Really!

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: What were you working on?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Horrible things. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Like developing skills no doubt.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. Making some money, paying some bills. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So you had enough skill to be working on—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And my big thrill was that I got, Sharon actually picked me up as a studio assistant a little bit.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's great.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That was huge.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I would imagine. So you really got to watch her work and be part of that.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I think I made every mistake you can make on her stuff. [They laugh.] It was very kind of her to keep me on.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were you working on in terms of commercial work? Was it just commercial jewelry?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, it was horrible. It was this guy who, you know, would make—well, it just introduced me to the kind of what you have to do to make ends meet in the business. I mean, one day we're making, like, praying hands signet rings. And the next day we're making something for the Federation of Whoever. [Laughs] Honorary pins for their, you know, their luncheon next week or whatever. And then the next thing it's this and that. I don't know. It's just, like, nonstop.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Rope chain after rope chain, you know, like— [laughs].

MS. RIEDEL: But wonderful to see that at that point in your career and understand how it works, understanding that end of the continuum and then not necessarily have to do it again.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And of course learning like, you know, that every skill that you— You know, it's so funny how, you know, you learn and it's like this is the way you do whatever. And then you take another class, and it's like this is the way you do whatever. [Laughs] And there are so many right ways to do whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then you go and you work for somebody that's making a living, and this is the way you do it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And, by the way, you have to do 50 of them in a row, and they have to be done by two o'clock this afternoon, otherwise you're not getting paid, you know. Or something like that. So that is very impressive.

MS. RIEDEL: And that is interesting because I think a lot of students who are at art school don't necessarily have a sense in that four-year period of time about how one can make a living—or how one might have to make a living if one's going to work—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —in that field. So you had a very hands-on, very graphic understanding of what was involved.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, indeed.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think educationally there's, you know, that is attended to in varying degrees to various success generationally. It's sort of like— Maybe I didn't engage it so much because in a weird way I kind of always figured I'd be a teacher somehow, because it was in the family tree, you know. But it's finite, right? Obviously there are only so many jobs. So what do we do in the meantime? What is there? And also it's not to say that teaching's for everybody. It's not to say that teaching is a pinnacle that you should be aiming for. And there's also, like, the kind of—the theoretical motivations compared to the practical motivations and so forth, that are very difficult to have open conversations about. Or you could have those conversations in your curriculum, but you can't make people listen to them.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: The people that want to hear. So you can always say to an art student: "Oh, you should take business classes, or you need to learn accounting or whatever." Well, nobody wants to hear that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Laughs] So, you know, and the same thing is like, oh, some people like, you know, think that art ed is going to be the way to be an artist and pay some bills because you're going to get, you know, a high school teaching job or something. But maybe not. And maybe it's not your passion. Maybe it's not your talent, you know. Like, there are these different tracks.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. Exactly.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That are either recommended or people are just driven toward because they hear that that's a sure thing. But it's not.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. It's interesting, too, because I think of one of the things you've talked about in terms of craft and your understanding of it in an intellectual sensibility, but you've also talked about craft in terms of an intellectual discipline and multiple things that we'll get into later. But you've also talked about it as an experiential discipline. And it seems like you have had such broad and diverse experiential understanding of craft, just going back to your childhood, college, that it's interesting to see where many of the roots of this—your sensibility, your way of framing craft—come from.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, it's interesting. I'm engaging that again like right now in my ruminations. But from my PCA experience and then into my Cranbrook [Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI] experience in graduate school, this thesis emerged that was spurred on by William Blake and *The Book of Urizen* [1794], which is essentially about the separation of the mind and the hand, you know. And how the world gets really screwed up by that, the division of powers and so forth. So it's been, you know, like my interest to find this holistic place for craft and the mind and art, expression, and pragmatic skills-based knowledge to coalesce and be meaningful.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. It seems as if the experience has just unfolded in a very holistic way through your own experience, too. Yes. Just the variety of experiences that you've had that have led up to where you are now. In a real hands-on way. Not necessarily book learning, but actual experience again after the other, after the other. Interesting. How did you— It seems like you— Did you finish your BFA and go directly to Cranbrook? You went directly?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. That's a weird thing. I know that some of the questions that the interview covers in terms of, like, rewarding educational experience or whatever—the *most* rewarding educational experience—and it's, like, really hard to say which is *the most* for somebody in my position. But I would say one very significant aspect of my educational experience was that decision to go from undergrad to grad school directly. And it didn't exactly happen as planned as it might seem. I mean, I had decided—My teachers were saying, like, "Are you going to go to grad school? Are you going to go to grad school?" And I feel like I was at this point where I had at that point a jewelry portfolio that was fairly competent in terms of its craftsmanship. I had a rendering portfolio back in the day with gouache and watercolors, right? So I could, like, probably have left school and gotten some sort of job in industry. But I think that Sharon and Rod and Dick knew that that wasn't going to work for me. And they really encouraged me to apply for grad school. I was—is it time?

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, no. We're fine.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I was thinking, "Oh, do I really want to do this? I don't know." I was kind of worried and money and this and that. All those reasons why you might not want to do something. So I said, "Well, okay, I'm going to just apply to one school." And at that time I was really only interested in studying with Brent Kington.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know, he's at Southern Illinois [University, Carbondale].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Very competitive at that time. It was a full tuition, a full ride. And Brent Kington was *the* guy. I mean, I was really being motivated by the blacksmithing. I was really being motivated by sculptural concerns really. Not even knowing what that meant per se. I had taken some classes in sculpture. But I wouldn't say that I even knew what that meant. I just knew that Brent Kington was moving metal in a way that was very interesting to me, very facile. He was a very powerful figure in the metal field at that time. And I thought, "Eh, I'll try it. And if I don't get in, I don't get in, you know." So I interviewed, you know, and I started to get worried that maybe I wasn't going to get in, and I quickly shot out some other applications. And in fact I didn't get in.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, I think I had a good interview. But, you know, there's only so many spots.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I completely understood that. But during the waiting period I had met Gary Griffin. He had come through, you know, the way we do. You're passing through town. How's it going? Would you mind showing some slides to our students? Okay. Let's all go sit on a stump and look at some slides. And I remember, like, being really troubled by what he was talking about, what he was working on. He was making that transition in his work between the machine aesthetic and the research he was doing on that and toward the romantic kind of tableau series in iron with the kind of metaphoric, symbolic, personally narrative pieces of, like, American landscape and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was mid-'80s—he had just relocated from RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology] to Cranbrook or recently?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No, he hadn't. He was still at RIT. So he's showing us these, like, lathe chips in the trashcan. He had these, like, trashcan type of forms. And he was putting them in there. And it was this whole, like, vessel, containers, sculpture—all this stuff was coming together—made out of the debris, you know, and everything. And I was just, like, trying to process all this information and trying to understand it against my own prejudices for expectations about what a crafted object could be or whatever, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I found it really, like, challenging and also problematic, you know. But I applied to RIT, because [laughs] I was provoked—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —by Gary's research. And then I didn't get into Southern Illinois. I did get into RISD [Rhode Island School of Design, Providence]. But I just—I don't know why, I guess it was expensive, and also I just—my heart wasn't in it. And then Gary called me up, and he said that, well, I did get into RIT. So I was planning to go to RIT. But then Gary called me personally at home and said, "Guess what? I'm going to Cranbrook. So if you want to go to Cranbrook, come and study with me at Cranbrook." So I knew that Cranbrook was a pretty special place because Warren Seelig had been there. And he, of course, was very prominent, the

head of fibers, and a very smart and influential faculty member, you know. So I knew it was an impressive place, but I had no idea really what it was about. [Laughs] And again, because of my naivete essentially, being, what, 21 or something like that, so I wound up at Cranbrook, like, crazy. Everybody else had been placed in the program by Richard Thomas, who was retiring. So essentially I was Gary's student going with him to Cranbrook.

MS. RIEDEL: And they were willing to accept that at Cranbook?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think that that would be the case just probably almost pro forma. You know what I mean? Like, if I were moving on and had somebody, I mean, you know, there are other models for that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MM: But the point being that it was sort of like a little outpost in a way. Everybody else [laughs] was there to work with Richard Thomas. So it was sort of funny. But Gary came in there with both guns blaring, you know. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: It was a big change and interesting time for him. And it must have been fascinating for you to—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: —be part of that, to really be watching that happen.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Very intense.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. So other students were there? Or were you really—you weren't his only student the first year?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, no, there were other students there, right? And some of them had been working within traditional silversmithing sort of. Some of them were reusing machine tool technology. Some of them were working in sculpture and metal. Yes. It was a range.

MS. RIEDEL: And was the mindset conceptually just completely different than what you were used to because this divide between craft and art really wasn't an issue? Richard Reinhardt's comment about, "Oh, I don't know what to say about that, it's moving towards art." This seems to be where Cranbrook—that was very familiar.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, that was not—yes. That was not up for— Well, although it's not necessarily true. I mean, like, Michael Hall, who was the very brilliant sculpture teacher there—and it's worth saying that none of them are teachers; they're artists-in-residence.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that in and of itself is very different: no grades, no classes, you know. Self-made, you know, basically a community-devised curriculum. So part of that collective experience thing that Sharon was training me for was really realized at Cranbrook.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you say that it was—there were aspects of it that were like an apprenticeship in certain ways? Or a mentor—mentoring rather than strict classes or studio work?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, I think it was a little bit more like independent study. Although what I was going to say about Michael Hall is that each of the artists-in-residence had, like, a very distinct kind of sense of identity and priorities. And Michael Hall would accept people into sculptural—like they could go and sit in on a sculpture crit as a quote, unquote, elective. But he referred to them as lower life forms. [Laughs] So on the one hand, yes, there was no art-craft debate. But on the other hand, I was very keenly aware of distinctions between these varying practices, you know. So you have the different departments, and you have nine faculty, nine departments, and then the students of each department. And there's a lot of melding and crossover work. But there's also some reason for distinguishing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So whatever, whatever that means. But still they had reviews. We had first- and second-year reviews, where all the faculty or a portion of the faculty would go through and critique your work in a one-on-one basis. So that in and of itself was very intense. Probably the hardest thing about that was sitting in the room with your work for a day or two.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting, though, that—and that's something that you've mentioned repeatedly, but I think it's worth saying here—is how much discomfort is an essential part of your process. [They laugh.] It's something you seek out. You've just illustrated that graphically with a couple of stories. And it seems to me that is an essential part of the way you work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. [They laugh.] Does that seem right to you?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, but—

MS. RIEDEL: Doesn't make it pleasant. [Laughs.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, and also when you know, if you know that, then is knowing that a form of comfort? And how do you un-know that?

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think a lot of the work that I'm working on lately is about not knowing. And that is very scary. [Laughs] That's a different form of scary. But I don't think I knew back then either. I mean, like, you know. But the sense of having an outcome in mind, a specific outcome in mind, and problem-solving toward that outcome produces different challenges and different satisfactions, different, like, gates that you pass through towards your goal.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But when the goal is to throw away all goals [laughs], or undo all that's known or whatever, then it's a little harder to know when you're attaining.

MS. RIEDEL: So it just makes me think of another way you talked about it and, [inaudible] like a lot of that space between. There is not a goal, it's not positive, it's not negative. It's just that space between.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So what was the Cranbrook experience like for you? What were the strengths of the program, what was difficult?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I mean, I hit a wall there very early, which was good. I mean, it was a good experience. But I think everybody has that memorable, tearful critique, you know. And so there I was. First of all, thinking I knew what I was doing as a craftsman, but realizing that I really didn't understand; there was a big disconnect—and I think often there continues to be a disconnect—between the making and the thinking. Between what you think you're doing and what your audience thinks you're doing. Just understanding the audience. I think that again, the time at PCA, my access to an audience was fairly limited or fairly supportive, right? It was like working within a really tight community. And Cranbrook provides a tight community, too. But it was a super-critical community. It's a critique community primarily. So the kind of congratulatory, you know, satisfactions that come with skills-based learning or whatever are not a priority in that context.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So who cares if you polish it 'til a mirror finish or that you can solder points A, B, and C without melting it or whatever. I mean, those things are not heroic. They're not gold star, you know. Make your own gold star. [Laughs.] But what does the gold star mean? You know. And if we put into this context, well, how does that meaning change as opposed to this context or whatever. So I remember distinctly being in a critique where I had been exploring different materials, you know. I was kind of working my way through. It was awkward, like, "Well, I'm going to stick this together." And I was learning torch welding and some basic kind of building techniques outside of the silversmithing purview. And I had made what I guess I would describe as like a pita-pocket type of form with, like, these kind of stilt leg things. It was like this quasi-sculptural vessel, confused object. And it had marks on the surface. And these marks were very significant to me. And I felt that that's where the content lies. But in the critique I get nailed for the fact that you can't create, like, a personal language and expect anybody to relate to it. Or that maybe your personal language is actually not that interesting. [They laugh.] Or why should we care? You know what I mean? Like why should we care? Where does that personal investment cross over into the public domain in a way that we can approach something meaningful? So, beyond yourself. And that was a very shocking revelation, I remember.

And then I remember, you know, like, the period where the bench space is occupied by books instead of by projects, you know. And trying to research what content was. I wanted to explore the relationship of process and content and just understand the difference between subject and content and, you know, these types of things.

And then also understanding it within a sculptural context. And trying to explore, like, a very representational strategy about making meaning compared to something that's more subtle or experienced in a different way. Like to compare, say, Kienholz [Ed Kienholz] to Eva Hesse, for example [laughs]. It would be ridiculous to think that there's no content in Eva Hesse's work.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But there's no apparent narrative, ostensibly. There's no story line that's easily read or legible or whatever in the work. And it comes from a much different relationship of thinking, making, and building form in a context. And all of that comes together to provide the content. And, like, it's really trying to understand that. Or how form can be political, you know. In the absence of words and recognizable images, how can that be political?

MS. RIEDEL: These are big, complex concepts, especially undergraduate, trying to figure that out.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. So that was big, important stuff for me in graduate school.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were you working on to work that out?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It was interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were you reading, what were you looking at that's significant?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I was just kind of grabbing a lot of different things. I was again reading through these books, you know, on sculpture generally, Rosalind Krauss and stuff like that. And also, like, looking at Raymond Loewy and, like, some of the very pragmatic, interesting design stuff. Here I was in a school with, like, this preeminent reputation for design. And really trying to understand what design was, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Which, of course, whatever I thought I understood it to be—[laughs]—it's certainly different now; there are many things to understand about design, right? Just becoming more well-versed in whatever contemporary art was at that time. Yes. And going to lectures, like, important lectures by visiting artists, and making the time for that. Not being so sort of self-absorbed in terms of studio work because, of course, craftsmanship takes a long time to develop. And understanding that it's maybe more valuable to put down the tools and get your ass over to the lecture center and listen to somebody else talk about things they're being challenged by. That that would be better use of my time, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I think basically the shift from product to process in terms of where the value lied [*sic*]; that type of research was very important.

MS. RIEDEL: What were you working on? What was the work?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, yes. Well, so after I developed these kind of sculptural forms or whatever, I kind of settled. I was prompted by a visiting artist. It was Sean Licka had come through. And I had no idea what I was doing. But I had started to make, like, these book forms and put, like, stones in the books. Like you would flip through, you know. It's sort of like again, as kids we hollowed out books and put cigarettes in there and stuff, you know. So I was using the book as a container. And I was putting precious things in these kind of ugly books, you know. I was making, sort of self-taught, bookbinding. [Laughs.] So anyway, he thought that there was value in what I was doing. And he had like this very provocative conversation with me about, you know, the metaphorical possibilities of a book as a container and this and that. And hiding the gem. And I don't know. The way that he basically gave it a material culture critique.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was also your real introduction to that as well.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then between Gary and his long-standing agenda, which was basically being born at Cranbrook, with the remaking materials research; and so that very meaningful investigation. And then just material culture studies at large. Yes. So I was really excited by Sean's enthusiasm for what I considered to be just a bunch of crap that I was working on, you know [laughs]. And then it prompted me to pursue that book format. I gave myself the assignment, you know, of exploring, like, the seven vices and virtues. It was just like a way to sort of try to put materials and symbols together in some sort of significant way, referentially to a theme

or to a subject. And, you know, I was exploring all kinds of stuff. I mean, gluttony, whatever. I saw myself trying to make a book out of spaghetti; it got all moldy, it was horrible, you know. Vanity, you know, I got my hair cut and, like, I bound this book with my hair, and it was kind of crazy. I don't know.

So I kind of worked my way through, like, this equals that and that equals that. Therefore that means that. It was sort of formulaic, but it was also a good opportunity for me to explore materials, get out of my, like, fallback position of very competent silversmithing, you know, skill set or whatever. And then, like, I made for fortitude, I made a branding iron in the shape of a knife. And I burned it into the pages of an accordion book. And I suddenly had this little epiphany about how the absence of something could speak to the presence of something. In essence it was this residue of the metal, you know, as in the burnt, the charred, image, right? So that charred image spoke to the presence of this hand-forged knife or whatever without the knife being there. And that basically led me toward the thesis body of work, which was, like, referred to as papersmithing. But, you know, again developing these tools that would sort of—like, the tools would reify craft as an activity. And then the tool would make this mark; but the mark would resonate about that experience, you know. It became kind of in a way so circular that it became a closed system. But through it I learned a lot about, like, a criticality about craft but also an homage to it.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Establishing that paradox right from the start.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And it also sounds like a very obvious precursor in certain ways to the bisected pieces.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Totally. So like even though it took five years maybe from grad school to get to those bisected pieces, I recognized that that's what that was. And by the time that that was happening, I was also becoming aware of, you know, the idea of signification and, you know, the absence signifier, the presence of something, and the impact of that semiotically. Yes. And then you see Rachel Whiteread's work and a lot of—Probably before that, though, I was thinking—I saw Jackie Winsor's work, you know, which I hadn't seen, but somebody referred me to that. But if you compare Jackie Winsor's work to Rachel Whiteread's, where Jackie Winsor's work feels a little more—I don't know. They're both— Hers is more sort of intensely primal-symbolic feeling to me and Minimalist in essence, sort of totemical almost in its encasement.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Whereas Rachel Whiteread's is more multivalent, multicultural, and kind of cross-dialogic in terms of its reference to architecture and to site and to the ghost and all these other things. So, but I think they're an interesting generational Winsor to Whiteread step in terms of Modern to Postmodern.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And this was work you were looking at during the years at Cranbrook?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No, after.

MS. RIEDEL: Later, okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Although Jackie Winsor, I was probably looking at her at that time because it was like, "Oh, look, burnt thing, you should look at Jackie Winsor." [They laugh.] Yes. But the idea of that void being re-presented and re-contextualized as a subject.

MS. RIEDEL: The seed was planted.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And also then the kind of the feminism implicit in that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So what was the thesis work? What was your graduate work?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It was books and images.

MS. RIEDEL: A series of books? [Inaudible.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, again, but I would say it came ultimately down to, like, the burnt book of tools is a piece that I have here to show you. You know, again, this was very cooked in a way now. But at the time it was important for me. But I made the tools; they're chasing tools, which are used for embossing metal. And I used those tools to make the hardware that is essentially the riveting for the book, which has, like, an ornamental pattern that sort of refers to Irish, you know, Celtic—it's got like a kind of a Celtic kind of aesthetic. And only because in my mind, that equaled decorative book, right? *Book of Kells*, you know, whatever, this will equal decorative book. So that, worked with that. And then those tools were annealed in the pages of the book. So they nestled their way into the book, and then the book becomes a box for the tools.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So it's a very closed conversation. But it was interesting that there is the tool, which is an actual tool, but it's housed in this book. It's an actual book, but it presents them almost as dead and alive. I mean, they're laying in there tomblike. But there's also this kind of smell and this sort of radiant, like, visual as a result of their burnt silhouette, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: And the process is very present. Your work operates on so many levels I'm trying to think of which ones I want to pull out. We'll just move on and address them as they come up. Also it seems like—did your experimentation with both more representational and more abstract ideas, was that rooted also in the Cranbrook years?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, I guess so. I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, I've been developing that conversation over time. So it's hard to know when I was really aware of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. We can come back to that, I'm sure. I'm sure it will. I mean, like, what I say about that generally is that I never really thought of my work as being representational, you know. I always thought of it as being kind of abstract. But it represents a field and a way of knowing and, you know, a knowledge base and a practice and a lineage and a history, you know. All that sort of stuff. So in that way it's part of this broader narrative.

MS. RIEDEL: It represents almost through absence, the absence becomes the representation, too.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So that's an interesting figurative aspect of the work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Right. Yes. And the sense of the body is something that's been kind of moving in and out of the work that I've become more keenly aware of.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Just my own physical relationship with working, our own aging, you know. All those things put the body more prominently in the work as subject.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Were you thinking about historic metalsmithing as subject or as specific objects as subject in graduate school?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No. That, I think—

MS. RIEDEL: Came later.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It did come later. But I was starting to realize that. Like, for example, you know, putting together decorative, traditional references to, say, "Oh, this equals precious book. And the only book I know is the *Book of Kells* and how I'm going to plug that into that as a sign of that, you know." But that kind of research, basically kind of like the Postmodern journeyman thing [laughs], was prompted after school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I would say that that's the first kind of real, you know, I hate to use the word *mature*. But like post-student mentality, you know. Building off the thesis but free of the thesis to some extent, and moving it to something else.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look back on Cranbrook, what—were there specific moments or specific experiences that really stand out as significant, that was significant to you in your career during the time there? Anything individual, or is it the collective experience? What about the critique you mentioned?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes. Well, that was a tough— Well, I met my husband at Cranbrook.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And that definitely counts.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That counts for something. [They laugh.] Yes, you know. He was there—he is older than

me, but he was still in grad school at the same time as me, you know. I think that he had a life that took him away from school for a while and then came back. So he was kind of coming in as a late student. So he was probably the oldest student there, and I was probably the youngest student there [laughs]. So we were both coming at it, at the experience, from very different places.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And obviously it was a good partnership because we're still working it [laughs]. He was in printmaking, and I learned a lot about printmaking. And then also just the politics of image-making.

MS. RIEDEL: Actually that's interesting, you know.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So he has a much freer approach to making and a completely different expectation for himself and his work than I do. But I learn a lot from a certain freedom that he employs. He's kind of a child of the sixties. And so he's really into the process, and he's not motivated by the outcome per se. So talk about, like, learning from experiences. Like, the experience is where it's at.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know.

MS. RIEDEL: Your concern with the politics of image and then the politics of form, is that something that came out of Cranbrook? Or is that something that you developed on your own?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think it definitely came out—started—there. The idea that politics, the idea that art is political. Of course at the time, you know, Hilton Kramer was, you know, writing. And Suzi Gablik was fighting back. [Laughs.] And there are all these different—you know, the Lucy Lippard thing: There's no neutral zone. Right? I mean, like, these are—there *is* no neutral zone. Or just the very—the inefficacy of the Modernist ideal came crashing down. And so, you know, at Cranbrook, even though he wasn't there for the whole time that I was a student, but Daniel Libeskind was there in architecture. And there was a tremendous amount of interesting and aggressive political work happening in the art world. So it's hard not to recognize that as a priority. But at the same time, how can you make, you know, a—what's a political pair of earrings? You know, what is that? And, like, what are our expectations for a pair of earrings?

So I think that crafts in general has been really challenged and terrorized by that inferiority complex and that challenge. And often fails to recognize opportunity that's in its hand, you know. The kind of the plurality of wearable object in the context of the street conversation or whatever, for example, has so much opportunity. But we more often than not make it as, like, this precious thing that gets passed around and then put in a drawer. Or survives as an image rather than as an object. Thereby acting like painting or photography. I mean, the impact of photography's humongous obviously in all of last century and certainly this one, too, you know. So what do we do? We flatten everything out and put it in a magazine or whatever. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: You were talking about that for your own work, how representations of it, they can do a fair amount of justice to the form; but that oftentimes the surface really does not translate well at all.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And the weight and the size and all these things. I mean, like, I realized that as I started to investigate historic objects in the field, I didn't know what the hell they looked like.

MS. RIEDEL: What inspired that? What inspired you to start that research?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, actually it's kind of— There are a number of different things. One is winding up back in Philadelphia.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And Philly is such a great craft place, you know. When I had been on a road trip to an ABANA [Artist Blacksmith's Association of North America] conference with Fred Crist and Jack Anderson and some other folks, that was happening in Wisconsin. And we drove all the way out there. Well, on the way home, we decided that we needed to see the Samuel Yellin gate in Chicago. So it was really impressive to—even though it was a pain in the ass to get there, traffic-wise and everything—it made a difference to see the actual gate. And then in Philly wandering around and looking at Sam Yellin's gates and window grilles and looking at Paley's [Albert Paley] work and this and that, being impressed by the presence of it. Going to the Philadelphia Museum, an incredible, great museum and seeing those objects in person. And then also Reinhardt had done like a—he was commissioned to do a silver thing in the style of Joseph Richardson. And I remember, you know, being impressed by the amount of research he had to do. And he would bring his work in when it was in progress and show us all the mechanics and stuff. And talk about how you could take it apart so that you could

fix the parts. And then resolder this to this. And then you're not going to be able to get back in there. And like all these kinds of practical concerns. But also watching him take a mace apart to have that conversation is a really valuable thing. So when I started to refer to these objects, spurred on by other impulses, I realized that I needed to see these objects in person.

MS. RIEDEL: Got you.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But the impulse to kind of make subjects of them was partly trying to understand my place in this continuum of the practice. And then there was, like, this instigating factor that I was caretaking an estate and came across a box that had contained candlesticks. But they were not there. It was just the red velvet interior of the box, you know. And it was in this bedroom that had, like, all these kind of unwanted wedding gifts and whatnot, you know. And those were missing. But there was the microwave and the this and the that. Those things were still in the room. But the sticks were missing. But there's the box without the sticks. And suddenly it's, like, where are the sticks? Who's got them? How valuable are they? Where are they sitting now? What conversation are they participating in in terms of the setting? And that just spurred me on to that whole body of work. You know, of these bisected holloware forms.

MS. RIEDEL: So before we proceed to the bisected pieces, we want to just be sure we cover some of the earliest work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking of—you graduated in '86. One of the earliest pieces I'm thinking of is the 1989 piece *Heels*.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Right. Well, you know, I had left school. We briefly moved to Denver. Basically I had a friend there who said we could crash at his place. We didn't have any job at the time. So it was kind of like you—whoever gets a job first, that's where we're going, you know. But we decided to move to Denver. And I got a job as a goldsmith working with John Atencio, jewelers, in Denver in the Cherry Creek store. And I was not great there [they laugh], I have to say. There was kind of one of these—"So you have an MFA, do you? Okay. Get in the back room, and we're going to, you know, teach you something about jewelry-making."

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, I think I got demoted to polisher because I had an attitude problem [they laugh] basically. But my attitude problem was just that I had skills that they weren't using me for. But I was being kind of smacked down into this, like, lowest person on the pecking order or whatever. So I understood my place in that, but I wasn't happy. And I had begged Sharon if she knew of any jobs. She knew of two, like, two adjunct spots in Philly. And so we sold everything we owned and moved to Philly basically from Denver, so having lived in Denver for, like, three months more or less.

MS. RIEDEL: Was this Beaver College?

[END DISC 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Myra Mimlitsch-Gray at the artist's home and studio in Stone Ridge, New York, on June twenty-third, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, disc number two [three]. We were talking about the gold and diamond thing in Denver.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, right, right, right. Yes, I was answering your question in a very meandering way. But just that this impact of working in goldsmithing in a jewelry store, you know, retail scene.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the first time you'd done that, too, with the goldsmithing? I know you've done jewelry work before.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I had worked in gold a little bit, but not in a high-volume retail setting in, like, a kind of posh area of town and so forth. So there's the front, there's the storefront scene going on. And then there's the bench workers in the back. So, you know, I was back there, bustin' it out, and I was not happy there. And so I begged my way into these adjunct teaching positions in Philly. And meanwhile I had Ken with me, Ken Gray, my fabulous husband, who happens to be Canadian.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah! That's interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: He was kind of basically in limbo at the end of a student visa and trying to figure out his residency status. So, I wanted to marry him. And I applied—[laughs]—for the permission to marry him through U.S. government. So that was happening. I was working with this gold diamond, like, reality. And then, you know, researching materials and so forth, it all kind of combined into this very brief body of work post-

Cranbrook. Exercise in kind of ideas about the diamond. And again, this was early. So I was, like, working with some large-scale gemstone ideas. And then came across Joan Parcher's work. Actually, it was so funny is I was reviewing a show at [Suzan Rezac Gallery –MMG] one day, and I walk in with this giant stone thing. And there's these great Joan Partridge earring findings that are, like, enlarged. We're both kind of dealing with the scale and pomposity, I guess you could say, of certain jewelry signs and moments. And I had also been continuing an investigation of materials. And the book kind of morphed into the jewelry box.

So I made a piece of, like, carved charcoal brick that had, like, a diamond set in it, you know, like a cubic zirconium thing. But it was basically, like, the hard and soft, and the contrasting materials, the carbon and the diamond, blah blah blah. Again, a very closed system of materials in the service of content and self-referential. But in that same time period, I did some other stone things, and then these heels came out of that. And they were these heels that you screw right into the bottom of your foot basically. [Laughs] And they were, I guess, shocking as images for some people. And probably, like, the—it was my first big break maybe professionally was that Suzan Rezac used them on the cover of the exhibition catalog, "Function Non-Function." And that was an excellent gallery, the Rezac Gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So here I was out of the blue, I got this opportunity to show in this gallery. I can't remember how she saw my—maybe I sent them to her. It was back in the day when you put slides in packets and sent them all around, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Some people actually typed a letter to you back, and sometimes you never saw the slides again, whatever. But she responded, and she included those pieces. In fact she sold them. So anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: That must have been wonderfully encouraging.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It was amazing that anybody was interested in the work in that way. And that in fact it could be, you know, bought.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I never really understood that. I mean I sold a lot of earrings and stuff, like, to survive through school and whatnot. But yes. I mean, those were, like, artwork.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And was that the first sale of artwork?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I had sold those. And then I think either at that same time or shortly thereafter, Malcolm and Susan Knapp bought the charcoal box.

MS. RIEDEL: Great.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that was very—

MS. RIEDEL: So you must have had a sense that you were onto something that might work for you.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, and Robert Pfannebecker bought a little brooch from me when he did his annual travels through Cranbrook looking at student work. And so, you know, little nibbles here and there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But the idea of selling something that wasn't a wearable object but implied wearability, and a critical wearability, such as a corkscrewed heel—[laughs]—that was a significant opportunity for me.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think also the heels are interesting to me, too, because they establish a few things about your work from the start: Of course there's a huge irreverent sense. There's a political statement. In this case there's also a feminist statement which is borne out by some later work—not too much later. And also something that I mentioned earlier, but I do think there's a real sense of humor that runs as a [inaudible] line through your work. Sometimes it's dark, but sometimes it's just laugh out loud, maybe it's an inside joke. Do you feel that way, too?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I do. I mean, I feel—it's kind of like we're not— We spend a lot of time, you know,

browbeating our audience about the significance of what we do or whatever. But does that mean—does that preclude—humor? Not necessarily. But it is a tightrope walk, because it can be very easily a one-liner; it can be very easily just written off as a nice little chuckle and move on. That's where craft has the capacity to rein people back in because there can be, like, an absolute commanding presence in the fact that the object exists at all. And then people can enter through its sheer skill or beauty. Then they can linger because of something else. And so the combination of craft and humor can engage and disarm. And then the other content can slide in.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. It's like a bait and switch almost. It can draw one in and then everything else can begin to unfold.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like it's a layer.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I think the heels weren't—they also weren't saying like, oh, you know, they weren't like femi-Nazi, you know. They were definitely, you know, kind of like, "Hey, if you want to wear them, go ahead and screw them on." [They laugh.] They were in essence functional.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Absolutely. I mean, there was a sort of straightforward functional quality to them almost that I think is part of it, the humor, and probably [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, they were stamped with the saying "One size fits all" on the heel plate. So, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: There's a little pragmatic quality [inaudible]. [They laugh.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. No sizing required.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Exactly.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But, like, at the same time, though, or maybe like '89, '90, I was making those timepieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And this is also another funny coincidence with Joan Parcher's work. So, like, on the one hand there's these kind of, like, slapstick heels and, you know, that coming out. The enlarged engagement ring type of moment of the mid-eighties. And then taking that diamond and using it more subversively to scratch a path into glass through wearing. So it's a piece of jewelry, you wear it, it scratches in the glass. Then, you know, I discovered Joan's doing—John Parcher's—doing the GRAPHITE PENDANT series, you know. And it's so funny, and I know a lot of people think that, you know, we were looking at each other. No, actually we weren't. But I always consider her a very fascinating jeweler. And kind of like a silent—we have a weird twin thing going [laughs] when it comes together every once in a while. But I know from my experience that I was motivated by Gary's sandpaper drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So Gary Griffin had in the, I don't know, maybe it was while I was in school, I can't remember exactly when. But he had done platinum workshops where Johnson Matthey used to afford people to go play with platinum. So back in the day silver houses would encourage people to use silver to promote the product.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And platinum followed suit. And so Gary was one of the people that got to do one of those. And all he did was draw on these. He made disposable jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, exactly. That [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: To the sandpaper.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And he drew, right. He drew, like, templates, circle templates or eraser templates or whatever. And made these kind of very eighties jellybean-type of drawings [laughs], right? On sandpaper. So I know that that is what was in my mind.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Even though I don't think I was directly ripping it off. "Yes, okay, I'll just go swap out the diamond for the dah dah dah dah dah." But I was making these things that were timepieces then, so it was kind of like a watch but it was a different sense of time. And it was a sense of erosion. And then it was a sense of the ultimate destruction of the piece if you dared to wear it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I think, like, for example, that Chris Burden piece *Samson* where he—I mean, I wish that my— I wish a piece of jewelry. I mean, in a way my piece of jewelry is—it's absurd to compare it to Chris Burden's sculpture. But the idea that this piece *Samson* dares enough people to come to a museum that they would tear down the museum, right? So it's a kind of a very slow-geared turnstile. And as people enter the museum, what's happening is micro-crank on a big bolt thing; it's, like, pushing against the walls of the museum in the basement.

MS. RIEDEL: Slowly dismantling.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Slowly it'll tear down the institution. But also there's the bittersweet reality that there's no way in hell enough people are ever going to come to a museum for that to occur. So it's, like, a safe bet for the museum to show the piece because it's not going to happen, right? [They laugh.] So, in a way, like, the timepieces were sort of saying, "Go ahead and wear them. Keep wearing them, and then eventually time will be told."

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: "And the piece will no longer exist as it currently does."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, you know, not funny. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But still kind of working with a wry sense of humor and purposefulness or something of craft and jewelry and materiality. So I mean, there's a whole—at that time also I was very much making a lot of jewelry. And I continued to make jewelry probably—I mean, I still do make some jewelry. But I would say that I was showing jewelry a lot, probably more than holloware or sculpture, all the way up 'til maybe the year 2000.

MS. RIEDEL: Really!

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I would say that, I think—well, I had a lot of success working with Susan Cummins [Gallery] in terms of jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right, jewelry. Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But it was Sybaris [Gallery, MI] that really was showing my objects. That was the first, you know, like, one-person show I was having of objects.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And when was that?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Hmm. I have it in my—I can tell you. I can tell you when that was. In the mid-nineties, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was the first exhibition of the objects?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, there was a show called—

MS. RIEDEL: I thought there was something before that.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, oh, that's true. But I mean in a commercial gallery. I guess I should say that I showed with a few people in, like, an artists' gallery. And then actually Jessica Berwind [Gallery, Philadelphia]

picked me up and showed a book that I had made that was very related to my thesis work. And in Philly I showed—oh, yes, what am I talking about. Thank you. All right, Mija, straighten me out. Yes, okay. All right. Now I see what we were doing out here. Well, where is the—[inaudible]. Oh, yes, okay. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: They were developing more in tandem.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, they were. But I feel like—maybe it has to do with what's visible in the field more than what's being shown. Because actually I would say that some of the biggest—[Telephone rings.].

MS. RIEDEL: We can pause this.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, you want to?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. [Audio Break.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: What I was trying to remember—[laughs]—my life here. Yes, for some reason—I guess my point is that within the metals community perhaps is more like what we should be saying, or within the crafts community, I showed a lot of jewelry early. But actually some of my most, like, important opportunities were showing in a context with other art forms. So it's, like, a craft object, but it's being connected with other work because of a thematic, curatorial project or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And that tended to be happening more at, like, university galleries, stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right, right. And those would be more the objects.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so a big break with Chris Scoates and Debra Wilbur. They were a curatorial team working in Atlanta at the time. And they included my work in a show called "Do Not Touch," I think is what it was called down there. And that included Mary Douglas and Mike Hill. So that was an interesting range of work. But even before that, they were a curatorial team in St. Louis, working out of Washington University where Chris was on the staff there. And they had a show called "Vanity, Value, Virtue," which included me, Lisa Norton, and Dana Duff and our work. So the idea of the theme determining the nature of the work and so forth, that was a big opportunity for me, because the work was being grouped by idea, not by material.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So we get into the art field, you know, and it's like, "Oh, everybody make a teapot. Oh, everybody make something out of, you know, marriage of metals. Or everybody makes an earring or something like that."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So it's kind of like—it seems to be operating from sort of assignment that's based on the practice and not what the practice might represent more broadly. At least that was the thing that I was struggling with in the nineties, I would say.

MS. RIEDEL: And this exhibition was Lisa Norton and Dana Duff was one?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And that was in—

MS. RIEDEL: It's funny because I was just thinking about your more recent work in relation to Lisa Norton's work. And so it's interesting that there was that exhibition back then.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —'93.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But, like, in that same year, for example, I was in a show at Susan Cummins's, "The Weight of Gold." So that would have been jewelry, you know. I was still kind of—but the cut, the bisected objects, were starting to appear. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And they appeared before even the spoon pieces and the more feminist found object pieces, the bisected pieces were sort of the first real series, no?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I'd say so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Other than the timepieces. I think that the timepieces and jewelry were the first—well, they were the first published things actually. Well, the heels, which were considered both jewelry and object. And then, Susan Grant Lewin included the timepieces in her—

MS. RIEDEL: That one-of-a-kind show?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That was in '94.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. So, yes, the bisected stuff. What about it? [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Well, it seems that that series really embodied in a lot of ways some of your major investigative questions and ways of working. It seems like it was an extremely successful; series. I know a piece ended up at the Renwick [Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC]. It was well reviewed. I mean, it seems like it's such a—it pulled together so many of your interests and concerns, both intellectually and physically in an object.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I feel like—plus it wasn't, it somehow managed to escape the closure problem that, like, the book of tools suffered from, you know. It was emblematic of the thesis, but it's not exactly as resonant as it could be because it's closed, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Those things, well, there was the kind of polemic of the handmade object, but masquerading as an industrial, like, casting component or something, right? There's the idea of the unique object being a possible replication of that object and its reference to a slip-cast form, for example. There was the journeyman aspect of actually endeavoring to make in the style of the master, whatever. So putting myself in that traditional educational role. But then saying "This outcome is not enough." We needed to take it someplace else. So then to bisect it was a way to kind of violate the authority, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: The phallo-centric authority in essence. And then splay it open where it became, you know, a very kind of suddenly feminized space.

MS. RIEDEL: There's also multiple references, it seems, to art history. I think of Modernist references, I think of portraiture.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. The face vase thing. The idea that the object became a portrait that became a portrait—that the object could be more grappled with rather than just walked by, because now it was turned into an image. So it became a silhouette, but it wasn't quite a silhouette because it was still a very present object, only halved and splayed open. So you couldn't help but apprehend the physicality in the presence and the absence simultaneously.

MS. RIEDEL: And at the same time it brings in the real—the first significant reference to the history of American metalsmithing.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And calling your work in that self-referential sense of the field.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then sometimes the object would be housed in, you know, cubic solid or a cubic vessel form or whatever, so that then it's this kind of Minimal, post-Minimal, Postmodern historic, you know. And it's like all that kind of being conflated. And the idea that I like to take a chalice and sever it in half and turn it

into decanters, becomes like a secularization. And so there's, like, a range of things going on there, I'd say.

MS. RIEDEL: That series feels very whole, it feels very rich. That feels to me like the first quote, unquote, mature series in many ways.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes. I was learning from it the whole time I was making it. And then, you know, as I'm sure you're aware, the thing completely closed in on itself.

MS. RIEDEL: I think you called them encasements, [inaudible] exactly.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So there was suddenly the only way into that object was through the orifice basically of where, you know, I was replicating or emulating the traditional object, housing it in a box that did not open. But that wherever the planes would intersect with the object within, would reveal a whole. And so becomes kind of like the object is very present but not viewable as this point. It becomes more like: here's the goods, and then the belief that it's in there. Or the trust that it's in there.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then that, like, the air space is, like, the solid thing. So it becomes, like, this thing about what's a volume and what's present. So the air was actually defining the object in a weird way.

MS. RIEDEL: It also feels like an interesting examination bisection of the whole concept of utility and function.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: That that really begins to become an issue with those pieces.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Totally. I mean, they're frustrated, and they're fetishized at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. And there again it's that paradox that you like and do so well. We could talk about [inaudible.] Just to keep us up to date, you were at Beaver College for three years, I think. And so then you'd moved on to the University of the Arts.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I was simultaneously— Actually at that time I was, from '86 to '90 basically, I was, like, adjunct and lecturer at University of the Arts. They went and changed the name on me at that point. And I guess it was '86 to '89 maybe I was at Beaver, which they changed the name of that as well to Arcadia.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But at that time it was still Beaver College.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, so I had those two part-time jobs. Plus we were caretaking an estate in there somewhere as well.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you have a studio then in there?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: In the living room kind of situation. [They laugh.] Yes. Interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: And while you were working as a teacher at these schools, what were you teaching? Were you beginning to develop ideas of courses? Were you teaching pretty much what they asked you to teach?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, at University of the Arts I was filling in for coursework that was already existing. So I taught forming and, you know, introductory metal classes. I had a Saturdays class for a while. But, I mean, I really didn't know— There's a lot that I didn't know and that I did poorly, I would have to say—[laughs]—as a very young teacher, you know. I had a lot of passion, but I just didn't have, you know, I was rough around the edges. And I didn't have also the authority per se. I mean, I was, like, 23, 24.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So you know, the Saturday class was hard because you had, like, an all-age demographic in there. And there was, like, radio wars and stuff like that going on. [Laughs.] Like all the kind of trivial things that became, like, crises for me, you know. But I think that—I also had the challenge of making the segue from being a student into being a teacher. And knowing where my boundaries were. And I think that's a challenge that many people in academia have persistently is that professional/personal divide.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, you know, we develop skills.

MS. RIEDEL: And you began teaching almost immediately after graduating, so—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think, you know, it's kind of a sorry state of affairs that basically I've never been out of school, you know. And that I don't recommend for everyone. But it has made me be the person that I am, you know. And I would say that very generally kind of something that I'm persistently keenly aware of, is the fact that I have this privilege but also this requirement to kind of work theoretically, because I am an academic. It's, like, my responsibility to make the weird stuff, you know. I get a paycheck. They're paying me to make the weird stuff. So it's kind of—this is a polemic for academics in general. But it's sort of like, "do as I say, not as I do" kind of thing, because there is a limited amount of opportunity to get that paycheck, to think that way, to make those things.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That aren't necessarily commodities.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, I think that just because you make something out of silver does not make it a commodity.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Especially if you wind up owning it for the rest of your life. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And it seems like that sensibility of that commodity versus the weird stuff was really brought home through that Kohler residency.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That the experience of just being in a real functioning factory where they're producing lots of commodities with the issue of quality control and stuff. Yes, probably—well, we'll get to that. I don't want to get into that now.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, that is a big story there. But, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, we haven't discussed the SPOON series at all, and they're interesting because they're more about portraiture again that was established in the silhouette pieces. But there's a real feminist critique aspect to those pieces.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So let's discuss what was significant about those, and then we can evolve more [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's sort of interesting how, you know, these sort of silly diamond pieces that I was making earlier and that problem where humor and kind of cuteness gets in the way sometimes of a more meaningful discourse or whatever. And the spoon thing was serendipitous, I have to say. It was spurred on by Rosanne Raab prompting me. "Come on, Myra, make some spoons for this spoon show."

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: She had included me in this show, *Silver: New Forms and Expressions*, in 1992, I think it was. And that was where I showed the bisected silver chalice form that was silver decanters.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so at that same time, she was trying to round up people making spoons. And again, it's one of these problems for our field where it's, like, "Let's all make a teapot, let's all make a spoon." On the one hand I despise that. And of course I'm at a point in my career where I don't have to do that if I don't feel like doing that, you know. But at this point in your career, you can't turn down opportunities that will put you in a different context or help you to advance something you're working on. So it was a natural—or it was an easy connection to make between the portraiture aspect of the bisected holloware forms toward flatware, which has,

you know, monograms on it, for God's sake. Has a whole history of pattern development and very identity-driven stylization, you know. So the idea of them as an extended portrait. And then of course the both phallic and feminine aspect of spoon itself, socially and physically, lent itself to more conversation about that. And so then by taking these forms and realizing that also their reflective surface inverts the portrait of the viewer, so it immediately, you know, becomes a mirror. And so in that way it draws the viewer in to an introspective opportunity with the object or through the object—via the object. So I basically created like a niche type of thing where I could juxtapose one sort of dominant silhouette determined by the walls of the niche, sort of like a hand mirror, scissors, or womb type of form, and then within that, bisect and alter the spoon's physical gesture and put them together. So they were inextricable by fabrication. You couldn't necessarily remove them. And then the two things combine to a certain kind of conversation where to call for a reconsideration of what that spoon is. Who it is, where it is, where it's from, where it's going, and what our relationship is to it.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you find that you work primarily in series like this, that that's the way to explore the idea in general?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think it is helpful, partly because of the time, too, that it takes to develop. For those pieces there are certain sort of technical things happening that are subtle. Like, for example, there's a silver edge that's a marriage of metals on the edge and it rims the form, you know. And it takes some time to figure out that that's what you need to do to kind of frame the image or whatever. And then you should try it again, or maybe change up the scale of it. Or what's the height of that wall, or what happens if I have to go into that space more or not? So then you wind up with a sort of mismatched, you know, grouping of objects.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I had also done some stuff with found plates as a way to just kind of jumpstart it. So working off of a found object plate and then housing a spoon within that plate helped me to get there faster in a way. Although my use of the found object is on again, off again with the works.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, it can be a quick way to get somewhere. Like in earlier investigations of the bisected stuff, I was using, like, William Rogers's silver plate here and there. And those spoons I didn't make necessarily, because there's a point where how is it—is it going to be better or not if I make that spoon? But if journeyman project is important to the content, then there's no point in not making it; you have to make it, you know. And so I knew that going in. But I was using found stuff as a sketch or study in preparation for the real deal, so to speak. And with the spoon thing, the real deal was already apparent to me. So I couldn't use the found and its resonance in that case, because the historical and all that kind of mark-making on the handles and stuff is, you know, somebody else's history. But there's a connection. We all have that spoon in our drawer, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. It makes me think of another one of the questions on the list regarding commissions, and I don't know if you accept them or if you don't. And to weigh the benefits and the opportunities presented by commissions and the difficulties of it. But theme shows strike me in some ways as something similar because they might provoke you to make something that clearly you wouldn't have thought of before. But it leads down a very interesting path. Do you accept commissions? And have you had much experience with them? Is it something that you enjoy doing under certain conditions?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, it's funny. I haven't had that many opportunities. And it is interesting because usually somebody will see your work, and they don't really respond to it enough to commission it until, like, five years later or something. So by then you're on to something else, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Something different, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: In my realm anyway. And again because I'm getting this paycheck from the university, do I want to stop what I'm actually investigating to go back and make another melted candelabra, for example? I don't know, you know. I probably don't.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that's been my situation. I probably had only one real commission was Seymour Rabinovitch in his quest for every fish slice in the universe—[laughs]—or whatever he was—right?

MS. RIEDEL: What was this?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: He has amassed this collection of fish servers.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: A [inaudible] fish server, whatever. And so it just, you know, this is—.

MS. RIEDEL: Had to do it.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You had to do it. But, you know, I did it on my own terms, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: So it sounds like—I mean, commissions sound like they're more often a part of a metalsmith that's working in production or working from a business standpoint—business situation—rather than a university situation. And it sounds as if the challenges of them that are beneficial, commissions, that is, might come to you through another route which would be the themed exhibitions.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And then you can choose whether you're intrigued enough with the idea to participate or not.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. I mean, I think that there's a lot of confusion about what is a curatorial concept—[laughs]—for example; and it's often very frustrating, because you might think you're getting involved in something meaningful and find out that it's really, like, a survey.

MS. RIEDEL: Uh-huh.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Or that the focus got lost somewhere down the line, and now you're going to show with 60 people. I mean, you know—[laughs]—how curated is it when there's 60 people in it?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, you know, maybe it's very curated, I don't know. But just as an example of, like, sometimes intentions get lost by various structures and influences and relationships.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So those big, giant shows are really problematic. But in 1992 I needed it. They were also talking about at that time being on a tenure track, trying to build the resume and the experience and the connections for the next show.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. So early on it goes without saying, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You have to do it. But I'm not in "500 Vessels" or "500 [inaudible]"—[laughs]—whatever. You know what I mean? There's a point where I'm just not going to do it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. You don't have to.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I don't have to do it, and I can let somebody else have that spot.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Speaking about jewelry, we've gone back and forth between the jewelry and the more sculptural work, I'm thinking of the series that happened right around the mid-nineties, the exaggerated four prongs.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: That seems like an interesting fusion of the more sculptural with your jewelry.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And also with the kind of—well, just exploring the magnification.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Of course.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Which led to a different body of work.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But the utility—And again, some of that was also just, like, the diamond, you know, like, the metalwork in a diamond ring or whatever. There's, like, some ratio or something. It's, like, the setting is 10

percent of the price of the stone or something like that, like in a traditional retail reality or something. I'm sure there's people out there going, "No, it's not. It's twice"—you know. But it's more or less like that. So the metalwork is basically completely supplemental, to use Glenn Adamson's word. [Laughs.] And I just was thinking, well, why isn't the metal the stone?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And again taking cues from the other work of, like, the absent-present conversation.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So featuring the metalwork and the utility aspect and ditching the stone, basically. And then making these kind of sculptural objects that are pendants. But, like, if you take a crown setting and it's at a certain scale, it's a crown—it's a rook; it's like the top of a chess piece.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Or on another scale it's a stool, you know. And then it's a king's crown. And it's all these, how big or little, so at what size? Plus, for that particular pendant they often slipped on the finger as rings. And sometimes when I'm wearing it nervously, I put it on my finger. So now it's the ring that you're wearing on a chain around your neck. And then it's, like, the high school sweetheart ring thing. And it's just like an interesting way to kind of explore and connect with different sentimental moments within jewelry via the setting.

MS. RIEDEL: And also the sense of scale, because that really seems to be explored through, at that time, through the MAGNIFICATION series, this being one end of how small and how large something can be at the same time.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. Yes. Uh-huh.

MS. RIEDEL: Right around this time, too, you started at New Paltz [State University of New York at New Paltz], I think, in '93, right?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So let's talk about that because we—yes, how that's evolved over time because you've been here now almost 20 years, 17 years, right?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes. Well, I had this part-time, part-time, part-time life in Philadelphia. And as much as I love Philly, it's one of those cities—I lived in Philly for eight years. It's one of those cities where you love to hate it, hate to love it kind of thing. And anybody talks trash about Philly to a Philadelphian, they're going to hear about it. But Philly people talk trash about it all the time, you know. [They laugh.] So it was very funny, but we were delighted to have an opportunity to leave Philadelphia. It just felt like a big relief, you know, at that time. We were poor. It was getting very challenging. We had moved around a lot in the city. And plus I was looking for a secure position in academia, right?

So I got this tenure-track opportunity at Purdue [University, West Lafayette, IN]. And I had been aware of the one-year temporary position, which I applied for, and they offered that to me. But I had heard through the grapevine that that school doesn't—I mean, many universities don't hire the temporary person the next year. They have a national search, it's much more earnest. At some schools it's less likely you'll keep the job; at other schools it's more likely. But at that particular school it was considered less likely. So I turned it down and waited a year and then reapplied. And then I was able to interview and get the job.

[END DISC 3.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. This is Mija Riedel with Myra Mimlitsch-Gray at the artist's studio and home in Stone Ridge, New York, on June twenty-fourth, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, disc number three [four]. So this morning we wanted to start with a few thoughts that you'd had about Cranbrook.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, yes. I mean, we had such a—there were so many ideas going through my mind yesterday that I was easily distracted at any number of times. But in referring to the questions that the interview seeks to get answers to, I realized that I wanted to basically acknowledge and be grateful for the time that I spent with certain colleagues at Cranbrook; namely, Lisa Norton. And that while she was not there with me during the first year—I mean, I think the point I was making yesterday was the fact that I had gone there with Gary, and we were both kind of like new to the Cranbrook scene together: he as the artist-in-residence and me as the student, basically. But the second year that I was there, Lisa Norton came in. And it was just incredible. She's an amazing artist whose work and whose ideas I have followed, you know, up until today. And even though we don't see each other very often, it's sort of like when we do, we're able to just connect again. We have certain kind of consistent intellectual and emotional connection. And that being said, our work has drifted away

from each other's in interesting ways. But we're still able to come back together and have a conversation about things as if we had been in close contact all along.

I also want to acknowledge Mary Douglas, who was not in school with me, but overlapped with Lisa. And so basically the three of us in a way represent Gary's agenda, I think, in our work. I mean, he kind of planted a seed, an important seed of criticality and material culture study and just, like, examining the social function of craft basically, that the three of us have picked up on and taken to different places. But I still see that connection in all of our work. So those people were very influential to me. Also have maintained a close friendship—and again, like, not day-to-day correspondence—but with Brad Collins, who was there in graphic design. And I would say that my time outside of Cranbrook with Brad has been more directly engaging. But I have worked with him on several publications, basically self-published brochure/catalog activities.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Has he done your catalogs, those pulled out.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, all those accordion-bound wires, so to speak. So, like, at school we had, you know, a lot of connections. But we didn't work together in that kind of proximity. So then to have him as a collaborator—basically to hire him as a graphic designer. But he doesn't let you off the hook. I mean, you can't just simply say, "Here, Brad, here's a project. Do something with it." He has to turn it into this very big collaboration. And he's an incredible editor, and he, like, scrutinizes every word, you know, to make sure that's what you really meant. [Laughs] And I'm very grateful for that kind of exchange. So those people are still in my life from that time, and I consider their input really important to my development.

MS. RIEDEL: Great. I'm glad we had a chance because we did mention, I think, both Lisa and Mary in passing yesterday, but not to this degree. So that's helpful. And also Brad, the brochure/catalogs are really unique, and they are beautifully done. They're very tight. So it's nice to hear how that came about.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes, yes. Analyzing their form, their format, everything. The fact that they can be ripped into pieces, and texts and images are torn asunder, is a calculation in their design. And it's the product of lengthy conversations between the two of us, so—

MS. RIEDEL: And the form. Some of them almost tear like postcards, those old postcard books.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: The idea that you can, like, kind of lock in on language.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And make it historical by the very fact that it gets put into print, and now it's old. It's, like, immediately—[laughs]—old and seemingly important or irreversible in a weird way, you know. And then the design, the structure of the book is such that it can fall apart and rip the language in mid-paragraph, you know, is an interesting challenge to the ideas themselves.

MS. RIEDEL: It's helpful. It is interesting that even the catalogs and the brochures are considered to that degree. Yes, nothing left unacknowledged, unanalyzed, unconsidered. Let's talk today, let's start with the work itself. We're sitting up here in your studio today rather than downstairs. And we're surrounded by the work, which is wonderful. There's work from some of the earliest pieces to— And jewelry.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: —just some of the most recent from Kohler.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think the one that we had just started to talk about magnification and that work yesterday. And that was a wonderfully significant series. I think a lot of things were developed and explored in that. How is that significant to you?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, you know, I had, like, been focusing on the object as image and portrait, and, like, exploring that object-subject relationship, making these concrete forms that could then flatten out and become pictorial in essence, while at the same time they exist in the physical realm and all that. Then I started to just think about, like, really going *into* the craft and *into* the process. And then exaggerating that process to the point that it would take on, like, a mythic or heroic structure. So, you know, thinking about Arts and Crafts and the Arts and Crafts revival. And then seeing the hammer mark appearing in commercial products and so forth, and it's being motivated by that conversation between the industrial interpretation of the hand-wrought and also knowing, you know, about how the hand-wrought was propagandistic and ideological in its own day or has at various times come to the surface—[laughs]—quite literally to boast its own, you know, relevance.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: In essence. So, I was kind of commenting on that and also indulging in it myself.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, again, I think the work is, like, a parody of it, but it's also indebted to it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So each, you know, like, each hammer mark then becomes enlarged to, like, a bowl form in and of itself. And then those things can be grouped to create, like, this oceanic surface. And I explored it in a number of different ways. In some ways they started out as trays because the tray became like a billboard or a badge or a sign, you know, a painting. It functions as an image directly. So I was able to kind of think of the object on the wall or a shelf. But also then horizontally it becomes a rhythm that's kind of physically apparent in a different way.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So it could be again both the object and the subject in two different contexts: wall or table. And then when you apprehend the object at that scale, it's big enough that you could kind of enter the surface in a way. So they couldn't really—they had to assume a certain kind of bombastic scale.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. I think of those pieces as being the first of this series that really addressed scale so directly.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And to work outside the limits of what I know in terms of soldering. And I had to learn, pull back to my Cranbrook experience and torch, oxyacetylene torch welding. But then apply it to nonferrous metals, copper and brass, and develop the different strategies in joinery that include, like, brazing, as much as silver soldering and riveting and low-temperature soldering. So kind of putting all these things together, which seemed sort of illegal or whatever from a silversmithing standpoint. You know, to just mix it up, these different joinery methods and so forth. But I had a goal in mind, which was to get to a certain scale and to a certain context. And so that required inventing different ways to make.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. I also think of those pieces as straddling a continuum between more functional—well, addressing function and utility.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And going from more to less functional. And also abstraction and representation.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Totally. I guess they started to lose their feet, their handles, their reference to the dec [decorative] arts in a way. They became just more biological, more biomorphic. And the hypnotizing aspect of the rhythm of the mark was more free to be, you know, interpreted and associated in different ways. So it didn't have to just be a conversation about craft or craftsmanship or the dec arts per se.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's interesting, too, I think, in relationship to where your work is going now.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Because it seems that more open-ended exploration, that more abstract, more ambiguous use of pattern and mark and form may be what you're looking at out in the studio now.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't know.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: We'll have to find out. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: We'll talk about that later. But it seems like it's heading more in that direction. But it maybe has its roots in some of these pieces?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And I think, like, this piece that we're looking at right now. It's called *Food Plinth*. But you see it's hanging on the wall. Although when it is sitting on a table it does invite you, at least in your imagination, to put food on it, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And to kind of imagine the puddles of gravy or cream or whatever might land in each of these divots. I love the fact that when people engage the work, they do think, "Oh, that would be great with

meatballs or sushi or whatever." And they want to put things in those spaces.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I think in some ways the function of the piece is to have people recall the functional and their relationship with that as it pertains to objects and as it pertains to service, you know. A lot of the work seeks to portray the service aspect that is related to the object. So, you know, whether it's kind of the anxiety that's being portrayed in the sense of a very kind of a balancing act between, like, a quivering silver—[laughs]—object for the table, you know, that that kind of a neurosis is meant to refer to the anxiety of the host or the hostess, you know, in terms of a centerpiece and a big event, you know, that kind of thing. It has the potential to personify, I guess, the user.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think it comes with—you make reference to the host; it makes me think of the reference to ritual and the ceremonies that often would accompany pieces of this scale and that sense of presentation objects, commemorative objects.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And some people will look at these hammer mark pieces and think, "Oh, it's like a steel drum or something," you know. And again, the scale can affect that if it's of a certain size. It gets bigger than a drum. This particular piece kind of is in proportion perhaps to a steel drum. So it's easy to make that association. But when they're larger, you don't necessarily retool that object as you look at it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But you can see with that one the sense of the solid of it. There is—the reference is a disc of metal that's been hammered on. So the edge is peened out. But it becomes, like, this weird, animated bulging out at the side. You see it goes back and forth between the slabness of the metal itself and then the fictional solid that it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That series went on for two years, three years?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Two or three. I think it was probably two or three years, maybe five, because I had also extended it into silver. You know, I was having these larger pieces that I was building, and also becoming more efficient about building them. It's like the very first ones started out with, like, a literal mapping of a hammered surface and then blowing it up in Photoshop and flipping the image, because I really wanted it to be apparent that it was a constructed surface, not a cast service or not— And that by working on the symmetry of the patterning was a way to expose it as an artifice.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. So that scale and the sort of the expectation that the viewer has entering a work of art that's known to be operating, you know, as wall work, for example, as an image and an object simultaneously. I think the viewer brings different expectations to the work, right? But I wanted to know what happened if I made these ideas occur within silver, within the traditional realm of silversmithing. And so I employed the hammered surface as kind of escutcheons and motifs on objects. You know, I made silver objects that basically morphed the two things together. Their identity as, say, a cup or a pitcher with the handle that's a blown-out kind of formal conveyance from the original form, and then articulated with the hammered surface, for example. And that then you would pick up this object to use it. And now those conversations are in your hand.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. So what happens at the table? Is it possible that you could be thinking about these things while you're drinking, you know, a beer out of that beaker, you know, of silver.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think, too, of the context that we've talked about, is the context and the site is not—it can go back and forth from a pedestal to a hutch or a table.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And that that back and forth, that space between those two areas, is almost a space between subject and object, representation, function and non-function, all different scales of utility. Different types of utility.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Different types of utility.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Exactly. Literal and metaphorical and applied utility.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Didactic. I mean, in some ways the work, you know, I'm challenged for the work not to become so didactic, you know.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But it's instrumental in different ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so I'm sensitive to how—I'm always trying to think what is the expectation of the audience in this context. And then what's the appropriate, you know, vehicle, material, scale, and reference to get that point across.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know, sometimes I feel like all the work that I do, even though it's made out of a range of materials, is like a study for a grand silver piece, you know. [Laughs.] And if I had an eight-foot sheet of silver, it would be very interesting to see how it would be affecting the content compared to, say, copper or brass.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But copper lends itself so well to the Arts and Crafts revival, revision, revival. [They laugh.] You know, because it's the humble metal that was employed for that very purpose in the first place, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: And what is the collection of copper works here that we're looking at?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: These copper craft studies?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. [Inaudible.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: These are the precursors to the mantel, actually. What had happened with those—and again, going from the sort of humility of copper theoretically—these copper craft studies are in conversation with two things: One is commercial copper craft, which is like this spun décor-ware that was produced—I think it has its roots in Arts and Crafts revival. It was K like copper, K craft production [Kopper Kraft Production –MMG] coming out of San Francisco, if I'm not mistaken. But it has become, like, a sellable, collectible enterprise. And I think that it kind of had its heyday in the seventies. And there were people that were, like, Tupperware saleswomen, you know, like, pitching these wares. And it was: Collect all 20, you know, whatever. And my sister-in-law had given me this collection that she had gotten through various relationships. And it was an extremely large and intact collection of copper craft.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it was sort of given to me along the lines of: "You're a metalsmith, and you would be interested. And, you know, maybe you can do something with these things." Which of course I was absolutely terrorized by them.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I admired and hated them all at the exact same time to equal measure. And they sat in the studio for a year, maybe two, just torturing me. I had them arranged, sort of set up. And there would be this glowing orange from the corner of the room because they're all lacquered, and they're, like, locked into that time frame so thoroughly.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know, they're very kind of middle-class American, you know. And they intrigued me in that way. We can all see them—you know, you can see them at Goodwill, you can see them at your friends' houses, you could see them everywhere, you know. So I looked at them, and I wondered about them. And at the same time I was making the CONFLATION series, which are these kind of image of molten metal or these sort of portraits of collapse and regeneration of silver forms of the table. And those objects were being very carefully wrought in, like, a trompe l'oeil effect. So the smithing and so forth, which we can talk about more. But the idea

that I was trying very consciously to portray, albeit a fictional representation of molten metal, you know, the idea that it was actually a solid blob of molten metal, right? So the kind of craftsmanship dedicated toward that effect.

These copper craft studies provided a relief from that to some extent and a casualness. I mean, they, instead of trying to roll the edge of sheet metal around to make it look like a pillowing bubble of molten metal, I reduced it to, like, a motif, a plaque, a trophy base. But their silhouettes are puddles that are actually kind of formed from grease stains from potato chips from a brown paper bag actually. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But they're motif-like, derived from puddles and stains. They also kind of refer in their silhouette to some of the hammer mark silhouettes that I was pulling out. I mean, in the hammer mark research I was seeing repeated forms: like coffee beans, snowman, caterpillar, ladybug, these kind of couplings and groupings of bubbles, you know, coming together. And then those were silhouettes that I could start with as I began to form the metal into the clustered bubbles of hammered marks, right? So those same silhouettes are recurrent here in the copper craft studies.

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't mean to jump there.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, I know, it's fine.

MS. RIEDEL: I know that I've popped ahead.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No, it's good, though, because it brings it back to the kind of heroics and the anti-hero in a way—[laughs]—of copper craft. So there's a much more kind of animated, humorous quality going on here. And then certain tropes, like twisted wire on the edge and kind of kitsching it up with bringing copper and brass together and braiding wire and fluting forms and stuff like that. So they're a little sillier, a little more laid-back. And they were at the same time an opportunity for me to study what I imagine form language to be, that the copper craft product was referring to.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. So I was—so that was my initial response.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Like, doing a caricature portrait of somebody sitting there in front of you. But in this case it was production ware.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this the complete series or were there more?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I made six, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Six, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Six different puddles, so to speak, that come together in this rollicking, playing.

MS. RIEDEL: It would be wonderful if we can get a CD of images or something to accompany the talks.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That'd be great.

MS. RIEDEL: So people can see exactly what we're talking about.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, there you could see—hear—the drawing in reference to it. And I wanted to say another thing about drawing. I mean, drawing and model-making is so critically important to my working methodology. And it's, like, you know, the time involved in making some of these things is crazy. Like the large brass tray from the HAMMER MARK series took two years to make, and it's just—it's not like I worked on it for two years straight. But you reach this point where you're, like, what was I doing again? And you've got all this effort and labor into this thing, and you still can't figure out how to wrap it up, and you have to kind of put it down and return to a model-making strategy or bang out a couple other pieces and then come back to it. So the model-making really can inform the content in interesting ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, like, here you see that I just basically threw ink at the paper to make a splat. And then

drew back into that splat to pull out the form. And then that led to these copper pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. That's really interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, you know, like, I had this series a while back of jewelry pieces make out of gold-plated charms that were, like, these kitsch charms from industry, you know. And the models that I made for that were made out of seashells. Like something about, like, the kitschy cute little seashells glued together into this conglomeration became, like, a productive modeling tool. And also kept me in tune with what the sensibility of the idea, my anticipated outcome, was, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so you see behind you there's plaster. So that, you know, to take buckets of plaster and dump them. And then work into them with cardboard and then dump more plaster on, became a modeling technique that spurred me on during the silver investigation as well.

MS. RIEDEL: And so is it always a sketch and a model? Is it sometimes one or the other?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, it's not necessarily sequential. I mean, I get to a point where I'll have a sketchbook and I'm just, like, making notations, you know. But then there's also a point where I don't need the sketchbook anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then I'll be making models with cardboard, plastic cups or paper plates or whatever. And then there's a point where: "Why am I spending my time doing this?" But then there's other times when the model is more impressive than the object, you know what I mean? And so you have to go back and say, "Well, wait a minute. What's the disconnect here?"

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. And really be willing to hit it with a sledge hammer and throw it in a scrap bin sometimes. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: I bet. I bet. And once you're actually then working with metal, does it continue to evolve there? Or are you trying to fairly accurately reproduce what you have in your head? Is there a very specific idea you have in mind?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, that is an ongoing discussion.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: For example, you know, I try—I think with, like, the BISECTED series, for example, where I have in my mind I'm trying to replicate or emulate or refer to a particular moment in dec arts history or design or whatever, then it is very linear. You have to lay out this cone pattern in order to get to this form. You have to raise it, compress it, and stretch it with a hammer, so many annealings, so much time. And it could deviate a little bit, and you go, "Okay, I can accept that, you know." So I don't have to be super anal about matching the silhouette exactly. But there still is the expectation for symmetry, for example, you know, and that kind of stuff. The idea that you could take two halves of that, the decanters, and put them back together to physically create the chalice in the round. So the skills invested in that, there's no shortcuts.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But at the same time there's no, you know, badge of honor or whatever. I mean, it's a baseline expectation for craftsmanship. As Bill Daley said to me once, "All craft means is somebody went and did something intelligently, you know." And that could mean de-skilling as much as skilling, right? But with the conflation series, the chafing dish, other work from that period, I was really kind of enjoying a certain freedom. Like, the fact that something didn't have to sit down on a table and be level.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: In fact could be better served to be off kilter. And then allowing myself the permission to solder it crooked in essence, you know. [Brief discussion related to the recording equipment.] So, you know, also I would say at that time I had a lot of silver on hand when I was working on those pieces. And, like, the price of silver was affordable, so I could buy it in a bigger sheet. And not to get too distracted here. But, like, something that we had talked about yesterday, commissions and having a paycheck and that kind of stuff. It's hard to get it up, to spend thousands of dollars on materials toward an idea, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I'd say most of my work is built on speculation. And then if somebody buys it, that's nice. If they don't buy it, I own it. And so I guess there's probably less production over all compared to— Like when I look at my sketchbooks, I get kind of remorseful because I see ten objects that could be made for the one that I actually made, you know. These books are filled with things that I could return to. But I don't know if I am allowed to return to some of them, you know what I mean?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Like, I would be returning out of a kind of, just to try to get reconnoitered, you know, rather than to return out of an authentic inquiry.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Are there are some that you would like to, though, authentically rebuild?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, there's some work in here that I wish that it existed in the real, you know. But I don't have the—to that extent I don't have the resources to make it happen.

MS. RIEDEL: Would it be interesting to you, though, given the conversation we were having yesterday, to go back and build those pieces now? Or are you wishing you had been able to build them then? If you had the opportunity, if a wonderful grant came along, it seems like that's not something, though, that you would go back and rebuild.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: There are certain things that I'm interested in. For example, in terms of the hammer marks, there is a lot of thinking about, like, kind of distorting the form much more radically and with, like, hammering off the edge and stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But also hammering, like, the rim of something where it's, like, an open space and not the object itself. But it's simply a line that's been altered with the hammer. I'm kind of curious about that, especially in terms of what I'm investigating right now with these loops that we'll talk about later. But I bring up the point of the expense and, you know, the front work toward realizing some of this, because it is important like now, where silver is so radically more expensive. And I actually have to—I'm at the point where I need to buy more metal. So the next project that I make in silver I have to say: "How big is it going to be? What size is it going to be? What sheet size do I need? Oh, it doesn't come that big? Well, am I allowed to, you know, alter my design so it will fit with the available sheet size?" And that kind of stuff, right? But with the conflation series and with the chafing dish and like this piece here called driftware, I happened to have a lot of sheet on hand that I was able to purchase with some grant money and stuff. And I allowed myself the freedom to take it to the shears and just chop a corner off. Or if I wanted it to be bigger in a certain direction, I gave myself permission to solder the seam and let it be that way. And at first I spent a lot of time blending it out. And then later I started to just celebrate that decision-making in the work. So the edge of things, the seams and stuff, is actually something that I've paid critical attention to throughout my body of work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so if you look back again to the bisected series, when you see the silver edge that the seam describes where the two planes meet, to me that participates as part of the conversation about the tension between the reference to, like, a cast solid versus the fact that it's actually fabricated. So, you know, and again with the hammer mark, the magnification series, that same thing occurs. You see a hammered seam, you know, where a line is defined by careful placement of hammer to stake and metal in between. Or you see a seam that's joined and obviously welded and ground back or whatever. To me that conversation livens up the work and the experience of the viewer. And it also capitalizes on my authority as a craftsman, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that's an important thing. I think that that kind of skill is a baseline expectation. But it has to be used when and where it's relevant.

MS. RIEDEL: And thinking about the importance of surface to your work, too, I'm thinking of the bisected series, how you really do enhance that line. You really bring that out through variation in color or polish or texture.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: So it is something you have essentially—again, that feels it's referencing the portraiture as well.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. There in that particular chalice piece, I mean, you do sense that the chalice itself is

raised and that it's smacked in there with this planar surface that's very cool, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: In fact the whole box is very cool, very kind of the nod to Minimalism and so forth. The hammer mark pieces, the magnification series, so each divot is like an enlarged hammer mark. And when you look at them, you see that those divots are in fact raised bowls. So they have hammer marks on them that are the real hammer marks to make the image of a hammer mark. And so as they got larger, some of those hammer marks are made with a sledge hammer, some of them are made with a fine planishing hammer. So, there's like this jazz aspect. The rhythm is both real in the sense that it's been embodied, both as a consequence of the craftsmanship but as an idea itself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think that that's a tension that I deal with and a lot of people deal with in crafts to varying degrees of success or failure, which is: the difference between illustrating an idea and embodying it. I think that there's a lot of illustration that's not exactly cohesive in the sense that it's like, oh, this means this and this means that. I put them together equals content. Or commentary, right? And that can be—I'm confident that that's, like, a consequence of the literary primacy, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: In terms of intellect.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So we just illustrate theory. And when that is so overt, the work is just in the service, and it's not seizing the opportunity that exists within itself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Like we were talking yesterday about jewelry and how jewelry has this great opportunity on the street, you know, to be seen and worn and engaged and celebrated and provocative and seductive, and all these things that are in the bag for jewelry. That's what's great about it. So when you turn it into sculpture, how does that—you know, what does that mean? What happens? And sometimes it's absolutely what needs to happen? Other times it's, like, a fallback position that's being informed by things beyond itself that can be counterproductive. So, you know, I just say this. It just occurred to me after our talk yesterday that there is a tendency for craft, I think, from a place of insecurity, to illustrate ideas outside of its purview. And in some ways it's kind of an affect—becomes an affectation.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Interesting. Can you say more about that? Can you give an example of what you're thinking of?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I can give kind of an example in terms of jewelry. I mean, I think that like, for example, Otto Kunzli, you know, is an extremely influential, brilliant, critical mind. And using jewelry to strategize many observations about society. But also making photographs, so, like, for example, maybe the work is not the jewelry at all but it's the photograph. In other instances, it's an installation. In other instances, it's this, that, or the other. But I think that the kind of critical context became the groundwork for Karl Fritsch, who is a student of Otto Kunzli, you know. And I feel that his work capitalized on that kind of commodity critique implicit or explicit in Kunzli's work. And then—but it exists as real jewelry, right? I mean, you wear it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: People buy it, in fact. And it's a successful product. And different from that but, like, more, maybe more conventionally understood, but also a beautiful contract between the patron and the client that's both conventional and contemporary would be like Gerd Rothmann's, you know, kind of very Romantic but Modern relationship of the fingerprint and the sort of heirloom jewelry that gets made as he invites the client in and people get their hands in on the work. And then he preserves it and all that. I mean, it's very Romantic. It's very different than Kunzli and Karl Fritsch's agenda. But I think that Karl Fritsch's work has had a huge aesthetic impact on a lot of people's work today. But I don't think that the criticality is so directly transferrable from generation to generation.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, I think that the idea of refuting the tyranny of traditional goldsmithing or

whatever, which I think is deeply embedded in Otto's work and I think is seized upon in Fritsch's work, but I think it becomes a stylization in other people's work now. And so we have all this kind of gemstone, anti-gem, booger jewel, you know, like, dirty gem, whatever. It's like the ugly, the abject jewelry thing that is just referring to that tyranny. But I don't see the tyranny there. And I also don't necessarily know that the need to unlearn certain imposing traditions of skill-based learning is that urgent today. I mean, frankly—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —there are a lot of students that come to school as graduate students that don't have the basic skills that we used to expect everybody to have. And which I think in the great tradition of German goldsmithing we still have that expectation. But I'm not exactly sure, you know, our kind of multicultural, interdisciplinary, academic setting right now, that we can understand that as a given.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I realize this is kind of a rambling answer. But I think it just shows that sometimes we can seize upon a trope, the exaggerated gemstone or the ugly jewelry or the awkward soldered seam or whatever, and it becomes this catalyst. But it also becomes a convenience.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it's important to discern the sincerity or the background of that gesture, opportunity, within a given body of work.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it seems to me, too, it really speaks directly to the essence of time, and something we touched on earlier today, about material culture or social commentary in a period of time. So if you're making social commentary about the tyranny of goldsmithing at a time when—at the appropriate time—it resonates; I would feel that that work embodies it much more. When you go back and you look at the pieces that you're using as models for the bisecting series, there's a lot of time that's passed. There's a lens for looking at that that allows a certain point of view. I think about the more current pieces that you did at Kohler, and how there's social commentary involved with, for example, GMO's [genetically modified organisms], that sort of thing.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: It occurs that it's a very different way of working with content if it's very contemporary content, if it's content that happened, relates to something that happened ten years ago or something that happened 200 years ago.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And what an impact that has on how effective the content is in the work and how you would bring the content into the work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. It's, I think like—you know, you can look at feminism as an example of an urgent subject—[laughs]—that has so many different, you know, opportunities to be current. But at the same time we're at a point where I would say economically, at least in this culture, we're kind of desensitized to what all the fuss was about at this point. Like, I saw a Carolee Schneemann retrospective recently. And, you know, several generations ago you would have to be very worried about the audience response to that work. And now we just kind of look at it, and it's become historical.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it seems fairly tight and well behaved, you know. [Laughs.] At the same time, though, I worry that there's this false sense of security as we see that women still do not make the money that men make. And now we have, like, you know, we still have rape, we still have objectification, we still have all these things, you know, and that's just in this culture. Like, forget the world culture for women, right? Like, it's a whole other horrible, un-reconcilable, you know, injustice.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But look at the way that art, you know, has—the strategies in art change in relation to the politics, the currents and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And what's appropriate as the level of discourse, the level of outrage that needs to be expressed. Or maybe it's not art that is the vehicle by which to express that outrage. In terms of my own work, I

think, you know, I thought I was going to be a Marxist silversmith. But that's fairly untenable. [They laugh.] You know. So you have to get your politics on in other ways, you know. Sometimes through art, sometimes through life itself. And, you know, it's wonderful when you can address concerns that matter most to you and have real impact.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: What did that have to do with what we were talking about, I have no idea. Oh, silver? Was it about silver? Whacking away on big sheets.

MS. RIEDEL: It was about working with the conflation series. Yes, exactly. [They laugh.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, it was the affected—I can't remember now. Seams and let it all hang out.

MS. RIEDEL: And we were talking about surfaces, I think, a little bit, too.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I think also we were talking about—maybe what I was thinking about—was superficiality. Oh, no, I know. It was about the illustrating versus embodying.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That's what went on. You got me going on that. So I think that that's a challenge for that work, too. I mean, a lot of people looked at the conflation series. They're like, "Have you ever heard of Salvador Dali?" [Ms. Riedel laughs.] It's like, "I believe I have. I have heard of that guy. He had the moustache. The guy with the moustache." But, you know, I mean, the surreal as an opportunity is important, whether he did it, I did it, or a whole lot of other people do it. And it's possible not to acknowledge that lineage, you know. But at the same time I had to, like, kind of be careful that I was growing as the body of work progressed and not just repeating myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And not just illustrating a single idea.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So one thing about the work is that it is a silver object. It is a presentation object. Yet at the same time it's an image of a presentation object.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's an image of anxiety, it's an image of money, it's an image of collapse perhaps of a field, perhaps of a way of life, perhaps of an economy. But at the same time it's a regeneration image. I mean, like, these things are—they're not necessarily just in a state of decline.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, like the history of silver is, you know, depending on which empire is—[laughs]—blowing through town at this time or another, what gets saved and what doesn't. Many objects wind up in the crucible.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then at the same time the sheet metal that I buy, when I get the nerve to make the piece, and I've called up the company and said send me the sheet, that metal could be made out of any number of historic objects over time. And I know that this is like— Like again, Gary Griffin's teaching and his ruminations about the wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald,* and its kind of teabag effect of, like, seeping iron into basically the Midwest's industrial complex, in terms of the auto industry and factories and all the stuff that became part of the American economy. So it's just like the idea that that ship sank, but it also kind of regenerated and was born again into these other outcomes. So the image of the melting silver is not necessarily the end of something.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Absolutely. And it seems that that's a common—that's always in your work, that paradox, that: is it coming or is it going? Is it melting, is it growing? Is it in the process of somehow being formed at the same time?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And the humor thing I think again. Like, some of those pieces in the conflation series are sort of solemn, you know. The horizontality, for example, is important. Maybe not from an Art 101 composition standpoint, an ideal dynamic strategy in terms of making an image occur. But that stasis or that slippage was required. So the work became very horizontal.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But there's still the rollick. And there's still an edge gets turned up, a leg sticks out from underneath, or there's light peeking out. I mean, this is the case in this particular piece where it's up on this piece of driftware where it's up on these little legs like it could be running away, as much as it looks like it could be floating away, you know. And it's a pillow. It's actually got a lot going on as a hand-held object even though it's a presentation object primarily, and it sits there and kind of dares you to think about using it. It's got four spouts. How do you use it? And then it's perked up on these little legs, but it's got, like, a kind of a physical complacency that's very much like an overstuffed chair, you know. So making use of, like, upholstery kind of darting and folding and overlapping seams, to show like a fabricky quality. But it's very much of a [inaudible] fabric around the form. It's kind of like the liquid, implied liquid inside of it. It's just pushing out. There's like this pressure from the inside of the form pushing out against what is the skin, which is silver. The idea of working with metal as a skin is I think [inaudible] very much keenly aware of how the metal is like that. It's stretching and it's compressing. It's pulling across air, or across what would then be liquid once it's filled, you know. It's definitely the sense that you're working with a volume. Even if it's going to be a closed form. Like say Toshiko Takaezu or Jun Kaneko. I mean, they make closed forms in ceramics. But there's definitely an awareness of the space inside.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I think that affects a lot of kind of, like, the formal decisions that I make in some of the work.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Well, volume—I think that's a really interesting point, especially given the fact that many of the pieces are bisected, and you have a very visual sense of volume implied. And then you have, as you say, the skin where it's completely containment and then your Kohler pieces, where again some of those pieces almost feel bisected; they're an open form. It's an opportunity to think about volume and examine skin both inside and out.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. With Kohler it was such a trip because, you know, I've had casting experience in the jewelry scale. And you think that you know about metal, you know. You would think I would know about metal going in there. But you get there, and you realize that you don't know anything—[laughs]—about mold-making or metal in that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, I would think it would be really challenging for somebody that didn't have any knowledge of metal whatsoever to come to that space and that facility to work in. But I definitely was challenged by the fact that I was making a hole and filling it with molten metal.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And there was this kind of thinking that had been referring to that look in my work. I mean, like, when people see the conflation series, they think it's a cast solid. And when they see the bisected work, often they think it's a cast or a machine to part, you know. And I'm playing with that. But the fact is that Kohler, the facility is filled with mold forms that are so amazing I wish I had made them, you know. The mold forms themselves are incredibly awesome. So then you're there, and you've got to make art that's somehow better than that? That is really intense, really hard, you know. And I think—like I talked about it in my SNAG [Society of North American Goldsmiths] presentation. But, you know, I went there, and I thought, oh, I'm going to slice a bathtub because a lot of my work has engaged slicing as a way to open up the form and open up the conversation about an idea that gets represented, you know? So it seemed natural I go in there and cut up a bathtub, and I was going to juxtapose it with a sliced-up chafing dish in this comparative analysis. But then when I got there and met the guy whose job is to cut up bathtubs all day long for quality control purposes, he's using a six-foot-diameter chop saw, you know. And I'm going to go up to this guy and say, like, "Oh, excuse me, can you please, you know, cut up a bathtub so I can just muse on its relational aesthetics with the, you know." You know what I mean?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It just seemed like completely privileged, prissy, and unrealistic to say the least in that context. And I was sensitive to the fact that I was, you know, working there as an artist, being watched in essence, but also watching them. And being really self-conscious about what work I was going to put out there. How would they understand it? What would they think about? Because suddenly my audience was the factory worker for a period of four months. And everything you, every mold you made, was looked at. Not commented on, but the artist's studio there was a path through from one part of the shop to the other. You had foremen going through. You had all kinds of people, contractors, and then the general public constantly coming through on tours, recreational tour groups basically. So it was nonstop scrutiny—[laughs]—and no comfort zone in terms of familiarity. It's not like you could bring along your work and set up a little display on the side. Like, "Oh, here's what I'm really capable of. This is what my work really looks like or whatever." [Laughs] It's just you and the facility and a lot of black metal.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. And it's interesting. Before we move on to Kohler, to think about how Kohler is so different from what you've been doing up 'til then.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Completely different exploration of metal. Something that happened in the conflation series that I don't know that we've mentioned yet but you've certainly mentioned it in passing and I think it's worth noting, is that there was a sense of serendipity and a sense of evolution that came into the work, into the working process, with that series in particular.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. That's true.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was new. And hopefully that was in some way helpful by the time you got to Kohler. [Laughs.] But, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. Yes. I mean, definitely accepting—letting some stuff hang out. Letting a fiction be developed through the process of making.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And, you know, still trying to keep in mind what I was working toward, but welcoming some other possibilities.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so I had that going on. But at the same time there was this copper craft pile in the corner of the studio—[laughs]—staring me down every day, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: We haven't talked about mantels. So would you talk about that, too? Before I forget.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. That's it, you know. It's, like, I was finally ready to accept the challenge of confronting those objects. And I had worked with—

MS. RIEDEL: The copper craft objects, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, I had worked with a found object as the kind of starting point for the chafing dish.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And we had talked yesterday about when do you use a found object and when you don't. Sometimes it's just expeditious in the form of study to get to your idea quicker. Other times you're—I'll embrace the resonance that comes with a found object in terms of its sentimental value or its provenance or something like that. And that gets incorporated into the work in significant ways. You know, I'm thinking of the spoon pieces and the kind of—the way that the spoon becomes kind of like a surrogate for the bride basically or the identity of the family. And then so the chafing dish was just really again a matter of being expeditious: Here's this silver-plated chafing dish that I fragmented and I copper-plated it to get it out of the silver realm and then built off of it. So that was, like, this kind of exploding narrative that was happening with the object, the craft, and the table, and the exaggerated conversation that that scale of that piece affords, because it's almost—it's, like, four and a half feet across. It's kind of like the physical limit of what I could work with in my shop, basically.

MS. RIEDEL: Just a quick question. Have you had this studio—is this where you do most of your work and you've had this for the past 16 years or so?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I used to work up here exclusively. We're actually sitting in the attic of our house here. And then it kind of became apparent that welding in the attic wasn't a good idea. [Laughs.] So that got moved out to the garage. And being interested in construction and stuff like that, both my husband and I, he also has a background in building. So we kind of contracted some friends to help us build this garage addition. And then, you know, we basically have had this small house and turned it into an art compound over the years, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: So that's been really—the garage has been your functioning studio for—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Probably about ten years.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I just got plumbing in there maybe five years ago. It's pretty exciting. So the attic now functions as, you know, like, my storage space, packing, shipping, photography, and occasional display opportunities. Oh, yes, so here I was kind of almost getting seduced by my own rhetoric in terms of the decline of the relevance of presentation objects basically. Or, like, the questioning, questioning, questioning had led to a fragmentation. I feel like the more atomized my sense of the field and its history became, the more reflected that was in the objects I made. So parts, fragments, sort of disintegration in terms of the autonomy of a single object, you know. It's sort of starting to happen. But the mantel became, like, this conglomeration. So it brought it back, all these parts came back into, like, one solid, in essence. But the bittersweet aspect is that it basically turned into a shelf for putting trite objects on top of. [They laugh.] You know what I mean? So I took all those quote, unquote, trite or accessory objects, and I sliced them in such a way that they were—had the effect of like a cobblestone. I soldered a plane of metal on top of every exposed sliced surface. And then put them back together. So it was like a stone wall or a cobblestone kind of construction.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But then hung it back on the wall, approximating a mantel, which is where those objects would normally exist.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So they became the mantel, but they also became like an inverted still life.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And that still life, it's kind of a chaotic—it's somewhere between, like, a bacchanal or a floating shipwreck kind of effect. So from the underside— If you were to flip the object back up, it would be a still life of a mantel arrangement of objects. But they would all be slightly off kilter and bobbing around by the way that their stance had been altered through my slicing. Then when you flip them over, it's just that flat stone pattern, kind of.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think of the first time, though, that inversion becomes so significant in the work very literally and figuratively as well, metaphorically, that whole sense of turning objects upside down. Yes. And giving them a new function.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. The idea that I interpreted its function and then reified it, but through a critical stance. So it is important to me. I mean, I never really escape the purpose, the function, the utility of a craft object. Or, for example, the opportunity of the craftsman through skill, you know, to be functional themselves toward a particular agenda or an idea.

MS. RIEDEL: And I know that piece was really significant for you, *Mantel*. What else about it really, in retrospect, was significant? Or how did it shift? What was of interest to you?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It really felt like I was putting a lid on my bag of tricks. [They laugh.] So we're back to extreme discomfort.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Laughs.] I mean, I could make candlestick after candlestick, you know. And again, in terms of commissions, nobody has called me up per se and said, "Oh, hey, I really want you to make one of those candlesticks." But this isn't exactly, like, the kind of thing that would happen—is it would happen well after the fact that I'm interested in doing that, you know what I mean? So it's like "Um, do you go for the money, or do you, like, stick with what the fact is? You've got limited time to make the work you're going to make in your lifetime. So do you want to go back, or do you want to go forward?"

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: If only you could persuade them to invest in the next piece.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Right. Because ten years from now they may want it.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That's right. So anyway, I kind of hit the wall both literally and conceptually with that mantel. It was funny how much it took out of me because—

MS. RIEDEL: That would have been '94, '95?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, no, no.

[END DISC 4.]

MS. RIEDEL: Like 2005.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, 2005, right. Like, you know, I sat there looking at those objects for a couple of years, and I finally got it up to put them together. But then they were so concise in their commentary, in a way, that I really didn't know what else to say. And, you know, there was a lot of stuff going on, like, in my life at that time, too, on the personal side. You know, I'd lost both my mom and my dad during that period. Pretty much, you know, like, within the last six years it's been, you know, the loss of both parents. So that is something that you prepare your whole life for, but you're never prepared for it. But the idea of scrutiny, questioning, and not knowing, and being left to wonder, and all that stuff is muddied together in my personal life as well as in my studio practice. So I had—I'd been looking for some big change. And I applied for the Kohler residency. [Laughs.] Because I knew that that would be a place to confront some real issues in my work. And also it would be a place to be completely immersed. So while I recognized that it was going to be very, very difficult, I also recognized that there was something selfish about being sequestered away from friends and family and just in the comfort of an enormous casting facility. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So two bodies of work came out of that experience, and you've talked about the experience in a good degree of depth in the SNAG talk. But maybe you can encapsulate it here about what about it was—surprisingly challenging? What about it, what about it was surprising? What about it was what you expected? And then the work that came out of it. Because it really is different than anything you've done before. Certainly there are references to things that come before. But starting with the material and the process completely different.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. It's funny because, you know, in art and in art school, and there's all this kind of awareness of, like, a dematerialization of art, we see that sculpture has become everything and nothing right now. It's funny that in some contexts sculpture programs are in jeopardy, because they have so thoroughly democratized that the role of sculpture as a discrete program of study is questionable right now. And it's ironic because the crafts have always been threatened by, you know, the fine arts, right? But here it's, like, you know, do the crafts have to bail sculpture out? [They laugh.] Yes, it's so funny. I think Lisa Gralnick refers a little bit to this in a recent interview in her *Great Gold Standard* catalog. But it is a funny, ironic place to be, you know. And this sort of interdisciplinary crossover space that we're in intellectually provides a certain amount of comfort and discomfort as well for somebody in my position, you know, who's invested a lifetime in mastery, but hasn't exactly celebrated—has been stigmatized by that mastery and is aware of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right? And tries to shoot myself in the foot every once in a while—[laughs]—but at the same time employ it through its best effort, you know. So going into Kohler, you know, I discovered that foundry work is like a supreme craft. It is so linear and specific. And that you have to be so dedicated to the knowledge of that process, that, you know, to be renegade about it could very well be fatal. So, you know, I was really impressed by the fact that there was so much craftsmanship involved. But at the same time the thing you're making, you know, if you dropped it on your toe, it was going to break your foot. So that must mean it's sculpture in essence. [They laugh.] Or something else, you know. So compared to my experience, where the objects that I make are usually the thickness of a dime, and even though they may be imaging something that might be described as massive, they still usually weigh less than ten pounds or ten to 20 pounds, you know. So here you could make a frying pan that weighed 20 pounds. Or 200 pounds. You know, that was an amazing discovery about the tooling and the kind of historical tooling. Like, it's a modern facility, but it's also, like, medieval, primordial. I mean, it's dark, and you see this glowing red, 2600-degree crucible thing. And you're standing next to this, like, container for slag, and it's just glowing, and it's four feet across. You look into that, that red pool, and you see the crystalline structure of the metal being revealed as it's cooling. And it's just like so micro/macro amazing conversation, and it's alive, you know. You're very much aware of molecular movement and all this other stuff even while it's this huge, heavy, super hot pool. [Laughs] Crazy.

MS. RIEDEL: So did you go there with specific ideas about what you were going to do? You mentioned the bathtub. And then did they mostly get thrown out?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, it's so funny because, you know, it's like—we were talking earlier about how these, I have these sketchbooks that I showed you, and each sketchbook kind of reveals a different moment in the series, in various series. And you'll see where some sketchbook is drawn to the very end; and in fact it's picked up in another sketchbook. So there is enough need for drawing to resolve ideas, you know. Then there's others where there's words, like—and there's a sense of, like, a right brain, left brain, you know, conversation.

MS. RIEDEL: With that dialectic, that makes sense.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And there's different needs to know. So like, for example, one of these books I was looking at was from my—I did a residency at the Banff Art Center [Alberta, Canada]. And it's so funny, because this was in 1999. But in there, even though that doesn't seem that long ago, it's like, you know, there's notes in there on how to use the Web, what is html, Photoshop, and that kind of stuff which we take for granted now.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But at that time— So there's a lot of writing in the book, because I'm, like, trying to remember this stuff, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then in Kohler the same thing. My sketchbook for Kohler starts out with a lot of writing and very directive: Like, "Do this, do that." You know, "Sliced slabs, stacked arrangements, found objects, you know, clustering, fossils, specimens." I was trying to think of what a mold could do. There was a moment where I thought about, like, casting blobs of molten metal onto chains. So that was kind of a weird way of building a sculptural expression from some jewelry work I was exploring. And in fact I had done a series of jewelry in 2006 with molten tin that was, like, the stepping-off point for some other things I was exploring, that connected to the conflation series. But also indulged in certain, like, decorative impulses on the body. And I don't know. They're funny. I'll have to show you some pictures.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd like to see this.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But, you know, I can tell in my sketchbook for Kohler the whole front end of it is very much like, "What if I did this? What if I did this? What if I did this? What if I did this?" And they represent a lot of things that I'm really interested in actually. But you can't do it all, you know. So you see that there's, like, a struggle to locate and to get focused on something. And then all of a sudden the book starts to become more about, "Okay, need to build the mold in this way. Need to allow this many inches for that or whatever". And then it all of a sudden turns back into like, "Uh-oh, what am I doing now?" And you see that I've left Kohler and back to thinking of sheetness and stuff. And there's, like, a great ambivalence about what that means. [Laughs.] But going to Kohler, I kind of knew that I was gonna to be makin' frying pans.

MS. RIEDEL: Why frying pans?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, because I was lookin' for some place as a starting point that would be somewhat comfortable in order to allow me the time to learn the mold-making process. And the frying pan seemed to me to be like the cast-iron equivalent of the candelabrum in essence. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Did I read correctly that you brought a frying pan that had belonged to your mother?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So it made me think of the conversation we were having yesterday about the interface between personal and more universal and more political. And it seems interesting that that would be what you would bring of to a personal object as a starting point

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. She had given me this [nine –MMG]-pound Griswold—well, it feels more like 20. It's a huge frying pan that's a really beautiful frying pan. And so I molded its handle. And, you know, it's kind of like it's a sentimentality that I indulge in. And it's important maybe for our conversation today.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But I don't think it's important in the big picture, you know. It's just a sweetness factor. It's nice.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a starting point.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. It was nice. And my mom was not with me anymore, you know. So it was a chance to kind of think of her. But it wasn't an overt part of the work per se.

MS. RIEDEL: No. But I do think it's interesting that it is a stepping-off point for that.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And that, I think, everybody has a frying pan or something in their kitchen that they inherited one way or another. And, you know, we can all connect, no matter what part of the world or class or whatever you're from. We've all had a frying pan. [They laugh.] And so they just became fun and funny. And the workers connected with them immediately.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, the same language.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. And I had been reading Michael Pollan's *Botany of Desire* and following his articles in the *New York Times* and so forth about the beef industry and everything. And the modified corn polemic. And I had seen some pretty dicey documentaries about that as well as the future of food comes to mind.

MS. RIEDEL: *Food, Inc.* maybe?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I haven't see *Food, Inc.* yet. But it's in my queue. But you're driving around Wisconsin, and there's all these silos, and this, you know, all of the big companies are out there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So there's, like, this innocent pastoral thing going on aesthetically, romantically. And then there's the industry, the food industry. And I was working in the factory as well. So it was kind of fun to draw sort of parallels between those two things.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But I started to develop—I mean, the very first I did make was a four-handled frying pan. And just on the personal side, I think that was kind of inspired by the fact that you're living in a house with other artists. [Laughs.] Suddenly you have all these, like, grownups thrown back into, like, a college, you know, house-share situation or whatever. And you're negotiating the factory all day long. And you come back, and you're negotiating the kitchen or the bathroom, you know. [Laughs.] The different schedules of living in this house together.

MS. RIEDEL: Who else was there with you at the same time?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, funny is that Gary Griffin happened to be there for the first four weeks of my residency. And he was smart enough to bring along a studio assistant, Kai Wolter, who, actually he's, you know, a Cranbrook alum. But also studied at University of the Arts. So he and I shared that path of having both had the same teachers, in fact. So Kai was from Gary's last year of teaching at Cranbrook, and I was from Gary's first. So that was kind of funny. But Gary was also smart enough to get his own apartment. And he brought Pat Griffin along as well. So he had a life, you know. And so Kai was in the house, and Lynn Yamamoto was in the house. She's a ceramics kind and also an interdisciplinary artist from Massachusetts, Northampton, I think. And then later Chris Lo came. He came from Hong Kong, ceramic artist.

MS. RIEDEL: So plenty of opportunities for discomfort. [Laughs.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Exactly. And so I would make these frying pans. And then people would respond to them. And then, as I was invested in research in, like, the food situation, I started to make them more directed toward that. So, like, the cornpone pan, I brought, like, a antique cornpone pan with me. Then I was able to press clay into those pone spaces and pull out these positive ears of corn. And then manipulate them and then use that to make a mold to make a mold to make a mold to make the metal object. I mean, that's one of the crazy things about foundry—[laughs]—is you have to make the things so many times before you actually make the *thing.*

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And that kind of tooling lends itself to production methodologies. But I'm not—I wound up using a production facility to make one-of-a-kind objects. So the only thing I made there that was repeatable is the bratwurst pans. But that's because I was trying to go for repetition in terms of form. I needed like a—I

wanted to have like a module that could be reiterating and develop a rhythm with that, because I was trying to refer at that point to food reproduction, production and reproduction. And also kind of like mitochondria or genes or some sort of weird wormy shapes that were coming out of the frying pan forms.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting too because that feels like the most overtly political and contemporary social commentary that I've seen in your work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's funny. Well, compared to, like, the very early work with the diamond stuff, so it's, like, a diamond pacifier, or the corkscrew heels or whatever, right?

MS. RIEDEL: That's true, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But these were funny because some people enjoyed them as humorous, you know. And then other people saw them as sinister. And you see them mixed up and they're hanging there. They're hanging there like the way that meat hangs in a butcher shop or something. I mean, they're hanging. And they start to kind of look like letter forms, you know. And so there's a code that starts to emerge from them in a way. And so —and then they were referring to double brats, which is, like, this culinary experience of the Midwest and Wisconsin particularly. These bratwursts that everybody eats. And, like, a cart would pull up outside of the factory. The brats would be there for lunch, and everybody'd go out there and eat their double brat.

MS. RIEDEL: What's a double brat?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's two bratwursts on a bun.

MS. RIEDEL: On a bun, okay, okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I imaged, you know, I thought of these nestling, you know, sausages in these pans. And so some of the workers would come and tell me, like, "Oh, you should make that with a moat where it could hold a 12-ounce can of beer because that's the proper way to cook a bratwurst." [Ms. Riedel laughs.] And all this. And so there was, like, some people that really wanted to engage in the practical, real aspects of culinary, you know, tooling. And then other people, you know— One time this guy come up to me and said, "You know, we think your frying pans look like penises, you know." [Laughs] And I said, "Well, what do you think bratwurst looks like? Of course they do, in essence." But I thought also how wonderful that they could connect with the work in that way. Like, they're getting it. It's not just a frying pan, you know. It's something else. The frying pan that's on a mission to reach out into other contexts—[laughs]—and to stimulate other considerations. Right? And then, you know, to make them in chrome creates, like, a completely different sensibility again. I mean, the cast-iron version, this is actually a brass, chrome-plated brass, double brat pan that I call *Silver Anniversary*. [They laugh.] Because again, it's like nestling, you know. A couple, a sweet little couple. But there's a couple of any gender. Yes. So they're opportunistic on a number of different fronts, I would say, these brat pans. And the cornpone pan, I mean, my first one was very controlled and very sort of subversive in that way. I mean, you could look at it and walk right by it, and then you'd take another glance at it and say, "What's going on with that cornpone pan?" Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then you can imagine what the loaf would look like coming out of that. But later I was working with those, and I kind of started to just mush the corn into slabs of clay, so it became much more Abstract Expressionist, so to speak. And then the quality of the corn imprint heaped up and heaved and started to be, like, seismic-looking. And also referred to chewing very directly. So while I don't consider this particular piece here that I'm showing you so thoroughly resolved in terms of its surfaces and so forth, I'm really interested in the activity that's being captured. And that kind of connects to the series of work that I was doing there.

MS. RIEDEL: Does this piece have a title, Myra?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, there's a similar one called *Mitosis*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So the silhouette of the total, it became like a plaque.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Or a tray. And then kind of literally these two circles overlapping to refer to cell division. But it employs that same kind of attempt at hypnosis that the hammer mark series investigated. But the automatic or the gestural seemed very difficult to attain—[laughs]—in the context of the factory requirement. Not just the factory requirement, but the foundry process, you know. I mean, you're going there to make these molds. Sometimes the mold could weigh a thousand pounds to produce a hundred-pound object. And the

hundred-pound object weighs, like, 300 pounds until you cut off all the extra stuff. Because it's a gravity pour, there's a lot of gating, which is the pathway that the metal can run in order to enter the space that's going to become the art object.

So the physical requirement, there's a lot of opportunity to stop yourself from doing something, just out of the sheer reality that it's going to be very draining to accomplish it. You say, "How many times do I want to push this cart across that floor, you know? How many times do I want to swing that sledge hammer to break out that mold." And you know, you can't make it as a smaller mold; it's got to be, you know, big enough to contain the metal and not break out and all these other things, you know. So the idea of working with a hoist—you know, everything that I had made up to that point was such that I had to be able to lift it and move it around the shop. There it's better to make stuff that you can't lift, because then you're going to have to use a hoist, and then you won't hurt yourself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that, you know, the issue of hurting yourself is ever-present. But I became—you know, while I was working comfortably in a way with the frying pans, I had developed a system to make them, I had developed the ability to cast four of them at a time. But it had turned into drudgery. Like, I started to realize that the multiple, you know, was a boring way to work—[laughs]—in terms of just the physical outlay. Like, I can understand why you would outsource that object to be made. But being dogmatic—[laughs]—motivated by craft, I persisted to make as many as I had to—I made enough to, like, give out to some special people who were helpful and kind while I was there. But for the most part, I mean, would I have liked to have 50 of them? Maybe. But would I have liked to have a hundred of them? Maybe. I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But to have to personally execute that many of them, I felt that I had run that ship aground, right? So at the same time, it seemed like everything I wanted to make, other than the frying pans, required some special consideration. There were too many undercuts. They couldn't possibly be done in this way. Or it was going to require, like, a multi-part mold and all this other stuff. And I couldn't understand why it was so hard to come up with a form I wanted to make during this process.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that this particular sand mold process, there's no undercuts allowed, as opposed to, say, ceramic shell casting, where you can—the flask is more mutable than these essentially two-part molds that have to be lifted. You basically cast this resin-bonded sand around your pattern. The pattern being the model for the object. And you have to be able to separate the mold. Clean out the mold, put it back together, separate it, put it back together, separate it. And anytime there's an undercut, you can't do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I then devised this way of working using matboard and chipboard and scoring and bending these belts of cardboard basically. And then casting the sand around them. And then using a soft, pliable sand in between layers of cardboard. And then I was able to, like, kind of dump that out of the mold, tear the cardboard out of the mold, and then cast the object that I was interested in as an experiment [inaudible] process. So what started to emerge were these weird, completely abstract forms on one hand, but also completely literal in the sense that they were documents of the process of this experiment. So it was funny that they were both abstract and completely representational at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: They were both concretized and somewhat seemingly ephemeral because they captured the improvisational mark of the scored line; the matboard, the piece of tape or whatever is, like, embedded in the surface of that object, but it belies the process in terms of, like, a production facility and a mold-making. And how do you capture something that's such an off-handed gesture as a quick blade across the surface of a matboard.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So they represented a lot of seemingly antithetical—[laughs]—relationships.

MS. RIEDEL: I think you described—You wrote about the molds as encapsulating the moment of making. I think that's such an evocative description of them.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That's the content. I mean, in that body of work. So they're sort of documentary.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And completely different than the brat pans that are going on.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Like visually, and in terms of the audience. I mean, the factory workers, they could all come and talk to me about frying pans all day long. But they had no idea what those things were. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But for me, they disturbed—those objects—disturbed me because, I mean, I couldn't make sense of them either in a way. But they were vaguely building off of some work that I had done just prior to the residency. I was working on these two metalwork pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this *Wooden*? Because we didn't talk about that yet.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, *Wooden*. And at the same time this series of cups.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Which are, like, very prissy, you know, fine silver- and gold-plated cordial cups, you know, that were extremely demanding in terms of, like, laying out a pattern and how do you build this form. And then careful handling to keep from crushing them or damaging them through making. Actually with those pieces, I was trying to score—I was scoring the sheet metal with, like, a Plexiglas scoring tool, and, like, trying to measure points that would be exact and then drawing a free-hand line between them and then bending on that line. So that it's not exactly a clear, regimented, conical surface, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then maybe I would sheathe it so they're kind of double-walled and there's a conversation between, like, two different modes of making, that are both measured and imprecise simultaneously. So putting those two things together in this little series of cups, that was happening. And at the same time this insane golden bough—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —of a brass centerpiece. And I think Patti Phillips writes really nicely about it, you know, its awkwardness. I mean, I refer to it as, like, the strange guest at a dinner party. But, you know, it's, like, this kind of guffawing, you know, brassy object.

MS. RIEDEL: And it ties back to what we were talking about yesterday: trying to capture that awkwardness. And you mentioned whittling and how you even whittled as a child. There is that awkwardness in the object that almost the impromptu, spontaneous looseness in an enormous piece.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. And it's, like, really—that is a hard object to make, you know. So you know, every little dent and ding is sort of like this gut-wrenching conversation that I'm having with the craftsmanship and the process. And thinking, like, "Oh, God, do I have to—can I live with that, you know? That dent or that ding." And meanwhile I'm sitting there obsessing about, like, this quarter-inch area of this four-foot-long thing that's, like, basically this—it looks like you could knock a door down with it.

MS. RIEDEL: It does, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But you could also dance with it. I mean, it's light; it's very lightweight. It's kind of approximate to the body. And it's got [inaudible] appendages. [Laughs.] It's a very strange object. And again—

MS. RIEDEL: It's very different than anything you've done before. What was the thinking behind that? What was the inspiration for that?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I guess a couple of things. I mean, you could say that it sort of builds off of what's happening in driftware.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And again, driftware being similarly awkward. But of a kind of a well-mannered scale.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it's sort of content as it sits on its puffy body. And it's silver, fairly well behaved.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. It's a buoyancy and a floating quality.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. So I had that going on. I had the mantel, which was basically saying, "No, you can't make another object with a—[laughs]—recognizable spout, handle, foot or whatever, you know." It kind of cut me off there. But I was still very interested in asserting, like, a new form for this kind of lexicon, you know. Like, what are the possibilities for continuing to practice, you know. So I returned to the centerpiece but only with a great deal of skepticism and awkwardness. Like, "Hi, I'm back to take over your table," you know. And I didn't know it was going to be a golden bough per se. But in just preliminary research on what the Golden Bough [*The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* by Sir James George Frazer] is and its kind of questioning that it presents about faith and so forth. And I love that that connection happened serendipitously.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes, that's interesting. That's very interesting. I hadn't thought about that. I hadn't thought about that as a golden bough.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, because its bough-ness is there. But it's also kind of crystalline.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it's as big as, like, a piece of furniture almost. In a way it's sort of like a car part or something. You know, it's got a couple different identities.

MS. RIEDEL: It does.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it's a piece, you know, people hate to love it, and love to hate it. You know, it's a weird—[laughs]—object. I know that the driftware piece has that same effect on people. Some people are just repelled by it.

MS. RIEDEL: Really!

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And I'm just fine with that. I mean—[laughs]—I say that to my students a lot. It's like —I try to say, "Don't make the work that you're going to wear." You know what I mean? Like, you should not be trying to satisfy yourself—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —first and foremost, in my opinion. Like, you have a responsibility to the audience and the context and a sense of history and all these other things that are going to ultimately be more—you should be more responsible to that in a way. Satisfying yourself doesn't further the conversation, right? And, you know, at the same time I want people that are, say, making jewelry to, like, get somebody to wear it. Or, you know, if it's ugly, maybe that is the point. I think about, like, Bruce Metcalf's work, for example. I mean, it's not—you know, it's hard to negotiate a conversation with somebody when there's this [laughs] very strange animal/object/person/brooch asserting itself into the conversation, you know. And Bruce is no shrinking violet, of course. He's been a great debater about craft and asserting his position intensely through his writing over the years and also through his [sometimes confrontational –MMG] work. So, I don't think of that [particular –MMG] work as being invested in beauty, you know. It's definitely not. It's more invested in the contract with the user and the wearer than it is in aesthetics. So, I often have to make work that I find ugly. I don't really particularly think about it as a beautiful object, although it preys on that kind of convention or expectation.

MS. RIEDEL: You know, that was well put.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Good.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that's something that we haven't addressed directly. And to just—because I think about form, I think about utility, I think about history [inaudible]. In craft certainly, design, technology, art. But the concept of beauty isn't something we have addressed directly, and I think that's helpful. So it's something that you think about, but it sounds like it doesn't get a whole lot of attention.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, I think that there's so much baggage around beauty—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —so many different ways to appraise it, so many different expectations for it, that to presume that I would even know what the hell it means is another thing entirely. But I suspect that everybody anticipates it in art. I mean, let's say the broader audience, not the cognoscenti but the broader audience. So I can't help but kind of pick at that. So to that extent I am involved, you know, with it subjectively. But it's not a

motivating factor if somebody finds my work ugly that I've somehow failed. And in fact, it's probably the contrary.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Is it something you think about consciously, directly, frequently?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I mean, you might—yes, I don't think about it.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think so.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Inaudible], no.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I'm a cynic kind of ultimately. I'm basically an atheist. [They laugh.] So you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, the aesthetic is what you were talking about earlier. You have, you have. It's just beside the point.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I'm immediately suspicious of it. If I'm going to make something beautiful, it's with an agenda in mind.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Laughs.] But at the same time as a hobby I like to go out and sit on a rock and do a watercolor painting in 20 minutes or less. You know, what I mean? And it's usually not a very good painting. And, like, I sit there, and I try to mix the paint and make a mark that somehow captures that. But, God, it's—I recognize my amateur status and my lack of conviction in that personally, you know. But in terms of design, like that *Wooden* piece, it's impossible to design that object. Actually there's a plaster model right there.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible] that earlier. That is, what, 10 percent of the actual [inaudible] piece?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I mean, it's like sort of trying to think about, well, what is it? I did some whittling in plasticene to kind of get revved up for it. And that was funny because plasticene, you know— Usually whittling is responsive to a certain resistance that occurs. I mean, you're sitting there pulling against wood that has a grain, and you're also very conscious that your finger's on the other side. And it's very easy to apply too much pressure and split out more material than you meant to remove. And then, you know, the knife's not sharp enough; it needs to be re-sharpened. I have different point sizes and this and that. So there's a lot of push and pull in terms of whittling. And the awkwardness is—and the hobby aspect of it is—that was motivating me as well.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes sense.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. And that piece has again that sort of blue-collar or casual, you know, thing. It is like the person that shows up at the dinner party in the wrong clothes, you know. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's a good description.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But it's not like I could actually draw that thing to say "this is what I'm making."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So you do see some of the drawing I was doing at the time for that work. Actually Rosanne Raab and Linda Ross are putting a show together for SNAG that's related to artists' sketches and work. And they've invited me then to be a part of that show. And I do want to put in also another shout out for Rosanne, who has quietly, you know, really been dedicated to representing, in her capacity, holloware, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And Linda Ross and Arlene [Selik] at Sybaris for believing in that aspect of my work. It's important.

MS. RIEDEL: Any final thoughts about—well, maybe we should move from Kohler into what's happening in the studio now? Or shall we [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, yes. If you want to relocate, we can relocate if you want to take a little pause and go on out there.

MS. RIEDEL: Shall we do that?

[END DISC 5.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Myra Mimlitsch-Gray in the artist's studio and home in Stone Ridge, New York, on June twenty-fourth, 2010, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, disc number four [six]. We've moved into the studio, the actual studio now. We're surrounded by the most recent work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. In progress.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. Exactly. So, what are we looking at?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Laughs.] Yes, we're looking at a lot of experimental work, I guess, at this point.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this over the past six months, 12 months?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Probably I'd say the past year.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I came back from Kohler with the struggle to process the range of work that I had explored there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then also the struggle to return back to the regular academic calendar, having come from sabbatical. I mean, it's—

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That's the thing about being in academia is every once in a while you are eligible to take some time off. And it's not time off, because the expectation—in fact the requirement—is that you're going to be researching something. But it's unfettered research time. So that was the situation that afforded me the opportunity to do Kohler.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it a six month sabbatical or a full year?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I took the full year. So the first part of the sabbatical was me trying to respond to what the mantel had presented to me in terms of challenges about how to continue in this practice that I had seemed to kind of come to complete closure around. And then that yielded simultaneously this fancy set of cups, these cordial cups.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. They were just [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. With the wooden centerpiece happening at the same time. And then took that information to Kohler, extended and extrapolated from those experiences into those two discrete bodies of work. Had the opportunity to exhibit that work at Sienna Gallery in August, which I was really grateful for.

MS. RIEDEL: The Kohler work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And I came back from Kohler, it was mid- to late June. And then I had a month to kind of do some grinding and fussing in my studio which made, of course, quite a mess because working with iron debris compared to nonferrous metals is a different thing entirely. But I was able to show the work right away, and that was just a great experience.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. With a nice catalog to go with as well.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It was exciting.

MS. RIEDEL: And as you said, so current, so current, so immediately after it was completed.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So it's, like, I came to this point of required introspection. I had been removed from one setting and put back in another. I had been removed from the research component and put back into the teaching role. And then shortly thereafter became chair of the art department, which has its own challenges and

opportunities. So it's hard—this is the scramble that we all deal with, is trying to find the concentrated time to process the information and make the next productive step forward. And I'm here in this place of confronting what is—how does my studio facilitate my future interests, you know. What are some of the things that I'm deeply invested in and I'm not willing to relinquish? You know. And what are the things I'm willing to let go of? And so that is like a perpetual conversation now.

MS. RIEDEL: Where are you at in this process? What do you want to hang onto? What have you decided to move forward with? And what are you relinquishing?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I think the relinquishing might be the outcome, like the specific outcome.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Kind of allowing myself to have more enigmatic product, perhaps. Like, so instead of I'm making a "blank"—fill in the blank—it's more like I am trying to feature making with a different kind of voice and a different expectation for a conversation than imaging a teapot per se. So that is a big shift. But that's also a scary place to be because what *are* these things? And then, you know, the act of making is really important to me, and I've been trying to figure out how to feature that more prominently as subject in a work. But it still has to be—I still have to have lead-ins to other broader dialogs. So it can't just be didactic making, made evident kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But I think that trying to process that is coming out of the sculptural work from Kohler. And then coming home to the thin sheet metal reality of my shop, and trying to say, "Well, what's the essence of that?" I know to use the word *essence* is always frightening because it conjures up images of high Modernist, you know, hegemonies and so forth. But there is something about the distillation of process that intrigues me. So some of the things we're looking at here, I kind of came back to the studio and gave myself, like, these simple exercises of "make two cuts and bend it around, you know. What is it?" And in doing that bending, responsive to the resulting gestures that come from that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Gesture is a perfect word, I think, for what we're looking at here.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And at the same time, as we were discussing earlier, you know, I'm suspicious of the aesthetic gesture or having aesthetics be the outcome of gesture.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know? So I'm negotiating my antipathy for that in a way. [Laughs] And you see on the wall here I have this piece of a torn T-shirt, that rolled edge of the jersey material has been kind of this starting point to riff on. And I had been rolling that edge in work prior to the Kohler residency, as I was exploring a series of enamel ware.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. We haven't talked about that series at all.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And actually—it's, like, a complete aside, I guess. But I had gone to Kohler thinking I was going to be exploring enameling. But there's so much challenge in learning the mold-making and so forth. And I was really lucky to be there when Gary and Kai were there because I basically the first week followed them around just learning the ropes of the studio—excuse, me, the shop. As opposed to the studio. And I forget—[laughs]—what I was going to say. Oh, I saw that Gary was struggling to get some enameling work done. And that he had been there already for several months. So by this time he was, like, getting ready to pack it up and move it out. And he was really product-driven at that moment. But even he, with all of his capacity working with steel and welding and comfort level of that environment, was, you know, spending a week to make the apparatus to have a part that he was working on enameled. And trips back and forth to the enameling foreman and having all these conversations; it's in another building, and all this fuss. And I was just completely overwhelmed with casting process in and of itself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But I had been interested in enamel as a clinical skin, you know, it's like an analytical surface, and it has a coolness to it and a certain sort of authority or scientific authority or purported authority, you know, that I was interested in exploring and, you know, developing. But I was also wary that it was just going to be an enamel version of the silver work that I was doing.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So—but it was an exploration of, like, camp ware forms. And then that helped to support

my interest in the frying pan in a way.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But that rolled edge which I was using to refer to the rolled edge of, like, a tin cup, is now more opened up and translated into these bands of metal that are kind of like fabric remnants.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so now I'm just trying—And they look, they kind of look vaguely purposeful, or as if somebody hung them up on the way to doing something else, so they have a certain kind of domestic reference. I'm interested in making, like, the hooks and brackets for them so that there's some sort of conversation with the utilitarian hook and the loop itself.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So they're heading that way. There are bands of metal. And in that way they refer to these bands of metal that are the results of cutting up a chafing dish which I actually finally got back to. So after Kohler I did come home, and I cut up a chafing dish. [Laughs.] And hung it on the wall like a diagram. So I'm kind of working on what I think of as a show that just is this riff on bands of metal that have been cut and manipulated. But how you can kind of state it in a very matter-of-fact way, but how there's going to be a lot more subjectivity to the outcome, you know. Even though that outcome is not going to be so directed as to say "this is a 'blank.'" However—[laughs]—there are these other ideas that I have about these things. Like, why couldn't they turn into a functional object? Like, there is one piece; it's a model hanging on the wall, and it's made out of brown paper and cardboard. But it is in essence like an oval tray that is folded over on itself, and it's hanging from a string on the wall. So it kind of has—in my mind I'm referring to, like, a mirror that's been shut down. But also, like, could that be a serving tray? I don't know. And that's, like, that whole question of, like, do I go and make that out of silver? Is it worth it to spend $2,000 on a sheet of metal to make that piece and do that? How would I get the nerve up to do that? This model that's adjacent to it has, again, taking that same oval—and I was trying to use the oval as, like, a leitmotif [inaudible] through this body of work.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. So that's like a—that's a low parameter that I put on it right now as an exercise to get myself, you know, to close in on some things that can be safe. And then to use, like, the home base as you begin to extend the body of work, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I mean that other model, you see an oval hanging on the wall. And the top has leaned over like it's on its way to being bent in half. But the scale now is like a catcher's chest plate, you know. It's got a shield quality to it. And a mirror quality to it. So just the cardboard modeling affords me an opportunity to explore those two things. And I had been thinking about Shaker design as well. So it's sort of like this futility aspect is returning to the work in a way.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this an evolution in the working process, or is this—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: The work itself?

MS. RIEDEL: No, no. The cardboard models.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: Is it an evolutionary working process since you've returned from Kohler? Or is this a way that is familiar to you from years ago?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, working with cardboard in this way?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, you talked about working with models. But are they usually this detailed?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think that this is familiar. What's maybe different is that the wall becomes a starting point now. So, you know, I'm conscious of trying to bring other things to them like this line. The hanging apparatus becomes a graphic line. And so there's a certain sort of formalism that's being worked out. While the content is not the starting point in a way, since this is a new discomfort for me now, is to be not determining what the object is.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know? But the scary thing becomes, well, why is it metal? What is it made out of—what is the purpose of metal if it's not referring to, you know, the nomenclature or whatever. So I'm confused and concerned about that. But then I go back to this kind of essentialized cutting and splitting thing that I'm trying to explore.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's familiar.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so then you see there are these other studies that I have here where they show that the sheet reveals itself and conceals itself, its sheetness. So in some cases, it's like a slab that's been split and splayed open. But in a sense its sheetness is still there. In other cases something has been, like, cloven and pried out. And that suggests maybe a handle—or not. It's like a box, but it could also still be a working surface. And, you know, a foldover becomes a handle or a container. So each one of these objects, even though there are a lot of variations in form and [inaudible] kind of start with that single cut and bending over.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. [Side conversation.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then, you know, I'm still thinking of the enameled surface as a possibility to distract me from some of the things I've already been working with. And to possibly introduce color in a way. And also to introduce function in a way. Because enameling is utilitarian, right?

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so from an artistic standpoint, it's a pain in the ass to work with at the scale that I'm using it. And I'm trying to use it on steel, because I have this insistence that, you know, like a bedpan is made out of steel for a reason, you know. If it was copper, it would not support, you know. And they have this enameling that has the ability like it can be thrown out of the sink or out of the camp wagon, whatever, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So it's sort of like a forced commonality that I'm interested in bringing to the work. So we see that I'm not that motivated by the preciousness conversation right now.

MS. RIEDEL: No. Not at all.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I'm kind of—it's interesting to struggle with that as well. But at the same time I wonder if I did make them in silver, what if anything would that bring to it, I don't know. I mean, I have some ideas. But I'm not sure it's the right thing at this moment.

MS. RIEDEL: So if you were going to describe what the focus is right now, how would you describe it? We've talked about gesture, we've talked about wall, we've talked about not knowing what the object is per se. Is there anything else that comes to mind?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I mean, I guess the issue is—

MS. RIEDEL: Back to sheet.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. But it's a kind of a challenge to the relevance of the practice in a way. Or how much can I employ, continue to employ, this way of working without the subject at hand.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that is an interesting problem for me right now.

MS. RIEDEL: And whether the metal is relevant?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Or whether the facility has a voice outside of imaging the specific subject, you see. So these are some things I'm struggling with—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —right now. And, you know, I confronted it completely in the sense that at Kohler I made a frying pan, and I made a I-don't-know-what. [They laugh.] A big, heavy I-don't-know-what.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So those things scare me, those objects, because without understanding them as documents of that process, they could very easily just assimilate into the realm of modern sculptural form, you know. And I don't know how I feel about that. It seems suddenly kind of ambivalent. So I am struggling with that. Yes. So here's where we are. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. It's nice to be in the interview so up to absolutely the current moment of where you are.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Because that's not often the case, to be able to be surrounded by work that's very much in process.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it's like when I teach, I talk to my students about, like, the importance of leading with unknowns and unresolved ideas because then, you know, you've got something to work on. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I had left Kohler with these two kind of complete bodies of work, but no way to continue facilitating that mode of making. And I thought that I was maybe going to come back and continue casting. I started to make notes, you know, like "What if I cast concrete? What if I, you know, cast resins or whatever." But that feels inauthentic. And I'm, like, less interested in exploring the casting out of that context. You know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Absolutely. In the context.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I don't have the impetus for it right now. So, I mean, I did casting before in my work, like to cast the drip edge of something. But, you know, to just kind of keep casting for casting's sake, I don't really understand the role of that at this point.

MS. RIEDEL: We were just looking at the jewelry, too, that you did recently. When was that completed?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That was right before Kohler.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That was, like, basically the summer when my sabbatical began.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I had a lot of like, you know, kind of anxiety and energy. Get out of the school mode. And I just started flinging this tin around and kind of dumping it on top of commercial chain. And then having those things silver-plated like a costume jewelry strategy. And they're funny. You know, they're very funny.

MS. RIEDEL: They are. [They laugh.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And they're big and they're aggressive, and they're costume jewelry, you know. I like them a lot.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I think they were fairly well received.

MS. RIEDEL: And they were done concurrently with pieces like *Wooden* and the cups?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And the silver cups.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But it was a schizophrenic moment. Then entering into Kohler. And then still being extremely nervous in that environment. But being able to pull out two bodies of—two discrete bodies of work from that. It seemed productive. But then now I'm foisted back into the unknown here.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That actually is an interesting segue into teaching; because one of the things we were talking about I think off disc as we were heading down here was the isolation of the studio experience. And here you are now struggling with a new body of work, trying to figure out what direction, how it's going to evolve. But you're not just working only in the studio. You're interrupted on a regular basis by teaching.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe this would be a good time to segue into—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Sure.

MS. RIEDEL: —the experience of both teaching and now heading up the art department at New Paltz.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, yes. You know teaching has so many wonderful things, and it is so intimidating at the same time. There's a tremendous amount of responsibility. And then there's a lot of identity crises that can happen throughout. I mean, you've got this question— You're kind of constantly questioning whose ideas they are. Like, as you're invested—I mean, I'd say like probably the ultimate compliment is for your students to exceed you, right? Just like parenting.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I don't have kids, you know. But if I did, I would imagine that that's the goal. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, you know, you want this to happen. And then you have to help them to facilitate their own direction and offer information and advice as warranted. And then sometimes you have to, you know, check yourself from giving too much information. Either because it's *your* information in that you're, like, superimposing your own agenda on somebody else's research, which is problematic. And then to feel like you've already given so much at the office, you know what I mean? Then you come home, and you have this—maybe I shouldn't say *you*—but *I* have this tremendous challenge to discern if this is my idea or is this being dragged back from the studio. So it's really an interesting process of giving and receiving. And it's constant dialog. And then there's also the idea that we're working together on building a community of inquiry. We are, you know, setting a pace as a collective for what the future of the field is going to be.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So have you developed specific thoughts about curriculum that you think are essential? Have you developed a certain philosophy of how to best advance the field?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I think it's a little bit of all the above. [Laughs.] You know, I think that—I have in my role as chair only been teaching the grad students right now. And so they come with, like, a range of skills and experiences. But then the expectation is that you're going to be talking to them more theoretically.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: However, there is this thing where I feel that there needs to be some real emphasis on making. I think there's a lot of image-making that goes on that is [inaudible] craftsmanship per se. So how can I bring some of those, like, basic or fundamental principles at the graduate level as interesting bounds. And then of course at the undergraduate level, there's this need to cover a lot of basic information and tool technology. But there's the need to grow and tend with ideation. So trying to make assignments happen that are provocative on both fronts. Trying to accept the fact that people are not going to be masters of the craft in the short time that it takes for somebody to gain an MFA, you know. I still, you know, have to—in my various series of work, it's like I constantly have to retool my own techniques and technologies toward the next body of work. So suddenly, if I'm interested in enameling, I don't know anything about enameling. It's self-taught at this point. So I've got to like, you know, accept failure and a bunch of parts get thrown into a box and hidden in the attic somewhere, you know. And knowing that this is just the procedure toward some other goal of mine. So they leave as imperfect thinkers and imperfect makers. But hopefully with a deep enough investment in a sense of themselves as having a voice and some ability to articulate that voice through the made and exhibited object. Or used, or worn, or whatever the appropriate context is. Giving them some sense of themselves within a greater world view and a cultural view, a social view of like-minded artists. These are important things to address and to encompass

within any curriculum.

MS. RIEDEL: And how has chairing the entire art department—you said nine different divisions, I believe.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How has that affected your thoughts on teaching?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, it's huge. You know, I have been known to be maybe like an *über*-disciplinarian, you know. [They laugh.] I mean, I have decided that metal is my material, for example. And it's not to say that I wouldn't combine metal with leather, metal with images, metal with, you know, sound or whatever. Metal as an installation or as a wearable or on the table or whatever. But there is a point where I felt that I needed to draw a certain line around what I was hoping to achieve in this lifetime, you know. And so to make a commitment and to kind of perpetually ask myself "What is this thing, metal, the material, the feel, the practice, etc., that's a locus for me?" But we're in a time now where this generation is consumers. They consume images. They consume ideas. They're not producers per se. And that reality has affected a lot of the content within the academy, I think. And also then how do you provoke those people toward a productive role when they can shop—? They're, like, shoppers for media and outlets and sources, you know? So they're very good at researching, actually, and being facile and nimble and so forth. But they're not loyalists by any stretch toward any particular way of working.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So even within metal, we often have students—and by *we* I say me and Jamie Bennett; he's my colleague and senior colleague in the metal program at New Paltz; but also John Cogswell and now Arthur Hash, who is filling in for me while I'm doing the chair thing. You know, we—What was I saying? [Laughs.] What was I saying?

MS. RIEDEL: You were talking about attaining some sort of focus [inaudible] the use of metal and what you wanted to accomplish at this particular time.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. And we have, like, very specific ideas about what we think these people should be knowing. But I, the chair—[laughs]—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —have to understand what's good for the greater population of our students. And I see that within metal, over the years of my time there, I have, like, made demands on departmental decisions that serve metal, the program.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But as chair, I've also seen that that kind of fiefdom, you know, exists in nine different ways throughout the broader art department. And is worthy of preserving and protecting in certain contexts and needs to be undermined in others, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: You're just the one to do it.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [They laugh.] It's terrible. It is terrible. But, yes, it's harsh. It's harsh. And I think that the other day you and I were talking about the 3-D, 4-D, digital, you know, advancements going on. And, like, from a metals perspective, you know, I hit metal with a hammer. So how involved can I be, you know, with that. But as an educator and as an administrator, I recognize that it's absolutely crucial to facilitate our current and future students' awareness and opportunities in the realm of digital technologies. So even while I'm advocating for that, I'm also recognizing it is somewhat of an awkward place to be. It makes what I do even more historical—[laughs]—in the present day. And jewelry doesn't have necessarily the same problem because jewelry has always been made out of a variety of materials, you know. And it has different problems right now in its perpetual struggle for identity as a legitimate art form. Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But metalsmithing, which is a thing that's defined by two words—*metal* and *smithing*—[laughs]—in some ways is so obvious what it is, and in other ways it becomes very complicated as it partners with all different things.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, that was actually another question: How your ideas about material culture or craft and/or design, formalism, what you described as aesthetic atheism, how that affects your teaching as opposed to your work? How those things come into play?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, in oh so many ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I mean, like, the formalism thing, for example, or the whole brooch dynamic. I mean, I think that there's this tendency for people to superimpose that kind of language onto a piece of jewelry, and it's often not appropriate. Like, you can't just simply make a Donald Judd piece into a brooch. And, you know, that will always be a souvenir of a Donald Judd piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Which is what jewelry does really well. Jewelry is an awesome souvenir. [They laugh.] You know? And I say that with, like, the utmost respect, you know, for what that is, because there's a lot of other art forms would like to, you know, participate in that idea. And certain forms are more conducive to it than others.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that's sort of content area is excellent for a jeweler to explore—among many, many other things, of course. But just as an example. Where the big *F* Formalism and the small *f* formalism collide. [Laughs.] So that conversation is a difficult one in perpetual need of rediscovery. What were some of the other—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, craft, design—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Popular culture.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Material culture.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: We have regular seminars. I teach the seminar in the fall, and Jamie gets it in the spring. So for me it's kind of an opportunity to bring in the new people, try to get the voice of the second-year students, give them, like, kind of a leadership role in a way and a mentoring role. Because people come to our program with a range of experience. Some are very well versed. Some are excellent readers and researchers. And then some have never really endeavored to read or to kind of be in a seminar environment. It just hasn't been their background. But I suspect that everybody's got something to bring to the table for discussion. So trying to be inventive about the ways to do that. But also most of my assigned reading somehow refers back to craft. I feel compelled to inform people about the field. But not in, like, an art historical framework necessarily. So I tend to try to build ideas around things that I consider important to the craftsman or to metalsmithing specifically. Whereas Jamie's seminar tends to be more of an art seminar in a broader sense.

MS. RIEDEL: I've got you.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But it's like we've created our own monster, as we always tell the students, "Oh, you should look at, you know, Wolfgang Laib's work or whatever." And, you know, they say, "Well, what does that have to do with jewelry and metalsmithing, and shouldn't they be looking at, I don't know, like Puiforcat or like"—you know what I mean? Like there is some kind of specific craft moment, design moment, historical moment, or contemporary moment that they should be looking at. Another thing that gets very muddy is the amount of product that's going on that's very influential from a consumer standpoint.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But you've got a ton of design out there, and it's all sexy and sassy. But in the end it's stuff you buy, you know. It's decorative. So it's funny because the rhetoric in academia has been to really find significant—identify significant meaning in the work that we do. And the premise is that it's tied to a theoretical construct, in essence. But from a practical standpoint, students are often interested in and often need to know those skills to survive. That's not to say that you couldn't survive within the realm of theoretical investigations. But that there are other opportunities by which to capitalize on your knowledge and your skill and that may turn into a design enterprise or something else.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So how do you facilitate that? So on the one hand I think that not every program can be all things to all people. But at the undergraduate level there is a bit of a requirement to show, to have a curriculum that can facilitate various directions, postgraduate directions. At the graduate level you can afford to be much more specific and say, "If you come to this program, critical thinking is going to be key to your experience here." You know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that is a given. And at the same time we're introducing, you know, these technologies that are going to be accessed by the whole department and not owned by any particular area. And this is suddenly creating, like, interesting challenges, too, in terms of, like, intellectual ownership of curriculum within programmatic discourse. So, you know, who owns 3-D technology? Like, what is that? Or who owns design? You know. And how do we appraise design as we move from freshman year to MFA? And what is that? Big *D,* little *d*, design. We're experiencing some rainfall. And there is the possibility that the power gets shut off. Here we live in the country. So I just want to say that. [They laugh.] If it does, we'll know what to do. You know, we have recently had some important searches within our department. And they've been cross-disciplinary positions. So it's interesting now that people come in having been hired without allegiance to any particular area, zone, or program per se. But at the same time, they're hired for their expertise. And that expertise might be that they're multivalent, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then their introduction to things as simple as committee meetings and stuff like that, where they're not voting to represent any discrete program per se, starts to open up a whole other can of worms, but interesting opportunities to grow.

MS. RIEDEL: You've taught at Penland's [School of Crafts, Penland, NC]. Have you taught at other craft schools?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Yes. The Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, ME, and Peter's Valley in Layton, NJ. –MMG]

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned residencies. This might be a good time to talk about the value of those. And then in relation to the craft schools and to residencies, what do you think of as the significance of university programs for craft?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Hmm. Interesting. Well, you know, I have been as a student, even, like, currently—right?—going to these artists' residencies, which I think are opportunities to be in that, you know, to re-immerse. So it's got parallels to, you know, being in school, even if you're the only student and in fact you're the only person in the room. I mean, like at MacDowell Colony [Peterborough, NH], which I did in the early nineties, it was really too early, frankly, for me, I think. I don't think—I think—I was only there for three weeks, and I don't think that I had the maturity necessarily to appreciate the experience. But I think I had some interesting ideas come out of that experience. But I went there, and I worked with cardboard and a glue gun primarily. So I kind of knew that the terms would be limited.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So in that way it was like a fast [inaudible] you know. And so that's an exciting thing. And I did a residency at the Banff Center, and that was, like, really being back in school in the sense it was 40 artists, and we were brought into that—we all applied to the theme. It was a theme-based residency.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And the theme was surface. So, I mean, surface is really important in my work and important in everybody's work. But the question there was, like, what's the surface of sound? What is the surface of Web design? How is somebody who's working sculpturally or working interdisciplinarily approach the subject of surface in their work. And it was a fairly structured residency in the sense that there were—they had, like, mentor critics kind of on hand to lead discussion groups and so forth. And so—and because it was an international residency, there were people from, you know, Cuba, all over the place. But I say Cuba as an instance of, like, an artist that we in the United States don't normally get to hang out with.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know. And to learn these varying perspectives.

MA. RIEDEL: What year was this for?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That was right at the end of 1999.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And so it was kind of a freaky time to be there. And I would say of the 40 people, probably only eight really worked in traditional media. Most people showed up with discs, and they left with discs, you know. And I had to build crates to ship my work. [Laughs.] But, you know, it was very interesting that there would be these really wonderful conversations between video artists, you know, Web designers, musicians, painters, you know. The whole thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It was very cool. So that was a wonderful opportunity. And then the Kohler thing, which was, again, extremely structured. But it had to be for survival. But also you could decide not to work hard or to work harder, you know. I mean, I saw that I had to be there. There was nothing else to do really except for be in the factory. So you were so tired by the time you got home, that you could just watch *American Idol* and then go to bed. You know. Like that was it. [Laughs.] But it just—the head space of each of these opportunities is very different and really precious. Then as a teacher, I've had these precious opportunities. So, you know, you go to, like, Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME] or Penland, and you're working with a completely different demographic. Yes, there were some college students in there. So there's some familiar personalities. But then there are all ages represented, a variety of classes and backgrounds and so forth. And so it's always a learning experience as much as it's a giving experience from the teaching perspective. My relationship with Haystack goes back pretty far because we went there on a class trip, like, when I was an undergrad.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I went there, and that's where I actually first met Jamie.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And Fred Woell. And I can't remember if it was BU [Boston University] and New Paltz and, or if it was, I think it was BU and UArts. We met up there for, like, a little weekend retreat. And I met Bob Ebendorf at that time as well. And I just remember, like, you know, being encouraged to work in that beautiful natural environment and how special it was. So then to go back again as a student and then again as a teacher, it's just a really resonant setting and vibe. It was incredible. And then I've taught as a visiting artist a number of times to give lectures here and there and crits.

MS. RIEDEL: At Haystack?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No, in university settings, right? But also to have the opportunity to go for a longer period of time. I did something at the university HDK in Gothenburg, Sweden. I was brought in there to work with these people, students, on a specific assignment where they had been—they received these wooden toolboxes. And their plan was to make, like, a portable gallery. Everybody made their own kind of valise. And then they traveled in the United States and showed these things. So I went over there and helped them on that project as, like, a critic at large kind of. And that was really amazing, to be in Sweden and to learn, like, a different pace and to be working with a more mature student body and, you know, just in age for example; not necessarily in intellect. But it's an older student body. And it's a design school in a big way. So that was an interesting teaching opportunity.

But the one that really blew my mind was at the Royal College of Art [London, UK]. And they have this week-long master class series where they invite four people to come in and work with their students. But you're also supposed to make a piece for their collection; they had a study collection, which I believe is being gifted to the V&A [Victoria & Albert Museum, London]. So that was such an amazing time for me because I was going there to produce as well as to teach and in a really intense, concentrated period of time.

MS. RIEDEL: One week?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: One week. And the teaching there is very, very different from the teaching here. Essentially there's, like, a divide between the technical teaching and the conceptual teaching. I don't know if that's the case now. But this was, like, in the year 2004, I think it was. So, you know, I went there and I had to kind of convince the technician to let me use the tools. And a big part of it is, I think, because the curriculum has a design primacy to it.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So when you see the work—and I happened to be there to see their final show—the work was exquisitely made. But it's kind of a combination of their personal making and also outsourcing. It's like they're trained to approach it as product, right? And nothing really gets started in the studio until the technician shows up, puts his white lab coat on. And then the machines are turned on. And it's like the gas gets turned off when they leave, you know. So I was there scrambling to, like, get all my metal annealed by Friday afternoon because I knew there was going to be no gas for the entire weekend. And I had managed to beg some tools. And it wasn't until the guy came back at the end of the weekend; Monday morning at eight-thirty, the technician walked in. And he saw what I had accomplished over the weekend. And then he gave me the keys to the cabinet. [They laugh.] So it was funny that I was basically in this space between the technician and the professor, and, you know, the making and the thinking. And it was quite the honor actually for him to trust me enough to, you know.

So by the end of my time there, he's, like, asking me about our shop and what kind of tools we have, and how do we, you know— It was very funny for, like, this whole tech talk to occur, because I don't think it's customary for the visiting artist to get down and dirty like that in that context. And maybe it's different because the other artists were jewelers. And I think, again, with jewelry and with the variety of materials and stuff going on, there's a lot more kind of automatic making or invention outside of the strictures of craftsmanship that the technicians have purview of. So whereas I was teaching metalwork—[laughs]—so different expectation. And, like, I had this conversation with one student there. And again, I went there and gave, like, conflation was kind of the assignment that I gave: Was how are we going to bring together these disparate ideas, images, and forms and ways of working toward a single outcome.

So I was talking to one student in the class, and I remember saying, you know, "Well, what are you going to do?" He's saying, "Well, I'm going to make this bowl, and it's going to have this thing and that." So I, of course, am saying, "Well, you're going to make the bowl. How are you going to make it? Is it going to be woven, raised, fabricated, you know, cardboard. Describe to me how you're going to make the bowl." And he said, "I'm going to have Peter spin it on Monday." So, like, he had already known that it was going to be produced by somebody else in lathe tool technology.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So it was, like, there was no possibility of finding content *through* the making so much.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: That was just so very different than the way that I was used to thinking about making

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Or, and again, if you always talk about, like, the American sensibility, and we're always accused of being narrative, you know, and maybe a little too sugarcoated. I get the impression that that's a dis, you know, the narrative impulse. But on the other hand, there's a little more autobiography or a little more personal investment in a way that comes through that struggle.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I don't think of my own work as narrative. I think I might have said that yesterday.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But I understand it as having my personality imprinted into it.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But it's funny.

MS. RIEDEL: So we talked about this yesterday, the question is: Among all these different experiences, does one or a few stand out as your most rewarding educational experience?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I think that, like, to get it down to a single thing—I know we talked yesterday about, like, the fact that I went straight through to grad school. And I don't know if I made it clear about how I felt that if I hadn't done that, you know, I either retrospectively became aware of this or maybe even knew it at the time. But I would never have allowed myself the time to discover things I've discovered about myself and my capacity to speak through this material and this process and this history of making, you know. I'm not sure that I would have been able to put a voice to the craft the way that I have. I mean, I've always tried to assert my work into contemporary art discourse. And at the same time, you know, uphold the standards of its identity within the context of craft history. So the head space to afford that kind of, like, to build confidence around that as an agenda, would not have come to me, I don't think, so readily had I taken the time off.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So having that continuity without any break was really important for you.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Because I knew in undergrad that I had more to say than I was saying with the work I was doing. I knew that I was an opinionated person. [They laugh.] But I had not been able to connect, like, you know, that perspective with art-making per se. And I think that the commodity aspect of my skills would have superseded my ability to get to that place.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that's probably—

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible], yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Critically a really important moment for me. But more broadly and reflectively I would say that there are a tremendous amount of students of mine that are teaching now. And so, you know, the bad thing is that I'm competing with them for students. [Laughs] But the good and the very flattering thing is that they perpetuate our honed discourse from seminars and theses and, you know, all the various critiques that we've had. So while I applaud them for developing their own programs and their own identities and their own assertions about where pedagogy needs to reside for people now within this realm, I still see that there's this connection: there's independence and allegiance.

MS. RIEDEL: Which leads to another question regarding community. And is there a community that has been important to your development as an artist? It certainly sounds like there has been in terms of your teaching.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But do you think it's true in terms of your own work as well?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, I think that there is. Clearly, the Society of North American Goldsmiths has provided a tremendous amount of community. But it's the family you love and hate at the same time. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know, it can get a little predictable. When I go to the conferences, which I try to attend regularly but you sometimes miss a couple, I sometimes feel a little overwhelmed by how familiar I am with everybody there. But I try to make it a point to have, you know, lunch or dinner with somebody that I don't know. You know, have some sort of conversation to meet new people. And then the other thing about it, it's such a huge community that its efficacy can be in question, I think. I mean, right now they're struggling with trying to figure out whether they should change the name. And it is a silly name in a way. But it's always provided a certain rudder.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I know that Kurt Matzdorf was one of the extremely persistent—he demanded that the name include "goldsmiths" at the onset, like in 1965 or whenever they formed SNAG. So, you know, that was a big fight back then. But my concern about it is it doesn't really address the things that I'm interested in. So, you know, I see it really as a jewelry community primarily. And then when you think, well, what is the sculpture community, and there is no real distinct holloware community. There's the Society of American Silversmiths. But I haven't endeavored to join that community. So I guess I'm cagey like that. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And is it because the concerns of SNAG are much more in keeping, I would imagine, with what your concerns are, even though there is a jewelry focus? There is a conceptual and a critical arm to be sure.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. It's invested in currents, you know, artistic currents. And of course it's invested in pedagogy. So like NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts], the ceramics organization, SNAG has that in its mission. And in fact sometimes it slips in and out of that mission. And I'm one of those pains, you know, who keep bringing it up. Because—and I think that Stanley Lechtzin is similarly minded. Just put that down in the record books—[laughs]—as me and Stanley being similarly minded, because he's an argumentative fellow that I've enjoyed arguing with over the years. But also have tremendous respect for him. I mean, he insists on the educational priority for SNAG, as I do.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Given all of what we've just discussed, another question here: What difference do you see, besides what we've already discussed, between university-trained artists and somebody who's learned their skill, their craft, their concepts outside of the university? Do you see one?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: A difference?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, yes. Tremendous. Tremendous. You know, it's kind of funny, though, because I think crafts is always a learned—it's fairly always a learned thing. I mean, all art-making or making in general is a learned thing. But it has teaching kind of embedded in it. So that teaching doesn't necessarily have to happen in a university setting. But somebody has always taught somebody something about craft, it seems. So I'm interested in that interrelationship. I think that some of the street stuff that's happening, like—and I think of auto body and chop shops and that, you know, kind of culture, car culture and bike culture, and it's really interesting. But they're not asking the same questions obviously. Clearly the academy affords the time and opportunity to ask questions that may never be answered. And that the questioning is more important than the answering

often. [Laughs.] And people that are learning outside of that context don't necessarily have that goal in mind. And in fact if their goal is to make a living directly, that sets up different priorities for the work. I'm sure that if I didn't have a teaching job, my work would have to change. It's too [inaudible]. But like, I look at somebody like Tom Joyce who's, like, an incredible, brilliant, wonderful artist, who—he doesn't have a college degree, you know. So it's wrong to think that the academy breeds smart people, or that only smart people are in the academy. Because there are plenty of stupid people in the academy. And there are plenty of smart people that aren't in it, and maybe they're smarter for it. [Laughs.] It tends to galvanize a certain privileged perspective. You have to kind of work hard to scrutinize and, you know, open that up.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. I'm going to pause this for a moment.

[END DISC 6.]

MS. RIEDEL: All right. Well, circling back around and having a look at some of the questions that we need to be sure and address here, we certainly have talked about influences in your career. Is there anything, any one, any particular people or movements, professors, artists, that have really been significant to your career that we haven't mentioned yet, that come to mind? You'll probably think about them tomorrow.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I know, exactly. We have talked about so many things. Well, my on-again, off-again affair with Duchamp [laughs] cannot be ignored.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then, you know, respect for Dada and Fluxus in general as, like, major movements that I think about a lot. I remember being, you know, motivated by certain—I'm always hoping for that epiphany when you look at art or when you come across a good book and, you know, that kind of thing. And you can't plan for them. But they are few and far between, and sometimes you're being influenced by things that don't have anything to do with what you're working on, but they just get you.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: One such moment was when I went to the M-A-K [Vienna, Osterreichisches Museum fuer angewandte Kunst], and Ken, my husband—Ken Gray—who happens to be an incredible, influential artist for me, and also a great critic; he's always up for engagement on some subject of work that we're engaged in. But he and I were at the M-A-K, which is this incredible museum in Vienna, the Museum fuer angewandte Kunst, something like that. Excuse my accent. Applied arts basically. So they have this great exhibit from their collection, but they had artists do the curation and oversee some of the installation. So they had Donald Judd did a Chippendale room, for example. Jenny Holzer displayed something; I can't remember if she— Barbara Bloom did chairs. I don't know. They had a range of people. And the way that the work was displayed and intersected with, you know, curatorial ideas, art ideas, craft, history, coming together in this tremendous display, was great. But they have an adjacent contemporary wing for that museum. And in that wing was a Chris Burden show. So, you know, we walked through *Samson*, the piece, you know, the turnstile piece, to get in to see this other thing, which was a steam roller that was driven by a museum guard in a circle. It's kind of on a leverage system, where when it achieved a certain amount of speed, the steam roller lifted up into the air, and then the engine was cut, and it just floated in circles in the air in silence until it came down to a soft landing. It was cantilevered with an equally weighted stack of cement blocks. So it had reached this point where—and I'm sure it was hydraulic assist, but without getting too specific. The image of this, like, flying steam roller within the museum walls, it was just the most amazing [inaudible] experience.

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds extraordinary.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I know. It was a very crazy object in space for the relationship. And also incredibly awkward and poetic at the same time. Very profound aesthetic moment. And I would say something similar happened when I saw a Richard Artschwager show, like 25 years ago or something at the Whitney. And I confronted all that Formica. And one piece in particular was an elevator piece, but there was no movement. It was just simply an enclosure that simulated the space of an elevator. And it was so incredible to enter that shaft, that space, that cubicle and awkwardly stand there with other elevator riders, not going anywhere—[laughs]—and just try to negotiate that as an artwork and as an art impulse and as a critique. You know, it was very provocative.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think Jeff Koons's work comes to mind as something that is so banal and significant at the same time. And, you know, talk about craftsmanship and its importance in conveying an idea, I mean, he knows enough to hire the best people to get it done and practically broke the bank trying to execute those balloon animal sculptures of his. But that work is so euphoric and sardonic at the same time. It's hard to

disregard it, you know. Even though from a feminist standpoint there have been many challenges—[laughs]—it's still an extremely, amazingly well-calculated body of work. And, you know, on the other hand Tim Hawkinson's *Ǜberorgan* [2001], confronting that piece, is pretty amazing. To call it a piece is really to undermine it, because it's just an enormous, outrageous installation. I don't know if you've ever seen it in person. But it's like this enormous plastic-bags-taped-together musical instrument, giant bagpipe bodily, crazy, farting instrument. It's like this—[laughs]—insanely concocted and constructed object that takes up, like, a 50,000 square foot warehouse. I mean, it's huge.

MS. RIEDEL: Where it is?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, it was at Ace Projects [in New York -MMG], and it had shown up at MASS MoCA [Masssachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA] as well. But his work, that kind of McGyver approach to craft, the purposefulness, and then just also the dead-on humor of it is just really motivating. Humor is something that you and I have been talking about probably more off tape than on. But, you know, I think, like, H.C. Westermann, for example, as having a really interesting, wry sense of humor and craft in that work. So these are some artists that have influenced my thinking in some way.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I think in terms of writing, we were talking earlier about Dave Hickey, didn't we?

MS. RIEDEL: No, we didn't mention him. No, we did not.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, I thought we did. But, you know, the *Invisible Dragon* [: *Four Essays on Beauty.* Art Issues Press, 1993] is just an incredibly beautiful book. And I know we talked about beauty earlier. [Laughs.] But to read that book—and in fact to discover that book—from a question, you know, questioning the idea of beauty, the role of beauty or whatever. And then to read his appraisal of it but really to understand the instrumentality and the institutional authorities that are so important and influential and maybe too powerful from his perspective in terms of art's negotiated relationship with the audience. It's such an incredibly interesting book. And a very calculated, super sweet, and seductive, like, piece of writing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: He's a great writer. Although he's maybe not—I don't always agree with him. And to that extent I see Bruce Metcalf is in that same place. I mean, for years—I remember as a student reading Bruce's writing and just pulling my hair out over it. But on the other hand, he has been absolutely dedicated to the cause. And sometimes his writing style is meant to agitate, you know. It's a shock jock kind of style. But he has carefully honed it now into a much more kind of traditional form, I would say, that's a little less aggressive and more long-reaching in terms of what it hopes to accomplish. And I really appreciate his dedication to the task of trying to make some sense out of the stuff that we do. Trying to discern, frankly, the difference between art and craft in that empowering way. And it's like what we've been talking about also with jewelry, you know. This idea that jewelry has tried to make a name for itself and really assert itself. But sometimes does so—it cuts off its nose to spite its face sometimes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it might be better that it was jewelry straight up, you know. And I think that Bruce makes that argument about craft: Like, can't you see that what you already have—is [inaudible] kind of provocative and valuable and worthy of more sustenance?

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I do admire him for that, his steadfast—[laughs]—writing on that subject. Because I think when you and I were talking the other day. I like the art-craft debate. I know it's very unpopular to say that out loud. But personally I kind of insist on it—[laughs]—because, like, when everybody has to get it all—the interdisciplinary place that we're at doesn't necessarily mean that there can't be distinctions drawn, or in fact that we can preserve certain identities while we come together. I mean, we have this world now that's celebrating diversity.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And at the same time, you know, combining, comingling, and discerning those qualities, you know, that make things special, you know. It sounds strange to have to make the argument for it. But it's true. So when I hear curators and stuff talking about, "Oh, craft, art, design, it's all the same thing," I beg to differ. I really do.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you think, Myra, let's get it [inaudible] for the record. [They laugh.] What do you know about that art-craft debate and what about it is still significant to you after all this time.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: The part is that people are still—because they don't get it. Everybody gets all pissed off like somebody's attacking, somebody belittling them to draw the distinction. They think that the crafts spend so much time trying to be recognized as important, and that means art. The craft is plenty important, you know. I think Glenn Adamson, who, you know, is doing some very significant writing, makes the whole point about the supplemental, you know, about craft as supplemental to art. He uses the analogy of a picture frame compared to the picture within. And somebody would read that and think, "Well, that's just derogatory." But it's not. It's like, it's just understanding parameters productively, you know. And I think that that is a great subversive place to be. So I don't like when people say—Oh, I remember once giving a lecture about my work. And at the end somebody came up to me and said, "Oh, that's okay, Myra, I always thought your work was sculpture all along." And I, that was just, it made me mad because I felt like they were placating me in that way that is so annoying.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know, because I'm sitting there trying to say that the work isn't sculpture in the sense that it *depends* on its relationship to craft. You know, it depends on that history and that specific knowledge and that specific sweat equity to some extent to be realized. And so I'm not willing to say that those things don't add meaning to the work. They do. But it is rhetoric because in the end, you know, it occupies that traditional space of sculpture in that it's a three-dimensional object that embodies a form meant to be contemplated or to reflect, commemorate, discern, or whatever. I mean, it has that functional priority as an idea, functional to embody an idea.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So in that way it's more sculpture than a lot of things.

MS. RIEDEL: How would you—how do you—define it, or how do you describe it in a broader cosmos of the art world? How do you think of it?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, it depends what grant you're applying for. [They laugh.] Right?

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, there has been—I think your work has been very well described by a number of different people as an intersection or a nexus of craft and design and art. And even I think somebody has mentioned at one point technology. But it does seem, you know, the idea of playing among those worlds.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And it does seem—do you think that's accurate?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, I do. I think it's accurate in the sense that that I have kind of pushed it into that place to provoke that conversation to some extent.

MS. RIEDEL: Because it does not feel—I mean, it certainly lives in craft. But it does not feel exclusively of that world.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: In fact it has a hard time, I would say, surviving certain walls around it in that respect.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, like, if you go to SOFA [Sculpture, Objects, Functional Art Expo] for example, my work doesn't make sense at SOFA. It tries, but I've stopped showing there. I mean, it doesn't belong there.

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe jewelry, but, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But it doesn't, it can't—because it's not product-driven. So in that way it seems silly out there. I mean, it's kind of clumsy-looking. Even though a lot of people regard my work for its fine craftsmanship, it's not that kind of fine craftsmanship.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It again goes back to Bill Daley's idea about making intelligent decisions, you know, that

that's where the skill lies.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But, you know, it's not craft toward product per se.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Not at all.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So in that way it's more quote, uquote, fine art than craft. But because it sort of insists on this peripheral frame of reference—that's not necessarily peripheral, often very primary—it's always going to be craft dialogically.

MS. RIEDEL: It feels like it's very much of that space between—it feels like it's very much of an interdisciplinary nature within the arts. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. See, interdisciplinary I'll allow. Even while I keep swinging metal, you know, with a hammer against metal sheet or whatever. [Laughs] But that is true. I mean, I think that interdisciplinary is—there's a lot of superficial understanding about what that means. And it's confused with the idea of materiality.

MS. RIEDEL: It's [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. But academic—for example, it turns academic arguments.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's problem in the way it gets understood.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it's also convenient because people's jobs can be lost if everybody's interdisciplinary to the point that we don't need to hire two people. We can just have one person doing two things. There are other kind of pragmatic problems about that label as well.

MS. RIEDEL: And I definitely see the chair of the art department coming to—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. The chair is [inaudible]. Here is where the chair is upholding the specific nature of the discipline so as not to lose the position. Because you see all these positions advertised: "Oh, teach foundations, gallery director, librarian, and also thesis advisor or whatever." I mean—

MS. RIEDEL: And welding.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, welding on the side.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, you know, what is that?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. We've talked about certainly, in passing and in some specific instances, political and social commentary in your work. And we've talked about function. Anything more specific you'd like to say about those? We were talking off disc [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Well, I mean, like, we had talked yesterday about how all art is political in the sense that it purports to raise an issue and make a point about something. At least art that I'm interested in. [Laughs.] But then again, even the most banal landscape is still political in that it represents a conservative stance.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know what I mean?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, I mean, in essence that's a form of politics as well, right? But my work has certainly been motivated by understanding social contract with objects, understanding how objects are stand-ins for personal and public histories. And then thinking of myself as the author within the context of a long of line of practitioners, mostly men, you know. So I think that those things do affect how I approach my work. Function remains key to my investigation. And that could partly be—it could just be, like, a knee-jerk or whatever, the residue of understanding myself as a craftsman first and foremost. You know what I mean? Without that—that does undermine the work's place, I think. So function is key to my investigation. But clearly a lot of the work is

not functional as we understand that word to mean. They function socially.

MS. RIEDEL: Does this new work—this new work feels less engaged with function or utility to me than certainly much of the past work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. But you see that I'm struggling to bring to bring it back in, in some way.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I still am asking myself that same question, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's really interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So we'll see. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Technology. Has it had an effect on your work?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, certainly as an administrator and educator it does.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's also funny now to go and talk to a student at their bench space, they've got their computer on at all times now, you know. Like, being able to Google things. The fact that more people are writing on blogs than they are—maybe not more, but, I mean, the blog is a legitimate source of information and an outcome for writers. And, like, to understand that is significant; it's an important moment that we're in right now. The idea of technology I think of in terms of how it would facilitate more production rather than discover a new way of thinking about making per se? Or, like, that informs some of the kind of conceptual decisions I make? I'm not sure. In my mind I know that I need to learn it so that I can be better informed and better able to be critical about outcomes that are derived through new technology. I mean, I remember when people were first using, like, Photoshop or whatever. And they would be submitting portfolios, like, freshmen applicants, and you're looking at it. And I wouldn't know what the tooling was that would produce these swirling forms or whatever. But somebody that knows how to use that program knows that that's a filter, and you push one button, and it takes whatever's on there and swirls it. You know what I mean? So if you don't have enough knowledge about how that image is derived, then you can't necessarily teach to it or give productive advice critically toward it. So I feel compelled to know enough about it to at least keep abreast of it.

MS. RIEDEL: As a teacher primarily, not necessarily for your own work.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then, but in my own work, I mean, like, I struggle with, like—I think it might be fair to say that I have control issues—[laughs]—in terms of being able to let go of certain things. I mean, actually the Kohler thing's a perfect example. When I was there with Gary and Gary's tremendous work ethic, you know. He's in there at eight in the morning, I'm in there at eight in the morning. Why? I could have slept 'til nine. I don't know. Because he just made me be there at eight in the morning. That's what it felt like. Got to get in there and get to work, right? And then when he left, an architect came in to be the other person. And that guy was kind of, like, where are my people? You know, he had a completely different relationship with making than I did. And me, like the dumb-ass craftsman, had to learn everything from, you know, the ground up about every single process.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So like, "Oh, that's interesting. Show me how to do that. Oh, I need to learn how to use that tool. Oh, I have to go do this and this and this." And just like, why? It's a factory. So, you know, designing a tool—like designing the handle for a frying pan based on my aesthetics might not be the right design when there's a particular tool that fits into that hole to grind that edge in such a way, that you don't realize that until you're in that factory setting that handles are actually designed like this maybe because that's the tool that fits in there to deburr that part or whatever. You know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Like that kind of thinking. But I would be just so fascinated by those decisions and this

and that. But the other guy was going around like, you know, paying. Because you could outsource the work to other factory workers if you wanted to.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So he was designing and directing.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, he had no problem doing the enameling piece, because that was very hands-off. He just had to, like, kind of make face time with those people, and then, like— So that's what he spent his time doing was making the appropriate face time with the various shops in order to orchestrate the production of the work.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I *was* the producer of the work. So the difference between orchestration and hand combat power with the actual object.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Very different kind of conceptual framework. So that was—

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I like that choice of that word *combat.*

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, especially in that area where you've got so much, you know, hard-hat, gloves, ear protection, full faced, hooved boots [technically, I'm referring to boots with metatarsal guards –MMG], you know, like the whole time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Do you think of yourself as part of an international tradition or something that's particularly American?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, I think that given my interests in understanding the work in a historical context lent itself to a Eurocentric, you know, focus. So in that respect it's very American, you know. But hopefully some of the broader dialogs that the work provokes are, you know, beyond continents or countries or designations like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. What do you see as the similarities and the differences between your early, early work and what you're working on right now?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Hmm. Well—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, or we can talk about the more recently completed bodies of work maybe [inaudible].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Inaudible] I don't know if I can answer that question until I've finished this work.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Hmm. Well. I mean, I kind of wrote to this when I was writing about the Kohler work. You know, I was sort of summarizing some of the things that seemed persistent.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: The sense of history, the sense of portraiture or, you know, objects as metaphors for social contracts. And then the baseline expectation for a craft or, like, the insistence on the coming together of the making and the mind. That I'm always wanting those things to negotiate a special balance. So I hope that those are values that pervade all the work that I do.

MS. RIEDEL: That, yes. That makes sense. So succinct. [They laugh.] Exhibitions: How has the market for American craft changed in your lifetime? Has it?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Laughs.] Well, you know, it's one of those elusive—the market is a very elusive concept for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I don't make decisions based on it. So I guess I'm used to not—I'm used to having a show and not selling anything, you know. So from my own experience, people might come back for the work later. And it's not to say that I haven't sold any work. I have.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But I'm not as eager to move it that I want to just—I mean, it's kind of priced high because there's not much of it, you know. It's, like, that's the way it is. It's one of a kind. And it actually is—I've reconciled with that, you know. Sometimes it feels—I've kind of decided that the work does exist as a theoretical model. And in that way it's kind of museum-bound or pedestal-bound or whatever. And that is a limitation for the work, I realize. A part of me would love to see it on somebody's table with candles stuck in it.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know what I mean? Like there's I have that fantasy for the work. And again, going back to Dave Hickey, he resents the fact that there isn't more patronage, there isn't more of a gamble on the significance of artwork. That it goes right from the studio to the institution.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right? So the public doesn't really get to say what the value of anything is, you know. And, you know, I think that is an interesting point. But I'm intrigued by patronage for what I do. I've had some people give me parts for work. [Laughs.] In fact Sharon Church gave me that chafing dish that I nicely sliced up. So, you know, it was like she was supporting the work and then gives me that. And neither one of us care if it sells or what it's worth. What it's worth is my conversation with her and her being inspired enough to give me this to work to continue that conversation. Yes. But the marketability. In terms of what you asked earlier about product—about new technologies—I mean, I realize that some of the work that I've made could be transmuted into sweet, plastic injection-molded objects for sale, like in a design store, you know. And then sometimes I think, "Well, why don't I? Why isn't that? What is the role of the multiple in that way? Or outsourcing to get more productivity out of an idea." I don't know. I guess it's because I haven't had to think—I haven't had to execute that.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But I do recognize that there are some ideas that could translate well into a marketable project.

MS. RIEDEL: Which might be the opportunity for more interaction with the public.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. Because I do have remorse over the fact that my work is sort of hermetic in its—in that audience relationship. So that's a sadness, but it's also, you know, some people would be jealous by that, too, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I just kind of accept it as part of the requirement of my dual life as pedagogue and a practicing artist.

MS. RIEDEL: So is your experience mostly that your work goes to institutions directly from gallery sales?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Sometimes people rally behind a work, the friends of the dec arts or whatever, will get behind. And I've placed some pieces that way. One that comes to mind is at the Detroit Institute of Arts. There's that dec arts circle there that did a studio and then rallied behind a particular piece, a stopper, and they placed it in that collection. And there have been other significant collectors that have done the same. And it's interesting now to see some of the work showing up in museums. And I'm really grateful for that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: There is patronage—it has that moment where I think everybody realizes I already have a houseful of stuff. Me, too. But this work needs to be seen by more people. So let's get it in a museum, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that's great. And then people are all invested in the educational contract in that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: In the sense that those institutions function that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I do enjoy that.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you have—what has been your relationship with dealers over time?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, you know. I relate to dealers. No, I have had a variety of relationships, and I've had close relationships with galleries, galleries that have closed, right? Sybaris with Linda Ross and Arlene Selik; they were really supportive of my work. I think I had three shows there actually. Or maybe—I can't remember. Two or three. Paul Kotula, who used to work with Revolution Gallery and now does his own project space, has shown my work and been a supporter. But, you know, what is hard for me is, I wish I could have more work ready all the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: This is the problem with being an academic, is people in the gallery scene, actually—it's, like, they don't want to have anything to do with you if you're an academic, you know. And I'm not saying this about Paul per se. But he recognizes this challenge now. In fact he's become an academic now. So we'll see how he negotiates his time in the gallery compared to his time on his own research and his own curriculum, you know. But, like, when you apply for grants; you're not a professor. Like, you're not applying—you could apply for some grants as professor of such-and-such, and you're using the mantle of the institution to get the grant. But that doesn't really happen in the arts as much as it does in sciences, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Sciences need that relationship to qualify for the grant. Artists apply as artists, and they usually don't, you know, they remove their job from the resume.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So it's like you have three or four different resumes in this business.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. So, you know, you get somebody interested in your work, and then they realize you're an academic, and they pretty much say, "Well, you're not going to have the product."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: "There's not going to be a regular enough turnover to the volume that we need to sustain our relationship."

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Interesting.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So in that way I really do depend on those kind patrons that value the work and then rally around it to place it somewhere.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. Because that's quite different, I think, than many artists' experience.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. I mean, I'm showing with Sienna Gallery as well, and she's been really supportive. And of course, as you know, I had a long relationship with Susan Cummins [gallery] until it closed [but I remain connected to her –MMG].

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But Sienna, you know, she wants me to be working. And she's a big advocate for "just quit your job and be an artist," you know. And I appreciate her enthusiasm. If only there was health care.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. [They laugh.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You need to think about all things like that. But, I mean, I'm eager to talk to her about what I'm working on now because I don't see how any of it's marketable, you know. But I think of it as an interesting idea. So is she willing to support the interesting idea? I don't know. I have to ask.

MS. RIEDEL: Wasn't she the venue for the Kohler exhibition?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And for her it was good timing for her as well because she had just doubled her space. And she wanted to have a project space. And she—a lot of people are in the same

place right now of sticking their toes in a number of different puddles and seeing what feels right.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And being known for one thing, in her case a jewelry gallery. But being interested in a variety of things.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And how do you move forward from your base?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, you know, we kind of have an interesting—we're constantly goading each other. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds fairly successful.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: [Laughs.] I hope she's enjoying it. I do.

MS. RIEDEL: What sort of changes have you seen in craft in the past few decades?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: What?

MS. RIEDEL: Since you've been working. Craft.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: What changes I've seen in craft?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Hoo! Well, you know, there's been a lot of economies influencing craft over the years, right? So, like, I was a student in the eighties. I think there was an article in *American Craft* written. "Generation What?" it was called.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, maybe.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I forget. It's terrible that her name escapes me right now [Joyce Lovelace, Feb/Mar 2008 issue. eds.]. But the gist of the article was to look up people from in the eighties, nineties, and talk to them about where they're at now. And, you know, the whole Modern, Postmodern thing and the product/process thing is a big aspect.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And there's a big divide in craft on that front. And glass, you know, we all survived a glass moment, which still has its moment. But, I mean, it had a *big* moment there for a while.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it did.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And that bubble kind of burst.

MS. RIEDEL: And jewelry is kind of—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Jewelry is having a big moment now. But I feel that it's kind of spinning its wheels right now. And the audience feels pretty insular right now. So I'm really curious to know how that works and rides outside of its comfort zone.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But it's interesting to see it coming forward. Ceramics of course. Fibers is probably *the* most influential thing, only not in the crafts field. It's really more in the art world.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Interesting. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know, fibers has become sculpture basically. And fibers has become more of like a civil action. You know, in fact craft has moved much more clearly toward an activist role that's beyond the object in terms of, like, most kind of—to me the most current work is really trying to employ craft toward like a socialist agenda really. And it could be like a return to kind of craft's roots in an interesting way.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But I think that there's a lot of guilt about making objects in this day and age.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Again, compared to the eighties when there was no guilt about objects or making money. Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Now there's guilt about both. [Laughs] And so there's this—on the other hand there's this Etsy thing and the DIY [Do It Yourself] movement, right? Very huge, but I have a feeling that when the lights come on, there's going to be the same kind of qualitative and quantitative analyses that happened the first time around, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Where the craft show is going to get out of the old swimming pool and into the convention hall. And there's going to be people looking to the left or right and saying, "How did *you* get into this show?" Compared to "Come on, everybody, into the pool," right? And that is going to be market-driven. That competition is going to be determined by people's livelihood.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then on the other hand you've got people that are basically—the craft is almost in writing the grants and getting the network together and building the community around an idea to make something change, presumably for the betterment. So that's like what I mean about, like, the socialist, this kind of impulse toward society. And the outcome is not necessarily an object or even evident—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —in any kind of physical realm.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, it's a very strange time. And, you know, I'm still sitting here and hitting metal with a hammer. [Laughs.] And I'm curious about all these other things, you know. And I'm interested in the diversity of expression for craft right now.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It's really a fascinating time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, you know, we'll see. But I'm not ready to, like, throw my hammers out and take to the road.

MS. RIEDEL: Has there been— Does it affect the curriculum and the way you teach? Has it evolved over time?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, it certainly would have to, yes. And again, you have somebody coming in that is already using those technologies, for example, in terms of CAD. Or, you know, like, they say they've got the computer on their desk, and it's, like, "What are you working on?" "Oh, here it is." And they pull up a line wireframe drawing of an object that they're thinking about making. And they can spin that object upside down and backwards and zoom in on it and pull out on it, and show you three different skins, you know, for it. All different colors. What color do you want it to be? Push this button; now it's green. You know, that kind of ability to change your mind about something has never been so fast, you know. But you can still be completely noncommittal. [Laughs.] You just keep pushing those buttons and don't ever make anything.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it goes back to the divide that you were talking about the Royal College of Art, where there's no thing that's actually being worked out in the process of making, well, actually swinging the hammer. There's certainly the process of making in the CAD program.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, in that particular example that I used, yes, I'm sure there are. And again, like I was saying, the jewelry level, where I think that the bench space provides this kind of personal kind of quiet, special space, you know, for the jeweler. And you can sort of work—you can bring sewing together with soldering,

together with stone-setting, together with whatever. And you can bring metal and shells and leather and string and all these things together to make it. So it's kind of much more a privately realized body of work, not necessarily as dependent on the technician or the technical setup as the thing that I was pursuing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So I should say that my comments were related to the metalwork side of things.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But, yes. I guess the invention, the impulse to invent a way of working is important to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: As well as the analytical. And like we were talking, we've been talking about gesture and stuff like that. And, you know, and I've been talking about cutting away on big sheets of metal and not really knowing exactly where the form was going to begin or end. The freedom and the confidence to be able to act impulsively to an effect from a craft action on a form or whatever is important even while it may be in conflict with the overarching plan, you know. You have to try and make space for both those things to feed off of each other in the work.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

[END DISC 7, TRACK 1.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Myra Mimlitsch-Gray at the artist's studio and home in Stone Ridge, New York, on June twenty-fourth, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc number five [eight]. I think we have done a very good, thorough job here. So in closing just a few final questions and any final thoughts you may have—

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Sure.

MS. RIEDEL: —in the way of summary. Would you just discuss metal as a means of expression, and what you, after this period of time, feel are its strengths and its weaknesses. And what about it still compels you? What it does that nothing else can?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Well, I mean, it's compelling—it's a paradoxical material at the beginning, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, good point.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It could be fluid, it could be rigid; it's a crystal. It responds well to being put to the test. It's got inherent strength, but it can be so fragile.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And it can take on so many different physical attributes. So just as a structure to work with, it's great. But also to push against.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So, you know, the idea of being able—I think Marilyn da Silva had referred to drawing with a hammer in terms of, like, the raising process. And I completely understood what she meant. It can be as plastic as dough under certain conditions. And one of the things I love to do with it is hot forge silver, for example. And this is a process very well explored and exploited by Gary Noffke. And just the idea of being able to take scraps of metal, melt them down into an ingot, and forge it into a spoon, say, directly, no cutting, no measuring; I'm letting just that kind of pushing of the material occur, and then responding to it and defining a form out of this amorphous puddle is so fascinating. That without any kind of artistic impulse whatsoever, that act is still very satisfying. So I love it in that way. But metal—so we have metal, a material, an element. But also there's the baggage of its reference and, you know, its tremendous history. It's got all kinds of physical strength, but it has all kinds of emotional baggage, and I'm very sensitive to those aspects; but it's very motivational as well.

MS. RIEDEL: And it sounds like that history and those aspects are also very valuable aspects to push back against.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible] contextualize.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know, I'm interested in working in steel again, but not cast. I could see kind of getting back into a blacksmithing frame of reference or a mindset where I could enjoy pushing that metal but at a larger scale. I don't have the facility for it here. But I could see in the future that would be something worth exploring. But it is amazing to think of, you know, like, buildings built and bridges built and all these other incredible things out of metal. You know?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: It has definitely had its imprint on civilization from its discovery onward and has killed a lot of people and built a lot of things at the same time [laughs].

MS. RIEDEL: How has your work been received over time?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: I mean, I'm very happy with the way that it's progressed and the way that the audience has spurred me on to address other questions that arise and, you know, to continue to put it out there.

MS. RIEDEL: And it seems like there was a very good response really from the start.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes, it's exciting. You know, the graduate thesis work, which was essentially books made out of burnt paper—[laughs]—I was able to parlay that into more of a metal-specific conversation and then some early exhibition opportunities. And some rallying by collectors and so forth has helped to put the work in important places. And that's been a great honor, really. I was very excited about that. I received some grants that gave me funding so that then I could make the work bigger, engage more of the spectacle of the object. And then also to go to visit sites, to look very specifically and hands-on at other objects, historic objects and otherwise. So that kind of support feeds new work, feeds new opportunities, which feeds new support and so on. So I enjoy that. This color stuff has been— It seems again every time I come out, as I'm sure you've noticed, is that the work tends to happen in these series. And then there's a departure.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And then there's a new formal resolution to what the idea is, the next idea is being explored, and a body of work builds itself 'til it starts to become, like, manneristic. And then I have to cut it. Then there's that ruminating time, that quiet time, what am I doing? And then out comes the next body of work. So people tend to approach it with concern—[laughs]—and maybe some skepticism. And then it rallies, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: When you say they approach it with concern and skepticism, during the quiet period, do you mean?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: No. When the new work comes out.

MS. RIEDEL: When the new comes out. Okay. [Inaudible.]

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: You know they'll come out, and people will, like, say to me, "Well, whatever happened to that other stuff you were exploring?"

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I'm like, "Well, I explored it. [Laughs.] And now I'm doing this, you know." So it's very interesting how people will— I really appreciate people who collect in depth.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: They'll pick up a piece here, there, and onward, and hopefully will continue to do so. Because it *is* very important. And the way that the work gets kind of encapsulated by a glossy photograph somewhere or whatever, and people are, like, "You're the one who did this." And it's because—it could be quite simply because that's the best high resolution image that's available to somebody who's in a position of power to use it. And then that's the piece that you're known for for the rest of your life or something. You know, that's problematic when the work changes its temperament, its presence, and its spectacle, and its personality over time. So it's important to make sure that there's fresh images available and fresh outlets. Of course, as we know, image is king, and often the object never gets seen. And as you and I were talking earlier, the difference between picking up a cup and feeling its weight and putting the lip up to your mouth and that kind of thing is so important, so misunderstood through photographic representation.

MS. RIEDEL: The feel of something actually in your hand, not just even—yes, yes. We're looking at those small

cups and just noticing all the facets and the weight and the feel in the hand. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So—

MS. RIEDEL: You know, there's a real knowledge that comes with handling the object versus the image, yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And I think that's why Brad Collins and I have pursued the publications that we've done together *as* objects too. Because we recognize that they're representing objects, and they function as paperwork, documentation.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But we want them to be that the person picks up one of those catalogs and understands there's some conveyance of the impression of the object for that publication as well.

MS. RIEDEL: And the dimensionality of the object, the 3-D, the very 3-D aspect of those catalogs.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. As an accordion-bound pamphlet it stands up on end. And in fact one of them, the *Magnification 500 Times*, you know, there's images on— If you look at it from one side, you see all images. You look at it from the other side, you see all text. So that strategy's employed in a couple of different ways in those brochures. Yes, as if you could possibly recreate the circumstances of the object; you can't. But at least this sort of pays some attention to that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Now that's a good point. We've talked about—Your work definitely has series, it definitely has evolved in series with occasional singular pieces: I'm thinking of the chafing dish or *Mantel*. And there are certainly also multiple threads of continuity that run through it. But what about the work in particular matters to you?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: What about the work in particular that matters to me? Well, I want it to have longevity, you know. And that's not just as, like, a well-made thing or a precious thing. But I want it to be reflective of its time. But also to have an extended life in the mind of its audience. So hopefully it's not bogged down in stylistic trappings or too specific, too topically driven so as to become outpaced or irrelevant, you know. In that way maybe the historical reference becomes—offers some security in the sense that the thing's old to begin with. [Laughs.] And then that kind of—the fact that they often image, like, a state of being that can be understood throughout time, you know. They are mutations. And they're sort of—they're mutable, the form language is in like a transitional state often.

MS. RIEDEL: That's right. Yes.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: And that transition is sort of timeless.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: But I don't say this like I'm searching, I'm on that quest for immortality or whatever. But just that, you know, the objects assert themselves as a precious commentary on something. And precious not necessarily because they're made out of silver, because in often cases they're not, but the way they're handled. There's an apparent preciousness to them in the sense that there's like a philosophy of care about them. And that is a constant, I think, in the work. Even, like, this piece on the wall here where it's much more informal in the sense that the edges are hangin' out there and solder's apparent and that kind of thing. It's still handled with care.

MS. RIEDEL: This is the cut chafing dish piece were talking about. Does this have a title?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, its working title is *Table Scraps*. [They laugh.] And the titling is an important thing because like, you know, then going back to Duchamp, where you see a snow shovel lying there, and it's called "An Advance with a Broken Arm" or something like that [*In Advance of the Broken Arm,* 1915]. Certainly the urinal entitled *Fountain* [1917]. You know. I mean, that whole play and pun and double entendre, all those things are really important. And then the title is like a frame for the piece, too. It somehow completes the piece in certain ways. But it also extends the piece, because language is not—you know, is fungible. So that the viewer is going to have to process that title with that image and that object simultaneously through their own subjectivity, you know. And that interests me. So titling becomes like a play in the work sometimes.

MS. RIEDEL: We should mention some of the titles from those shows that we were talking about.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Oh, yes. Earlier we were talking about how, you know, particularly of course with the solo shows. I mean, the group shows, of course, are often the title is sometimes regrettable. I think there's this "Crafty Wafty" problem that happens where there's a cuteness factor that was good in committee but not good in the long run, you know. And it often hurts the object. It so determines the content of the total exhibition in a way, that the individual voices are somewhat muddled by that, and it can be problematic. But when you're have a solo exhibition, you have the chance to frame exhibition with a title, and that title can be an interesting summary of your work overall. Or at least I find that in our discussion here today, you know. It's like, looking at, my solo exhibitions I had "Magnification 500 Times," which of course was the planish mark series.

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

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: So that doesn't really—I mean, it helps to guide the viewer toward the fact that they're hammer marks per se, because they might not have noticed that, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: But it also works on figurative levels as well, not just simply descriptive, literal. But there is that—and I appreciated those titles [inaudible]. There's a historical figurative loadedness to it. There's a layeredness.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Right. And that *magnification* implies scrutiny—

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —or analysis, right? So there's, like, this scientific inquiry implied. And then "Conflation" was this idea of bringing, as I said earlier, idea, image, form, subject, and context together, you know. So these various states coming together, seemingly irreconcilable. But, you know, they get mashed up in interesting configurations and outcomes. "Interpreting Utility" is another show for 2004, which is a pretty straightforward title, but it definitely puts as a priority the functional inquiry in the work.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Then in 2005, I had a show at the Kohler Arts Center; "Drifting" was the title. And again showing that kind of, the ambiguity or the uncertainty about the role of these objects. And the role of my persistent investigation. And the kind of persistent conclusion through a smithed object. You know, that sort of self-scrutiny, I think, is reflected in "Drifting" as a title for a solo show. And presumably, if you're having a solo show, it's because you know what you're doing. [Laugh] So then to have the show and call it "Drifting," was a way to undermine my own intent, or at least to expose my own ambivalence. Then after the Kohler experience when Sienna gave me the—I should say Sienna Pati or Patti, her whole name there—gave me the opportunity to show that work, I called it "Force Times Distance." And I think because, first of all, I enjoyed the fact that those are three very different words: *force, times,* and *distance*. But also, of course, F x D, as in basically the jargon for work or the kind of physics understanding—although a superficial way to describe the essence of work. And that's what it really felt like, pushing a cart, grinding the thing, you know. There was so much work, so much force and forcefulness and a questioning of the forceful outcome, and then the time, the times, the historical times and the present time, and then just the distance that I traveled both personally and physically in producing that work seemed like a good way to summarize it.

And then the last show that I had of the solo kind was at Wexler Gallery in Philadelphia. It was similar to the Sienna show except it was more of a retrospective. And it was held in conjunction with the SNAG conference in Philadelphia. And I had been a featured speaker at SNAG. So I titled both my talk and the show "anti/icono/clastic." And this is kind of a pun. It's both an insider—it's an insider thing in terms of, like, in metalsmithing anticlastic raising—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: —is a particular term that was coined by Heikki Seppä, who just recently passed away. And we haven't had a chance to talk about Heikki Seppä here, but this might be the moment. He wrote probably *the* most influential 20th-century book on metalsmithing [*Form Emphasis for Metalsmiths,* 1978]. I guess Oppi Untracht's book [*Jewelry: Concepts and Technology,* 1982] was incredibly influential, but it's more of a world view and a technical view on jewelry-making. Whereas Heikki Seppä's was very poignant, very specific about the need to develop a new form language for silversmithing. And that the teapot was basically a dead end, you know, is the premise for the book. And then he proceeded to invent all this form language in names and approaches to coming up with these forms. I mean, he is like the ultimate Modernist in terms of, like, silversmithing for silversmithing's sake and the speed of light across the form and, you know, basically making questionable, like, decorative sculpture, but to exemplify the silversmith's prerogative and process without the outcome of a functional object. So it's kind of very political in that respect. But anticlastic is the term for the forms that he derived, where they're moving on two different opposing axes. So I incorporated that in the title. But also iconoclastic. So, you know, it reflected again my ambivalence about being so dogmatic about a preservationist stance for silversmithing per se. And also being willing to cast it asunder and say whether I'm

destroying its image or enhancing it or hanging onto an image that no longer exists—[laughs]—was kind of all circling around me as I developed that work and that lecture, in fact, in front of that audience that should be specifically invested in that conversation.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And who better to appreciate that than that audience?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. It's interesting to give a talk to 800 of your best friends. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: This was SNAG in 2009—2008?

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Nine, I guess. Philly. Nine, I think it was 2009. Yes, so it was not that long ago. But very daunting because this is an audience who knows you so well. And it's an audience—it's that very big community, but of many different opinions. And it's a teaching and learning audience. So it was challenging to speak—to recognize the opportunity to advocate. Not proselytize per se. [Laughs.] But definitely to advocate for some focused, introspective activity—[laughs]—for the field and for its future.

MS. RIEDEL: Which leads to where you might see your work going in the next ten to 20 years.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Yes. It's a very interesting challenge because I see the possibility of repeating myself, and I don't like that. So how do you invent new things, new directions, and at the same time protect and preserve the things that you hold dear? And there has to be editing, right? And there's editing from our values in order to make room for new discoveries and new values. You know, I live in fear of becoming conservative. [They laugh.] That's given me a laugh; I like that. But I want there to always be questioning. But when there's always questioning, then it's hard to make clear what you absolutely stand for because everything's up for grabs. But I feel that to know everything means that you don't need more information; you're done. And I clearly don't know anything. [Laughs.] Or everything. But I do want to know more. I'm up for it, the challenge to go to the unknown even more.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you.

MS. MIMLITSCH-GRAY: Well, thanks.

[END DISC 7, TRACK 2.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]