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Oral history interview with Roy Superior,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Roy Superior on June 29 and 30, 2010. The interview took place in the artist's home and studio in Williamsburg, Massachusetts, 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.

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

## Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Roy Superior at the artist's home and studio in Williamsburg, Massachusetts, on June 29, 2010, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, disc number one.

Good afternoon. Shall we start at the beginning? Let's cover a little of the biographical background.

ROY SUPERIOR: The early years before I was born?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, the early years before—your parents?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, the first thing I think that I ought to mention is where my name came from.

MS. RIEDEL: Please do.

MR. SUPERIOR: Because one doesn't grow up with a name like that without it having some effect.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: I grew up with an inferiority complex. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. SUPERIOR: And Roy Inferior was the first nickname that I had, which caused many fights. [Laughs.] Originally it was Zeviliansky. And at Ellis Island one of several brothers changed his name somehow to Superior. And they went from there to Montreal.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah-hah.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I don't know much about my great-grandparents at all, except that I do know that my parents are first cousins, which may explain a lot of things. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Your parents are first cousins!

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And where are they from?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: Originally where are they from?

MR. SUPERIOR: From Montreal. They were both born in Montreal.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And my father's parents moved to New Jersey, Elizabeth, New Jersey. And he met my mother when he was in college, I believe, at Tufts Dental School.

MS. RIEDEL: What was your father's name and your mother's?

MR. SUPERIOR: Daniel.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: Daniel Superior. And my mother's name was Ethel Shapiro.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: So there were a couple of Shapiros with an A, and a Superior, only one.

MS. RIEDEL: Did your relatives select that name, Superior? Or was it given to him at Ellis Island, do you know?

MR. SUPERIOR: I don't know. I wasn't there.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting. [They laugh.] I thought perhaps there was a family story.

MR. SUPERIOR: I'd have loved to have been a fly on the wall when that happened to see, because it's pretty presumptuous. I remember being in a student show when I was a student at Pratt and overhearing somebody say, gee, look at the grade back I got. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Is that true? Or are you telling a story?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, that's true.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And, you know, there are limitations on it, like you can say, "Hi, I'm Smith." I can't do that. Not without provoking people. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: You know instantly if I say, "I'm Superior," people say, "Who the hell do you think you are?"

MS. RIEDEL: So where and when were you born?

MR. SUPERIOR: I was born—[Phone rings.]

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I was born in 1934.

MS. RIEDEL: Where?

MR. SUPERIOR: In New York.

MS. RIEDEL: New York City?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: And my parents lived in Jackson Heights at that time.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I grew up—my first memories are of things like that living in an apartment that had a tar balcony. It was one flight off the ground above a butcher shop. And I remember playing with a hose on this balcony and spraying people as they walked in and out of the butcher shop. And I also have a very, very distinct memory of standing at the top of the stairs with my Superman cape and actually flying down and landing on my feet on the first floor. And I remember sitting on the front steps with my roller skates with the keys waiting for somebody to come by to tighten them up for me. [Laughs.] And I remember my very first art experience when I was four in kindergarten being taught how to draw a turkey. The teacher drew a circle, and we all drew a circle. And then a bigger circle. And then some feathers, some feet, an eye and a beak. And I could still draw that turkey. But I started to draw when I was four. Somewhere I have a painting from when I was four, and I have like my very first sketchbook which is filled with drawings of, among other things, people—fishermen—standing on docks with shark-like fish all over the place. I didn't know then, of course, I would become a fly fisherman dedicated, a purist, for over 40 years now.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Anyway, that was the beginning.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting, given the contraptions, the flying contraptions and the allegorical constructions that you—

MR. SUPERIOR: My mother made—my mother was a seamstress.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MR. SUPERIOR: She worked at Bergdorf Goodman among other places, and she made me a little Superman cape. [Laughs.] I guess he was my first hero. But I distinctly, clearly remember I was able to fly from the top floor of the stairs down to the landing.

MS. RIEDEL: You have a clear memory of that? Is it something you—

MR. SUPERIOR: I probably fell down a couple of bottom steps, that was it.

MS. RIEDEL: Or maybe it was a dream?

MR. SUPERIOR: But in memory I actually flew.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you dream? Was it something you might have dreamed, do you think?

MR. SUPERIOR: I might have dreamt it, but in my mind it's true. So we'll just let it go at that.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That explains the perfect introduction.

MR. SUPERIOR: I was not able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, however.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. But you could fly.

MR. SUPERIOR: I could fly.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Alright. Well, it's here on the record.

MR. SUPERIOR: On a flight of stairs down. [They laugh.] But I couldn't fly back up again.

MS. RIEDEL: So what was childhood like in Jackson Heights?

MR. SUPERIOR: What was what?

MS. RIEDEL: What was childhood like in New York? Were you in and out of museums?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, my mother took me to museums.

MS. RIEDEL: What did your father do?

MR. SUPERIOR: My father was a dentist.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: Then in 1939, they built a house in Great Neck, Long Island. And that's where my childhood was.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: We moved there in 1939. In 1941, on December 7th, I was in the movie theater. It was Sunday, December 7th. There's 400 ten-year-olds sitting there, right? Eating their free orange and white ice cream pops and watching Donald Duck. And all of a sudden the screen went blank, the lights came on, and somebody came out on the stage and said, "Well, all servicemen please report to their bases. The Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor." So 400 kids, all ten years old, well, nobody reported to the bases. But we all walked home looking like this.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. The sky.

MR. SUPERIOR: And my mother was an air raid warden. She had a white World War I style helmet with a symbol on it. And she would go out and blow the whistle during air raid drills and so forth. And my father enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor, and he wanted to go overseas. He never got overseas. He had a fight with his senior officer, a captain, when he went in as a second lieutenant, who had just graduated from dental school. My father

had been in practice for a long time. And he wanted my father to pull a tooth. My father said, "No. I can save that tooth." And he did. And the guy said, "You'll never get out of the United States because he knew he wanted to go." So my father served for four years in the Army; came back a bitter man because of the waste that he saw and the fact that he never got himself fulfilled.

MS. RIEDEL: He felt he could do a lot more good—

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: He felt he could do a lot more good overseas.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, yes. That's why he enlisted.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. And he was okay with leaving the family and your mother was up for that?

MR. SUPERIOR: My mother went—he was in Texas for a while. My mother went out there, and she was with him. And we had a live-in maid at that time who raised us during those years. And her name was Beatrice—Beebe.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember her last name?

MR. SUPERIOR: It may come to me later.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And how many siblings do you have?

MR. SUPERIOR: I have a younger sister, four years younger.

MS. RIEDEL: And her name?

MR. SUPERIOR: Caryl, C-A-R-Y-L.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And does she work in the arts at all?

MR. SUPERIOR: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: No, she's long since retired, and she lives with her husband out in California in a place near San Diego called Leisure Land.

MS. RIEDEL: I've heard of that.

MR. SUPERIOR: Which tells you a lot about them.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it does.

MR. SUPERIOR: And my brother-in-law just sent me a photograph of his new car, a Cadillac.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh. Yes. Okay. Different paths. Do you remember drawing from a very early age?

MR. SUPERIOR: I do. Yes. And I remember—

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like even before school you began to draw.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Oh, yes.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: And—

MS. RIEDEL: Was it something you were encouraged to do or were you naturally drawn towards it?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. I was recognized by family and friends as being very tal-ented, as a German doctor used to say to my mother: "He's very tal-ented." He said that 'til the day I went in, and he gave me a shot, and I threw up spaghetti all over him. After that I was no longer tal-ented. I had to go to another doctor. [Laughs.] I remember right after the war was over, when Beatrice left because her room became the office, we went to visit her and her family in Levittown, which was the little—tacky little shacks, you know. Bob Dylan? Perfect example. Other things I remember were in 1948 my father, after the war, he bought a black Chevy convertible. And that eventually became my first car. And we drove to Florida in that for a vacation. The one and only time I've ever

been there. And we could not stay in a motel until my father found one that did not say "whites only."

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. SUPERIOR: You know that little poem out there. This is the kind of person my father was, you know. We'd go to the movies every Sunday or something like that. And we'd sit up in the balcony being the smoking section. My father would light up a big cigar. People would move away. [Laughs.] And we'd watch the movie, usually a western, and he'd say, "That was a western with a moral." And then we'd go to the diner, and my mother would shovel all the biscuits into her pocketbook. And this is in Great Neck, the land of the rich and wannabe famous, where the original nouveau riche was invented.

MS. RIEDEL: Now was she taking the biscuits for later because she was frugal? Was she sharing them with somebody else?

MR. SUPERIOR: Everything. All of the above.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: She just could not waste the things.

MS. RIEDEL: Couldn't waste, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: But we always made a secret to-do of it. We'd slip her biscuits under the table, and she'd have this big pocketbook. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Was she like that before the war as well?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, I guess so.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: I remember getting lots of letters from my father during the war, and he would send home helmets and things like that. Somewhere I have a photograph of me in a World War II uniform standing like this, that typical kind of thing. Before the war we traveled. My mother and I traveled to visit our relatives in Montreal. And my grandfather was a jeweler. He was deaf as a stone. But he always had a big red moustache and a smile on his face. And I would go out on the balcony waiting for him to come home. He'd come striding down the street. And my grandmother, who was from Glasgow, a Scottish Jew, was very independent. And when she was sick, she'd sit in bed and sing "Don't Fence Me In." [Laughs.] So they were great. They were great. The other grandparents were not so great. Well, my grandmother was okay, my father's mother. But my grandfather was a loser. He got into the stock market and lost a lot of money. And then did all kinds of things trying to pressure his children into giving him more money. He lost it. He was —

MS. RIEDEL: Not all there mentally, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: I remember one day him coming to visit us and saying that he was going to turn in my Uncle Mosey, who had never gotten his citizenship papers, if my father didn't give him money. And that was the end of that. It was sad. I remember also their 50th wedding anniversary when they sat in chairs back to back, and they hadn't spoken to each other for years.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear! But your other grandfather was the jeweler.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you go to his shop with him, do you remember?

MR. SUPERIOR: I did. And I have—you know he wasn't a very creative jeweler; he just kind of put things together from things that were available. But, you know, he worked on watches; that's his watch up there.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's the piece you did the self-portrait painting. Yes, yes. So you must have then at a young age seen all those tiny little gears making things work.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. I don't have a great recollection of it. But, you know, it must have crept into my system somehow or other. Trying to think of—other than pouring water on people—that was my strongest memory of Jackson Heights.

MS. RIEDEL: So humor has been part of your life from the very start.

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, clearly.

MR. SUPERIOR: A prankster. I'll tell you about my favorite one of all time in a few minutes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: In Great Neck I was constantly being lectured about values because we were surrounded by all bad values, by people living in huge houses with Cadillacs parked in the driveway, never in the garage, but always out from where everybody could see them. Very well to do. Some very snobby schoolmates and very cliquish. And I grew up almost being anti-Semitic because of that. I remember my father when he went into the Army, he gave his practice to a young dentist who didn't return it to him when he got back. He kept the patients except for those who knew my father had come back. He was fit to be tied, furious. I remember constantly him yelling and screaming about people who stayed home and made money on the war effort. So we were surrounded by that kind of thing.

In junior high school, I had a crush on one of my teachers—no, in fourth grade—I had a crush on one of my teachers. And she called me her little artist. And in the fifth grade, I didn't have a very nice teacher. For sitting there and drawing pictures instead of paying attention, she made me stay after school until I'd filled up three big sheets of drawing paper with drawings. I loved it. Her discipline had exactly the opposite effect. So I have an authority thing—

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

MR. SUPERIOR: —ever since then.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were you drawing?

MR. SUPERIOR: Everything and anything. Baseball players. I have somewhere a little—some of that stuff. I have a little book of *Sports of the World*, pictures of every sport you can think of that I did when I was about that age.

MS. RIEDEL: And were these drawings from your mind, were these copies of things that you were seeing in magazines?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, I didn't copy much. I would look at pictures, but I didn't like to copy.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I either made them up, or I did them from life, which formed one of the bases of my whole teaching philosophy when teaching drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: Which is?

MR. SUPERIOR: Which is, the only thing you learn from copying photography is how to copy photographs. They can be very useful after you know how to draw, and a great time-saver. But for example I have a granddaughter who is very gifted in drawing. But she does most of her stuff copying photographs. And it drives me crazy, and I can't say a word because it drives my daughter crazy because it will hurt her self-esteem blah blah blah. I'm the one person in the family who knows what she needs to do and needs to know, and they just refuse to consult me on it.

MS. RIEDEL: How old is she?

MR. SUPERIOR: She's a junior in high school.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah!

MR. SUPERIOR: And now she's thinking of being a beautician. Alright [whispered].

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] We'll talk about that later.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. So I had a former life. I got married being a total virgin to the first girl that changed that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, before you get there, let's just go to—

MR. SUPERIOR: Wh-what?

MS. RIEDEL: Let's cover high school maybe before we jump into the first marriage.

MR. SUPERIOR: Okay. Alright. High school. Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there art classes in elementary school?

MR. SUPERIOR: We had art classes, and I was by far the star—the class artist.

MS. RIEDEL: Drawing, painting, any three-dimensional work?

MR. SUPERIOR: Not much painting, but drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I didn't do much painting. I didn't know much about color at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Uh-huh. Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I did a few little watercolors maybe, but it was always drawing, drawing, drawing. I was the art editor of the school paper.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And every week they did an article about one of the students, and I had a drawing of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Photographs at all or all drawing.

MR. SUPERIOR: No, from life.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, right. But were you taking photographs as well?

MR. SUPERIOR: No.

MS. RIEDEL: It was all drawing. And any 3-D work, any construction?

MR. SUPERIOR: No 3-D. I did have one class when I was a kid in which I had a little head. It was during the war. Her name was Dorothy Kuh. She was a sculptress. And K-U-H. And I had a kid's course with her. And I had a little bust of a soldier outside someplace that I did. But I don't think that left too much of a mark on me.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Three dimensions did not enter until much later. Much later.

MS. RIEDEL: And was art something that was valued in your family? Were your parents interested? Your mother was a seamstress.

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, yes. But mostly from the commercial potential.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I grew up in what was known as the golden age of illustration. With Norman Rockwell and N.C. Wyeth and all of that. And at the tail end of that, which came in the fifties, was when photography began to take over.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I graduated as an illustrator when it was on its way out. But I had dreams of glory of being a great illustrator.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that true even in high school? Was that something that you thought you would do from a very young age?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. I had never thought about anything else. I didn't know about being an artist.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Ah! So not many trips to museums, that sort of thing?

MR. SUPERIOR: It was draw and make some valuable use out of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And that was illustration, which was what I was going to do.



MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Where did you go to high school?

MR. SUPERIOR: Great Neck High School before there were two.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And you graduated in—

MR. SUPERIOR: Now it's Great Neck North and Great Neck South.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I went to the old one, which would be Great Neck North.

MS. RIEDEL: And you would have graduated in what, '52?

MR. SUPERIOR: Fifty-two.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: When I was about 16 I got a yen for music.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I had taken violin lessons and piano lessons. The piano lessons actually stopped with—speaking of Norman Rockwell, a very typical Rockwell scene: I actually climbed out of the window, as the piano teacher was coming down the front steps, with my baseball glove. [Laughs.] In the fourth grade I fell madly in love with a little girl named—I forget—who sat on the opposite corner. Never spoke to her, but I must mooned over her all the time. And she was in the orchestra. So I joined the orchestra. And within a week I brought home a trombone, a trumpet, a couple of other things. And then finally the violin. She was in the violin section.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah-hah!

MR. SUPERIOR: When we graduated from the sixth grade, for some reason, even though I thought I was doing all right, they didn't put me on the list for the seventh grade orchestra. So that was the end of that. But I still had a yen.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: So the violin that I had, I traded in for a ukulele, and I learned from Arthur Godfrey on television. And I then got a bigger ukulele. Then I got a big tenor ukulele, and I played that for a while. But there wasn't enough there, and I used to, you know, people would gather around and we'd sing these stupid little folk songs. And then I bought a harmonica. My first job was selling the *Great Neck News* for two cents, which I got to keep a penny. My second job was stacking books in the library, and I got fired from that because I spent all my time reading fairy tales. I read every fairy tale—I was a voracious reader. This is before television. I fortunately grew up before TV, which is very significant. So the illustrations of the fairy tales were also things that had a great effect on me.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think you had—

MR. SUPERIOR: I had every Oz book ever written, at one time. I loved the illustrations, all of them, from the very first one. I had a whole series of *Bomba, the Jungle Boy* books. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, that makes a lot of sense considering the drawings that we were looking at earlier, those fantastical—

MR. SUPERIOR: I read fairy tales. I read all—any book of fairy tales and Sherlock Holmes. I read the complete—when I was in graduate school at Yale, I went on a binge, and I read an entire shelf of H.G. Wells, like 40 volumes.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: I think almost everything he ever wrote.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That's interesting.

MR. SUPERIOR: [Inaudible.] Anyway in high school—

MS. RIEDEL: What about it was compelling to you?

MR. SUPERIOR: What?

MS. RIEDEL: What about it was especially compelling to you? The H.G. Wells, why were you driven to that work in particular?

MR. SUPERIOR: I missed that, I'm sorry.

MS. RIEDEL: Why the H.G. Wells? What about that was compelling?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, fantasy, science fiction, *War of the Worlds*, continuation of the fairy tales but a little more sophisticated. And I was in graduate school at that time. So it's a little different.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you drawing based on those books in graduate school?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, no, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Or was it a completely separate interest?

MR. SUPERIOR: Completely different. Anyway, going back to high school, I wanted very desperately to have the big Hohner four-octave harmonica, which cost then the humongous sum of \$13.50. I already had the smaller one and the middle-sized one. And it came in a beautiful wooden box. And I didn't get an allowance comparable to what the other kids did. If I wanted something, I had to work for it. I had to mow the lawn or this or that. I got a job pulling pegs in a piano store. And I would ride from Great Neck to Port Washington, which was two stops. I'd go in the morning, get on the train in Great Neck, run through the cars to avoid the conductor, and get off two stops later without having to pay. I would go down into the basement of the piano store and spend the whole day pulling pegs out of the old pianos. I'd come up, and in the wintertime it'd be dark. As soon as I had \$13.50 and the train fare, I quit the job. And bought a ticket to Flushing, got off, went to the music store, bought my harmonica, went home.

MS. RIEDEL: Very clear focus.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Strong sense of struggles.

MR. SUPERIOR: It was around this time that I began to listen to music, and I listened to—I hated popular music. "Mairzy doats and dozy doats and little lambsy divey, A kiddle divey, too. Wouldn't you?" I hated that stuff. And I would lie awake at night listening to things like the ballroom something; I forget the name of the show. There was also a show from Eddie Condon's, in New York, on Saturday nights. And I started hearing jazz. And one of my uncles had some instruments in his attic: a melaphone and an old Alber system clarinet. Well, I couldn't do much with the melaphone. But the clarinet I actually got some sound out of. And decided, okay, I'm going to get serious about this. And when I was 16, I started taking clarinet lessons. And it was a classical clarinet player. I took it for about a year and a half. And I remember buying—I would go into New York and haunt 47th Street where all the music stores were. And I'd buy transcriptions of jazz solos. And I remember bringing some Benny Goodman home and giving it to my piano teacher and saying, "Play that for me," because I couldn't. And he played every note. Amazing. But it just didn't sound right at all.

So when I was a senior in high school, I actually had a little band. I even have a recording of it somewhere, which I can't play because my turntable has died. But we were the Taproom Five, plus one or two, depending. My first band that I listened to was the Walt Disney group, Firehouse Five Plus Two. And I soon decided they were pretty corny. And I moved on to Sidney Bechet and Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton. And I have never left. So when I went off to college, I had my clarinet. I played a lot. I played with a bunch of little groups in and around New York. I remember playing a job in Philadelphia at one of the fraternity houses. And we all went down in a couple of cars and hitchhiked back, standing on the highway playing our jazz until we got a ride. And I remember we got a ride in a Volkswagen, like five guys with a bass fiddle up on top. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: How did you decide on Pratt?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, before I went to Pratt, a couple of experiences: One I remember very distinctly driving home in my black Chevy convertible about five o'clock in the morning from attempting to pick up girls at Lake Ronkonkoma and failing miserably. But getting drunk in the process. And at five o'clock in the morning, it was dawn. I'm driving down a highway on Long Island. And all of a sudden in front of me coming over a hill I see a chimney, a roof, and a house taking up the whole road. They were moving a house, coming at me. And I had to pull off the side of the road to avoid being plowed over by this house. That's one very distinct memory.

Another time we were coming back from a gig, a musical job, in the band, and there was a boy in my class, Fat Freddy Fliedner, whose father ran a funeral parlor. And Freddy was the butt of a lot of jokes. And as we're driving

back, we pass the garden center; this is about two in the morning. And I got a flash of an idea. And I stopped the car and ran out and grabbed a couple of signs. We drive on. We come to Freddy Fliedner's father's funeral parlor. After I did what I did, we were laughing so hard, that I could hardly drive the car to get away. But in the morning, it said: "Fliedner's Funeral Parlor — Bone Meal, Fertilizer."

MS. RIEDEL: Oh! That's great.

MR. SUPERIOR: So the humor was there, and sometimes at other people's expense.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Somewhere I have a couple of copies of papers that I wrote in one of my English literature classes that were filled with illustrations and fantasy stories made up starring my teacher, the beautiful Miss Wells, whom we would save in the jungle or from pirates or whatever. And all with illustrations, of course. I also remember my first falling in love with an artist in the fifth grade—no, no, it would have been maybe the eighth grade. I had a French teacher who had posters of French painters all around. But in my English class, we were all given pictures, reproductions, and had to write the story about it. And I got Jack Levine's *String Quartet*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I looked at that, and I thought, that is a painting! That was what painting ought to be. That was my goal in life. Jack Levine became one of my instant heroes. But he was not an illustrator. I chose Pratt because it was the only art school I ever heard of, and it had a good reputation. And I applied, and I remember doing the application form and drawing the pictures and sending it in. And I was accepted right away.

MS. RIEDEL: Were your parents supportive of an art career, an illustration career?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: They were. Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, yes. No problem with that at all. When I was a freshman and got there, I was immediately blown away because I was the best in my class. Everybody there was the best in their class. And there were some really talented people. Within one week of living in the dormitory, which was an old Army barracks, one of them had painted a mural on two walls in his room. Just completely blew me away. So that was a very formative stage. Like most college men—of college age, I spent my time doing my schoolwork. Every weekend almost I would go to Eddie Condin's and get a beer and a hamburger and sit there at the feet of these great, great jazz musicians. Occasionally I would talk to them, and I would draw, draw pictures of them, all kinds of pictures. And those pictures were stuff that I used for school assignments and so forth. And eventually I actually got to sit in with a couple of them, which is some of the big thrills. Gene Krupa, for instance, one time. And I don't know if you're familiar with that traditional jazz at all.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: Well.

MS. RIEDEL: But, please, yes. Do mention what was significant, please.

MR. SUPERIOR: I'm sorry?

MS. RIEDEL: Do mention what was significant to you about any experiences that were formative.

MR. SUPERIOR: Alright. Well, that was very much a part of my life.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So you were playing music and working in drawing and illustration.

MR. SUPERIOR: I played music. I would practice my clarinet in the dormitory when everybody else was in class and I had a break. I would run home to the dorm and play.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I'd long since given up lessons.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Did you ever consider going into music?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, yes.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: For a very brief time, maybe about two hours when I was in high school. I thought about the life of a musician. Being on the road. The main thing, of course, was girls. And I wouldn't have been the first jazz musician who did so because it was a way to attract women. Of course that failed for me miserably. I fell in love twice when I was at Pratt. First time was a girl who—the main thing we did was play ping-pong. She was a dynamite ping-pong player. But I think she was gay. I'm not sure. At least I never got very far. [They laugh.] [Side conversation.] When I was sophomore I fell in love with a girl who eventually I lost my virginity to and instantly felt I had to get married. So we did in June right after graduation. And we were one of the couples that the president of the college at commencement had stand up, you know, that kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: So you got married after your sophomore year in college?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, after graduation.

MS. RIEDEL: After graduation, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I got married at 21 going on 12 or 13. That really ended about four or five years later. But I stuck it out for almost 15 years. So I've been married my entire life really. Anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk a bit about Pratt.

MR. SUPERIOR: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Who was teaching and what classes you were taking?

MR. SUPERIOR: I took every drawing class I could. I flunked lettering a few times. Had to make it up at night. Flunked it again. Eventually I became pretty good at calligraphy, and I actually earned some money at it. But I flunked it when I was in school. I was not an outstanding student. I was a good solid A-, B. But I had a teacher who was part-time, who taught a painting class, and we had a model and we painted. And I adored him. I thought he was the greatest thing since Cheerios.

MS. RIEDEL: What was his name?

MR. SUPERIOR: His name was Jack Wallace, which was changed from Jack Valovich. And he sort of adopted me. I went to the museums with him. I walked around Greenwich Village. I heard all his stories about how he was one of the first Abstract Expressionists, but he never got that which was due to him. He was a portrait painter also. He could paint like Rembrandt almost. And he introduced me to Rembrandt. And he introduced me to Rembrandt—and we'd walk around the museum. There's nothing like going to a museum with somebody like that, who has a little idolizer following around after him. And when it came toward the end of the semester, he told me he was going to give me an F because he thought I was getting too big for my boots. And he did! And I was furious! I got so angry I got drunk one night, and I went over, and I knocked on his door. I called him up first, you know. "I'm coming over to punch you in the nose." And I go over, and I knock on the door. And he answers, he was wearing boxing trunks. He says, "Well?" And I turned around and walked away. I didn't see him again for years, until well after—years after I graduated. And we went back to New York. He was having a show, portraits in a gallery in New York. And we go into the gallery. And this little old man comes out from the back eating a sandwich. And he didn't even remember me. And that was the end of that period.

MS. RIEDEL: But he introduced you to some artists that were significant. He introduced you to artists that were significant to you and to a way of looking at art?

MR. SUPERIOR: Rembrandt was the first real artist that made an impact on me. Partly through him, but also it fell right in with my love for Jack Levine at that time, too. One day, years later, I visited Jack Levine in his studio. And I showed him my portfolio. And he said he didn't think I could become a painter. He was a rather crusty guy. But I never stopped admiring him. I thought he was a wonderful painter. He even rejected one of my paintings from a show when he was a juror. But that's okay because a year later I got first prize when the juror was one of my former teachers from Yale. [Laughs.] I had my very, very first show— oh, after we got married, we went directly in a Ford that we had gotten, drove to Mexico.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: To study painting at the Instituto Allende in San Miguel.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, in San Miguel.

MR. SUPERIOR: I was going to get a master's degree there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. That place I think is still there.

MR. SUPERIOR: It's still there, oh, yes. Sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. SUPERIOR: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about that because that—what inspired you to go Mexico? What drew you there?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, I guess somebody must have told my father about it, and he thought that might be a pretty good idea to go down there and then study. Also the draft was popping up. As a matter of fact, I was supposed to be down there for six months or eight months or a year—I forget—and I got a letter from my father in which was a notice from my draft board, which was weeks' old, saying that I was due to be inducted on such-and-such a date. And I had to come back, be back in the country. So I left prematurely, never graduated from there, never got the degree. But I did nothing down there but paint. And that's when the painting bug got into me. And then all those things became my portfolio for illustration. So my first illustration things were very painterly. Art directors would tell me that they already had an oddball artist on their staff. I went to a few galleries; they said my work was too illustrative. So I was in the middle.

MS. RIEDEL: Before that, though, let's talk a little bit more about Mexico. Who was teaching? What it was like to be there? Was it your first trip outside the country?

MR. SUPERIOR: It was—yes. My very first.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you speak Spanish?

MR. SUPERIOR: I had taken a Spanish course in high school, but I'm pretty good not learning a language but learning how to communicate with it. My wife had studied it, but she didn't really speak it. But I would go down, and I would spend two hours dickering with the guy in the fruit stand over a mango. And he loved it because we played chess.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. It's a beautiful old colonial city.

MR. SUPERIOR: The most impressive— Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Please.

MR. SUPERIOR: —artists down there besides Siqueiros and Orozco and all the Mexican muralists, was a 14-year-old kid who was very precocious, who did these watercolors because he had to. And they were very loose and free. And he would take the end of the brush and paint with it and draw. And he would be done in 15 minutes so he could go off with his friends and play. As long as he came home with a watercolor in hand, they were happy. But I was so impressed by his loose style. I adopted a little bit of that, some of the tricks that he used, like wetting the paper, dipping the end of the handle in it, and drawing on the wet paper.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember his name?

MR. SUPERIOR: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I have no idea what happened to him.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there many Americans studying there?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, yes. There were a lot of Americans. At that time San Miguel was populated by a lot of political people and some expatriate Americans, and occasionally an asshole or two from Texas who would come down and make it bad for everybody. You know, wanting to buy everything and expecting everybody to be his servant. We rented a house, though, which came with a maid who cooked. And she was getting the huge amount of like a dollar and a half a week. Or the equivalent. And I actually gave her much more because I was—it's ridiculous. When the people came back, oh, they were so angry because we had spoiled her, and she had to leave. But I also, one of the distinct memories was I remember going out on a Sunday afternoon onto the patio and looking down into my next door neighbor's yard which was filled with cactus. And he had an outhouse, and it had no door. And I'm there reading my paper, and I hear "Buenos dias!" And I look, and there he is sitting in his outhouse waving up to me. I remember that very, very distinctly.

I also remember driving, on the way down there, driving, seeing three guys on mules, donkeys, coming down, and they had bandoliers and big hats, and I hit the floor. Also on the way to Texas I had my first car accident. Before we got to the border, we were in Nuevo Laredo, and I'm going down a road that was straight as an arrow

as far as you could see, and not a car in sight. And I'm doing 90 miles an hour. And all of a sudden it makes a sharp right-hand turn. And I tried to make the turn, and we ended up—

MS. RIEDEL: What does? The road does?

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: The road makes a sharp turn?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. SUPERIOR: And they told me that any Texas driver would have just gone straight into the desert and not try to make the turn. But I didn't know that. We ended up upside down, not a scratch on us. But the car was demolished. So we sat in Nuevo Laredo while my father negotiated on the telephone, and we ended up with a new cheap Ford. Which I took the seats out of and left them there, and they shipped them back. Because I needed the space to bring back all my drawings and paintings. I need to go to the bathroom.

[END DISC 1.]

MR. SUPERIOR: We brought back a ton of drawings. We were stopped at the border. They were looking for pot. But they made me take every single one of the paintings out of there, and I had packed it so carefully. But they were curious. Nothing eventful. On the way down I remember going through New Orleans because I had to see it. And going to Bourbon Street, doing the whole listening to the music. And I actually sat in with a black piano player. As long as I stayed on the other side of the bar, it was okay. But I couldn't go behind the bar and play with him. There's, you know— I remember around '49, '48, driving out on Long Island and seeing signs that said "Restricted." And I didn't know what that meant. My father told me: No Jews. This is what it meant. But they had signs. But that's as close as they came to saying, no Jews. But that's what it meant on the golf clubs and so forth. So I was never the victim of any kind of persecution except one time there was, on the way home from grammar school, as I walked, I passed by this little alley street where a lot of Irish families lived. And there were a couple of bullies who used to call me "Jew boy!" and come running out and beating me up and so forth. So I always walked down the other side of the street and ran.

I also used to—I didn't have a dog, I wanted a dog desperately. And I would stop at the North Shore Animal League on the way home, and they would give me old magazines with pictures of dogs, and I had them all over my wall. And they would give me dog biscuits for my dog, and I would eat the dog biscuits on the way home. And one day my father said, "You want a dog? You want to take care of it?" I said, "Yes, yes, yes." So he said, "Well, my friend so-and-so has a new puppy. They have to go away, and they want you to take care of it for a weekend." Well, the first time the dog took a dump on the floor, on the newspapers we'd spread out, I puked, and that was the end of it. I never mentioned a dog again. So here are object lessons.

I also burned down a golf course. This would have been just—let's see. Now maybe during the war. Yes, it was during the war. Because the golf course was taken over by the National Guard and the Army. And they had tents, and they were doing maneuvers and practicing all kinds of stuff. And one of my friends, a little girl down the street, and I went, and we were going to have a little cookout in the woods. And we brought some eggs and built a little fire, and this was in like October. And the leaves were very dry. And our little fire caught onto a leaf, and we chased after it, and we chased after it and another one. The wind came up. Before we knew it—we were in the rough—it was burning. And I ran home. And I remember standing on the corner with my father, and the fire engines were down there, talking to the local policeman who was a friend of my father's, and looking as innocent as could be. It was years later I think I may have told my father that I was the one who burned down the golf course. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So it really caught and took off.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, the whole rough went down.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, gosh. How old were you?

MR. SUPERIOR: Probably maybe ten. The golf course was something that we used to walk, cut across, on the way to school. I was a rabid, rabid Brooklyn Dodger fan. We went to games, my father and I would. We were so thrilled when Jackie Robinson came along, and we had just gotten out first TV set which was this big, and the screen was that big. And I remember watching him dance around on second base, and it was so exciting. So inspiring!

MS. RIEDEL: Was civil rights important to your father?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: Was civil rights important to your father? Was it important to your mother?

MR. SUPERIOR: My father was the kind of guy, who when he read in the newspaper about some kid who had been given an award by the DAR declined it because he didn't believe in their right-wing politics, my father wrote him a letter. That's the kind of person my father was. He was a liberal of the first order and a Democrat, staunch Democrat. So I became the same, of course. And I remember, he and my cousins and uncles, they used to say—he would sit for hours and hours, he would argue and argue. He also belonged to a chess club.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MR. SUPERIOR: And he taught me to play when I was about seven or eight. And for years we would play until, I finally, when I was about 12, I beat him. And he got so angry; he smacked his fist down on the boards; the pieces flew all over the place first time I beat him. I remember the chess club meeting at our house. And I you could hear a pin drop, like 12 people sitting around.

MS. RIEDEL: These were adults?

MR. SUPERIOR: And my mother walking around with a tray full of cookies and stuff. But silence, dead silence. And the cigars and pipes and cigarettes going.

MS. RIEDEL: So these were all adults. It was a local adult chess club.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it wasn't high school. Interesting, interesting.

MR. SUPERIOR: Great Neck Chess Club. We used to subscribe to chess magazines. And I was always teamed up with the oldest man in the crowd, who was Mr. Young. I never forgot that. So Mr. Young and the kid, we'd sit there and we'd play, too. And I remember my mother rattling a little cup and saucer as she came in with the cookies and people going, Shh! Shh! So I grew up, an avid chess player filled with conflicting values and senses of what was right and what was good and what was bad and so forth and so on. Also I grew up with, when I wanted something, first it was maybe I could make it myself. That it's always worth more if you make it yourself. For example, all the kids in school had, went and bought these fancy autograph books that some cost as much as two or three dollars. And my mother said, "We don't think we can afford that. If you want an autograph book, why do you want one like everybody else's? Make one yourself." And I did. And I brought it to school, and the teachers all raved about it. There was a place that had remnants of fabric and so forth. And I would go in there, and they would give me little scraps of all kinds of things. And I'd bring them back. And I would play with my mother's sewing machine. I learned how to sew when I was a kid.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? That's unusual.

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: That's unusual.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. But I had things like—my mother made like a little baseball uniform for an artist's mannequin that I had. And she made a baseball uniform for it. And I made the leather glove on the sewing machine. That kind of thing. Or holsters.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. When did the printmaking come into it? Did the printmaking begin in Mexico?

MR. SUPERIOR: Printmaking? Yes. I did some lithography down there. And I had done some woodcuts in Pratt, the only printmaking I ever did at that time and my first experience with wood. And I remember not knowing how to sharpen my tools and not even knowing they were supposed to be. And I worked on this piece of cherry wood, woodcut print of a jazz band. My hands were bleeding, and, oh, it was terrible. But the print wasn't so bad. But something went ding ding somewhere in a very small way. And I learned how to sharpen those tools that I had. And I still have them.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: Those very first woodcut tools. Of course they don't have the same handles on them now.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was a Pratt?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. I also—

MS. RIEDEL: Who was teaching, do you remember?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: Who was teaching, do you remember?

MR. SUPERIOR: Interestingly enough, I remember two children's books when I was a kid: The first one, I was about four, was a book about a car driving through the jungle with all the lions and tigers and animals, and its headlights shining. And bing! The terror of the jungle. I remember that and Joe So-and-So and His Steam Shovel. One of my teachers at Pratt was named Mr. Bates, and he had written and illustrated that book, which I thought was just astounding. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Philip Guston came and taught a drawing, figure drawing class as a part-time teacher, and I was in his class. And he never said a word. He would sit in the back and read *Life* magazine. And every once in a while he'd get up and he'd walk around and he'd sit down. And he'd do a sketch on your newsprint pad. And I remember treasuring those. I don't know whatever happened to them. But they were wonderful, marvelous. And he was having, about to have his first show of Abstract Expressionist paintings. So we all went, of course. We didn't go to the opening. We went the next day, and it was still crowded. And the paintings were still wet. And I looked at these Abstract Expressionist paintings. I couldn't figure them out at all. I knew his work as an illustrator beforehand. And I wondered—I remember wondering how many people at the opening had actually changed some of those paintings by being bumped into them.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I thought it was nuts. I thought it was crazy. But I did try a couple of paintings that were really loose and free. I remember getting some really good comments from teachers on one of them, which was also a painting of a jazz band, but it was all splashy and so forth. I also remember very clearly being put in my place. We had one guy who was extremely gifted, really like a whiz, draw like of a son of a bitch. When Mr. Ajootian, the old head of the department—Khosrov Ajootian—you don't forget a name like that, taught a figure drawing class in anatomy, when he had to leave the classroom, he asked Twit [ph] to take over, and he would do it. I was so jealous, insanely jealous. And *Boys' Life* had a competition. So we all signed up for different stories. And being the kind of guy I was, I signed up for the same story that Twit, the star, was working on: "I'm going to beat that guy." Well, I went in, and I looked at what he was doing. And I went into Khosrov Ajootian's office and said, "I'm going to change to another one." And I tried to pick the weakest person I could that was competing. And I did. And I lost. And I thought mine was better. And I remember going in and asking about it. And he said, "You know, Roy, you're not as good as you think are." This was a very clear memory. I so admired that man. He was one of those old-time, old Art Students' League-trained people who could do nothing but draw magnificent figure drawings and anatomical drawings. But that's about it. I also had a teacher—

MS. RIEDEL: What did you take away from that experience? Did that inspire you to change direction? Did it inspire you to work harder? Were you deflated?

MR. SUPERIOR: I worked harder; I worked very hard. And I kind of followed my own path. We had a book illustration class with an artist named John Groth, who was an illustrator, who did wonderful ink drawings on the spot. He would be in a war someplace, and he would do drawings. And I wanted to be an artist correspondent in a war. So I felt always a little twinge of guilt about the war—not about World War II, I was a kid. But when I went to Pratt the Korean vets were starting to come back. And my roommate was not in Korea, but he was in Europe, in Germany at that time during the Cold War. And like another friend was in Korea. And I was too young for it.

MS. RIEDEL: What happened? Why were you called back from Mexico?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, the draft board.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Said I had to be back in the United States by a certain time. I was furious. And I ended up going a week or two late, getting back. And I'd get the mail, and it said: You'll be receiving your draft notice next week at such-and-such a date. That night I was listening to the radio, and I heard that they had just opened up this six-month RFA program, Reserve Forces Act, where you could enlist for six months active duty and then spend the rest of your life going to meetings in the reserves. So I jumped at it, and I got the recruiting sergeant out of bed. This was during peacetime. And I was filled with my father's tales of the waste, which are absolutely true. And I joined the reserves. And I went off to Texas for six months. And I'd forgotten most of the pranks I pulled down



there, but several years ago we were in Chicago at the SOFA show, and I had all my stuff there. This guy came up with his daughter and told me that he was in my—he was one of my buddies. And his daughter looked at me. She had heard all the stories about Crazy Roy. Things like— we had a captain, I remember, in Texas. I didn't like—nobody liked him very much. And I got together with the camp and a couple of the guys. We'll fix him. Every Saturday morning the whole what do you call it? Not the platoon. The whole company met on the parade grounds, and the captain would give a talk, bawling us out for not doing this or that and why we couldn't have a weekend pass.

So we went out the night before, and we dug a hole where he would stand, and we put twigs over it and covered it up with sod. And we all march out there with great expectations this next Saturday morning. And what do we find out but the commander of the post, the colonel, was coming to speak to us that day. And he walked right into the hole. And of course we lost our—the whole company lost weekend passes for a month. But it was so funny. So funny. And then because I was an artist, they had me do things like the captain asked me to do something that he could bring as a door prize for some officers' club thing. So I got an old door, and I painted "Officers Only" and all kinds of cartoons on it. He was so pissed at me because it was a parody, you know. It was political cartooning.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: So that kind of thing. And also not wanting to go on PT, physical training. I had a thing about heights, and I didn't want to climb up and drop down over a rope. So I remember sitting in the back of the truck on the way out shoving my fingers down my throat until I threw up so that I could get out and go back to the hospital instead of going to PT. What I would do is put a clipboard under my arm. And when you had a clipboard, nobody bothered you. It looked like you were important—doing something important. And I would go directly to the library because none of the sergeants ever went to the library. But that kind of stuff, you know.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: And I would write letters home with cartoons on the outside making fun of the staff sergeant or this or that. So, you know, my Army time was not too—it was fun, but it was not great.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: When I got out, I went to meetings for several years: summer camp up in Massachusetts, which was like a foreign country to me then. And the second time—well, the first time and the second time—all I did was paint watercolors that then became the property of the company, you know, of the Army. You know watercolors of people setting up tents and carrying stretchers and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, really!

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. One day—

MS. RIEDEL: Was this while you were actively in the Army?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, no. This was during the reserves, and I would go to my meetings, put on a uniform, and go march around once a week. And then we'd go for two weeks every summer.

MS. RIEDEL: And would you donate the paintings to the Army?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. I had no choice. It was on Army time. So one day we were playing baseball. And the sergeant saw me drawing, and he said, "Now go play ball with the other guys." And he made me go. So I love baseball. So I got a base hit, and I was going to slide into second base. And the guy playing second base thought he was Ty Cobb and came down on my knee and wrecked my knee. And I came hobbling home in my uniform with my duffel bag on crutches. And they did nothing for me at the hospital. Said it'll get better. Well, I didn't know it, but the cartilage was destroyed.

MS. RIEDEL: Mmm.

MR. SUPERIOR: So it was several years later when I was teaching in Hartford that I stood up on a rolling chair in the office to hang a picture, and it went out from under me, and I fell down, and I couldn't straighten my knee out. And they had to perform surgery on it before they did the orthoscopic surgery. So they wrecked me knee, and I have—really I've got to get a new knee one of these days. But it tremendously bothers me; in fact, I have terrible arthritis. No cartilage, and it's just ruined. I'm a candidate for a new knee.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: But for some reason I don't want to go ahead with it.

MS. RIEDEL: How did the transition from Mexico to Yale come about?

MR. SUPERIOR: When I came back from Mexico, I had been bitten by the painting bug. I wanted to be a painter. For the first time I knew what an artist did, what a painter did.

MS. RIEDEL: What—had you seen something in Mexico that made you realize that?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, my paintings. It was just so different than what I had been doing in school. And I taught myself watercolor, which I'd never had any instruction in.

MS. RIEDEL: And color in Mexico can be such a strong—

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, color for the first time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: I came back, and I was waiting to start, and I got a little part-time job before I went into the Army doing cartoons of ducklings on T-shirts. It was the only job I could find. We were living in my parents' house at the time. And then finally, thank goodness, I gave that up and went off to Fort Dix and then to Texas. I was in Texas. My roommate, who was a Texan, who was ten years older than me, which because of all the incredible experiences he had, made me desperate—desperate—to lose my virginity because he'd be going out on a date, and I'm hear. Blow by blow. And I was clawing at the walls. No wonder I got married right away, which is not the reason one should get married. But who can tell you, somebody who's 21 and clawing at the walls that that's not a wise thing to do.

I remember the first time I brought her to meet my friends. My best friend came up to me and said, "I think you're making a mistake. She's a JAP—Jewish American Princess." And, yes, she was, and I didn't recognize it. I didn't now, and I didn't care. But our values just conflicted tremendously. For an engagement ring I gave her my mother's engagement ring, which meant a tremendous amount to me. Her mother said, with her father, I remember sitting there, and saying, "Your father's a dentist. You can afford something better than this." That was my first clue.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: But desperation blinded everything else. So after I got out of the Army, got an apartment, right after I came back from active duty, we got an apartment in Queens, Elmhurst, I think. And I began to be an illustrator. And I got a job with an artist's agent, an artist's representative. And I would be in the studio doing paste-ups and mechanicals and [inaudible] for all his artists. And he would carry my samples around and eventually I started to get some jobs. And I was doing pretty good.

MS. RIEDEL: Who was this and where?

MR. SUPERIOR: This was in New York City. His name was Lore Noto, N-O-T-O. I think he recently died. He was also very much interested in the theater. And he was an actor on Broadway and a producer. And the first thing he produced, which starred Albert Salmi—I'll never forget it—he got all of his artists to invest \$100, which was like a million dollars to me at that time. The name of the play was *The Failures*. It closed opening night. We all lost our 100 bucks. Then a few months later he came around, and he wanted us to invest again. No, no! The name of the play was the longest-running show in Broadway history, off-Broadway history, the something-or-others. Name a couple of plays that have been running forever. You're a New Yorker.

MS. RIEDEL: No, I'm from San Francisco.

MR. SUPERIOR: Ah! Oh, a musical.

MS. RIEDEL: We can add it. We can add it later. Do you want to ask Mara?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, I thought we'd be rich if I had—

MS. RIEDEL: He's determined. So it was *The Fantasticks*.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, anyway, I decided I was going to go on my own, and I got a space in exchange for artwork in an advertising agency, the Groody [ph] Advertising Agency. A very small place. And I had my little studio in the back, my illustrations studio. And I did stuff for—I did some record jackets, some book covers. One of them made the "Book Review" of the *New York Times*. The very first illustration job—I have to tell you this story—that I ever got I was a junior in Pratt. And a senior whom I admired greatly was doing some illustrations for one of these little mystery magazines or science fiction magazines. And he said he thought I should go and see this art director, that he might give me some work. So I go in, and he looks through my stuff, and he picked out one drawing and said, "This is good. I like this. Here's a job." Get \$35 to do a drawing of a woman holding a frying pan that she just bashed somebody on the head with. And I went home, and I did the drawing. I go back in. He looks at it. He says, "This isn't the thing I looked at. This isn't like that. I can't use this. This is junk! I can't use this! Get out of here!" He threw me out of his office like that. And I was in tears. I left. I went over to the Public Library, and I sat and brooded. Took out my portfolio. I had another piece of drawing paper in there. Made another drawing. Went right back to the office, two hours, three hours later. He's on the phone trying to get another illustrator at the last minute to do this job. He said, "What are you doing back here? What do you want?" I said, "I did another drawing, sir." "Oh, that's good. I like it. Okay, I'll give you another one. Call me next month." And I did, I don't know, four, five, six drawings for them. But that was my very, very first commercial art experience, and it was a zinger.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. Especially as a college student.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. I did illustrations for—I never made it into *Playboy*, but there were *Hustler*, other magazines, of that type. Not *Hustler*. But there were a couple of others that were sort of second-rate *Playboy* magazines. And I did a lot of illustrations for those. And every now and then when I Google myself, which how can you not, it comes up with one of these things in some list of obscure magazines, and there's my name, you know, with—It's so funny. *The Gent* was the name of one of them, I remember. And, you know, all the guys in the class, we were—one of the art directors was one of our classmates. So we were all doing illustrations for that.

I did a series of things for Pfizer which were more like paintings, but they all had to have somebody in them suffering from the symptoms of some disease that their pill cured. And also one of them, the first one I remember, was an old lady. I don't remember what she was suffering from. Maybe it was arthritis. And she's sitting there like that. And, you know, I actually had to hire models to come in. I had an old lady, I had a man model who came in because he had nice hands; he was a hand model. I remember doing a drawing of hands from him. But I didn't like working from photographs even then. I took my own Polaroid photographs sometimes of friends' and used that if I had to. But I still preferred working from life.

Then my father, who always wanted me to be what I wanted to be, said—because I was trying to paint on weekends. I had my first show in a little frame shop quasi gallery in Great Neck of Mexican watercolors. I sold my very first painting. My father hung my paintings in the living room, which was our office. For my entire childhood, the office was in the house, and the living room was the waiting room. And I'd tiptoe down the stairs, and I'd go in the kitchen which was right next to the office, and my mother would say, [whispering] "Can't you wait 'til your father's finished? He's going to speak to you about that." And I'd say, "But, Mom!" You know it was like that. [They laugh.] So I grew up tiptoeing. Anyhow—

MS. RIEDEL: These watercolors, were they portraits, were they landscapes?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, landscapes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Landscapes, all the paintings. One was an oil painting of San Miguel of the big churches and all. And it was hanging over the fireplace. And one of his patients said she'd been looking at it for months and months, and she wanted to buy it. And she bought it from me for 50 bucks. She then went out and spent \$150 on a frame.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I never quite understood that, but I realized that's when I should have known it was not the way to go. But not me. Anyway, my father came and said, "If you're not happy being an illustrator—"And I was doing—financially I was beginning to make some reasonably good money. As a matter of fact, my first teaching job I taught for two years before I earned as much as I had when I was an illustrator.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. SUPERIOR: And he said, "If you want to go back to school and study painting, I'll pay."

MS. RIEDEL: Extremely generous and supportive.

MR. SUPERIOR: So where's a good school? I'd heard of Yale, I applied, I got in.

MS. RIEDEL: Who was teaching there at the time?

MR. SUPERIOR: At that time teachers were William Bailey, Neil Welliver. This was before—Neil was a—before he became really big and he was doing paintings of fat angels and things. Then he became famous for his Maine landscapes and all. Let's see. Bernard Chaet, who put one of my student drawings in his book, which he eventually came out with like three new volumes. It was my first published—outside of illustration—my first published thing. Anyway, and Josef Albers had retired the year I got there. I went specifically because Rico Lebrun was on the faculty.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And do you know who he is?

MS. RIEDEL: I know his work.

MR. SUPERIOR: Alright. This was a man who not only could draw, but he had a thing for Picasso, and he knew Mexico, and he was of that ilk, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I thought his things were so powerful. And when I went for my interview, I met him. And Albers was teaching at the same time. Well, they were polarized. And Albers students wouldn't speak to Lebrun students and vice versa. I went into the coffee shop there, Albers's students over there, Lebrun's students over here. And like a thick wall of haze in between them. So I went home, and I was going to start in September. During that time Lebrun retired and so did Albers. So neither one of them were there when I went. So I really lost out. I wanted so badly to study with him. Albers would come back as a visiting critic every now and then. And he had a slew of totally devoted acolytes, followers, among whom—one of whom was Bill Bailey whose paintings reflect nothing of Albers. But I noticed that at least two thirds of all the faculty, when they were looking at stuff on the wall, would go, Well, I think— and they all did this. And the first time I met Albers, he came in and he's looking at a student painting. And he goes, "Well, I think." One time he came through. We all had—our paintings were in little booths in a big room. And one of the students had his dachshund in there, and the dog took a dump as Albers was coming in the door. And they rushed the dog out of there and cleaned up as best they could. But Albers walks up, and he walks with his little entourage behind him. And he walks up, and he looks down at this painting. And he says, "Hmm! Not only does it look like shit, it smells like it, too." [They laugh.]

Another time he gave a lecture. And my wife and I were there, and we went down, and I was saying "hello." And somebody pinched her on the butt. [Laughs.] And he was standing like right next to her on the other side. It must have some effect on you when you spend your life painting nothing but squares and change the color. And as desperately as I wanted to, I'd walk up and down in front of those things and I would see this, and I'd say, "Fuck! What the hell is it all about? Who cares? It's boring." So I fought my way through Yale. It was Abstract Expressionists all the way through. And I was like one of the only figurative painters there. I remember when I was in my last year going down through the first-year painting studios and looking at them. And thinking to myself, God! What are they taking in here? This was garbage! Awful stuff. And the next thing I know one of those guys, whose paintings were the worst I'd ever seen, was circulating a petition trying to get the dean of the school removed. I didn't sign it. It turns out his name was—oh, the big sculptor. The great big huge metal things he leaves out in the rain to get rusty. Major, major sculptor in the United States. You know like a 40-foot by 20-foot piece of steel on its edge? Oh, he's world famous, and I can't remember his name. Richard something-or-other.

MS. RIEDEL: Serra?

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Richard Serra?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, Dick Serra.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I saw him on Charlie Rose about a year or two ago, and what a phony, baloney.

MS. RIEDEL: But you're talking— so this was sculpture, though, not two-dimensional. This was sculpture—

MR. SUPERIOR: He was painting then.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, he was painting.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. You know he picks up the phone and calls the foundry: I want a piece of COR-TEN steel, 10-foot by 10-foot by 1 foot. And then he charges \$100,000 to have it come and be delivered and dropped down by a crane, and he stands there and says, "Okay, put it there." And that kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: So the *Torqued Ellipse*, his work. You're not a fan of his work.

MR. SUPERIOR: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Those *Torqued Ellipses* and [inaudible].

MR. SUPERIOR: No, and I've seen a lot of it. And I walked up and down inside it trying to feel something. And all I could see was rust. And thinking, well, you know, if you put any piece of steel outside, it's going to get rusty. Who cares? Anyhow, the older I get, the more Andy Rooney-ish I get. The more angry I get at stuff that, you know, I— In all of my openness as an educator—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: —now feel is a waste of time. And I get furious. For example, every time I see what's his name in some article, I go berserk. Guy with the big pink rabbits.

MS. RIEDEL: Koons?

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Koons, Jeff Koons?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Oh! His motto—I mean he is the greatest, most successful follower of Andy Warhol's attitude which is I want to be famous. I met Warhol when I was an illustrator. This is before he was Andy Warhol. He was just doing Delman shoe illustrations. And somebody sent me over to see him with my portfolio. And I remember talking to him. And when I left, the first thing I did was go to the men's room. I wanted to wash my hands. He was just so pasty. Ick! And he had one of those wet-fish handshakes. Then I saw him again when he came to Hartford Art School as a visitor once. And I remember walking across the campus, and people were listening to every little sound that came out of him and trying to make it into a monument. And I, you know— and we had students who saw him and who went and joined his factory and, you know. You know, I had students one of whom I remember thinking he was a very promising painter. Then he comes in with paintings in which he just dumped his ashtrays on the canvas. And I talked and talked and talked and talked and talked. It didn't make any sense to me. But, you know, I remember also being in a faculty meeting where one of the faculty members had his first raised and wanted to hit me because I had given my class an assignment to make a shocking drawing. And they came in with all kinds of sexual things. One student had—who was gay—had done an unbelievable pencil rendering of an erection. And I brought these in for the student show at our faculty meeting. And he was so incensed at this stuff. And we argued, and he had his hand back. This is the kind of thing that went on. It was an eye-opener. And I prided myself on avoiding the politics.

Anyway, while I was at Yale, I realized I was going to have to earn a living. And I didn't think I was going to do it selling paintings for a long, long time. And I did not want to go back to illustration because it would tear away at everything I had done and believed in at that point. My ex-wife kept pushing me to do the illustrations, right? But—and I thought, well, maybe I can get a teaching job. And about two weeks before graduation, I'm walking through the hall, and this guy comes up to me. He says, "Hi, I'm—my name is such-and-such. I'm from the Hartford Art School, and we're looking for a good teacher." And he said, "You and so-and-so are two of the people that I've picked, and I think I'm going to choose you." And I was hired. Bang, bang! Just like that. My first teaching job, teaching drawing and printmaking and painting. And I taught printmaking for two years, and I stopped because it drove me nuts because it was like being just a technician. All the students would come in, and they would change the formula of the acid, and so forth, and maintaining the presses, the whole business. I never made another print after that.

MS. RIEDEL: This was at Hartford?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MR. SUPERIOR: But I was on a TV show where I did a half an hour show, one on drawing, one on printmaking.

MS. RIEDEL: You were also teaching in New Haven, though, at Connecticut College, weren't you?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, not then.

MS. RIEDEL: Not yet, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: You saw my resume, that's right. I taught there for ten years, and as I told you before, I got promoted with no effort on my part. I had tenure after seven years. Unless you did something really bad it was almost automatic. So I was completely naïve when it comes to politics because all this stuff, you know, kind of hit me in the face at once after that. But during the— after I left Hartford—

MS. RIEDEL: You finished at Yale in '60—?

MR. SUPERIOR: I was there from '59 to '62, three years.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And graduated with an M.F.A.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there anything significant about the time there other than having to fight your way through as a figurative painter?

MR. SUPERIOR: No. Except that Jack Tworokov was my advisor for the last year. He came up once a week from New York City and he walked around and said a few things. Then he comes in and he looks at what I'm doing. And he says, "Why don't you just set up a still-life and paint it as best as you can." And he walked out. That's the only thing he ever said to me. And I did that. And I had my little show at the end. And they told me that I'd shown great improvement. I thought, well, it certainly wasn't with your help, you know. Anyhow, that was pretty much that.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look back on your collective experience, is there a particular one that stands out as the most significant educational experience? One that was most helpful?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, I would have to say Yale was.

MS. RIEDEL: Yale.

MR. SUPERIOR: Because you can't help but learn something when you're fighting.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Because you have to understand something about what you're fighting against before you can make any kind of choice. And you know I made some discoveries for myself. I discovered bird watching. I took an ornithology class. Spent much too much time walking around the woods with a pair of binoculars. [Laughs.] I took a tree identification course, which was as close as I ever got to wood at that time. And we moved up here, up to Connecticut, bought a little house in Avon, a little ranch house. And my wife hardly ever went out of it. We had two kids, bang, bang! And we just completely grew apart. I couldn't stand the life that I think she had planned for me then. And I felt like I was trapped and so forth. At any rate, we ended up getting a divorce. And just before the divorce went through, I met Mara, who was a freshman, and I was her teacher.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MR. SUPERIOR: And it was like that. I remember the exact moment when I was doing private little interviews with their portfolios at the end of the semester. She comes in, and I'm looking through her stuff. I come across a sketch of me in her sketchbook. And I looked up, and I said, "Hmm. A crush on the teacher?" And she goes— And I said, "Well, what happens when the teacher has a crush on the student, too." And from that moment, I was a goner. So about 15, 20 years ago—this is years after we left Hartford—we're sitting in a little café in Northampton. And I overhear a bunch of student types at the table behind us talking. And I'm listening. They're Hartford High School students. And they were talking—this is 15, 20 years after we left—about this legendary teacher who ran off with a student. And they were talking about us. And I did not tell them it was me, as tempted as I was. I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I didn't want to destroy their fantasy. So we were legendary.

We got married at a Unitarian church about 200 yards from the campus; half of the art school was there at the wedding. It was really something. The day before the wedding I was going to pick up the wedding cake. Mara and her mother were in the car. And the baker had worked really hard at the last minute. It was one of those things where we got married twice because of the regulations that you had to be married in the town you were living in. So we were married in—the apartment that we had—in Collinsville. But then we got married a week

later and had the wedding in West Hartford. But the justice of the peace came out and performed it. Anyway everything was done in kind of a rush. And I think part of the reason was so that Mara could continue school and go free and all that. We went to pick up the wedding cake, and I take this cake that the baker had worked all night on, and as I'm walking towards the backdoor, I step back to let him open the door, and I went right down a flight of stairs.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh!

MR. SUPERIOR: And as I went down on my chin, I threw the cake up on the landing and he caught it. And it was all lopsided. And I thought, oh, boy. And we couldn't tell her mother because she would have gone crazy thinking what a bad omen this was. The guy worked all night to fix it. It was kind of propped up at the wedding. [Laughs.] But it was so fun.

MS. RIEDEL: So what year was this that you were married?

MR. SUPERIOR: That was 1970.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: [Laughs.] So, I don't know if Mara would want me to be telling you all this stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we can leave it at that.

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: We can leave it there and check with her.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. I don't know how important it is for the Archives.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting because you two have collaborated so many times.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, we've collaborated. Yes. It was not always easy.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But you've collaborated over years.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: On multiple pieces, of course.

MR. SUPERIOR: It seemed logical. You know Mara—make some special piece, it ought to be in a special thing. So that's how the first cabinets came about. And Mara would get ideas, and we'd argue. And then I'd go and do what she wanted me to, as always. [Laughs.] So it was for whoever had an influence the most over whom. I would say definitely she's had a much stronger influence on me than the other way around.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. SUPERIOR: Although now she's beginning to tell me she wants to know how to do all the things I was trying to teach her when she was a reluctant student. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: How did you first begin to work in wood, and when did that happen?

MR. SUPERIOR: Okay. The first wood began when Mara and I had just gotten married. My best friend at the time was Tommy Simpson who had just started to teach there. He had his studio in the basement of our apartment. And I was fascinated watching how he worked furiously, and he'd come out like an abominable snowman, covered with dust. And one day—we had no furniture, no money. We had a porch, a folding chair, and a couple of folding tables. That was it. And I said, "We need a table." He said, "Why don't you make one?" I said, "I've never worked in wood. I don't know anything about it." He said, "Well, you can use my tools, and I'm going to buy some wood. Why don't you come with me?" So I went. We bought some wood. And he showed me how to glue a board together and one thing led to another, and I made a table, which I thought was the cat's pajamas. It had cabriole legs with skulls at the bottom, which I carved. I loved carving.

MS. RIEDEL: Mmm.

MR. SUPERIOR: And something just went clung! in my head. And I couldn't rest until I really was able to do it. So I borrowed some money from my mother, push the easel up against the wall, put in all this table saw and a band saw and a drill press and a lathe. And bought and read every book I could find on how to work with wood. And asked a lot of questions of Tommy whenever I got a chance. But I didn't want to bother him. But I knew that I

didn't want to make stuff that was like his in any way at all. So it was year before I dared touch any of my wood with paint.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you working at this time in your upstairs studio?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. And I made the table. And that's when Mara—she had gone home for a weekend, and she came back, I had made a whole set of bookshelves. But it was literally just pine boards nailed together. Big deal! But she was so impressed that I thought, whoa, you know, I should do more of this. So I made the table. And she says, "Are you going to make all our furniture?" Now, she says, "Aren't you going to make all our furniture?" [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: So one thing led to another. And those things, those carved filigree things you saw out there were things I did to repay my mother, and I did a lot of those.

MS. RIEDEL: Window screens? They're window screens, are they?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: I made a table, big circular coffee table, with a plate of glass. It was like that. It was all carved with angels flying around inside and stuff. That was a commission I did for one of Mara's uncles. A couple of things like that. That helped us get through. So after I left Hartford Art School, I taught part time in Central Connecticut State College, Tunxis Community College, Manchester Community College, and there was one more somewhere. So I spent more time on the road than I had ever spent full time teaching for half the pay.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. The Hartford position had been tenured, correct?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And why did you choose to leave that?

MR. SUPERIOR: I quit because it was going in such a completely different direction. Half the faculty, who didn't like it, were being persecuted. One of them retired and took off to Florida. Another one got a heart attack, and I'm sure was provoked by all of this tension. I remember being in an outer office hearing the dean bawl out one of the faculty members for parking his car over the line in the faculty parking lot. He would just work on people like that. He was insidious. And the pressure just got to be too much. I said, "That's it!" I figured I'd have no trouble getting another job. So I drew and hand-lettered, a big broadsheet, folded it up, and I sent out 400 of them. And I got back 13 replies. It had in it a questionnaire: Do you want somebody who can do this, blah blah blah. And then at the end it said, if your score is such and such, then you want me. The very first letter I get back was an offer of a job to teach at the Arkansas Polytechnic Institute. And I thought, whoa! This is going to be great. But I didn't want to go to Arkansas. Well, thanks. So I politely declined that. The other 12 were very nice comments about my broadside, but they had no openings. And it was really difficult, really tough. So that's when we were really struggling. And Mara had a part-time job, and she had been two years at Hartford. I was teaching at University of Connecticut in Storrs, part-time. So she went out there, and she got her bachelor's degree there, two years there, while I was teaching there.

I was almost certain I was going to get a full time job there as soon as Mrs. Snow retired; she was like 90 years old teaching watercolor. And she announced her retirement, and we started thinking, well, we're going to have a party. And she changed her mind. And while all this was going on, the job at Hampshire College turned up. And one of the guys down there knew Arthur [Hohner] up here, was a very close friend. And recommended me, and I went up there. I had an interview. And the dean and Arthur offered me the job. Not only that, but the job was for an assistant professor, and I was an associate professor. They gave it to me as an associate professor at more than the salary I had been making at Hartford. So, you know, I had a great start. Fabulous start. And so for a year and a half I commuted from Collinsville, Connecticut. And it was an hour and a half, two hours' ride. So I started sleeping in my office a couple of nights a week. And it got to be just too much. So one day—

MS. RIEDEL: This is the early seventies, 1972. Just to orient us time-wise, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I said to Mara, you're going to love Amherst, you'll just love it. And I got her in the car, and we drove up, and she looked around. She wasn't very impressed. She is very hard—once she gets her roots down, she's very hard to move, no matter where she is. So Mara and I—I give her an ultimatum. I said, "I'm moving up there with you or without you." So we came and started looking for a house. And it turned out that the only thing that was affordable was this place that had a studio. Mara had never—ceramics wasn't even in the picture at



that time. At that time she was doing some embroidery. She was doing soft sculpture, stitching. We bought her a sewing machine. She won a prize with one of them in a— Shortly after we moved up here, she took a class— well, she'll tell you all about this, right? Took a little class with somebody in porcelain, and the same thing that happened to me with wood happened to her with the porcelain.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I had my studio out there. I thought, knowing nothing about carpentry, give me a couple of months, this place will all be [Click!]. Well, it took like two or three years before it was almost—we were living with, you know, stuff hanging out of the ceiling.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were you teaching at Hampshire? Because it had been primarily—

MR. SUPERIOR: At Hampshire I was teaching drawing and painting.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was all two-dimensional up to this point, right?

MR. SUPERIOR: All two-dimensional.

MS. RIEDEL: All 2-D, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: They didn't have a woodworking studio of any kind. They had no crafts. There was a little ceramics room, and they had one little room with a couple of machines in it which the people from the facilities department kept stealing. I did one little course. At Hampshire you might get 20 students who sign up, ten come to the first class, three come to the second class. You know that's how it is. So I ended up with a few students who took one woodworking class in this now barely functional little shop underneath something somewhere.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: But it didn't really figure into it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I had, when I first started there, they gave me a show in the gallery, you know. They sent a truck down. We loaded up. I had furniture, woodworking, drawings, paintings, filled the entire gallery with stuff. Very impressive, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So it was functional furniture and then drawings and paintings?

MR. SUPERIOR: I called it functional sculpture then. I had all those carved stuff, the carved cabinets. And things like this, this desk over here, which is the first piece of sculptural furniture that I ever made, which actually got— made it into a book. And I don't remember exactly how that happened. But it was the first recognition of any kind, again. *Decorative Art and Modern Interiors*, 1970.

MS. RIEDEL: Who's the author?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, I'm so proud of this. It was not an author, it was an article; it was an edited book. So here I am along with people like, well, John Makepeace wrote the article. But, you know, Wendell Castle.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And it was your first—

MR. SUPERIOR: And me.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary. "The Writing Desk."

MR. SUPERIOR: Wharton Esherick.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Quite an auspicious beginning.

MR. SUPERIOR: That was the beginning, yes. So, you know, I would get an occasional commission. I did some— while I was teaching at Hartford, I did a lot of portraits. And I won a bunch of prizes in the Hartford Arts Association and whatever the Connecticut Watercolor Society. You know it was something all the faculty members had to do.

MS. RIEDEL: So these were watercolor portraits.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: No, not portraits in watercolor, I did landscapes. I won a prize in the American Watercolor Society show in New York, a little watercolor of a dead bird. Anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: Sorry. Did you just say you were doing portraits as well?

MR. SUPERIOR: I was doing portraits, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And the portraits were in oil paint?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

[END DISC 2, TRACK 1.]

MR. SUPERIOR: I did one, one of the best paintings that I did then was a portrait. It was of four children ranging in age from like four to nine. And the littlest one would not stay still. So I remember at the very end, the whole painting was almost done. Her father sat there holding her chin like this, and the mother holding her back while she read *Winnie the Pooh*. Something like that. And in 15 minutes I did this profile of her. [Laughs.] Anyway, I started to, you know, get some good commissions for that. But it wasn't enough. And after I stopped teaching there, we were really struggling along to the point where one day we had—Mara hates it when I tell stories like this—we had 13 cents left in our bank account. And so I had a tag sale. I spent my last \$5 on putting an ad in the paper: Artist's tag sale. And people showed up. They'd come back to my studio, and I had a pile of \$2 drawings, \$5 drawings, watercolors, oil paintings, everything. One woman said to me, "Well—"I had a big painting, a painting of a jazz band nightclub six feet long. And she asked me how much it was. And I think I said it was \$1200, something like that. And as I was leaving, she said, "Well, when you think you might sell that for \$700, let me know." And they started off. Halfway down the stairs, I said, "Okay!" So this is the story of our life from rags to riches. You know here we made like, I don't know, \$6,000 in that tag sale.

MS. RIEDEL: Really!

MR. SUPERIOR: And it was like so much money then, 1972, '73.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were both supporting yourselves for this period of time.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Strictly from making and selling art.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. And I was doing the part-time teaching.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you were still doing part-time teaching.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, that sustained us. So after Hampshire, that's what—my habit was—and after a period of time trying to make it selling our work and it being so difficult, I got that job in Philadelphia. And I ended up for 16 years commuting until I retired at well past 65. I was 70 years old when I retired. And I thought, oh, I'd better retire before they tell me to. So I did. It was just wearing me down. And I finally figured out, after all of the expenses of having an apartment, commuting, train fee, eating or food, I wasn't making a penny, you know. It cost me almost as much to be there as I was taking home. And you're paying Philadelphia city taxes, which the first year I was there, I went into the office, in the tax office in the city, and I wanted to file for a refund. And they gave me a form, and I got a refund. And everyone I told couldn't believe it. Nobody'd ever gotten a refund. Because I was out of state. But I was paying Massachusetts tax, federal tax, Pennsylvania tax, and Philadelphia tax because I worked in the city. The second year I went in to the tax office, and they said, "Oh, those forms. We don't have those. They're up on the eighth floor." I got up to the eighth floor. Oh, we don't have those. They're down on the first floor. I said, "But they sent me up here." They said, "Well, they have them down there." So that was the end of that. Never got another nickel back from the City of Philadelphia.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's pause for a moment, and we'll swap the discs.

[END DISC 2, TRACK 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Roy Superior at the artist's home and studio in Williamsburg, Massachusetts, on June 29, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number two.

We were just starting to discuss that the evolution of the very first of the wood constructions.

MR. SUPERIOR: So it would have been about 1975, '76 maybe, something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were still at Hampshire College.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I'd finally started the major work on the house, and I started to get to work out there. And as I said, I had only some small pieces of wood. And I'm not sure exactly what sparked the beginning of it, but I thought, why not make some little patent models of fantasy machines.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. And you don't know what inspired that? Because—

MR. SUPERIOR: What's that?

MS. RIEDEL: You don't know what inspired that initial idea?

MR. SUPERIOR: I think—what?

MARA SUPERIOR: Your father's dental little wooden dowels.

MS. RIEDEL: Mara's here with us.

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, right, right, right. When my father died, among all the usual dental stuff, I found a little jar of sticks, little, tiny dowel sticks that you would wrap cotton gauze around the end of. So they're about the size of a cue tip but only about this long. And I had them sitting around my painting studio for years. And then I'm looking at them one day, and I said, "Gee, those would make great little wooden pegs for something that's really small." And I thought—I had seen some patent models, and I had a book of patent models. I thought they were wonderful. Why don't I make some patent model-size things? But for fantasy machines. And I have sketchbooks filled with all kinds of crazy things.

MS. RIEDEL: That you'd done previous to these?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, that I did at that point. So I made this portable, *Heavy-Hearted Tortured Soul Retainer* thing. You press a lever, and the little heart, which is made of lead, goes up and opens the cage door to let this little tortured soul, which was a little pink fabric thing with little carpet tacks sticking out of it all over the place, breathe.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah-hah.

MR. SUPERIOR: And don't ask. I don't know.

MRS. SUPERIOR: It's a miniature little satin pillow. He made a tiny pillow.

MR. SUPERIOR: It was like a little pink satin pillow, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: That was the tortured soul. And I had all kinds of things. Like it was in a cage so that it was defensive. It had all the things. But it was still vulnerable and so forth and so on. And I would start to live in this thing. And the more I made, the more credibility they all had in my mind. So that one of the things was that in order to really have credibility, I felt they had to be miniaturized versions of something that would be full sized. So they had to be made with all the same joinery and techniques that you would if you were making something full sized.

MS. RIEDEL: And they all had an actual function.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: They had a mechanism, they were engineered. They all moved in one way or another. Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: So this was of that ilk, of that period. This is a *Coochie-coo Pram*—or *Coochie-coo Pram*. You'd put the baby in there. And as you pushed it along, the feathers go back and forth and tickle it. *The Walking Bass*.

MS. RIEDEL: That was a music box. *The Walking Bass* was a music box.

MR. SUPERIOR: This was *Follow Me*. It was a little thing for people that were shy about being leaders, but they wanted to be out in front. But they had to have something to follow. So you pushed this along, and it plows a trail. And it makes footprints for you to follow as you go. Don't ask. I don't know. A self-powered—a nature-powered boat. When you blow on these things, the propellers go around, and the oars move.

MS. RIEDEL: And these are all roughly in the two-foot scale.

MR. SUPERIOR: About so big.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: A little smaller. More like the one-foot scale.

MS. RIEDEL: Eighteen inches, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Like for instance this piece right here would be about maybe half an inch thick. About this big.

MS. RIEDEL: And what's this piece called?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: What is this called?

MR. SUPERIOR: This one was *The First Air-Conditioner*, portable air-conditioner. You push it along, the fan goes up and down. And then there's a filter. I also in my teaching myself about woodworking, had discovered early American woodworking techniques: the Shakers, etc. And I had a yen for wooden farm machinery, stuff, wheelbarrows. I just thought they were beautiful objects. And I wanted to figure out a way to make some of them but not full size.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting to note that you're completely self-taught when it comes to wood, as opposed to painting or drawing.

MR. SUPERIOR: Never a class, never nothing. Everything I got from books. I was very much inspired by Krenov's books. You know James Krenov?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely.

MR. SUPERIOR: Although in retrospect I totally disagree with his philosophy.

MS. RIEDEL: I would think so.

MR. SUPERIOR: I mean he was—talk about right-wing, you know. This was the way to do it. Anything that was deviating from that was crazy and insane.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Do you believe that he and Wendell Castle were on the same faculty at one point.

MS. RIEDEL: No. Not happily.

MR. SUPERIOR: I can imagine what that must have been. And what really points it out to me is that 90 percent of all his students' work looks like his. I honestly can't say that I think I've ever had more than maybe one student who ever did anything that was remotely like what I do. That's what I pride myself on. I think you're doing a job if that's how it is. Alright, this was the first of the Shaker pieces. And a whole series of those. This is a Shaker downhill racer. No, I'm sorry. The *Shaker Drag Racer, Two Candle-power Headlights*. And notice how it's all streamlined.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: And so forth. Like for instance I had to learn so much. I had to learn how they made wagon wheels because I made them the same way only this big. Here's another version of a self-powered boat.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the significance for you in making them miniature?

MR. SUPERIOR: What was significant about it?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, that's a question I get asked all the time. And my standard answer for that is that by making it in miniature and living in it myself and believing it, but in being miniature puts it in a position where one can feel omnipotent as you look down upon this world you've created. But at the same time, when you think of patent models, it has a possibility in your imagination to grow bigger. And since they're patent models of which many were really cuckoo, you know. You know how many patent models of machines for people who were

buried but may not be dead there were? Bells that they could ring. All kinds of things like that. Plus the fact that I really enjoyed working on this scale.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: You know I'm not that interested in model-making. I made a few little things when I was a kid; I made some airplanes and all, and stuff. But model-making per se doesn't really do it for me. This one—well, the shark was about this big. No oars, you notice. All you did was steer. The seagull, which is strapped to the mast, chases the fish, which he can never quite catch. The shark chases the baitfish down below; but he's in a harness so he can't catch it either. And every so often you just change fresh bait.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was this piece called?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: The title of this piece?

MR. SUPERIOR: I think this was the *USS Easy Does It*. Another little workbench. There's a little pot of fool's gold. I made all the pots and pans and everything, all the tools. A wooden rainbow. And inside the drawer it says: "He Who Cuts His Own Firewood is Twice Warmed." And the title of this one is *Good Work Is Its Own Reward*. I don't know if you notice, but I have an antique workbench out there that looks very much like this. I had drooled over them, seeing them in antique shops and whatnot. But they were like outrageously expensive. Always wanted one. It killed me when I would see them being used as decorations. And a couple of years ago, a very good friend of ours who lives up the road in the woods, we were up there, and in his sheep's barn, I see this piece of a workbench sticking out from underneath all kinds of junk. And sure enough, it was one of these workbenches of that vintage covered with about a half-inch-thick crust of chicken shit. And so we made a deal, and he gave it to me, and Mara made him a platter. And I scraped it all down, cleaned it up, refinished it. And it's a wonderful, wonderful thing. So finally I got the workbench that I had only been able to make in miniature; I made two versions of that thing.

This is a dog-petting machine for people who are terrified of dogs but really like them. So you get in the cage. You turn the crank, and the dog biscuit goes up and down and attracts a dog. He comes over. The hand goes up and down and pets the dog while you feed him little dog biscuits through the thing there. Here's *Terrible Two*. This was inspired by some Italian movie in which the opening scene was a building, an old, like the kind of the rundown Italian sections of the factory era right after the war. [*The*] *Bicycle Thief* and all that. A big white wall with one stark little window in it. And that was an image stuck in my mind. So the other side of this is that. Only on this side it's the Carpentry Worshipper's Ritual Wall. So it's like years from now they find carpentry tools in the desert. Do the research, figure out what they're for. But there's a trapdoor here. There are some bones underneath there. A cage that goes up and down. A gold—gilded—saw, a whirligig here that moves, does a little thing when you blow on it. It's about this big.

MS. RIEDEL: About 18 inches?

MR. SUPERIOR: It's one of the bigger ones.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Here's another. You saw that, right? *The Fly-Fishing Monument*.

MS. RIEDEL: But this is more recent, isn't it?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: This is more recent.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. These were in my second show.

MS. RIEDEL: So let's talk about the first show because we have them in that, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: The first show, as I mentioned, I had accumulated about eight or ten of these things. And they were little, they were very simple. Those things that you saw before. There's another one that was a *Tickle Torture Machine*. I made—subsequently made—another one. This was in that show. It was one of the more complex ones. This one was *Star Gatherer*. Inspired by the song, [sings] "I would gather the stars out of the blue for you, for you." So you push that along. It's a celestial rake, and it gathers the stars, which are porcelain into this basket. And it's guided by love. So who says Mara hasn't been an influence, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Now, at the time you were beginning to work on these, were you showing your drawings and

your paintings, do you think?

MR. SUPERIOR: I never— Well, I showed the drawings at Hampshire in another show, all those fantasy drawings that kind of—I showed you before.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: I had many, many of those.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting because those preceded these. And you said those came out of a doodling.

MR. SUPERIOR: The first wooden thing came out of those drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I have another one upstairs that shows like a wooden easel with all kinds of stuff going on. And on it is a blank canvas with a whole in the middle. It's called *Breakthrough*. That's when I said, "Why the hell am I giving myself writer's cramp. I could be making these things." So that's what—

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about those drawings, though, because we haven't talked about them yet on the disc, and how those came about.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well—

MS. RIEDEL: You said they began with a doodle, as I remember.

MR. SUPERIOR: Maybe I should go up and get a couple more.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. I'll pause this.

[Audio break.]

MR. SUPERIOR: The entire series of things. And certainly it was the last of the watercolors that I did at the time. It came before this. And then I decided, why am I trapped having to have something in front of me to paint? I've got all these plants and things from nature around me in the studio. Why don't I just make something up from them? And so this one was called *Emergence* and that's what just came out of that. That started in here someplace, and it just kind of grew.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because it's a round format.

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because it's a round format.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. I had done a series of charcoal drawings that were round that were like that, too.

MS. RIEDEL: And what year was this, Roy, do you remember?

MR. SUPERIOR: That's '69.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Very early.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: This is just before we got married.

MS. RIEDEL: So what is the piece we're looking at that you just put down now? What is this one called?

MR. SUPERIOR: That was called *Breakthrough*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And this was done in 1980.

MR. SUPERIOR: 'Eighty?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's what it's dated down in the right-hand corner.

MR. SUPERIOR: Okay. So that would have been before I left Hampshire. I left Hampshire in '82.

MS. RIEDEL: And so this is the piece that launched the small wood constructions, is that correct?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, yes. Well, once I get going on an idea, it just kind of keeps feeding itself. So, for example, I had one of these things going all the time. There were dozens of them. And I gave—when I had that show up in Hartsdale, where Allan Stone bought 18 pieces—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, we haven't talked about that here.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But we haven't talked about the first show yet. Did Allan Stone buy 18 pieces—was that the first show? No.

MR. SUPERIOR: No, they were from my second or third show.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And at that time, once again, you know, we were pressed for money. I'd left Hampshire. And while I was waiting for Allan to pay me, Butch Brown came down and asked me if I needed money. I said, "Yes." So he gave me a thousand dollars; I gave him about 20 of these drawings. And I thought he was going to sell them. Well, I have no idea what he ever did with them. I think he put them in a closet, and he moved down to Florida. But they're out there someplace.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah. But you kept this one.

MR. SUPERIOR: I kept a few. Or I did some since, after that.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, just that blank canvas—that in the center, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, it's very, very symbolic.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: And everything's fragile, made of wood that rots, loosely put together.

MS. RIEDEL: All sorts of gears.

MR. SUPERIOR: On a landscape that's dreamy and with strange plants and things growing out of it. These things were very internal. And what I was consciously thinking about while I did them were dark and light patterns. And the whole abstract thing that took place. You know I would see a shape I needed. And I would construct or come up with something to make that shape, whether it be a cloud or a form or a crazy little— well, for instance, that's a self-portrait up there from the time. There's one of those little things on my shoulder.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And people thought I was kind of nuts at that time.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you looking at a lot of Leonardo da Vinci already? I know you had mentioned he was a most significant influence.

MR. SUPERIOR: I always looked at da Vinci.

MS. RIEDEL: You can see it in the [inaudible].

MR. SUPERIOR: And I could never make head or tail of his machines, but I loved them. And there was something about the look that they had. And I had seen a couple of those traveling shows of his machines made. But they were all—they never seemed to be that convincing. They were all, you know, made too clean, too modern, too polished, etc. Modern joints and screws and so forth. And I thought I wanted to make things that looked like a certain period.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Whatever that was. Or looked like farm equipment or the itinerant furniture-makers, that whole 19th-century Civil War things. I made a piece which was inspired by a Shaker cobbler's bench, only I made it in the cobbler's bench, and I put early medical tools with the saws and the hammers. And I called it *Sawbones*. And there was a little sign: "The Doctor's In, the Doctor's Out." You know, which kind of spoke about that level of rudimentary medicine.

MS. RIEDEL: From the time that you made the first ones to that first show at Heller, how much time passed?

MR. SUPERIOR: The first show I had at Heller. I had another one when they moved about a year and a half, two years later when they moved to SoHo.

MS. RIEDEL: But from the time you completed that first series of constructions, they were shown fairly quickly, yes?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. And there was like another year before I had accumulated enough for another show. And I got lots of publicity out of it. I was on *Saturday Morning Live* with them. Eventually one was purchased by Jim Henson. And it was in a show at the Crafts Museum, after he died, of collectors. And they called me up, and they wanted to know—I have it here someplace I think. It was an *Anti-Buggee*; it was like a wooden tractor but with a flyswatter attached to the front. And with a scope you'd see the fly. You'd push forward, and the flyswatter comes out. And he had it sitting on his shelf with a little Kermit the Frog sitting up in the seat. And they wanted to know would I mind if they displayed it with the Kermit the Frog. And I thought, alright, the guy's dead. It killed me, but I said okay. Because it cutesified the whole thing, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And it was more about him than it was about me. So I never even saw the show.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] How did you come to have an exhibition with Heller? Because they were showing exclusively glass.

MR. SUPERIOR: I was the first. I walked in there, and they said, "You know we're a glass gallery." I said, "Well, I made the appointment because it was Tommy [Simpson] that told me they were very nice guys, and I should show it to them. They might be able to suggest some other gallery." And I had these cardboard boxes with four or five pieces in them. And I started to unpack them, and they really loved them and offered me a show right then and there. I mean this never happens.

MS. RIEDEL: Never.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I called up and cancelled all the rest of the appointments I had that day.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was 1980, '81, something like that?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And that show was extremely successful.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, it was also very low-priced.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, I think I sold all but maybe one. One of my best ones, one of my first: *If pigs had wings. Or Bringing Home the Bacon As the Crow Flies* was the title of it. And it was the pig in a sling with the crow.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: The guy who bought that— all these things were in little glass display cases. I mean it blew me away when I left the cardboard boxes with these things there. We went home. We went down for the opening. And here they are in like a museum display. And I couldn't believe it. I mean I didn't really think I had made all this stuff. One of the first ones that sold was the pig piece. And on one of the visits back there a week or so later, I noticed that in the case, underneath the pig, are little pieces of corn kernels. Turned out that the guy who bought them was a collector, but a kind of an eccentric guy. And he would come every morning on his way to the office, and he would stop, and he would put fresh corn out for the pig. [Laughs.]

MRS. SUPERIOR: It was popcorn, wasn't it? Dried corn.

MR. SUPERIOR: What?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Dried corn.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, dried corn.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Popcorn.

MR. SUPERIOR: So, you know. And I've seen him many, many times since then, a very normal guy. We went for



dinner and all and met his wife and his daughter. And it's one of those things where—which happens all the time—where somebody bought one of your things 25 years ago, and that's it. They own one. They have a piece of you. That's it. Mara's collector was sent from heaven.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, yes, that's in-depth collecting.

MR. SUPERIOR: Allan Stone was the closest I ever came to that. But, you know, I remember going up there the first time. And this is a 50-room mansion. The gardens. The yard—

MS. RIEDEL: We haven't talked about that story yet on discs. So maybe would you retell that story here on the disc? Because when we were talking about it earlier, it wasn't on the disc.

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, about sitting here looking through the help-wanted section when the phone call came in?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well.

MS. RIEDEL: This was the second show or the third?

MR. SUPERIOR: This was—I had had one show at Heller. And in between, when they were moving, I asked—because Tommy suggested a show with me and him at the Alan Brown Gallery up in Hartsdale. So I asked the Hellers if they wouldn't mind. They said no, and it happened. Actually it was after the last show I had with them. I'm sorry. I get confused.

MS. RIEDEL: That's okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I had three shows.

MS. RIEDEL: With Heller.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. And they sold out the first one. Second one a few pieces. The third one maybe nothing. So I still had a lot of these things left over. So they made it into that show at Alan Brown's. So I get a phone call from Butch saying that Allan Stone had come by and he made a deal with him. And he bought all 18 pieces—at a huge discount of course. And Butch would take no commission from me, but Allan Stone gave him one of the pieces. So I thought, wow, a big major dealer buys 18 of my pieces, and this is it. I'm on my way. And as I said, it took me six months before I get to meet him. And the first time I went to the gallery, it was like you could hardly get up the stairs because there's stuff, sculptures, artifacts, art, antiques all over the place. You had to weave your way up through.

MS. RIEDEL: This is in his house, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: This is his gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: His gallery, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: You get to the gallery, and there's like a space cleared out. But then there are other rooms off, and it's like—his house was this way, too. If you took everything out of the basement of all the major museums in New York, and you shoved it into a room until you could just close the door, that's what his house was like. He had—I walked in there the first time, and my things are spread all over. One of them was sitting on top of a Bugatti desk. Another one was underneath a de Kooning drawing. And, you know, so we talked. And I said, "Well, any chance of having a show?" And he said, "Well, show me some slides." And I thought to myself, you just bought 18 pieces, for Christ's sake, you know what I do. What is this?" But I did that, you know. I showed him some slides. While I was waiting, he gave me a date for the show. I began to hear all kinds of stories about him, tales of how he would cancel a show at the last minute because he didn't like the work, etc., etc.

So I go down with my work in cardboard boxes as usual with a friend of mine. We bring it down for the show. And it was a show with two other artists. One of them was a painter, academic-type painter, and then his father who did paintings on saws. And while I'm there, I brought my boxes in. I hadn't unpacked them yet. He's hanging this painting, which was about 12, 15 feet long, big orangey thing. Abstract Expressionist. And this guy, he's like a teacher at some college down south. Allan Stone comes out of the office, looks at the painting, and says, "I can't show that. It's mustard. I can't show that." He turns around, walks back in the office. And the guy's just like this. And I thought to myself, it's true. My God, it's true! You know I'd heard stories that if he didn't like something, he didn't even come to the opening, at his own gallery. So the guy says, Oh, I know, don't worry. I'll take care of it. And he goes in the office.

And I said to my friend, Chris [Witherspoon], I said, "Let's get the hell out of here and go and have some lunch. I

can't watch this." We go, eat lunch. I come back terrified. I mean what if he doesn't like this stuff. So I unpack the boxes. Meanwhile the guy had come back out, and the painting was hung, and it went in the show. Open my boxes, put my things around on the floor, and Stone comes out of his office and says, "Good work." Walks around, turns around and goes back in the office. That was it. That's the only thing he ever said to me about my work. Except for the time when I got a phone call that one of his kids had had a party and they threw some coats over some things. And some of my pieces were slightly damaged. And he says, "Now I used to make models myself. I could probably fix them with a little glue." He said, "But I'd rather you take care of it." So naturally I dashed up there, took the pieces, came back, repaired them all, didn't charge him, didn't even mention it. Not a penny. He never said another word. He said, "Thank you." That's it.

All the conversations we ever had ended up with him telling me his life story. Never one word of interest expressed in me or my work or what I'm doing. Nothing, nothing at all. And I tried so hard. It was frustrating me to hell—like crazy. And then when I had my show there and what's her name, the head of the Museum of Modern Art. Ask Mara who'll remember. Name somebody big connected to the Museum of Modern Art.

MS. RIEDEL: I can think of a few names, but it's not coming right now.

MR. SUPERIOR: She was like the head of the board of trustees of the Museum of Modern Art.

MS. RIEDEL: Agnes Gund?

MRS. SUPERIOR: [Inaudible.]

MR. SUPERIOR: She buys a piece, but she comes up, and she says, "You know, I really like this." I'm looking at it, but I think I have to talk to my husband first." This is like a gazillionaire. Anyway, I sold maybe two pieces. And Allan bought another one or two himself. It took me months and months and months—a couple of years actually—before I finally got paid off for that. Drove me wild. It was a really difficult—here we are struggling along, I'm not looking for another teaching job because he tells me that I shouldn't worry about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Allan Stone?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. So other than the Hellers, my experience basically with dealers has not been that great.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Rick [Snyderman], for example, well—alright. I won't get into that. But, you know, I'm not the only one by any means. I'm sure you've heard plenty of stories.

MS. RIEDEL: No, it's a common complaint. I mean that's one reason why it's a question on our list.

MRS. SUPERIOR: It's changing. It's extremely challenging.

MS. RIEDEL: It's not uncommon.

MRS. SUPERIOR: It's a very mysterious business.

MR. SUPERIOR: When you're worried like that, it's hard to focus, really hard to focus. Anyhow, this went on, and I was in another show, a new talent show.

MS. RIEDEL: And which gallery was this?

MR. SUPERIOR: After I had my first show there.

MS. RIEDEL: This is at Allan Stone?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I was in that show. And then I went and talked to him about when I could schedule my next solo show. And he once again, he says, "Send me slides." So I did. I had some pieces going. I made some—I took some photographs. I send him the slides and didn't hear a word. I go in there, and he's sitting behind this desk, with crap all over the place. And I said, "Well, what did you think of the slides?" "Slides? Oh, I misplaced them someplace." And I blew my stack. And I told him off. And he says, "I guess we can't do business anymore," and I stormed out. About, what, a month later, we're walking around in New York up in that area, and I had a change of heart. I said, "Geez, this is stupid of me to do that." We went up there, and I went in there and apologized. And the last thing he said to me was, "Send me some more slides." And I never saw him again. [Laughs.] Until

about three or four months ago. I get a phone call from some art appraisers after Allan had died. And they wanted to know about my pieces, what they were worth, so forth and so on. And they sent me photographs. Some of them were a little damaged here and there. They were thinking that his daughter might take a booth at SOFA New York. And I said, "Well, I don't understand that. They're not a craft gallery." She said, "Well, the trustees may want to try it." Which is like all of her sisters; there may be four or five of them, I don't know. One's a filmmaker. Then there's Claudia [Stone, who] owns the gallery in New York now.

MS. RIEDEL: Claudia Stone?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. And then there's another one has a gallery out in California, maybe in San Francisco or LA, I'm not sure. And they said, "Well, if we do this," she said, "we may feature your pieces." And they wanted to know would I clean them up and make repairs if necessary. So I thought and I remembered what had happened before. And I said, "Sure. I'd be happy to. But I would charge you this much." And they went a little crazy because this prompted a whole discussion between whether they would pay for this or not. And then she just said to me, "Well, just remember this: The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree." That was the appraiser telling me that. Yeah, this is okay, I don't care. The world has to know. But the world's never— It's going to be a year before this even— And who's going to hear it? Who's going to read it? And I'll probably be dead by that time anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: You can decide then whether you feel like you need [inaudible].

MR. SUPERIOR: I'm trying to figure how can I, after all this time, finally make some kind of—get some kind of benefit from the measly amount of money that he paid for all these things. And they hid them away. Meanwhile telling me that all kinds of people from museums all over the world would come to his house, and I'd get plenty of publicity. Never heard one single word from anybody about anything that had anything to do with seeing anything at Allan Stone. He may have sold a few of them. I have no idea.

MS. RIEDEL: So the whole large collection went into a private collection, and then really just disappeared.

MR. SUPERIOR: It just vanished into his house. They have or have accounted for them, oh, about 16 of them.

MS. RIEDEL: And you said in total there are probably 70 or 80 of these. In total there are 70 or 80, and they have maybe—

MR. SUPERIOR: I made about 65 or 70 of these sculptures.

MS. RIEDEL: So they have 25 percent probably of the entire collection. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Anyway, I thought, well, unless some of them are going to be shown. So it turns out they picked not the three best ones I had told them. And also I said this would be a perfect time to donate one of those pieces to the American Crafts Museum, the Museum of Art and Design. As a matter of fact, the head curator of the—

MS. RIEDEL AND MRS. SUPERIOR: David McFadden.

MR. SUPERIOR: David McFadden had told me he would welcome the idea and was there anything he could do to help?

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And so I've told this to Claudia. I've seen letters and emails about this. Never got any response whatsoever. So comes SOFA New York. Sure enough they have a booth. They have three of my not-so-great pieces. And they're all over me with compliments and how wonderful. I have yet to hear still one word from all of that, not one word about anything. They did not hire me to clean them up or fix them. But the ones they chose, I think they chose because they didn't need any repairs.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: So as far as I'm concerned, that whole thing was a fiasco.

MS. RIEDEL: Which did they show, do you remember which three?

MR. SUPERIOR: Do you remember which of the three pieces? One of them was the little piece called *Follow Me*, with the feet. A follow-up—no pun intended— piece that I made where you have a little shade and you pull the thing along behind you that makes footprints and then a broom sweeps them away. It was called *A Fugitive's*

*Machine*. So you're protected from the sun, you run along, and it erases your tracks. They had that one. They had a Shaker downhill racer, which is a round circle—no, a *Shaker Nautilus Machine*, a rocking chair with weights and pulleys and all kinds of things. And what was the third one? I don't remember. I'm sorry my memory's so lousy. Or is it selective? Or do I just keep putting them out of my mind for one reason or another?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we can always amend this if it occurs to you later.

MR. SUPERIOR: We made an appointment. We went in after sending her several emails that she didn't respond to, we made an appointment and went in to talk to Claudia. And I wanted to ask her if she was interested, and I showed her pictures. Gave her all kinds of material. We talked to her. She expressed no interest. And I couldn't bring myself to say, "Would you take me on?" I just couldn't do it. And she said, "Stay in touch." So I kept sending emails, and I sent her all the new work I had. Never heard a thing. Never got an answer. And Mara said, "She busy." Fuck that! You know. It's just wrong. I don't care how busy you are. For example, when I was chairman of the crafts department in Philadelphia, every time somebody would retire or a job opening would turn up, I was in charge. And I would get all these applications. Every single one of them had to be acknowledged and answered when I had been through it myself and known that you send something out, you don't get anything back, it's really terrible. So I made sure to do that. So I just cannot believe that anybody could be that busy that they can't hire one of the secretaries to say, "We saw your email. No, we're not interested at this time."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. Even that I didn't get. There's nothing worse than being ignored.

MS. RIEDEL: No. Well, especially if the material's been more or less—especially if the material has been more or less requested.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, yes. So—

MS. RIEDEL: The machines, though, the fantasy machines and the allegorical constructions got excellent response in the media, didn't they? They were well documented in some of the craft magazines.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, I got, you some, publicity. At my first show Henry Geldzahler came in, and Doug [Heller] tried to interest him. And he said, "No, they're a little too cute for me." That was so much for me from Henry. [Laughs.] You know, no big deal. I was on the TV show and a few little reviews here and there, nothing, nothing much to speak of.

MS. RIEDEL: Some of the woodworking magazines, though, picked them up.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, *Fine Woodworking* had one on the back cover. I since had them publish a couple more things in some contests that I entered that I didn't win. I sent in that jewelry chest, for example. But then they put a picture of it in the magazine, but they didn't give me a prize. And then there was something else, too, I forget. And then there was this guy had a magazine called *Scale Woodworking*. And he wanted me to write some articles for the magazine, *Scale Woodcraft*, so that I did two. He wrote one of the stories, and then I wrote an article myself. Well, these are some of the Shaker things. This is a Shaker loveseat. You know the Shakers were celibate. This is for the same couple after 20 years. *Dr. Lucifer's Eternal Youth Machine*, *The Drag Racer*. This is the backend of the one I was telling you about with the brush that sweeps things away.

MS. RIEDEL: The *Fugitive*, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: And he never paid me for the articles. He never sent my drawings back. I sent him many letters. Finally he sent me a really nasty letter and a check for 50 bucks. And then I see that he was on the staff—had gotten another job. He'd quit the magazine, and they ended it. So it's like you keep running into people who want to do something for you and they're all sincere. But it always falls through.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MR. SUPERIOR: Or it doesn't amount to a hill of beans anyway. So through all this, you know, I give myself a certain amount of credit, and other artists, many of which I know, who keep on with it no matter what, in spite of all this. And it's tragic in a way. But I'm not bitter about it. But I get angry from time to time. And, you know, I don't want to live up to the [Vincent] van Gogh cliché. It just doesn't make any sense, not these days.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd like to talk about some of the pivotal early pieces. You mentioned *da Vinci's Studio*. It was certainly one of the most significant of those early constructions, one of the most [inaudible].

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, I'd say that. And the *Eternal Youth Machine* were the two best of that group. *Da Vinci's Studio* had the entire second floor rotated around on wheels. And there was a little crank-up easel that worked

with a painting of the *Mona Lisa* on it, and the mouth is all wiped out because he just couldn't get it right. And it had a telescope and a table and candles and some food. Had an outhouse in the back. And a moat and a drawbridge and a mailbox, you know. All the things that I thought—why not, you know?—he would have if he was around now. You know and around the moat is carved and painted green water, and it says, "Italy, see." Other land, that kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like, yes, *The New Yorker*, who was it? Saul Steinberg that drawing of the—

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: *The New Yorker's* version of the world [inaudible].

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: That's been one of Mara's great inspirations, that particular thing of Steinberg's.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was the Leonardo Italian version.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. There's a flying machine up on top. These are not his machines. But they're the style of. An amphibious vehicle here with propeller and thing to steer with. Here's the outhouse back here, has a fan up on top. You know I figured he would have invented that, I'm sure. That's the *Mona Lisa*.

MS. RIEDEL: And this dates from 1984 I think, is that right?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, that sounds about right.

MS. RIEDEL: And where was this exhibited, and where is it now?

MR. SUPERIOR: This was exhibited at an invitational show in Indiana, I think, of visionary artists, three people. And I shipped some things out there. It took me all so much time to make a crate for the pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember the gallery?

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: The name of the place. Do you remember the gallery name?

MR. SUPERIOR: It's in my resume.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. I'll take a look at that.

MR. SUPERIOR: So another one of those fantasies, rags to riches stories. We were sitting here once again between jobs. And I had put an ad in the paper trying to sell one of my iron stoves out there that we didn't want. And I got maybe two calls, one of which a guy came out to look at the stoves. And he was a German businessman who lived in Chesterfield, or something like that. And he looked at the stove and said, "No, it's too small, he wasn't interested." But he happened to catch a look at some of my sculptures, including *da Vinci's Studio*. And he asked about them. And I showed him around. And he said, "Well, how much are those?" And I gave him a price. He said, "What!?" He said, "Occasionally I get a good thing in the stock market. If it happens, I'll come by. Maybe we can talk." Two days later I'm in my studio, worrying about where—how we're going to pay the mortgage—a knock on my window. It's him. He says, "I had a good day. How much for all three?" And he bought that one, and he bought the one with my studio with Mara; the muse flying around on top. What was the other one?

MRS. SUPERIOR: The ritual wall? The *Carpenter's Ritual Wall*?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, he didn't buy that one.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember his name, the collector's name?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Manfred Zorn. It was during that time when Germany was completely on top of the world, whenever that was. The late eighties, when their economy was booming.

MR. SUPERIOR: We invited him over for dinner. Turns out he was an ex-alcoholic, and he wouldn't even drink the cider because it had 1 percent alcohol in it. And I made a table for the *da Vinci's Studio* to sit on. Never charged him anything for it. Never heard from him again.

MS. RIEDEL: And the pieces, did they go back to Germany, or did he live here in the States?

MR. SUPERIOR: I have no idea.

MS. RIEDEL: No idea! Interesting.

MR. SUPERIOR: No idea at all. I don't even know if he's still living there.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about *Peace Missile* too, because that—

MR. SUPERIOR: About who?

MS. RIEDEL: *Peace Missile*?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That seems one of the most overtly political of your pieces.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, you know, it was during those times.

MS. RIEDEL: 'Eighty-five, I think, 1985.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. The end of Vietnam and— and I wanted to say something about it. So that was—

MS. RIEDEL: And one thing people may not realize if they just have seen a photo of it is that it's also—it's a music box.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And what does it play?

MR. SUPERIOR: "Silent Night."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, it's like almost all the things that move, you can't really get the whole thing until you see it happening.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's true.

MR. SUPERIOR: I had a piece at the opening of my second show at Heller down in SoHo. And the opening night, a woman from the *New York Times* was there. And there was one of my pieces I called *The Oracle* and it was a building up on top of some posts and a ladder that goes up. And on top were hanging all these things with words on them that were factors in making decisions. And then it had a little battery hook-up so that light would go on. So you'd ask it a question, and then you'd climb up the ladder, you look in, and it says either yes or no. So she looks at me, and she says, "Will that tell me if I'm ever going to meet a man and get married?" And Ah! And at the time I'm thinking this is from the *New York Times*. What if it says no? She goes over to the machine, cranks it up, and looks in, and it's right on the line. So she wrote a very nice little review. [Laughs.] You know people relate to these things in a personal way. I thought always that kind of in the realm of H.C. Westermann, who was one of my favorite artists. But too obvious to have that kind of mystery that his work has. His is far more sculptural in the true sense of sculptural, I think, you know. Mine are objectified, and my own self-criticism was that they basically could become one-liners. And, you know, once you get it, okay. But, you know, that's why I put so much effort into them because I want there to be more that you constantly find out and discover and make it well.

MS. RIEDEL: And was there any Dada influence or Surrealist? Anything along those lines or not really?

MR. SUPERIOR: Only to the point that I think a lot of things were neat the first time like, you know, *The Urinal* [signed] R. Mutt, by Duchamp.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And look what happened to him. He said, "Screw it! I've done it. I'm just going to go in the swimming pool and play chess the rest of my life." You know Salvador Dali was a phony baloney whose greatest creation was himself, even though he could paint. But, you know, his own—after a certain point, his paintings became imitations of themselves. There are a few artists who—contemporary artists—I really admire.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Who comes to mind?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, I saw some stuff up in Boston, and I bought the book. I missed the show, but I bought the

catalog.

MRS. SUPERIOR: He's a Spanish name.

MR. SUPERIOR: Garcia Lopez [Antonio Lopez Garcia]. Now what's his first name?

MRS. SUPERIOR: The catalogue is right here. And Walton Ford?

MR. SUPERIOR: Great, great, great painter, I think. I sometimes would hesitate to admit it, depending on the company I was in, but I really, really liked Andrew Wyeth. And I thought his critics were full of shit in every respect. Boy, could he paint. And did he ever have so much influences, so many imitators of people painting barns that don't have a whit of the abstract sensibilities that his work has had. And there was nobody could evoke something the way he did. I think he was a really truly great painter.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MR. SUPERIOR: So much for that. And I know, you know, there are people who would tell me I'm full of baloney for feeling that way. But, no, I love looking at his things.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: I think I've got every Wyeth book ever published. Picasso's blue period is one of my favorite things, and his prints are wonderful. His prints are great. There's a lot of stuff besides the big black-and-white painting in Spain there—what is it?

MS. RIEDEL: *Guernica*?

MR. SUPERIOR: *Guernica*. Which is a great, great anti-war painting. But there were some paintings he did that are downright ridiculous and awful with cartoon feet that didn't make any sense at all. And I don't like the idea of idolizing somebody just because of who they are when they can do a lot of crap. I mean Calder was a great artist, and he made all kinds of things on all levels. Tommy [Simpson] admires Calder a lot. And, you know, would love to be like that. And I love Calder, especially the earlier things, you know, the wire sculptures. I had a student at Hampshire who was literally copying the wire sculptures. And he made a living off it, you know. And I don't know how many times I'd look at him and, "When are you going to do something your own? It gets tiresome." You know when I was a student at Pratt in three-dimensional design, we were shown pictures of those, and one of our assignments was to make things out of wire like that. And that's where that belongs. But to pick up where somebody else didn't even leave off as a statement about—

[END DISC 3.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Roy Superior at the artist's home and studio on June 30, 2010, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. This is disc number three.

Roy, this morning let's continue with our conversation about the constructions, the allegorical constructions of the machines. And let's talk about something—one of the first monuments you made, you think it's the first one, also in 1981, the *Great Clarinet Monument*. So that happened—you made that the same year that you made *When Pigs Have Wings*.

MR. SUPERIOR: I did?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, you were saying 1981.

MR. SUPERIOR: Okay.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, that was the year after the first one.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Oh, right. It's after the—

MR. SUPERIOR: It was at that time when I'd just spent maybe three or more years primarily working on the house.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And knew that I would be coming up for reappointment at some point, and I couldn't bring my house in as a what I'd been up to. Although I did have—somebody in the architecture department came out and

wrote about it as being a rather significant work of art. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And we should say it was a major restoration to a home that dates to what, 1830, this home?

MR. SUPERIOR: This home was supposedly 1828.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I went to the hall of records, and I traced it up as far as like 1948, and there were something like 20 owners in that amount of time, and maybe 20 more since then. So it's changed hands. And everybody that had it did something horrible to it. For example, where that hearthstone is, that was covered with 1950s bricks. In other words, perfectly uniform bricks. And by some strange coincidence, the custodian who cleaned the offices at Hampshire College had lived in this house. And he is the one who put those bricks down on it. And I found that out and we were chatting one day. And I said, "By the way—"I forget his name—"—what's underneath those bricks?" He said, "Oh, there was an old stone that had a crack in it, so I covered them up. And I rushed home, grabbed a crowbar, pried off the bricks, and there's that beautiful piece of Goshen stone there with a wonderful crack in it. Hasn't hurt it a bit.

MS. RIEDEL: So this house really was a major renovation?

MR. SUPERIOR: He told me that back there was the talk of the town, a brick beehive oven. And they took it out because they were afraid it was going to burn the house down. And there was a brick wall there. I took it down, brick by brick. And rebuilt it to do that. So I had been spending so much time working on the house after we moved up here, I hadn't really been doing much artwork in the studio yet. And I think pressure was beginning to build all over because of that. So out of that comes the *Heavy-Hearted Portable Tortured Soul Retainer*. I somehow always found a way to laugh off everything. As a matter of fact, it goes way back. When I was being bawled out by the principal or the teacher, my reaction was to laugh or giggle. It was completely involuntary. And meant nothing in terms of anything other than that that was my reaction.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I still do that, although the closest thing to a principal now is Mara. [They all laugh.] And I learned long ago to restrain my laugh when she's bawling me out. [They laugh.]

MR. RIEDEL: So there was from the beginning with the constructions, a back and forth between machines that functioned, that actually moved, and temples.

MR. SUPERIOR: Machines, fantasies, I wish there was a machine to do that. Ooh, I'll make one.

MS. RIEDEL: And we were talking about how these machines evolved from one to the other. Right before the disc ended, you were saying there's not a Dada influence even though one can see them in that same—in that context, one can see them in terms of social commentary.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, one of the differences is because I don't take myself so seriously and because I don't think that when I do something that's unique for me that it's going to change the art world. So if I was Marcel Duchamp, after the big to-do they did over the toilet—or *The Urinal*—I would've made toilets and urinals and showers and kept on going for quite a while because I liked, I thought it would be fun, you know. But he does one, that's it. But that's Marcel Duchamp. "I did it. I'm moving on to something else."

MS. RIEDEL: But the point you made earlier is that in your case, because these pieces are finely crafted, they're not ready-mades that you've picked up and identified, the craft, the process of crafting something would often lead from one piece to the next.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Well—

MS. RIEDEL: Would you explain that?

MR. SUPERIOR: The slightest technological thing can spark another idea. For example, if I found a chisel at a tag sale that was maybe a 16th of an inch chisel, and I didn't have one that small and I realized, oh, I can make little tiny mortises with that. One piece wasn't enough. So, you know, I would expand on that. Or was wanting to make—I have some wheels out there that never got into a piece because I just enjoyed making wheels. Or they would find their way into something years later. It's almost as though the pieces were the byproducts of what was really important, which was exploring the ideas of fantasy as moving on with these things. And I think that a lot of art is that way anyway. You're into something that has—may or may not be revealed in the work. But that's what moves you on. And the work, you keep putting behind you. I painted this, okay, but I'm really interested in this aspect. And this one is good, but it's not doing what I want it. And these things pile up. And people look at them and attribute all kinds of things to them that aren't necessarily there. Or they may exist but



the artist didn't know he had put them in.

So when it reached the point where just before my first show, I had these things all over the house, and I kind of got used to seeing them that way. I just took them for granted. So when I brought them all in, and I came back for the opening, and there they were up on pedestals, behind pieces of glass. I just couldn't believe that I had made all these things because I was so deeply involved in the process. So that really for the first time objectified the stuff. When you look at something, a painting on an easel, in that context, for months and months and months, and then it's abandoned and you frame it. I say abandoned because how the hell do you know that does it? You usually just get worn out. Or you want to move on to something else.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: The minute you put a frame on it, it takes on a different life. You know it's like putting the mark of the kid's head on the wall. In 1943 he was this tall. In 1944 he was that tall. That is it. That ends it. And you keep on going higher and higher. So that's how I see the work. And to talk about a retrospective, you know, in one sense, sure I would love to see all these things together. But in another thought it almost terrifies me: What if I think they're pretty bad? [Laughs.] Or crude, you know. Because as my skills got better, the crudeness of the earlier ones may jump out. But in a sense they were made intended to be crude because a lot of the emphasis in them is on that kind of farm construction, you know. Somebody—a wood butcher—slapping something together. But over the time the patina's that developed on that wood and the joinery and everything else takes on a certain attitude. And so these pieces, once they're out of the way and removed, take on a whole different life. And I'm not sure what I'm going to find, but I want to see these things again.

MS. RIEDEL: But we have right in the living room, we have the *Temple to the Clarinet*.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. Now, every time I walk by that clarinet and when I look at it, I think how crude it is. And I think how dusty it is. And I think how it really needs to be oiled. And I think about how much work all that would be. And I'm lazy. So I just move on.

MS. RIEDEL: The *Peace Missile*, though, that still works perfectly.

MR. SUPERIOR: It still works, but you saw how faded the wood is from being in the sunlight.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, from being outside. But if one didn't know how vibrant it is on the inside, one wouldn't necessarily think that.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: I think it's because you have an image, and once it opens up, you can see the contrast of the wood.

MR. SUPERIOR: It's also very frustrating that over the years sometimes a spring weakens or a belt loosens up or the wood—which is constantly moving—shrinks and something doesn't work anymore, that annoys me. I would wish these things would just keep on working over and over and over again. Like every time I turn the crank on that flapping thing in there, I'm never sure what's going to happen if anything at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. What's that one called again?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: What's that piece called again? Something about real life.

MR. SUPERIOR: *The Human Condition*.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, *The Human Condition*, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. You know no matter how hard we try, we can make all kinds of flapping to do and racket and leave behind all this stuff, but it doesn't always get off the ground.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Because it's chained to real life.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about two of the influences on the work: your love of tools and your interest in patent models.

MR. SUPERIOR: I've only actually seen a few patent models in real life. I have never been to the Patent Museum—Office Museum. There are some in the Smithsonian. I saw those. So everything I saw was in pictures. And in a

way I'm glad because it gave me the beginnings of something, and I could go on for myself without, you know. When I look at some of those pictures and realize, oh, I took this from there and that from there, I don't like that because I have a thing about being a do-it-yourselfer, you know. Like I rarely, hardly ever use found objects and materials in my work. Mara's constantly trying to get me to do that. But I can't. I have to make it all myself.

MS. RIEDEL: And why is that?

MR. SUPERIOR: I don't know. On *The Olive Museum*, the thing that I am most proud of is the knob on the door because I made in on a little lathe that I have gotten out there. Made it from scratch, the whole knob and the little latch and all. And I am so proud of that. Now I almost lost my fingers making the hinges out of big chunks of brass that are very hard to cut on a machine.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: But, you know, that's for me. I can't say for anybody else.

MRS. SUPERIOR: This reminds me of your mother telling you to make your own autograph album.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right, I told her about that. Yes.

MRS. SUPERIOR: She instilled making it yourself at a very young age.

MR. SUPERIOR: It may be because I got so much attention and so many compliments. I was lavished with praise for that thing. And nobody got anything remotely like it because they all went down and spent \$3 at the drugstore on buying their autograph books which all looked identical.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: And here's mine with this remnant piece of plastic fabric with like a, what do you call those shirts that were so popular in the sixties? You know with all the organic things on them?

MS. RIEDEL: Embroidered shirts? Embroidered? I don't know.

MR. SUPERIOR: A pattern.

MS. RIEDEL: Paisley?

MR. SUPERIOR: Paisley. It was like a paisley green and gold plastic fabric. Something that you would put on a kitchen table, you know, to keep the spills from getting on the wood. [Laughs.] And that was the cover. And I cut all the—I bought some colored paper and I cut them all out. And I punched holes in them one by one. And put it together. So maybe it's that I get a sense of satisfaction, and I kind of think how much praise I ought to get for something like that. So, you know, and it never does because people just mostly take everything for granted anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think tools have influenced the work. Tools. They've certainly inspired the way you've developed the work. New tools have led to new technical abilities.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, because I've spent my life on a limited budget, let's say limited finances, never had a budget. I have to justify every single tool that I buy. So, for example, when I saw—I'll show it to you later—a little tiny miniature brass finger plane that violin makers use. An exquisite little thing. I had to have it, but it was like 40, 50 bucks. And what do I need this for? I'll make a little violin. And that's where the *Walking Bass* was stimulated. I've got to buy that now, and I've got a reason. And so I made the inside of it with that just like it was a full-size violin. So I learned an awful lot about violin making at that time.

MS. RIEDEL: This leads to another question, which is you made full-scale furniture, full-size. But all of these constructions are miniature. Was there ever any desire to make full-scale objects?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, not on the mechanical things, not on those. They only time I've ever done that is that chair.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And that chair is —

MR. SUPERIOR: Because it's not— Number one, it removes you from that omnipotence that I was talking about

the other day of being godlike and looking down and creating this world and then being able to enter into it. And by making it full-sized, would open it up to all the practicality of function, whether it really worked and so forth and so on. And who is going to be strong enough to turn those huge cranks, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Making full-sized furniture was almost like a relief, an antidote because it's much more difficult to make little tiny dovetails than it is to make big ones, for example. If you make little slip on a full-sized dovetail, it doesn't mean anything. You make one little slip on that, you have to start all over again because you've chopped the whole dovetail off, you know. And I had finally got both of my eyes fixed with what do you call it surgery?

MS. RIEDEL: For cataracts?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. And it's helped my vision a lot. But you know I was using magnifying glasses and a magnifying lamp and all of that. And I almost didn't want to admit it because I think back looking at all the fantastic miniatures from the medieval time. All that stuff they did. They must have used magnifying glasses. I can't believe anybody could have that clear vision and paint those little tiny lines with one-hair brushes. It just boggles the mind. So, you know, I was very reluctant to tell people that I actually used a magnifying glass from time to time.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look back on the constructions, which strike you as most significant? Which started your work off in a new direction? Or which are you still happiest with?

MR. SUPERIOR: It still would be that first one.

MS. RIEDEL: The *Heavy-Hearted Tortured Soul Retainer*?

MR. SUPERIOR: Because that's where you'll see those little pegs that I inherited from my father.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And it just opened up a whole world of possibilities. For example, I'd made, I don't know, four or five pieces, I think, that have wheelbarrows in them.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Just because I like making little wheelbarrows. And it's not like making miniatures. It's—to me they're full size when I'm doing it.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. SUPERIOR: And that is much more meaningful than to be confronted with something that is physically full size. So that's why I keep doing them small. I mean many times I've been asked, "Gee, would you ever think of making it this big?" Well, you know, yes. *Tickle Torture Machine*; I made two of those. The first one was very crude. But it was like a table that one would like on and be strapped down and various feather things would go around and torture you with tickling.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: And that sold to somebody who took it down to South America from that first show. And to this day I envision some dictator's company, you know, and he's got a basement somewhere where they're manufacturing these things and sending them out to all the local prisons. [Ms. Riedel laughs.] But I liked the idea so much, and it had vanished, so I made another one, which was a little fancier, a few years later.

MS. RIEDEL: And there are certain pieces that seem to go in series. I'm thinking of the Shaker design-inspired works.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, in that case the next significant one, moving from the farm furniture and reading books on early American woodworking and so forth, that was the beginning of those things. Or were farm machinery, a lot of wheelbarrows, horse buggies, and all the things that were made out of wood, made by hand.

MS. RIEDEL: We were just looking at a potato digger in one of those things dating from the 1800's, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Exactly. So the next thing would have to be— alright, well, there was a series of about five or six what I called models for lifetime machines that would never wear out. So for example this is called *Yankee Ingenuity* and it's based on all those Swiss Army Knife type things, which have all the contraptions in one.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And this is— this comes in a— what am I looking at, Roy? What exactly does this do?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: What does this do? I can't tell.

MR. SUPERIOR: It doesn't do anything. Well, it opens up, it's a pair of scissors with brushes on the end. I mean I put it together as ridiculous things that didn't make any sense being connected. You know a pair of scissors on one end, and a hammer on the other end. So to me it talks about the waste of time on inventing ideas that don't make any sense, which is exactly what I do. Only these were done seriously with a different intention altogether.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: So for example here's another one. *A Lifetime High and Low Reversible Stool*, which would naturally never wear out.

MS. RIEDEL: Did it actually come apart, or can one not sit on it?

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, one can't sit on it.

MR. SUPERIOR: No, of course not.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a completely nonfunctional stool.

MR. SUPERIOR: Hey!

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Wait, there's more. If you want to call now, we'll sell you two of them. [They laugh.] So that's, you know, where that mentality is. We as a nation still suffer from that. I had to put in my fence in the back and digging the holes with a posthole digger that was really rough because there's all rock underneath. I made this combination saw, posthole digger, and hammer. That was sold.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you have work in the Hechinger Collection?

MR. SUPERIOR: Do I what?

MS. RIEDEL: Do you have a piece in the Hechinger Collection?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. You were just looking at it.

MS. RIEDEL: And is this the one in there?

MR. SUPERIOR: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: No, no, no. It was just open to that page. Oh, you see the saws, the painted saws?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: That's who was having the show with me. And his son was the academic painter. And I told you that story about Allan Stone Gallery. Now, so you can imagine the odd combination of—

MS. RIEDEL: Do you mean Howard Finster or Rico Salinas, Lew Horner?

MR. SUPERIOR: This guy. Not Finster, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: This one?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Rico Salinas.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: You see where the yellow piece of paper is?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Should be on the other side maybe?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, this is the *Mr. Goody Two-Shoes Tool Shed*, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Now, interestingly enough, the Hechinger Collection was sold.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: I don't know who bought it or what. But I get a call from them that it had been on a tour, and in the process the little rake was broken.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MR. SUPERIOR: And they wanted to know if it was okay for them to show it without that? And I said, No, I don't really want you to. Why don't I just repair it for you? And they said, "Well, how much would that charge be." And I, you know, I said, "I don't know. A hundred dollars an hour or something like that." Knowing full well it was going to take me about ten minutes. But they said that, well, if it's more than a hundred dollars, they said, we can't afford that in the budget. So we'll just put it on hold. So that's the last time—that was years ago. And as far as I know it's sitting in a warehouse someplace because the bastards are too cheap to spend 50 or 100 bucks to send that back and have me make a new rake. That burns the hell out of me, along with Allan Stone and, you know—anyway. I don't want to get—

MS. RIEDEL: So we were talking about the next series, I think, and we'd start talking about tools.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right, right. This is another one of that series things. This was a circular saw, you see it, the round saw blade?

MS. RIEDEL: And so these are from what, the mid-eighties, the tool series.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. This is '81.

MS. RIEDEL: Now this one is 1989, in the Hechinger Collection.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes that came a little later.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And it's much more—it's not anywhere near as crude as these early things.

MS. RIEDEL: No. And it's also—it's not— did it function at all? Or is it a temple? It looks more like a temple or a shrine.

MR. SUPERIOR: No, that's the monument really.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I kind of, after those pieces, I think, I didn't—I lost interest in making things that moved. And one of the main reasons was after doing it only maybe two or three shows—I've only done one craft show in my life, and that was the first and last Armory craft show that the Museum of Crafts—Craft Museum—was sponsoring. One of the board of trustees or whatever talked me into doing it and I didn't think my work was appropriate to put in a booth and try to sell.

MS. RIEDEL: This was at the Park Avenue Armory in New York?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: One of the SOFA exhibits?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, no. It was way before SOFA.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And so Mara and I said, okay, we'll just share a booth. And I stood there for three days talking and explaining and cranking these things up over and over and over, and didn't sell one single thing. And the killer was at the very end, there was this guy—an older man—in there for about 20 minutes and studying and studying. I had a piece called *The First Snow Blower*. And it was a thing you push along, and shovels went and threw the snow up in the air. And then a bellows blew it away. And he looks at it, and I think, oh, boy. Maybe I got a sale. He says, "Now I'm a retired engineer" and looking at this and saying, "Well, wouldn't the parts rust, and wouldn't that snow be blown back in your face?" And I said, "That's why it never got beyond the patent model stage." [Ms. Riedel laughs.] And then another younger guy came in, and he looked at them, and he said, "Are these expensive?" And I said, "I don't think so." And I started packing them up, and I said, "That's it." Never again. Then I did SOFA Chicago with Leslie [Ferrin], and did the same routine. Standing there talking about, explaining them over and over and over, cranking them, hoping nothing would break. And nobody bought one single piece. I said, "That's it." Never again. And Leslie has taken stuff to Chicago, to SOFA New York, never sold any of them. I don't understand it. I don't know why. It's very bizarre.

MS. RIEDEL: And yet at the beginning, in the early and mid-eighties, they sold immediately, many of them sold fast.

MR. SUPERIOR: Go figure. [Laughs.] Here's a *Lifetime Reversible Axe*.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you decide which ones you were actually going to make and which ones stayed in the sketchbooks?

MR. SUPERIOR: Some—all kinds of reasons. Some just plain laziness. I realized how complicated it would be. Or I tried with sticks and pieces of cardboard and pegs, trying to make something work, and I couldn't figure it out, so I would move on to something else. Or just getting a better idea. Or thinking about something and saying, "That really is corny." Now I always walked that line of not wanting to fall over the edge and making a one-liner that's really corny.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: You know I don't want people to just go up and look at it and say, "Oh," hah-hah! And walk on, and that's it. You never look at it again.

MS. RIEDEL: The titles seem to me especially important. And sometimes I wonder which came first, the titles or the piece?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, if you look at the sketchbooks, most of them have titles because the titles, the words kind of—I twist them around, I work at those sometimes. And the idea comes out, the image comes out of the words. As a matter of fact, when I taught, the most commonly asked question that I ever had for over 40 years was, where do ideas come from? How to you get started? And I've find that over the years, over the generations, the increase has been in students with no imagination and no way of figuring out how to stimulate the imagination. So one of the things I would always have them do, somebody say a word, and I'd write it on the wall. And then say a word based on that, and we'd have this stream of consciousness until all of a sudden an image starts to come from one of those words. So play on words is a very viable way of doing that. I think Tommy must do that. You know he uses words and language. He's a poet. And anything that you can do, you know, makes sense. It's never really been a problem for me. Once I get a bee in my bonnet, I just keep going, and I work in spurts. So probably between all these things I did a lot of fishing.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Do you think of many of these pieces as being—having a kind of social commentary to them?

MR. SUPERIOR: Some of them. Not all. The main comment I think that they all make, that they all make to some extent, is showing our human foibles, how much of our lives we spend pursuing things that in the end don't really make any sense at all. And you know it's like accumulating millions and millions of dollars in the bank, and then you die. Big deal. What was it all worth or all for? So these things are about that. And some of them are kind of obscure. Some of them are very direct.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking of *Peace Missile* and I'm thinking of the first chemical warfare piece.

MR. SUPERIOR: *Peace Missile*, I'm making—I'm preaching.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: No question about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you talk about the chemical warfare piece, because we haven't mentioned that yet, and

that's wonderfully satirical.

MR. SUPERIOR: That's kind of a three-dimensional cartoon.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Kind of a Rube Goldberg. Although he was never really an inspiration. A lot of people automatically assume that I must have studied Rube Goldberg, and I have, after I started making these things. But I've known about him for years because I like the way he drew. And I remember when I was about 11 years old, I'm looking through the "Book Review" section of the *Sunday New York Times*. And there was a book on how to draw. And I pestered my parents. It was like a very expensive \$13 book. And that was the first book that—art book—that I ever purchased on my own. And I finally got it. I kept it for years. It was like—and it was terrible, now that I think back on it. You know I've had to unlearn so much of the stuff. I was weaned on Robert Foster's how to draw this, how to draw that for a dollar. The paperback books, you know, when I was a kid. How to draw animals. And they were awful—awful, awful!

So I had to undo so much of that. I don't think I really learned about drawing until I was at Yale in graduate school. It was something I always just kind of took for granted beforehand. So after that, drawing was a much more conscious procedure. But at the same time, when you do something in your mind and you figure it out and you do it over and over, it's like playing a musical instrument, you forget about it. It's under your fingers. So I had to take what was under my fingers and scrape it all off and throw it away. And then take on new stuff. And when I got that under my fingers and started teaching, it all kind of came clear to me. It was amazing. I think especially when you start, you learn more about everything when you're teaching than when you're a student.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And drawing is a very important part of your process, your working process.

MR. SUPERIOR: Drawing is the fundamental, rock-solid basement of everything I've ever done.

MS. RIEDEL: And we've talked about how difficult that was for you as a teacher when drawing was not—when drawing was out.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. You had to do it in a clandestine sort of manner to teach it.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So we were talking about the chemical warfare piece.

MR. SUPERIOR: The who?

MS. RIEDEL: The chemical warfare piece?

MR. SUPERIOR: I don't know what this all had to do with that. What's wrong with you?

MS. RIEDEL: That's okay. The thoughts often go in— Thoughts very rarely—

MR. SUPERIOR: Maybe you should go away. Maybe you should go to the farmers' market?

MRS. SUPERIOR: That's at two o'clock.

MR. SUPERIOR: Or maybe we should have breakfast—or lunch?

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, the chemical warfare machine made lots of sense to me. I mean in medieval times they didn't have much chemistry. And it would make sense that something in nature, which they found if they could control it, they would sure as hell use it. They kept making machines to pick up bigger and bigger rocks, right? So why not? And, you know, without having all the steps laid out for you as Rube Goldberg would do, it's all there in one piece, and you kind of do it in your head, which makes for the kinetic part of it, where it's interactive because it takes place in your imagination. And, yes, you can press a little crank or do something, but still, most of it takes place up here.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's called the *First Chemical Warfare Machine*? Is that the title? And there's a cage with a skunk. Is that correct?

MR. SUPERIOR: *Early Chemical Warfare Machine*. That came after the *Execucycle*, the one that went around in circles. So I mean there's an example of taking a shot at the foolishness I felt of big business. And how can somebody these days—it proves my point—become an executive of BP for \$10 million or whatever it is a year, and not know what the hell is going on. Right? So as far as I'm concerned, I put them in their place years ago.

MS. RIEDEL: There also is a series that deals with Shaker design. And I think we haven't covered that.

MR. SUPERIOR: Alright. We haven't gotten to that yet. This was one of the best and most purely lyrical pieces I think I ever made. And this is the *If Pigs Had Wings or Bringing Home the Bacon as the Crow Flies*. And this is a perfect example of how words or clichés, literary clichés, or old sayings, can spark an idea. So I just took these three things: "If pigs had wings," you know, "pigs could fly"; "bringing home the bacon" or "as the crow flies." And I put them all together, and I virtually illustrated it in three dimensions. And it became a thing that I felt had to do as something allegorical about earning a living.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah-hah.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. You know which is all on wheels, and the wings flap.

MS. RIEDEL: It feels very much like Theater of the Absurd.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. At what point, Ray, did the large—Roy—did the large cabinets begin?

MR. SUPERIOR: Those came later.

MS. RIEDEL: Nineties, earl nineties.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: You saw the first rainmaking machine?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Yes. We did.

MR. SUPERIOR: The little thing with all the little things. And then there was a second one with the thing with the governor on top of the hoop, okay? Then came the *Portable Air-Conditioner*, which you saw. And talk about the absurd, this was at that time the largest thing I made: the *Conchologist's Chair*. A conchologist is a seashell collector. So it's for people who want to collect shells, but don't want to get their feet wet walking in the sand. So you sit there, and you have these tools that you reach down and pick up this. But they want to leave footprints so that people will know they've been there. Ridiculous, but why not?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And what was the size of this?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: What was the size?

MR. SUPERIOR: The sandbox was about this big.

MS. RIEDEL: So what—two foot diameter, 18 inches?

MR. SUPERIOR: Plus this is the first chair that I made.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And we had been going to local auctions. And occasionally a Shaker chair would pop up, and they were very, very expensive. We could never afford one. But there were Shaker-like chairs that we thought were kind of neat. Not because they were Shaker-like, but they had a certain character and simplicity. So those Shaker things began to just kind of filter in. And it hadn't dawned on me to make a connection. Then there was a *Celestial Rake*, *Tickle Torture Machine II*, the *USS Treadwater*—that was the first self-air-powered boat. *Dog-Petting Machine*, the *Carpenter's Worshipper's Ritual Wall*. Now we're into 1983. The *Coochie-Coo Pram*. This is *Ego-Boosting Machine*, which interestingly enough was purchased by a woman who had just come out of eight years of therapy. You lie on the couch and turn a crank, and as the big drum goes around, it says "You are wonderful, you're terrific, you're great," and that hand comes down and pats you on the back, strokes you. So I thought that was appropriate.



MRS. SUPERIOR: The *Tickle Torture Machine*, Roy—

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, where did that one come from? There's a wind-powered chariot, kind of a—it was a chariot with a sail, but it goes on land. And I realized halfway through that you couldn't see where you're going because the sail would block your vision. So I made this double periscope thing that goes around. So that's what I mean about living in these things.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: You know? And you start, and you don't realize until you've made half of it what the most logical next step will be. So that was a lot of the fun of it.

MS. RIEDEL: And wind-powered seems to suit this routine like.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, it's the most obvious one, wind and water power. Here's the oracle, the *Decision-Making Machine* that the person from the *New York Times* asked if it would enable her to meet a man and get married.

MS. RIEDEL: And you spun the crank, and it said yes or no? Is that how it worked?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, yes. You'd turn the crank, and this thing on top spins around. And all the wooden things with the words on them go flying around. Then comes the first chair. Oh, wait a minute. In between that was *Dr. Lucifer's Eternal Youth Machine*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Which was the most complex thing. And also introduced something else, which I never really took advantage of, and that was sound. When you turned the crank and this wooden conveyor belt starts moving along and it's you know, slats glued onto canvas. So it like bends and rolls. It made a wonderful sound.

MS. RIEDEL: Mmm!

MR. SUPERIOR: But I never really did much more of that.

MRS. SUPERIOR: That's my favorite piece.

MS. RIEDEL: *Dr. Lucifer's*?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Did you see the picture of that?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: That's the one, I several times begged the Stones to contribute to the Crafts Museum. At the opening of New York SOFA a few months ago, we were there. I had my shrines there. And we were talking with McFadden—you know him?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, David McFadden. Mm-hmm.

MR. SUPERIOR: Interestingly enough, his partner was a classmate of Mara's at the School of Art and Design when she was in high school.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm!

MR. SUPERIOR: And they have this ongoing, oh, love affair of reminiscence. And he's a curator at the Metropolitan Museum. So, you know, you keep pushing every chance you get. So I was talking with McFadden, and down the aisle was the Stone's Gallery booth with three of my pieces there. And I asked him if he'd go in and maybe say something about that. And he said he would. I still never heard a word back, and I haven't since. Anyway, this is the first of the series of Shaker things, and it's not Shaker. It was a Windsor rocker. It's a *Windsor Rocker Shocker*. So once again, it's play on words, right. I like puns. You know, the *First Electric Chair*. Now I have—these are terrible slides. They're dark. I did fix them up. I have a picture someplace. I don't know, I'll come across it later. A piece called *The Battle of the Sexes*. And it's two wheelbarrow-like farm machines that face one another. One is a male. As you push it along, an erection pops up in the air. And the other one is a female. And as you push it along, a thing with teeth goes like that. [Laughs.] That was the first piece that sold out of that show at Heller, that second or third show.

MS. RIEDEL: And what year was that, does that date from?

MR. SUPERIOR: That was 1983.

MS. RIEDEL: Roy, we were just talking about sound effects and some of the pieces that made sound effects. I know *Peace Missile* was also a music box.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Did any of the others play music?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, *The Walking Bass* had a music box in it, that when you tilt back it played "The Entertainer." A walking bass is a certain style of playing the bass in a jazz band.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: So a term. So once again, it's a pun on words.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: And an excuse to buy that little plane I was talking about.

MS. RIEDEL: There you go, right. Given your love of music, I'm surprised there aren't more musical references in the work.

MR. SUPERIOR: I have lots of drawings for things like that. Things that I never did make, but haven't ever quite given up on. But I've just moved on. For example, one time I contemplated trying to sell stuff out of my barn. And I was going to put up a sign "Whirligig" up front of the house. But all I ended up doing was titling a course I taught at Hampshire after that.

MS. RIEDEL: Fantasy Factory, is that what it was going to be?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And fishing, too, is something that we see in the sketchbooks more than in the constructions.

MR. SUPERIOR: Somewhere I have sketch for a tuba thing—a tuba-powered machine. That's not it. Interestingly enough, a lot of these books are only half filled, if even that.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, fishing tied into the chairs, *Dangler's Rocker*.

MR. SUPERIOR: Now that came much later.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, anyway, after that first chair, there were a few things in between. I was into buggies and more farm stuff. This one was called *A Tough Hoe to Row*. Right? And that's [inaudible]. And then there was the *Anti-Buggee*, which Jim Henson bought. You know, just imagine that with Kermit the Frog sitting up there.

MS. RIEDEL: That's unfortunate.

MR. SUPERIOR: You know for me it's a crusher when I hear something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: You know it's—

MS. RIEDEL: I don't know if we mentioned that on disc. So it might be interesting to mention.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Well, it was as a disappointment, but I understand. You know there are some people that can only see the entire world in relation to themselves.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, Jim Henson had passed away, isn't that correct?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And they were going to show this piece.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. But that's how he had it displayed at home.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah! So with Kermit

MR. SUPERIOR: So, you know, going from one extreme: I thought, oh, wow! Somebody like Jim Henson bought one of my pieces. And then I find out that it makes me feel he bought it because he probably thought he could put his little Kermit the Frog in it and it would be cute. That—but who knows?

MS. RIEDEL: Perhaps a child came and plunked it in, one can't tell for sure, right?

MR. SUPERIOR: The negative activity comes along. The *Trail Sweeper*. I told you about that.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Roy, did you show Mija the *Tickle Torture Machine*? That's one of my favorites.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. We looked at those; there's two, right. Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: The *da Vinci's Studio*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: There was a portable hammock that wasn't very good. One of the weaker ones. Okay. The first one—after *da Vinci's Studio*, which was a monumental thing, I wanted to do something that was faster. And so I remembered the *Windsor Rocker Shocker*, and I thought, well, what has words that have potential: Windsor rocker, Shaker rocker. Shaker, oh, boy! So, you know, I began—and I love the Shakers' furniture.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes, but we also had— somewhere along the line we discovered Hancock Shaker Village, and we were going to the antique shows every August on the grounds of the Shaker Museum. We were starting to do a lot.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. The design sensibility, the simplicity— Hey, this is my interview.

MRS. SUPERIOR: You're not on tape right now, are we?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, actually we are. [Laughs.]

MRS. SUPERIOR: I'm so sorry. I'm sorry.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, this is a realistic version of our life. Mara's says— this is typical. Mara's says, "Roy, tell them about—"And I get maybe two words out before she's jumped in and given away the punch line.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I do want to have the two of you talk, but you've collaborated so frequently that it's inappropriate, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: This gives you an idea of how it goes. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So we will definitely get to that. I mean we'll definitely talk about your collaborations.

MR. SUPERIOR: Alright. So—

MS. RIEDEL: Shaker furniture and the Rocker Shaker. But it's interesting that words are so significant to the work into the present.

MR. SUPERIOR: And then came the *Shaker Rocker Shocker*. Alright? And I thought, hey, this is fun making these little Shaker chairs.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And there was the *Shaker Drag Racer*. The *Shaker Downhill Racer*.

MS. RIEDEL: Fun seems to be an important part of the work.

MR. SUPERIOR: Which what?

MS. RIEDEL: Fun seems to be important.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And which is this one?

MR. SUPERIOR: The *Shaker Downhill Racer*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And these all date from the mid-eighties, the Shaker pieces?

MR. SUPERIOR: These are '84, yes. There's the *Shaker Nautilus Exercise Machine*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: *The Shaker Loveseat*, which I showed you. And then *His and Hers Shaker Rocker*. Here's a *Texas Shaker Rocker*.

MS. RIEDEL: *Texas Shaker Rocker*.

MR. SUPERIOR: With the longhorns and a leather seat. Texas Ranger's star and the arms are pistols.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So the chair, the Shaker chair, was extremely fruitful as content to be developed and exploited.

MR. SUPERIOR: I took all the Shaker pictures of the Shaker pieces. I took them over to Pittsfield where June Sprigg was. And she wrote one of those books on Shaker design. And I thought maybe, you know, she'd be interested. No. No, no humor, dull as could be. Anyway, but don't quote me on that.

MS. RIEDEL: Too late.

MR. SUPERIOR: There's a *Shaker Snowmobile*.

MS. RIEDEL: This is in 1984 as well. Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: They're all 1984 for the most part.

MS. RIEDEL: It would be great to have visuals to go along with the conversation so people can see what we're referencing.

MR. SUPERIOR: This was a pretty ambitious piece. This is the one that Allan Stone let Butch Brown have as his commission. It's called *Shakerland*. It's kind of a miniature Disneyland but for Shakers. That's one side. And this is the other side. Everything is functional. It's a jewelry chest. And all the drawers open and the cabinets. And you can put jewels and hang necklaces. So it's like a theme park in miniature.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That actually leads to another question. I know you're working on a jewelry box commission right now. Have you done many commissions?

MR. SUPERIOR: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. SUPERIOR: What other commissions have I done?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Well, you did a furniture commission for my aunt and uncle in the beginning, very early.

MR. SUPERIOR: That sort of doesn't count. But that was the first commissions. I did—I made a jewelry chest for a woman's husband, for her to give him as a gift. And one of the reasons I don't like about commissions is somebody will, in her case, she said, "Well, can you make a jewelry box for me for my husband? But it has to be under a thousand dollars." So I can't turn these things down because I always need the money. But I inevitably—I can't help it because I don't think in terms of equating what would I do for a thousand dollars? I think what can I do that's relatively simple? And before you know it, it gets complicated. So she got a three or four thousand dollars piece for a thousand dollars. And that's one of the reasons why. And what if, you know, you make something and they don't like it?

MS. RIEDEL: Has that happened?

MR. SUPERIOR: Not to me. But I know people that it has happened to. That's one of the reasons why, as I'm going along with this thing out there, I send her emails and pictures every step of the way. And she has been just fantastic. Unbelievable. Here's the *Peace Missile*. That's still 1985. *Walking Bass* was '85. *Good Work Is Its Own Reward*, the first workbench is 1985. *USS Easy Does It*, the one with the shark, that's 1985. Things were a little more complex, and I think better made at this point, too. It's like entering another stage. I think that begins with the *Shakerland* piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Did they reach another level of technical expertise?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: Did they reach another level of technical expertise?

MR. SUPERIOR: I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Okay. I was beginning to run out of Shaker ideas and getting a little tired of it. So I made this which I figured was going to end it. I made the *Monument of Heavenly Design*. But that's it, that's it. No more Shaker things. But then came *Terrible Two*, and then came this, which was—

MS. RIEDEL: That was '86, I believe, *Terrible Two*.

MR. SUPERIOR: Eighty-six, yes. And then came *Shaker Menage á Trois Chair for the Games in Life*.

MS. RIEDEL: And is this set on a chess board?

MR. SUPERIOR: It's on a game board. It's kind of an abstract game board. In other words there's lots of checkers, more than 12 I think. And then for the very first time I incorporated painting into pieces. This was called *Whistler's Shaker Mother* and it was based compositionally on the painting, *Whistler's Mother*, which was really titled *Arrangement in Grey and Black*. So it has all the configurations except she's not sitting in the chair. And the little tiny painting on the wall is a little watercolor of the Hancock Shaker Village—of the Hancock Shaker, the round barn that's there. Then came *Sawbones*. I was telling you about that one. That was the cobbler's bench that was a doctor's office.

MS. RIEDEL: And just to clarify, the Hancock Shaker Village is in Hancock, Massachusetts, is that it?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: And what year is that, *Sawbones*—is that '86?

MR. SUPERIOR: That's '87.

MS. RIEDEL: Eighty-seven, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Then one of the first commissions I had based on these things was the *Sweets-R-Me* army knife.

MS. RIEDEL: Sweets Our Me?

MR. SUPERIOR: That was the Louisiana Pacific Corporation.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. It's a play on Swiss Army, but I didn't hear you.

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, it's a big thing that had a tennis racquet and a fishing rod.

MRS. SUPERIOR: The title.

MR. SUPERIOR: *The Sweets-R-Me*.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Right, there we are.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you.

MR. SUPERIOR: S-W-E-E-T-S-dash-R-dash-M-E.

[END DISC 4.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Then *The Human Condition* in '87.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Also now in '87, this was *Metropolitan Hiawatha*, which was for a guy who worked in Manhattan but really loved the outdoors.

MS. RIEDEL: And this is a commission?

MR. SUPERIOR: No. It was a canoe that when paddled that made it go so you could scoot down Madison Avenue on your way to work in that and feel like you're really in the Maine woods.

MS. RIEDEL: And how big is that piece?

MR. SUPERIOR: That was about so big.

MS. RIEDEL: Twelve inches or so.

MR. SUPERIOR: And didn't you say that one of these was a commission?

MS. RIEDEL: No, no. None of these were commissions.

MRS. SUPERIOR: The Swiss Army knife.

MR. SUPERIOR: Just the Swiss Army knife was the only one.

MS. RIEDEL: And who was that done for, Roy? Who was that done for?

MR. SUPERIOR: The Louisiana Pacific Corporation. This is the first *Snow Blower* that I told you about.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: With the engineer. Found all the things that—I said that's why it never got past the patent model stage. Now I could have kicked him.

MS. RIEDEL: Nineteen eighty-seven, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. You know I said it, "That's why it never got past that stage, you jackass. Get the fuck out of my booth!" [Laughs.] Alright. Then came the *Golden Temple of the Ivory Moon*, a jewelry box, which sold at my first show at the Snyderman Gallery, which was the opening show for their new gallery when they moved to a big space.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Along with—who was the other guy? The guy who made what I call—and a lot of other people—Flint Stone furniture. Gary—not Gary Bennett. Well, he had his show upstairs, and mine was downstairs. And I got such a big kick out of it because he's a very self-important guy. And he has these big massive things, chairs carved out of tree trunks and all.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Lindquist?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, Mark Lindquist. Sort of— But once again, off the record, the people would walk in upstairs, go right through his stuff, and go downstairs and spend all kinds of time looking and turning and having fun.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was the first show at Snyderman.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You had multiple shows with them through the nineties.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Showing the constructions as well as furniture.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Then the last Shaker died in New Hampshire, I forget when, but it was around or a few years before this piece, which was I think the last of the Shaker series. This was *Dinner for One: A Monument to the Last Shaker*.

MS. RIEDEL: And so the Shaker series went on for two years, three years?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, more than that. This is 1987 or 1988.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it started in '84.

MR. SUPERIOR: Nineteen eight-eight, so it's four years.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's really—is it the only series you've done in the construction pieces, the small constructions?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, there was the tools series.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, that's true.

MR. SUPERIOR: But that was not—there were only a few.

MS. RIEDEL: But nowhere near as lengthy.

MR. SUPERIOR: No. And this had a lot more potential, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, I don't know. I might still come up with some more tools at some point. I don't know if I— I think I got kind of worn out on the Shakers. That was the *Wine-Making Machine*, which you saw. *Sweet Burden of Youth*, that's that thing over there. There was then the first *Angler's Shrine*, which you saw, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was the very first, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. That was 1989. And *Mr. Goody Two-Shoes Tool Shed*. These were all from my first show at Snyderman.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Although I wasn't making them for that because it was before I went to Philadelphia, which I started in 1990. Interestingly—

MS. RIEDEL: And so did the—

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Did your association with Snyderman begin when you started teaching in Philadelphia?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, an interesting little aside on that: When I first started working in wood, and I had been at Hampshire College for a while, one of the first woodworking conferences took place in Purchase at SUNY. And so I went down there. I slept in my van for a couple of nights to avoid having to pay hotel fees. And Snyderman was there, and he gave a talk, you know, about what a wonderful dealer he was and so forth and son.

MS. RIEDEL: Rick Snyderman.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I had slides, my slide portfolio. So after the lecture I go up, and give him my slides, asked— He said he'd be looking at things. And he looks at them, and he says, "Well, they're not very unique. But keep at it." And I wanted to punch him in the teeth. I was a professor. I had a beard. I had a little gray. I was mature. And he treats me like some 20-year-old beginner. And I didn't like him from that time. I don't care if it goes on record or not. But when I went to Philadelphia—this is like ten years later—he was all over me. As a matter of fact, he wasn't the first one. Helen Drutt. For some reason I'd gotten a little notoriety, you know, through the shows in New York and all. So my name had a little connection to it. Then when I went down there to teach, first Snyderman, and he talked me into have a show and all kinds of promises. This was going to be their new gallery space; it took them a lot longer to get it together than originally planned. But it was also about that time that, after that show, there are some things that I made for that were that I don't have slides of or photographs. A couple of chairs that I made. I had made some full-size chairs.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Which are not in this bunch. They're someplace else unedited. So they'd be hard to find. But I made some full-size chairs that had themes to them. Like one had a piece of bone that I found in the woods. Or an antler. And I made a chair called *A Walk in the Woods* around it. And that was shown. I had a show at Leslie's in Northampton.

MS. RIEDEL: Leslie Ferrin, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SUPERIOR: She actually sold a few pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: And were these chairs, these full-size chairs, these were functional, yes?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: One of them was purchased by Helen Boyd Johnson who's a very wealthy collector out in the Midwest there, the Johnson & Johnson people.

MS. RIEDEL: Karen Boyd Johnson, I think, yes?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, Karen.

MS. RIEDEL: And a few years back I got a letter and a package in the mail of one of the spokes from down in front which was broken in half. And a letter that explained that one of her overweight friends had sat in the chair and put her heels on the rung. As she started to try to get up, and it snapped it. Of course. And would I make a new one? So I did, and I charged her an arm and a leg. And I wrote her back a letter about telling her friends what to do. And she wrote me back a very, very lovely letter saying that I was absolutely right. She'd gladly pay it. And that friend was no longer invited to sit on her chairs. [Laughs.]

Now that's not the only time. That jewelry box, the *Temple—The Golden Temple of the Ivory Moon*. About just before I left Philadelphia, which is in '96—I think it was maybe '95—Snyderman calls me up, and this is like eight or nine years after the show. I remember delivering it to these people. They were in a big rush, and they had to have it for a party. They wanted to put it as a centerpiece on the table, you know. So I drove down to this mansion outside of Philadelphia. And they had probably maybe 150 glasses, hand-blown and like that, all sitting on this table and getting ready for their party. And the house was just crammed full of craft; big collectors. About eight years later I get a call from Rick that there were some repairs that had to be made to the jewelry box that apparently they said their maid had knocked it off a pedestal or a dresser that it was sitting on. This thing was kind of hefty. Hefty? You'd have to shove it to knock it. You don't bump into a dresser and have this thing fall over. He gave it to me. It was in a cardboard box, smashed. It took me—I had it in the box sitting in the studio there for about two years almost before I had the courage to even unpack it and really see what the damage was.

Anyway, I rebuilt it. They paid originally, I think, eleven or twelve thousand dollars for that piece. I was going to charge them \$2,000 for the repair. And I got in the car, and I was driving it down, to bring it down to them. It was a pouring rainy night, miserable traffic. I get about halfway down, and I stopped for a cup of coffee. And I thought to myself, that's not enough; they got it cheap in the first place. And what they did to it! So I took out the bill, and I doubled it to \$4,000. I bring in the piece, put it on the table. Her husband wasn't there. And she's just thrilled to pieces. And then I gave her the bill, and her eyeballs went up to the ceiling. So I left. Three days later I get a letter from her husband with a check and a letter that says, "It's even better than before, and you absolutely had every right to charge that much money." So I felt, you know, really vindicated.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: But that's similar to commissions, that kind of thing. It's just hard to imagine that somebody could spend that kind of money, which to me that was a fortune at that time, still would be, and then be so casual. And then try to palm it off as something the maid did while dusting? No, that would be like tipping over one of these bookshelves when you're working with the vacuum cleaner. Anyway, so where are we?

MS. RIEDEL: Have you made multiple jewelry boxes? Multiple jewelry boxes? They're few and far between is my impression.

MR. SUPERIOR: No. That jewelry box had the center part rotated around, and it had all these triangular little drawers in it, maybe a dozen of them. And it was a hexagonal thing. It was inspired by an antique hardware store cabinet that was rotating and had all these little triangular boxes, dozens and dozens of them, with nuts and bolts in them. Allan Stone—you know I saw many in antique shops, very expensive, they charged for them. Allan Stone had like a collection of six of them. I was lusting after one, and I couldn't afford to buy one. So I thought, well, screw it. I'll build one for myself. But I didn't have the energy. So I did it this big. And then I realized, hey, this would make a neat jewel box. So it kind of grew. After I figured out how to make it go round, then I added the top and the wheels and the rest of it, and it became a temple, which opens up, the top dome opens up. And inside is a little kind of sculpture of—do you know what an orrery is?

MS. RIEDEL: An aurore?

MR. SUPERIOR: An orrery. You know those scientific instruments that have the planets made out of brass and things.



MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: That's an orrery.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I didn't know that until somebody wrote a review of the show, and mentioned an orrery. And I thought, what is he talking about? And I looked up, and that's what they were. I mean this was abstract. And it had a round jade on it. So that's how the title came about, *The Golden Temple of the Ivory Moon*.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. SUPERIOR: Or the jade moon or whatever. I forget.

MS. RIEDEL: Ivory, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. But, you know, words are still part of the thing. On the very top there's a little whirligig thing with an image of a moon with a balloon in his mouth, and he's saying "Jewels are the stars of the earth." Something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: This takes us up to the late eighties, yes? And at this point you begin to make large-scale cabinets, right? And is this one—

MR. SUPERIOR: I made the first one before that show, that first show at Rick's.

MS. RIEDEL: And when did you and Mara begin to collaborate.

MR. SUPERIOR: That was the first one.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: It was probably Mara's idea, that she had made a piece and said, "Why don't you make a piece of furniture to hold this, a cabinet special for this?" We'll title it and make it consistent. And so I did. And I also had the idea of, you know, slip a painting into the door. So I did. A painting of a tree. It was *Arbor Vitae*. And the piece was about, that she had made, was a big teapot with trees and things. And there was a platter up above. And sold that in that first show.

MS. RIEDEL: This was a Snyderman as well?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. He sold—actually he sold pretty well. I think because he was really pushy. [Laughs.]

[END DISC 5, TRACK 1.]

MS. RIEDEL: We haven't yet discussed your career teaching in Philadelphia. So you began teaching in Philadelphia at the—

MR. SUPERIOR: In 1990.

MS. RIEDEL: —University of the Arts.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: In 1990.

MR. SUPERIOR: And as I mentioned before, I was terrified because I never had taught wood before. And I was sure that teaching, being self-taught, that I wouldn't be knowing things the right way. And when I got down there, I found that there were about a dozen copies of a crummy old paperback textbook on woodcarving which I immediately threw away. And then started in. I had one colleague there, part time, in the wood department, Peter Pierobon, P-I-E-R-O-B-O-N who was six foot six, and I'm five foot seven. Right? So it was a Mutt and Jeff situation. And he offered that—he had an extra room and bathroom in his house, and would I want to stay with them? So I said sure. The rent was cheap, and it was only for a year. So I went back home and got all my stuff, packed it in the car, and drove down. Get out at his address, knocked on the door, and he answered and he said, "Now, before you come upstairs, there's something I have to tell you." And I looked, and I could see peeking around the corner one of the students from the interview I'd had the week before, one of the female students. And instantly I knew what was going on. They were living together. And he was about to try to explain to me that, you know, you're sort of not supposed to do that. I started to laugh before he said a word. And I said down on the steps because I was laughing so hard. "And the fuck is so funny?" I said, "Been there, done that. Don't

worry about it." So from that moment on we became very, very close friends.

MS. RIEDEL: What were you teaching, Roy?

MR. SUPERIOR: Wood.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, but what in particular.

MR. SUPERIOR: Everything.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: First year, majors, foundation, wood. Well, actually they didn't have wood in the college. They had an elective which some of the freshmen took.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And that went along with it. I was teaching that. And then intermediate wood and advanced wood, which meant working with the majors who had their individual workbenches in the space in the back. Room was very, very limited in size and possibilities for expansion. And it was in kind of rough shape.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you developing the curriculum or were there set things that you had to teach?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, I came down there without a curriculum, and they just expected me to continue on, which I did, but my way, you know. And then through the years I added some things, made some changes.

MS. RIEDEL: And what did you add or what did you change? What did you feel was important?

MR. SUPERIOR: Eventually I added a course in woodcarving.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I did tutorials in drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I changed the way we had our critiques. I had them making presentations every week to make sure they did research and got the idea of historical connections between things. And I emphasized safety. I made all the advanced students sit through all the safety lectures again. And one of the things, for example, on the table saw. There are certain things you do to avoid kickback. The entire time I gave the lecture on how to avoid kickback, unbeknownst to them, I had a rectangular black-and-blue mark on my hip from a kickback in my own shop, in my own studio, with my own table saw. [Laughs.] So I knew whereof I spoke.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And there was a broken window behind the table saw from one of those kickbacks. And we left it that way so that every time we did the lecture, we could point to it. And so that was an important thing. I'm sure the others all did that, too. But I really made an issue out of it. If I have a teaching philosophy, it was a continuation of whatever I taught before I taught wood. And the goal always was to give them enough material and information and the tools to find their own way. That was my number one goal. And you could not teach them how to do anything, although in one working certainly there's more technical stuff that you can impart than any other thing I can think of, other than how to mix two colors together with a paintbrush. Or how to sharpen a pencil, which surprisingly I had to teach them. Because I said, "What are you going to do when your pencil sharpener is broken?" You know how to sharpen a pencil with a knife? But first I had to show them how to sharpen their knives properly and their chisels and everything else because you can't do much without a razor-sharp tool. Especially in the woodcarving class. We started with chip carving and moved on.

I usually had a pretty full enrollment for that and for all the elective courses. So I think I did pretty good. The enrollment in the wood department went up and down. We'd have 12 or 14 one year and maybe four the next, depending on who was coming up and what was going on. I had no idea. But there was no rhyme or reason for how the interest went up and down. At one point we had 18 majors, which was more than we had room for and benches. We had them sharing benches. One of the first things I did was I talked them into giving me some money to buy new workbenches to add to what they had there. Which we did.

We took field trips to Wharton Esherick's house, Nakashima's house, etc. And I introduced a course called—what did I call it? I forget. Low-Tech Furniture, which was all made out of found materials or twigs, and they weren't allowed to use any of the machines. And they had to do all with the hand tools or with tying things together or

finding natural ways to— So, you know, rustic furniture and incorporating found materials into new things.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: That was a new thing. That proved pretty popular.

MS. RIEDEL: Was the program in the process of building momentum the entire time you were there? You were about 16 years. Did it go up, ebb and flow?

MR. SUPERIOR: The elective classes and the freshmen wood were recruiting grounds for me to try to get people to become wood majors. And I was shameless about trying to do that in my recruiting. I promised that— everybody in each department at some time during the year had to make a slide presentation to the entire freshman class in the auditorium. So I get up there, and I promised—I said that woodworkers had better sex than anybody else. And they all cheered, you know, as compared with I'm falling asleep with many of the other lectures. So that I always had a pretty intensive audience. [Laughs.] I would do anything to get the majors in there to keep things— because they were constantly threatening to cut this or cut that. And the wood was one of the things that they were threatening to cut because the enrollment was so low, that was mainly because we only had room really for about eight students.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. SUPERIOR: And so whenever we had more than ten, it was jamming them in.

MS. RIEDEL: Now was this a tenured position?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, this was not tenured. I was only going to be there for one year. And so I was pretty cavalier about trying new things. You know, what the heck? I had nothing to lose.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And in the middle of that year, Michael was in Japan, sent back a letter that he wasn't coming back to teach.

MS. RIEDEL: Michael?

MR. SUPERIOR: Michael Hurwitz. That the thought of having to be the chairman of the crafts department for two years was just more than he could handle, and he didn't want to do it. So they asked me to come back for another year. So, you know, I'd kind of gotten used to the paycheck. And the rent at Peter's was very low. [Phone rings.] Sorry. [Audio break.] Where was I?

MS. RIEDEL: You'd been invited back for a second year after Michael was going to stay in Japan.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, this went on for five years. And during that time Peter took in another roommate, another partner. And eventually decided that he was going to redo that part of the house and rent it out as a house. So I had to move out, and I got an apartment, which cost me three times as much as I had been paying Peter. So with all of this and with Amtrak and prices constantly going up, I realized—and having to eat out the entire time—that it was taking up all my energy. It took a whole day to get down there, and a whole day to get home. It was about a three and a half to four hour train ride, which could be anywhere up to seven or eight hours depending on Amtrak and unreliability and unforeseen things. I saw everything on that train. One time including when they hit somebody on the track. It was abysmal. I was on that train heading home on 9/11. And the entire way, once we got to New York, there was, you know, looking out the windows at this plume of smoke. And that morning I had watched the second plane hit on the news before I went to class. So Amtrak was an experience all right. I got to know some of the conductors by their first name. I knew all the ways of getting a good seat and so forth and so on. But after I figured it out, I was just barely breaking even. But the money was coming in steadily. So I kept on going. I began to feel a sense of responsibility.

Finally they offered me a three-year contract, but under the proviso that I would chair the department, take it for two years. So I thought, okay. I said, "Look, I will have been here seven years, and you're supposed to be eligible for a sabbatical after seven years." And they said, "Well, if you become chair, we'll give you a sabbatical." So I went through the process of applying for the sabbatical. I was granted the sabbatical, but I had to wait two years to take it. When the two years came by, they didn't want to give it to me. The school was too broke. Anyway, I fumed and fussed, and they gave it to me. And also I got a five-year contract. So it was almost eight years of one-year contracts and then three and then five. I couldn't believe I'd been there that long. Now, I'm getting—I'm confusing myself. Oh, yes. The sabbatical was postponed two years, right? So I felt that I should be credited that amount of time for the two years so I'd be eligible for the next sabbatical in 14 years. And they didn't want to give that to me. But they promised, okay, after I came back from my sabbatical, if I would still

continue to chair the department for another two years, they would give me the sabbatical. So I did. And when I came back and did that, when I was done, when it came time, they didn't want to give it to me again. I finally got it, and I got it at the last semester when I retired. So actually I left there in December, the end of the semester, and—

MS. RIEDEL: This was in '96.

MR. SUPERIOR: And never went back except for my graduation party and for graduation because they made me grand marshal of the academic parade. [Laughs.] Which I kept referring to myself as the professor de-meritus and the extinguished professor. [Laughs.] But when I retired, and I was over 70. And I figured, you know, I don't want to be like some people—I even had to deal with them myself when I was chairman—who were, you know, clearly should have left years ago, and I didn't want to be in that category.

MS. RIEDEL: Roy, when did you retire, which year?

MR. SUPERIOR: In '96?

MS. RIEDEL: And one of the sabbaticals is especially significant because it was your first trip to Italy, is that correct?

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And that has become so significant to your work.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd like to talk about that.

MR. SUPERIOR: Actually it was a crucial point, a road mark—a what do you call it?

MS. RIEDEL: A turning point, seminal point?

MR. SUPERIOR: A high point, you know, an asterisk on my life, to dramatically change the way I did and saw everything. I was sure that as confident as I was when I first left Hartford years before, that I would have no problem getting another job. But this time I knew I wasn't going to be looking for another teaching job. But I was confident that Mara and I could make it selling our work since the last show or two I'd had in Philadelphia was very successful. But that's when, shortly after I retired, the economy fell completely, flopped, and Mara's sales went from being way up to way, way—hardly anything. And I had been sort of out of the scene for a while because my production had really slowed down with all that teaching. And so it was more almost like starting all over again. So I made some more of those cabinets, collaborative cabinets. And then began to exhibit with Leslie at SOFA New York and Chicago. But unable to sell many of those things at all.

MS. RIEDEL: These are the cabinets that you collaborated with Mara on?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, no, we had at least one at every show that I had.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And we'll talk about those as soon as she comes back.

MR. SUPERIOR: But the first cabinet sold immediately, though it wasn't that much money.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that 1990?

MR. SUPERIOR: That would have been '95. I'd have to check my resume; it was the first show at Snyderman.

MS. RIEDEL: And a smaller piece? Was the first piece a smaller piece?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, that was maybe the second.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: That eventually sold. The first cabinet I made I showed at—I had a little show at Pinch Pottery with Leslie. In the gallery when she opened up the back to become Ferrin Gallery. So I had a show there of my furniture and pieces, small pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: What year was that, do you remember?

MR. SUPERIOR: That's also in my resume, but I don't remember. That would have been in that—

MS. RIEDEL: Late eighties?

MR. SUPERIOR: Late eighties, yes. As I remember that she did actually sell a few pieces, a chair or two, and some pieces of sculpture. She sold *Monument to Canine—Shrine Canine: Monument to Dead Dogs*, with little doggie angels flying around. The *Wine-Making Machine*. I remember she sold that there. And this first cabinet, which is now the one that's in the Smithsonian, after Leslie's show, Mara and I were invited to have a show at the De Cordova Museum in Lincoln. And so we had our show. And on the invitation we had a picture of that first cabinet.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that *Aqua Vitae* or no?

MR. SUPERIOR: Was that what?

MS. RIEDEL: What was the name of that piece? Was that the redwood piece or no?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, it was *Aqua Vitae*.

MS. RIEDEL: *Aqua Vitae*, yes.

MR. SUPERIOR. The first one that sold was *Arbor Vitae*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: So the first one was homage to trees, the second one was homage to the sea. We had put a photograph of that cabinet on the invitation that was sent out. And Leslie had a buyer for it just from the invitation because he thought his wife would like it. And he paid her with a large deposit. And then they went to the opening, and his wife said she didn't like it. So he changed his mind. Leslie had already given us the money. Leslie said, well, you know, I paid the artist. You're going to have to wait a while before I can afford to pay you back. And I don't know whether she ever did or not. I don't think he ever asked, he was so embarrassed. So here the piece had been sold, and I still had it. And I put it in the next show in Philadelphia, and someone from the Smithsonian saw it.

MS. RIEDEL: Michael Monroe?

MR. SUPERIOR: I think it was Michael Monroe, yes, at that time. Anyway it was purchased for the Smithsonian, and that was one of the high points in my career. And it was even better when I went down for the opening, and I got the flower in my vest and got to stand right next to Wendell Castle and Tommy and everybody else. I was very impressed with my luck at that. So Mara was convinced that these are hot items. You've got to make more, you've got to make more. So I made two or three more. The first one I made we took out to Nantucket, which was not easy, [Laughs.] on the ferry with the van. And lo and behold, it was sold on Nantucket. Turned out it was purchased by Mara's major collector, who at that time had a house on Nantucket, along with a house in Hartford and another one someplace else, and in New York City. And was buying virtually everything that Mara made. It was incredible.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: We thought things are ripping right along. And this was just before the economy went poof. Which it did with a humongous crash.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was 2001. Is this *Latonaka* we're talking about? *Latonaka*?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, it was after that because 9/11 was 2001.

MS. RIEDEL: So *La Mer* maybe? *La Mer*, the piece?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, now wait a minute. *La Mer* was—

MS. RIEDEL: Two thousand two?

MR. SUPERIOR: I'm confused myself now.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. I think *Latonaka* was 2001. Maybe that was the—

MR. SUPERIOR: That was the small one.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. The one on Nantucket that they bought was about Nantucket. I forget the title. I think it was

—that might have been *La Mer*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I don't remember.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. We'll check.

MR. SUPERIOR: I'd have to go look at the pictures. Anyway, they bought that, and they bought a whole bunch of Mara's stuff. And eventually that's how Mara got the show at the New Britain Museum. This person donated her whole collection for the show. And also donated another cabinet as a commission for the museum. So that's how we got a cabinet into their permanent collection. So that's how we got pieces in two museums. Well, Mara thought that this is really a hot item. Make some more. So I made a couple more. We took one out to Nantucket, and that's when the crash happened. So there's one that's been sitting out on Nantucket now for two years. And then this one, which is back and forth. It's been in SOFA New York, it's been in Leslie's gallery, and now it's back here, the one that I had to repaint three times because somebody kept licking it off. [Laughs.]

I called up a friend of mine who—a very well-known artist—who works in egg tempera exclusively. And he does these very, very photograph-like time-consuming portraits. And I said has anything like this ever happened to you? Is there anything I can put on it to keep it? No, he said, you don't varnish egg tempera, which I knew. He said he took one of his paintings to a local photographer. And while it was there, the guy's dog, the photographer's dog, licked the hand off one of his portraits. So now we know, you know, that pets and egg tempera just don't go together. So I keep wondering, you know, how many great masterpieces must have disappeared and been ruined in history, egg tempera being consumed by cats and dogs and who knows what? So I haven't sold anything for a while. Now I know Mara would not want me to be being negative, you know, and say nothing but positive. But, you know, it just would be a lie to say that the public has been falling all over themselves to buy our stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about Italy.

MR. SUPERIOR: Okay. Happily. It started when—at a wedding as I recounted to you, that little story—my cousin told us about purchasing a house in Italy. She's the painter. And they were working on it.

MS. RIEDEL: What's her name?

MR. SUPERIOR: Helen Yaker. And her husband's name was Chuck Yaker. Really, really sweet man, wonderful woman. Anyway, they said if we were ever in Italy, come visit them. Well, it was almost ten years, I think, at least, before we were able to get it all together to do that. So we did. We visited them. And you read the little bit about, I'm sure, in that first sabbatical report.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And what did you call your sabbatical report? What did you title it?

MR. SUPERIOR: *Trout Fishing in Italy*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: *Pesca alla trota in Italia*.

MS. RIEDEL: There you go.

MR. SUPERIOR: Figuring it wasn't about trout fishing at all, any more than what's his name's book was about *Trout Fishing in America*, but he was a fisherman.

MS. RIEDEL: And what year was this, Roy, when you first went to Italy.

MR. SUPERIOR: In 1999; it was over the New Year's. So we came back—went in '99 and came back in 2000. And it was about six weeks that we were there. And we've been so many times now that—at least so many times that it seems like it—that I get a little confused as to which trip was which. We spent almost a week with my cousins in their house. And then we went from there to Florence. Rented a car, and that was when we went down that trip, ended up in Venice and Milan. The next trip was about a year or two later, and it was during the summer. Pretty well blew all that was left of my inheritance on that second trip, in which we did not go to Italy at all, but we wanted to see some more of the rest of Europe. So we went to Paris and Belgium. And we had certain goals like the altarpiece in—the Ghent Altarpiece. I had wanted to see that.

We went to Amsterdam. Went to Rembrandt's house, another one of my goals. And there was nobody else there when we were there, just us and the guard. And so we were standing in the room that was supposedly his studio. And they had an easel there and a palette with some dried paint on it and a blank canvas on the easel.

And there were a few brushes stuck into the paint, glued in actually, so that they stood up as though the ghost of Rembrandt was there about to paint. So naturally as soon as the guard turned his back, I reached over the grabbed one of the brushes. And Mara took my picture. Downstairs was a bed that looks very much like the bed that's in the painting of his wife, Saskia, peering out from behind the curtain. And so once again the guard turned away, and I looked. Pulled open the curtain. And right there where she would have sat, it was completely depressed like somebody had been sitting on it for a hundred years. Every tourist in the world must have done that. So of course Mara popped down there, and I took her picture. But I could feel the ghost. It was a spectacular experience. We also wandered accidentally through the red light district in Amsterdam. I didn't know it until I thought we were passing a lingerie shop, and the mannequins started to move and smile at me. [Laughs.] Naïve tourists.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, though. You traveled to multiple countries, but Italy is the one that has really appeared in your work.

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, unbelievably so. We went to Bruges to see the—not Bruges—the tapestries. It'll—

MS. RIEDEL: We can add it.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, so I've got to remember that one.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll add that later. But Italy, something about Italy, began to surface—you began to draw again in Italy.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. I had always taken a little traveling watercolor box with me. And I'd made some sketches before. But we never really had much time to do anything. And so I took a lot of photographs. But we came home from that second trip, and we're yearning to go back again. But we really wanted to go back to Italy. And during this time Chuck passed away. So Helen asked us if we'd like to accompany her back there to take care of things. She didn't want to go alone. So of course we were more than eager to do that. And we did. And it was very sad, ghosts were there. And I think we helped a lot by being there. But I had time now, to spend. And that's when we really, really fell in love with Italy because we were in one place. We could take all out little trips. We had somebody who knew the lay of the land. We had a home. And we went back again the next year, and Helen decided that she really couldn't handle it anymore. She didn't want the—it was getting to be a big expense. And she didn't want to keep going back there by herself. She would just constantly miss Chuck being there.

So she decided to sell the house. And one evening she got a little tipsy and said none of her children wanted it. And said, "Well, maybe I'll give it to you." So Mara and I went to bed a little tipsy ourselves, thinking, my God! What are we going to do? What are we going to do? Of course in the morning she called her son, and that was the end of that. So that was the one, two, three, fourth trip. Then she put the house on the market, and eventually she did sell it. But the new people weren't moving in until January. And she asked me if I'd like to go over there by myself. The house was empty. Why not? So during that last semester that I had been given my overdue sabbatical, I went there for ten weeks by myself. Mara came in the middle for two weeks. But all we had to do was draw and paint. It was fantastic. And I really felt at home. And would have moved back there in a typical New York moment if I could. It is just so completely different.

MS. RIEDEL: And your work—you really began to draw and paint on site.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. Well, I did a lot of drawing and painting there. I did a lot of sketches. When I got back here, I couldn't stop, and I kept on making drawings based on the sketches and watercolors from that, and using some of the photographs I'd taken. And it became a long series of drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the inspiration for the first shrines—or the *Olive Museum*. Was that the first piece, the first small construction?

MR. SUPERIOR: Everywhere you go in Italy, every corner you turn, somebody has put a shrine in, a niche in the wall, mostly to St. Mary. But every obscure saint. Every day in Italy is named after at least two or three saints. At any given time I was probably the only person in any town that wasn't named after a saint. [Laughs.] Which would have been pretty funny if I had been. So when I came back, I started working on the *Olive Museum*. And ended up working on that for about a year. It was ridiculous. It just kept getting more and more complicated. It's a very complicated—well, you'll see it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: And to see it, you don't really—unless you know how things are made, you won't really get or understand what went into it. But I have to make things so that they can be at any stage taken apart and put back together again so I can alter it, make changes, whatever. Things that normally a painter does with his brush and a rag and some turpentine without even thinking. Woodworking is a little more complicated. So that's

one of the reasons why I made everything with the kind of joinery I did and with pegs that can be removed. And I did not glue my mortises and tenons together. I made them with wedges or with pins or something.

[END DISC 5, TRACK 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Roy Superior at the artist's home and studio in Williamsburg, Massachusetts.

MR. SUPERIOR: I see a red light.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's a good sign.

MR. SUPERIOR: Either we're back in Amsterdam or we're ready to go.

MS. RIEDEL: Ready to go. June 30, 2011, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, disc number four.

MR. SUPERIOR: Alright. So where were we?

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about dogs' view of the world.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. When Oliver died in 2003—

MS. RIEDEL: And Oliver showed up in quite a few of your pieces.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. He was quite a protagonist.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. Now I painted the painting of Oliver in Italy before we had any clue that we were even going. That was like 1998 or something.

MS. RIEDEL: And why did you paint Oliver in Italy?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, I wanted to paint a picture of him, and it was my first egg tempera.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I'd never actually painted in egg tempera before. But I figured it couldn't be that much more difficult than working in watercolor—or especially working the way I did in watercolor. And, you know, our first dog we had for 18 years. And he died, finally. The hardest thing I ever did in my life was putting him down. And then we had Oliver from puppyhood through 13 years. And one morning he was fine, and that afternoon his stomach turned over and twisted or whatever it is that happens every now and then, and we rushed him down to the animal hospital. He was in the back of the van with a what-do-you-call-it?

MS. RIEDEL: Like an IV?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And he died on the operating table. But his personality was pretty iffy. I never knew if— Well, for instance, Marshmallow, you could shove your hand down his throat while he was eating, and it wouldn't bother him at all. Oliver—we had to leave the room when we put his food down or he would take your arm off. [They laugh.] Other than that he was wonderful. So the next dog is going to be a very, very mild-tempered dog, that's for sure. [Laughs.]

MR. SUPERIOR: So the constructions after Oliver shifted to focus on Italy and focus on food and paint. They become—there's a definite change in tone. They're not satirical. They're not—

MS. RIEDEL: You know Italy had come into our lives. And it occupied our lives. Mara was buying and reading every book about Italy. We had nothing but Italian calendars. We ate nothing but Italian food. We had Italian cookbooks. Desperately wanted to go back. We haven't been able to since then yet. But we haven't given up hope. So I'm trying to think what should I make next? And I started thinking about museums and I read a book that was about—it was a kind of semi-fictional book. I can't remember the title. It was sort of a conceptual art book about insect or ant museums; I forget exactly what it was. But that stuck in my mind, the idea of bizarre museums. And I thought, well, being in the same state of naïveté as when I thought I had invented the idea of holding up the Leaning Tower of Pisa, I thought, well, hey, I'll make a museum dedicated to olives; that's bizarre. Well, about five or six months after I was into it, I happened to go on the Internet, and I typed in olive museums. And up popped like five of them. Most of them in Italy.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.



MR. SUPERIOR: And of course none of them had any humor in them at all. So I figured I'll continue, and I had gotten too far; I had about finished it. Then it dawned on me, well, you know, there are other things besides olives in Italian food. But I'm not going to make another museum for a while. This has been too much. And shrines. And it all kind of connected. Right? You saw the little sideshow there. That's exactly how it happened, thinking about Italian food, thinking about the architecture, the shrines, arches. And whoa! What's Italian? Truffles. Porcini. And I did a couple of mushroom shrines. And by then I was hooked. So then next I did the *Prosciutto Shrine*, and the *Formaggio*, the cheese shrine.

A friend of ours who does our gardens for us lives on, not a farm, but they have a couple of sheep up the road about ten miles. And one of his sheep was killed by a bear. Unfortunately, he woke up one morning and heard these funny noises. He looked out, and there's a bear eating one of his pet sheep. So, yes, there are bears here. I had recently drawn some pictures of the sheep. And when I did the cheese shrine, I been putting little egg tempera paintings in the back as the background to the shrines. It seemed logical since a lot of the cheese that we liked came from sheep's milk. So I painted that sheep from the drawing into the scene. And it was very interesting when he came down one morning when I had finished it, and I showed it to him. He recognized it instantly, as his sheep. Just a little emotional side.

So there will eventually be a pasta shrine, probably eggplant. Probably just about anything you can buy in a food place in Italy. I mean I would be more inspired if they would start selling. But I really like making them, and it's a very nice size format. It's not that complicated technically. And I kind of know how to go about it now. It's a good way to incorporate the painting into the work. So I feel like I've come full circle in different directions and come kind of back together again. And the *Olive Museum* being really the first, other than putting a painting on the surface of a cabinet, which isn't the same as building it into a piece one way or another.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I feel hope, fulfilled. And that's probably where I'll begin with the next piece. But economics are a factor, you know. And I'm trying to figure out, put myself in what's-his-name's shoes and give them what they want, but what do they want that I can give them? I've no idea. So as it's happened on more than one occasion—like the time I told you I was trying to sell a stove and this guy came up from nowhere and bought three pieces. The bank account went from zero to \$28,000 overnight. And that's not the first time that's happened. And then a few months back, I get this phone call out of the blue from this woman in New Jersey, who has been absolutely wonderful. That can go on record; she's been great. And I don't think I should mention her name because I don't have permission to. But I can't say that my commission experience has been unpleasant, not based on that.

MS. RIEDEL: And she has commissioned a jewelry box?

MR. SUPERIOR: Beg pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: She has commissioned a jewelry box. We didn't talk about this yet.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, and I'm hoping she has lots of friends who will see it. [Laughs.] And want to keep up with her.

MS. RIEDEL: And she'd seen your work, you had said yesterday, years before.

MR. SUPERIOR: They had seen my first show or last show at Snyderman's, which would have been 1995. She said they were both students then, and she fell in love with that. Now her husband's a lawyer, must be a very wealthy lawyer. And she wanted me to make a jewelry box for her. And it was just that easy. So I made some sketches, came up with an idea. Sent her six or so different versions without any effort. Got one approved. I think she would have gone with anything I said at that point. But I've been trying to keep her involved in every stage of it, all the way through. So that almost every drawer that I make, I send her pictures as soon as it's happening. So that's been occupying my time. That's what I've been working on.

MS. RIEDEL: Then this is not a painted piece? Is this a painted piece?

MR. SUPERIOR: A what?

MS. RIEDEL: Is it a painted construction?

MR. SUPERIOR: It's going to have paintings in the door.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Like you will see the *Olive Museum* when we go over to Pittsfield.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And you saw the pictures. So that it'll have the doors open. But when they're closed, you'll see the paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So that's the new format you're working with, are these paintings and constructions.

MR. SUPERIOR: That's the format I feel, seems to me, the most inspiring right now. I tend to live in the moment. Mara likes to live in the future. So she's always dreaming, and I'm trying to figure out what to do next. And I'm kind of a one-thing-at-a-time person. So when I'm out there, I'm focusing on one thing. Occasionally I've had several things going at one time, but it confuses me, [laughs] and it ends up that the others get dusty being pushed off to the side. So one painting on the easel at a time until it's done.

MS. RIEDEL: And when you think about your work, similarities and differences between the early work and the current work. It seems as if, as you just said, it's come full cycle—come full circle.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And now you're incorporating the painting on the three-dimensional pieces.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, these things, the newer things, are very different in that they're not kinetic pieces that are interactive in the same way. They're not fantasy machines in any way manner or form. And they're more homage pieces. They're—there's an idea behind it. But it's also the beginning of another series. I've made four of the shrines now. And I don't see the end of it in sight yet. One part of me hopes that I don't sell any so I can have a show with 20 of these things. I think it would be fabulous. On the other hand, I'm still looking at the help wanted. But at 75 it's not so easy. I don't think I would make a very good greeter at Walmart. [Ms. Riedel laughs.] Besides the fact that it's a very dangerous occupation. You read about the guy who was trampled in a sale?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I did.

MR. SUPERIOR: The person at the door, they trampled right over him, and he died. And I'm much too honest and immature, which is a bad combination. I'd be standing there saying, "Welcome to Walmart. Lady, did you look in the mirror before you went out in that Spandex?" I'd last maybe five minutes. So the idea of getting a job is kind of off-limits. I have thought of—and Mara has been pushing me—to advertise a shingle that says, "Consultation for Artists." You know all this teaching, I can critique, I can certainly help people get over certain kinds of humps. And I'm worth at least almost as much as a therapist charges, if not more, having seen some therapists in my time, and realizing that they didn't do squat for the money. It seems like a pretty soft job, and I wouldn't have to go to school.

MS. RIEDEL: Changing topic for a moment: Roy, have you done anything with any of the craft schools, with Penland, or Haystack?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, I was actually invited to—well, yes, I did. Which is the one in New Jersey?

MS. RIEDEL: Peters Valley?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. I did a workshop with Peter there once.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Peter's Valley. It was kind of fun. But, you know, when you teach full time and you have a limited amount of time to do your own work, I really wasn't looking forward to the idea of spending a few weeks away from my studio dealing with—let's face it—amateurs. So I was actually asked to do one in—what's the one down South?

MS. RIEDEL: Arrowmont?

MR. SUPERIOR: No. North Carolina.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, Penland.

MR. SUPERIOR: Penland.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I turned it down at the last minute, and I've never gotten another invitation from them, I

expect because of that. And they don't pay that well. There's like a camp, crafts workshop right up the road, a mile away, which has been going on under a couple of different names for years and years and years. And I used to get invited up there every year to give a talk to their Elderhostel people, for which I got I think, 50 or 60 bucks and a T-shirt. But they rarely made extra large. So I wasn't sorry when she sold it to somebody and moved on. They haven't invited me. But every now and then whoever's doing the woodworking work wants to bring his students to my studio, which I do. I can't say no. It's a freebee. So I've gotten to the point now where I feel I've earned the right to be paid for my time. And having taught night classes for a long time—that was a part of the requirement when I had my first job at Hartford—there's a certain mentality to the amateurs. That in one sense it's very intriguing because they become friends and so forth. And then on another level of maturity and for the time they put in they work harder than the daytime students who are kind of lazy sometimes. They're more determined, but they have less to bring to it. I just don't think I want to give my time away any more like that. It's too much to give my time and energy. So at my age now, I am determined that I've got to really rebuild an entire body of work to make up for the time that I gave to helping other people do it.

MS. RIEDEL: I think you're ideally—your experiences are especially suited to this next question, which is, what differences or similarities do you see between students and artists who have learned their craft or their art in a university setting or not? Because certainly you're self-taught as a wood artist. But you're very trained as a painter and in drawing.

MR. SUPERIOR: I think it's great just like going to an art school to major in painting, to go to a school where you can major in ceramics or major in wood. It gives you a lot of information much faster than you can get it otherwise. And I know for sure because it took me a long time, and I'm still teaching myself, still learning. And I had to read and absorb a tremendous amount of information that is now instantly accessible to students who only have to either ask or type it into Google. And there it is, whatever they needed to know. But there's nothing like being in an atmosphere where somebody knows how to do something and can tell you and offer suggestions for even better ways, where if somebody's there encouraging you to be yourself, what more could you possibly want as a student? Unfortunately, some of the students, many of them, more so than ever as I remember, are not accustomed to thinking for themselves and being motivated. So the attitude, when I left anyway, was much more like here I am, teach me something. Or then how do I learn this? I don't want to learn that. When I was a student—and here's where I, okay, now that I'm an old fart officially, I can say when I was young. But it was fiercely competitive. And everybody worked their asses off trying to outdo one another. Now, I have to—it's like selling iceboxes to Eskimos. I have to push and push and push. And I don't like the idea of being a disciplinarian in any way manner or form. For me that has nothing to do with teaching in college where you're supposed to be beyond that level. So it was filled with its frustrations in terms of some really gifted students who just didn't have the motivation and didn't do the work.

The first year I went down there, there were six wood majors, one of whom had been nothing but trouble before I got there. And was one of the most gifted students I've ever seen in my whole career. Could draw. He knew tricks of woodworking that more than most woodworkers ever find out. And he had an imagination. But he didn't have any motivation. And he had a terrible attitude, and he was dragging down the rest of the class: five students who were all eager and young and really going at it. This guy was a little older and, I found out, had had some emotional problems in other ways that manifested themselves. And I had to boot him out. And it's the first time I ever did that, my first semester teaching wood. Well, that group of five, they all came back 16 years later to my retirement party, one of whom flew all the way out from Colorado for the party. I have to show you this.

MS. RIEDEL: Roy is pointing something out.

MR. SUPERIOR: At the end of that first year, Peter and I threw a little party for the five students where we were living and had a little gift just for them. And they had a gift for us. [Ms. Riedel laughs.] This was my introduction to teaching wood: Five really great guys, all trying to outdo the other in every way you can imagine.

MS. RIEDEL: So there are black-and-white photos of that stunt [inaudible] with the planks in front.

MR. SUPERIOR: And that was the first year. The second year I went back, this is what they gave us. We had many more students that. [Laughs.] This is what they gave us at the end of that year. [Laughs.] This is a whole calendar. It's worth looking at.

MS. RIEDEL: Things going on in a woodshop, one could never imagine. Perhaps this will be part of the —.

MR. SUPERIOR: I'd loved to have been there when they were taking these photographs. Such a funny experience.

MS. RIEDEL: Perhaps this calendar can become part of your Archives collection.

MR. SUPERIOR: She is reenacting an actual event. Her T-shirt got caught in the jointer, and ripped it off. And

there she was, with no bra. And her T-shirt curled up inside the machine. [Laughs.] So for this calendar she reenacted the whole thing. That's a planar. [Laughs.] That's what it's all about.

MS. RIEDEL: Are any of these students working still?

MR. SUPERIOR: Most of them as far as I know are working either in related or in the field. A few have set up their own studios, their own shops. Some are working for other woodworkers who have their own shops. And I assume that they're all doing something. I know that they're spending time on the Internet because all of a sudden in the last couple of years, I have found out reluctantly I've been pulled into getting a Facebook page. And students whom I don't even remember are wanting to be their friends on Facebook. And of course our friends on Facebook put my name in, too. And I have no idea who they are. But it's a way to keep up. Heh!

MS. RIEDEL: Roy, has there been a community that's been particularly important to your development as an artist?

MR. SUPERIOR: Here?

MS. RIEDEL: Anywhere. In the university, here?

MR. SUPERIOR: Not really. I'd say the community consists of one or two friends. Tommy Simpson is one of my very best friends. And we don't talk much about work. But, you know, we share experiences, and we have a lot in common in that respect. I've known Tommy for years now, for more than 40 years. And greatly admire him. I think he's a grossly neglected—over—under—

MS. RIEDEL: Recognized?

MR. SUPERIOR: Recognized artist. He's recognized, but he should be right up there with Calder, who is his role model. But his work is nothing like that. Also, you know, he has spent—where I gave in to fear and panic and took teaching jobs—he refused it, and he's great [inaudible] and has managed to do well. So that's my community. When I was in Philadelphia, Peter was my community, my colleague. And, you know, I would be in his shop, and we'd talk about what we were both doing and so forth.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you had any involvement with any craft organizations: the American Craft Council or World [Crafts Council]?

MR. SUPERIOR: No. As a matter of fact I have sort of avoided them. I'm not sure why. Maybe because it's I was spending so much time with other people that I just— Well, it's like when I retired from teaching, I didn't really want to have a conversation with anybody for about six months. I wanted to go off to a cabin in the woods—metaphorically speaking. The last thing I wanted to do was have any conversations about art. So when the Furniture Society started up, I wasn't really seriously involved. I did go. I was on one of the committees for a while there. And I just never was that interested. Participated in one or two shows. But I never—well, it's like about the same time that I gave up my subscription to *Fine Woodworking* magazine, which basically caters to hobbyists. And the articles are, you know, pretty much reruns and reruns and reruns and people showing you how to do stuff. I did enjoy watching Roy Underhill on television. The Yankee Workshop, the guy who dressed in 18th-century clothing and made 18th-century things with 18th-century tools. But no pretense. As compared, say, with Norm [Abram], the other guy on PBS with the woodworking show, who started on the program where they rebuild a house. *This Old House*.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. You know who was pretty of a worker with typical machines and tools and carpentry, but a carpenter's mentality. Cabinetmaker mentality. Nothing really creative at all. So I will look at every book that comes out on woodworking. If I'm not in it, I won't buy it. [Laughs.] And if I am, I'll wait for them to send me a free copy. [Laughs.] I was delighted to get the book from the Smithsonian where not only one but two pictures; the group shot as well. And I'm still—I can't believe I'm in such good company as that.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there any writers or critics in particular whose work you value? [Audio break.]

MR. SUPERIOR: You were asking me about the community and if it's been important to me.

MS. RIEDEL: And writers as well, any writers or critics that have been significant to you.

MR. SUPERIOR: Since I stopped taking Amtrak, my reading has decreased a lot. Years ago I fell under the spell of Ayn Rand. And as anyone else who's under 35 or 30 at that time, it was uplifting and inspiring. And not downright Communistic, but who cares, you know. The point there was that it was about somebody in a creative field. I remained a fan even though her second book ended like a comic strip, *Atlas Shrugged*. And that ended when she gave a lecture at Yale when I was a student there. And it's like she just sort of seemed ridiculous with

her followers and so forth. And I would never become anything like that. But, you know, it was the kind of book that if you're young, and looking forward to a life doing things your way, can really inspire you.

MS. RIEDEL: Which book was this?

MR. SUPERIOR: *The Fountainhead*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: Ayn Rand, A-Y-N.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. I just wasn't sure which one you were referring to.

MR. SUPERIOR: I will confess that when I started woodworking, I read—purchased and read—all of Krenov's books.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. SUPERIOR: I liked his attitude about tools and materials. I completely pushed away his attitude about a way to do the things and education and so forth. I still found his attitude about making things very charming. Right? I did not fall under the spell of making things that looked like his. And as I mentioned before, to me that's a sign of not a good sign of an educator. If all your students' work looks like yours.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you looking at Wendell Castle's work? Were you look at Sam LaRue's work?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, sure, of course I looked at Wendell Castle in the very beginning. And started—made some of my first pieces of furniture with the stacked lamination. That kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Only I did them all wrong. So, you know, my things have cracked and so forth. But if it makes me feel any better, Tommy once said, "He made a trade with Wendell; where he gave Wendell a baby carriage or what do you call it?"

MS. RIEDEL: A cradle?

MR. SUPERIOR: A cradle. And Wendell gave him a chopping block. And in a very short time that chopping block developed a big crack, which made me feel so good. And every time I'd go over to Tommy, I'd look at that chopping block and I'd feel like I wasn't doing it wrong at all. [Laughs.] But who can start working with wood and not have been influenced by Wendell Castle? I mean what Wendell brought to it was a complete departure from everything that Krenov stood for. And it was like giving you a ticket, a free pass to use everything without those restrictions. And that's where I think his was a great significant thing in the crafts world for people who worked in wood.

MS. RIEDEL: Anybody else who was influential?

MR. SUPERIOR: Sam Maloof of course. That's pretty much it. To tell you the truth I never was a huge fan of Nakashima, even though I had great respect and admiration for all those people. There aren't that many whose work moved me. I was still much more moved by painters.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: Historically.

MS. RIEDEL: Anyone we haven't mentioned that you'd like to mention now?

MR. SUPERIOR: Of those?

MS. RIEDEL: The painters?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, where do I start, and where do I end? I could go on for a long time.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, maybe start with the ones who were important early on and then the ones who were—

MR. SUPERIOR: Rembrandt, Bosch, Bruegel, da Vinci, Rubens, Botticelli.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned Dürer, I think, it was.

MR. SUPERIOR: Dürer of course. He's right up there. Van Eyck, that's who did the Ghent Altarpiece. That was an interesting experience, by the way. You know I was familiar with everything I saw there I'd seen before in pictures and in books. That's why it was such an emotional thing when you found yourself actually standing in front of *The Night Watch* [Rembrandt, 1642], for instance, in Amsterdam, and the museum wasn't too crowded, and there was nobody else in that room at that time but the guard. And I couldn't help it. I walked up. I stood there, and that magnificent, incredible light. And I had seen that painting a million times before. I'd studied it. I wrote a paper about it. The tears poured down my face. Walking around the corner, seeing *The Birth of Venus*, Botticelli's, painting right there on the wall.

The *Mona Lisa* didn't do it for me because when we got to the Louvre, the crowd was so heavy the first time that we couldn't get in. But on the way down to the *Mona Lisa*, through the hall, you passed by three other da Vincis, one of which was *The Madonna of the Rocks*, one of my very favorites, and nobody was even looking at it. But you get into the room finally, and there at the end of the room, behind bulletproof glass is *Mona Lisa*. And 150 people, mostly Japanese, with their hands up in the air taking flash photographs, and the guard standing next to it saying, "No flash. No photographs." "No flash. No photographs." "No flash. No photographs." Meanwhile the light bulbs are making it hard to see. So I went up to her just before we left, and I said, "How come you don't get angry?" She said, "It doesn't matter," she said, "That's not even the real *Mona Lisa*, it's a copy."

I went to the Metropolitan when it was here to see it. And you were on a conveyor belt. You sent by so quickly that you hardly had time. I spent hours studying the big photographic reproductions they had outside. When we had the World's Fair in Flushing, I went, and there was Michelangelo's *Pieta*. Once again a conveyor belt. Sitting out there, surrounded in dark blue with gold stars all over the place going off like a Walt Disney scenario with the music playing. It was horrible. Horrible. But then you go to Italy, and you walk into a cathedral, and there is one of—who did my favorite sculpture?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Bernini?

MR. SUPERIOR: Bernini. One of Bernini's—I'm not so good on remembering all these names. But I could draw you a picture of the sculpture. It's St. Somebody in agony and, boy, is she. But the light coming through the window. Nothing to do with Walt Disney. No hoke, no nothing. Just the thing. And it can move you like nothing else, you know. It's—for me those things are worth a pilgrimage. And Italy, there's no end to those pilgrimages, absolutely no end. Of course there are other places in Europe, yes.

MRS. SUPERIOR: All over Europe.

MR. SUPERIOR: Every little village of more than two or three houses has its own museum of some sort with their own history. We went to one, which was a museum of Cycladic and what, Mara? Hello?

MS. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Where was it we saw the Giacometti-like thing?

MS. SUPERIOR: I'm not sure what you're referring to, Dear.

MR. SUPERIOR: Where is she, on the phone?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MRS. SUPERIOR: I'm not sure what you're referring to.

MR. SUPERIOR: The museum with the Giacometti skinny figure that we saw. I'm forgetting all the names. You know the husbands and wives on their tombstones.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Oh, Volterra?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. And what do you call that stuff?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Etruscan?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. [Laughs.] I do know a lot more than it sounds like. Yes. We went through every Etruscan museum we could find. And one of them there was an anonymous piece of sculpture of a walking man, a figure, which looked exactly like a Giacometti. But since that was 600 years before, I don't think they had a chance to see it; even if he got on the Internet, I'm sure they didn't have a chance to see it. But I wouldn't be at all surprised if Giacometti had seen that particular sculpture because you could not imagine anybody else having done it. So you make these little discoveries. In Barga, for example, a little hill country town, relatively free of too many tourists, with a very large Scottish population. For some reason there during, in the past, Scotland and Barga had a lot of people going back and forth and intermarrying and working in the two different countries.

There's a sign as you drive up there that says, "Barga, the Most Scottish Town in Italy."

At any rate, at the very top of the town is their cathedral. And I never saw anybody in it, although there were people looking at it. And it's dark. There's no lights inside. But you can put your coin in the machine. And for about five minutes a light comes on, and it's funny. You put your coin in, and you see things you've never seen pictures of. Some little mosaic or a construction with all the cross with wood and artifacts. They're fantastic. Another thing about those places: You go into a darkened room. You put your money in, and you find there are 25 people sitting around waiting for somebody to come in and light it up. [Laughs.] Because they're too damned cheap. [Laughs.]

MRS. SUPERIOR: Or they'd done it already.

MR. SUPERIOR: When we went to see the Ghent Altarpiece, it's sort of down in the basement. And you go down through these little narrow hallways, and finally you open a door. You walk into the room. There it is, you know, sitting up there in all its magnificent glory. And then you're so consumed that you don't notice that sitting jammed elbow-to-elbow around the wall are 15 people quietly, without even breathing, studying this piece. It's so bizarre. But there was no slot to put money in to light it up. You had to do the best you can with what they had.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Roy, did you mention all the artists there?

MR. SUPERIOR: Where were the tapestries, Mara?

MRS. SUPERIOR: The Bayeux.

MR. SUPERIOR: The Bayeux.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Did you mention all the artists' houses that we visited?

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, yes.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Delacroix.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right, Rubens, Delacroix, Rembrandt.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Frans Hals.

MR. SUPERIOR: Frans Hals. We didn't go to Monet's house, though we wanted to. But so many people said it's so filled with tourists and it takes a while to get there.

MRS. SUPERIOR: It was the wrong time.

MR. SUPERIOR: But I did want to see Giverny.

MRS. SUPERIOR: But we didn't see it.

MR. SUPERIOR: Giverny.

MS. RIEDEL: Mara, would you be willing to join us to discuss your collaborative works? Is this a good time?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Certainly. Certainly.

MR. SUPERIOR: I'm sure she would. As a matter of fact, while she joins us and we answer your questions, I'm going to go to the bathroom.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll pause this for a minute. [Audio break.] Mara has joined us, Mara Superior. And we're going to discuss now—

MR. SUPERIOR: You're right, this was the first one.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Let's discuss the evolution of how did you two begin to collaborate? The first piece that you worked on was the *Arbor Vitae*?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's the piece that is in the Renwick.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And your first collaboration.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, this was the first one.

MS. RIEDEL: How did it come about that the two of you began to collaborate?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Well, I believe that this came about from this porcelain vessel, which is in the shape of a seashell. And it refers back—

MS. RIEDEL: This is your piece.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes. It refers back to the original name given to porcelain by Marco Polo called *Alla Porcella*. He described Chinese porcelain when he saw it on his travels in Asia as *Alla Porcella*, like a shiny seashell, is the way he described Asian porcelain to the Europeans.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MRS. SUPERIOR: And I loved that idea. And the title of the porcelain piece is *Alla Porcella* a rare beauty. I mean it says *Alla Porcella* on the other side of this piece. It's a two-sided vessel in the shape of a shell. And there are little images of Canton porcelain, Asian porcelain from that period. And boats about the China trade. East-West Chinese export. And I thought about this piece and porcelain's connection to the sea and seashells. And thought this was such a big idea for me, and such an exciting theme, that I probably thought it would be wonderful to have a sea-themed cabinet to encase this shell. And Roy having so much—we were probably looking at American grain painted furniture and loving it, loving Americana, loving antiques, going to antique shows. And probably seeing some beautiful grain painted pieces.

MR. SUPERIOR: I did that before this way before.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes. So Roy was beginning to have fun with grain painting. So he grain painted wood previously for some furniture in our house. But I thought, well, why can't we grain paint some water and do some paintings and sculptures. And it just seemed like a very natural collaboration with his interest in fishing and the mysterious. An intelligent trout that he's familiar with and salmon interacting with. It just seemed like a natural—

MR. SUPERIOR: That's a salmon. There's a cod, a pollock, and a something else. I don't know.

MRS. SUPERIOR: So that's how the first one. And then after the first one, we just felt, well, we could do this in any theme.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Have you collaborated strictly on the cabinets and now the porcelain pieces? Are those the two main formats for the collaborations?

MR. SUPERIOR: Just the cabinets.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Just the cabinets. The porcelain bases, which are covered with tile, we're not calling those collaborations. Although I couldn't do it without a woodworker. I couldn't do it without Roy's help.

MR. SUPERIOR: Most of her pieces now have wooden bases that are gold-leafed. Or they're bases that are made out of wood and covered with tile. I wouldn't call it a collaboration. It's just me helping.

MS. RIEDEL: But there are some platters now that you're painting. Those you don't call collaborative?

MRS. SUPERIOR: No, we don't.

MR. SUPERIOR: Okay. Well, those were thrown by her assistant.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MRS. SUPERIOR: No, no, no. No, no. Not thrown.

MR. SUPERIOR: Drape molded.

MRS. SUPERIOR: They're molded. Draped slabs molded—draped over wooden forms that Roy made.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Which you will see in the studio.

MR. SUPERIOR: And they've been sitting in her studio for a long time. Why don't I try putting a drawing on one?



MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So those are really canvases.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: For all intents and purposes for your work. So that the cabinets are the extent of your collaborations.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And they began in 1990. And when was the most recent one? *The Sea of Plenty* that's here, 2008?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes, and there's one on Nantucket.

MR. SUPERIOR: The most recent one is the one that's on Nantucket.

MS. RIEDEL: *Pearls*? Was that *Pearls*?

MR. SUPERIOR: *Pearls*, yes.

MRS. SUPERIOR: That's name of it, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So there have been roughly a half dozen?

MR. SUPERIOR: One, two, three, four, five, six.

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

MRS. SUPERIOR: The small *Botanica*, which is a jewel chest.

MR. SUPERIOR: That's included.

MRS. SUPERIOR: That's the only miniature. And there are tree-themed pieces, the *Tree of Life* and several about the sea.

MR. SUPERIOR: There's Melinda's piece also, title of that *Nantucket*?

MRS. SUPERIOR: No, I'd have to look it up.

MS. RIEDEL: Had either of you worked in collaboration before?

MRS. SUPERIOR: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And after this first piece, which clearly was based, Mara, on your seashell object and building a cabinet around that initial idea, did you collaborate back and forth on particular ideas? Did it always start with a piece of ceramic? How did they evolve?

MR. SUPERIOR: We talked about ideas about a theme. Because we already had a viable format basically. And all of them have been essentially the same shape and construction with some differences in what's going on inside. We've even continued to do that and the title in that format. And the painting on the door has changed from—

MRS. SUPERIOR: Well, that always varies.

MR. SUPERIOR: —oil paint to egg tempera. The first two were in oil paint. This was oil in the tree. So the collaborations have been mostly in the beginning coming up with a theme. And then Mara will make a piece or she might have a piece that's on that theme. And I'll follow suit.

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

MRS. SUPERIOR: But the ocean theme has been something that both of us have—it's just been a continuum throughout the years.

MR. SUPERIOR: One of the reasons we haven't made another is that we can't think of another word to put in as a title.

MRS. SUPERIOR: No, no. No, no, no, no.

MR. SUPERIOR: We've got *Aqua Marina*. What was the one—Melinda's? *The Seashore*?

MRS. SUPERIOR: *La Mer*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: *La Mer*. Okay. *La Mer*.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Roy, there are plenty of other sea names. *Oceana*, *Botanica*.

MR. SUPERIOR: *Botanica*, and what's number six?

MRS. SUPERIOR: There are a whole world of floral, flora—

MS. RIEDEL: [Aqua] *Marina*. I don't know if you mentioned that.

MRS. SUPERIOR: You know there are a lot more potential that either he or I could come up with. I'm working on this aviary theme with birds. We could make a cabinet about birds. We've talked about a crenelated top for a cabinet about, an Italian-themed cabinet about Tuscany, which would house some Tuscan—Italian-themed—porcelains. He's talked about a Venetian cabinet, which the top would be the Rialto Bridge, and it would be a water painted cabinet, and it would be about with Italian-themed Vivaldi; he was from Venice. We've talked about cabinets that we haven't made yet.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MRS. SUPERIOR: But, you know, it's—

MS. RIEDEL: And was this something you'd like to continue?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes. Sure. It's just a matter of time.

MS. RIEDEL: So this has been ongoing over the past 20 years really. The first one was 1990, yes?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Right. And I think we were given a show at the De Cordova Museum. And I think that was the impetus to make a very grand and elaborate—

MR. SUPERIOR: That's I promise, I promise, I promise. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So this is a sketch for the Venezia cabinet.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That has yet to be realized I guess.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Right. Right. So we've got birds. There's Flora, the goddess of flowers. And I'm beginning to work with figures.

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

MRS. SUPERIOR: So that's another potential cabinet.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I make IOU sketches for things like I did for the kitchen island and for a couple of other cabinets.

MRS. SUPERIOR: It's kind of like the shrine idea in a way.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MRS. SUPERIOR: It's like a shrine to an idea.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Our work has been commemorative and ceremonial.

MS. RIEDEL: And very rooted in place since Italy. Though the Nantucket and your work certainly New England. And it seems like words and text, titles, has a lot to do with both of your works.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Absolutely. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So I would imagine, given that you both see that as a catalyst, it would be a rich dialog back and forth, literally and figuratively, for how the work might develop.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes. I mean any number of animals or—

MS. RIEDEL: And these cabinets are interesting because they're both functional and sculptural.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Yes, yes. We have thought of some other formats that wouldn't include the cabinet. That would just be cases, glass cases, where you would be able to view both sides of an object.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's a nice idea. Yes. Yes.

MRS. SUPERIOR: I mean it's essentially a format.

MR. SUPERIOR: The next one, though, will have the egg tempera painting well above ground level.

MS. RIEDEL: Above dogs and cats. Great. Anything else in particular about the collaborations that significant to the two of you, that's spurred any new way of thinking about your own individual work?

MR. SUPERIOR: Behind every collaboration is a spouse kicking, pushing, and shoving.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah-hah. [Mrs. Superior laughs.]

MR. SUPERIOR: There's a version of that: Behind every great man there's a wife, kicking, pushing, and shoving.

MRS. SUPERIOR: He has plenty of his own ideas. I think the collaborations are something that I usually have the initial thrust to get done. [Laughs.] He has, you know, plenty of ideas, sketchbooks filled with ideas of things to execute. And it's a matter of capturing his attention; capturing him is the key word.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Well, and in many ways you're right. They are shrine-like and they are commemorative. And so they're not at all a deviation from your work in content. They're a deviation in scale.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: They're assembled objects, and you make all of them except for Mara's pieces, correct?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] He makes the hinges.

MS. RIEDEL: They are no found objects.

MRS. SUPERIOR: No. He makes the hinges varying with the theme and the bone handles and knobs and carves the title.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Okay. Thank you.

MR. SUPERIOR: Next question.

MS. RIEDEL: Roy. We just mentioned the platters that you started. And these are new for you last year? And they're basically canvases in porcelain that you've begun to paint on in blue and white.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. It's that blue has a tradition, a long tradition.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: And—

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting that Mara just mentioned Marco Polo because a lot of that blue and white dates back to that.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. Well, that's where the tradition began.

MRS. SUPERIOR: And one of the reasons that it is, is because only the oxides work at that high temperature range which is something I'll get into, I guess. But also once you work with just cobalt, it immediately links you to the whole history and tradition of porcelain.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right, right.

MRS. SUPERIOR: And since he did these monochromatic drawings, Roy's not that interested in color. And he's always loved drawing in black and white. And now he has this sepia ink that he loves. But this is just another monochromatic method of drawing, which he loves doing.

MS. RIEDEL: And are they exclusively about Nantucket?

MR. SUPERIOR: So far because that's where I figured my market would be.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: It's one of the first things I actually did with a market in mind. And I lucked in, at least in the beginning. So I've never really been driven by economics before. But when I sold the first one, which was the *Angler's Guide to Nantucket*. I made another one with some variations. Which hasn't sold. Neither has *The Striped Bass That Ate Nantucket*. You saw that on the Internet.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: She sold *Striped Bass* after I made another one, which hasn't been fired yet. [Inaudible] which I have to make another of. So I enjoy drawing. I love drawing. It's a little awkward for me. I've help Mara now and then paint. I paint— can I tell about the fish?

MS. RIEDEL: So the blue and white has opened—well, in many ways it's bringing your work full circle. In many ways the blue and white drawings bring your work full circle, back to the monochromatic drawings, the pen and ink drawings.

MR. SUPERIOR: I've tied up as many circles as I can think of. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: But they also incorporate a strong sense of place, which is new since Italy.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, fortunately my connection to it was the last holdout of how could I get that other than any anonymous work I may have helped Mara with. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So, Roy, when you look back on your work over the past few decades, what do you see as the similarities and the differences between the early work and the recent work? And have your sources of inspiration changed at all over this time?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, obviously going to Italy has been the biggest change of inspiration.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: And now that I'm incorporating paintings back into the three-dimensional pieces, I kind of reconnect with my painting inspirations, something I, in a sense, except for drawing, left off a long time ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And starting off painting in a new media, which for me was new, egg tempera at the time, it was like a fresh start on painting. So when Mara says I'm not interested in color, that's not quite true. You can't paint without being interested in color.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Right, right, right. I'm sorry.

MR. SUPERIOR: But it has never been a primary focus. I mean it's something I'm interested in because my paintings are in color, and I have to think a lot about it. But color's never been a natural strong point like it is with Mara.

MRS. SUPERIOR: And weren't you told that you were colorblind? Which is another issue for a painter using color.

MR. SUPERIOR: I in my time failed two colorblindness tests.

MS. RIEDEL: Really!

MR. SUPERIOR: But it doesn't make any sense because I don't think my colors and my paintings are off.

MS. RIEDEL: You know I'm thinking of the oranges and the—

MR. SUPERIOR: And green and red.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, exactly. So that doesn't make any sense.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I don't think that shows up in my paintings. At least not to my vision.

MS. RIEDEL: And you really began to paint again with Italy, is that not true? The painting reemerged in your

work with Italy.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. Since the only woodwork I could possibly do was to carve a cane. Go and get my cane. I'd made several, many canes before that. And of course I had no tools there. But Italians make beautiful knives. And I couldn't resist them. And so in order to justify collecting them, I had to make something. So I was on a mountaintop, and I saw this tree with a relatively straight branch which is hard to find. And before I could really identify the tree, which I think might have been a pear tree, a fruit tree—

[END DISC 6.]

MR. SUPERIOR: —of some sort, I cut off the branch and ran away.

MS. RIEDEL: And carved from it this cane.

MR. SUPERIOR: And carved the cane. So it was made in Barga. That's why it says Barga.

MS. RIEDEL: Two thousand and one.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: With a lizard of some sort or a salamander on top.

MR. SUPERIOR: Our third trip. The first one when we went back with Helen. And you saw the picture of me sitting there.

MS. RIEDEL: Whittling, carving.

MR. SUPERIOR: I had to carry newspapers everywhere I went because Helen didn't want to get the house dirty or in the studio getting chips all over the floor. Which is one of the things I really enjoyed when I went back there by myself and somebody else owned the house, you know. When I knocked over a bottle of olive oil, it was okay. [Laughs.] And the cleaning women came, and they cleaned it up, and I had no problem. No Helen to freak out. So this was the only woodwork I was able to do. And I had actually designed and made another watercolor box special to take with me, and I was very much anxious to get back into it again. And Helen had this beautiful studio building all separate with big windows and easels and everything. And got lots of pictures of that.

MS. RIEDEL: And she's a painter herself.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: She paints mostly pastel—does a lot of monoprints.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Do you think of yourself as part of an international tradition? Or do you think of yourself as part of a particularly American tradition? Or do you not think about it one way or the other?

MR. SUPERIOR: I don't think it's either one or the other because there's nothing particularly American except maybe some of the artists I have liked, like Andrew Wyeth. And yet my all study has been of European artists. So I don't think I'm especially one way or the other.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: I'm all by myself. But not that far off, you know. Lots of boats go by.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Is there something in particular you require for your work environment? You have a beautiful studio out back, which is enormous and lots of natural light. Incredible tools.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. I find it's very hard to work if the environment isn't compatible. I have to create a space. I like to have all my reference books and my materials all handy. If I had my way and if I could, I'd have all my art books out there, but it's physically impossible because of the dust.

MS. RIEDEL: So you have your books in here, and out there is strictly a working space.

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes. The drawing board is out there because I got that for practically nothing at a tag sale, and it has a glass thing and a light underneath. And I figured I maybe could use that for some kind of mechanical drawing or tracing some of my sketches. And I had no place else to put it. But I had to get it because it was such a bargain. And so I put that out there. I had to move things around and create a space to do that. And it seemed like a logical place to do my painting. So I do most of egg tempera painting out there. A lot of the Italian

drawings I do upstairs on my drawing board up there where I have all my sketchbooks and pictures and so forth. So most of the stuff out there is what's related to the wood or is connected or part of paintings that go into a piece of wood.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: As far as changes, I guess there have been plenty. I pretty much went from a straightforward painter of things as I saw them in front of me, to completely turned inwards with those organic fantasy drawings, to a whole new medium starting with functional work moving into stuff that was functional but was more involved with sculptural attitudes, to things that were neither functional or sculptural in a traditional sense but on a whole other scale. And changes in the content or the theme so that the parody or the satire is not quite as strong necessarily.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: I always wanted to make some kind of a museum, and I thought lots of things, you know. I have sketches for a Museum of Bent Nails for example. [Laughs.] Probably just about anything you can think of you could make a museum for. So there's lots of material available. All I have to do is be able to focus and concentrate.

MS. RIEDEL: The social commentary doesn't seem quite as barbed as it did in some of the earlier pieces.

MR. SUPERIOR: Right. Well, I'm getting older. [Ms. Riedel laughs.] And most of my viciousness is aimed at current events. And I figure I just don't want to make any more political cartoons. And besides, Mara's doing such a good job of it. If all of her political things started selling like hotcakes, maybe I'd change my mind. I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Has technology had any impact on your work?

MR. SUPERIOR: You mean computers?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: Up until I bought my first Palm Pilot, which was a couple of years after I started teaching in Philadelphia, I swore I would never get a computer. I wanted nothing to do with any of that stuff. And I felt that it was holding back all the students and everything else who spent all that time. Then I got my Palm Pilot because I wanted to be able to—I didn't like carrying notebooks for scheduling and writing down dates. I thought it would be pretty good for that. Then I found that you could get Scrabble on it, and you could read books on it. I started—I couldn't go on the train without it. And then I got the bigger one, and then I got the more advanced one. And every time I'd get a new one, within two weeks they'd come out with a replacement of the newest version like the iPhone. Before I knew it, I was hooked, and I had our first computer, and that was the beginning of the end. The best thing about the computer, other than the obvious things of communications—I love my email a lot—is the instant access to knowledge and visual images. In one sense it's fantastic. And in another sense it's frighteningly scary.

And in another sense you can become dependent on it, and I refuse to do that. So that if I have an idea of something, before I do anything, I do not look it up on the computer. That's the thing I did with the *Olive Museum*. It was a shock to me to find that there actually were olive museums. And in a way it was a little deflating. And then I thought, well, maybe I should send pictures of it to the Olive Museum. But I never had any luck with that. I never get any answers. I've sent I don't know how many times to the company that made my fountain pen, announcements of my shows, copies of my drawings, all made with their fountain pen, offering to let them reproduce them or—I would be willing to let them—to give them a drawing for another fountain pen. But I never get an answer. I wrote to the Italian consulate or something in New York thinking maybe I could get a show down there. Never got an answer. The most recent attempt was we have, you know, a debt with our credit cards with Bank of America. Now they have one of the biggest corporate art collections in the world.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: So I wrote them a letter. I have yet to get an answer. That was, reminded of that because of that idiot woman out in California who suggested that people trade chickens for doctor bills. You remember?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. SUPERIOR: You haven't heard about that?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. SUPERIOR: I can't believe it.

MRS. SUPERIOR: A congresswoman.

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MRS. SUPERIOR: A congresswoman.

MR. SUPERIOR: A congressman.

MS. RIEDEL: Somehow I missed that.

MR. SUPERIOR: Who suggested we return to the barter system as a way of solving the economic crisis and the health costs. She said there isn't any reason why you shouldn't be able to trade chickens—give chickens—to a doctor, which is hysterical because she was serious.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm sure.

MR. SUPERIOR: On the other hand, I remember my father having patients who brought him produce and chickens.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Sure. I'm sure [inaudible]. Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: They couldn't pay their bills, and he accepted it because he was a great guy. But not out of necessity.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: So bartering has always been something that I've been able to do. I've traded paintings for an automobile. I've bartered with other artists. Traded them for musical instruments.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: Now I'm trying to be able to pay off our credit card debt with— [Laughs.] Who knows?

MS. RIEDEL: And we should mention that—I don't know. I think we've mentioned on disc, but that you play clarinet, and do you play something else as well?

MR. SUPERIOR: I play what?

MS. RIEDEL: You play clarinet. And do you play another instrument as well?

MR. SUPERIOR: Soprano saxophone.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. SUPERIOR: Which is very much in the tradition of the music that I play, which is all pre-1935 stuff or 1939. New Orleans jazz, early jazz of all kinds.

MS. RIEDEL: What sort of changes have you seen in the craft field over the past few decades? Is there anything in particular that you can point to?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, along with everything else in the art field, there's a lot more appropriation going on. Blatant. I call it—Mara calls it appropriating and so do a lot of people in the art world. I call it blatant thievery. But then again Picasso once said a great artist doesn't borrow; a great artist steals.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: In other words, you take something and make it your own. But most of the people who do it do not follow through and do not make it their own. They're just copies or, you know, taking a piece of a painting and putting it into a collage. That's not for me. So there's a direction that the art world is going in—and the craft world is beginning to pick up on it and follow as best it can. Mostly in the fibers, at least as far as I remember from school. And that there were a lot of students who were doing image-oriented stitching and whatnot. A folk artist named Henry Darger—

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

MR. SUPERIOR: —had an exhibition. He's long since gone. But there was an exhibition at the American Folk Art

Museum next to the Museum of Modern Art.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: And that had a tremendous influence. I see a lot—I had a lot of students who've visited it. And I had a lot of students, mostly in fibers, who began to use some of that imagery. And you see it all over the place now, things that are derived from that or derivative. So I feel, yes, I have appropriated Shaker stuff, but I made it mine, and it had something to do— All I did was take their chairs, made them on a different scale. But in order to keep them appropriate, I made them as accurately as I could. But not because I was trying to imitate anything.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: I was very upset when after I had done quite a few of that Shaker series, we went to the Whitney Museum, and there was a Shaker exhibition. And in the bookstore they were selling miniature Shaker chairs, exactly the same scale as the ones I'd been making. And these were a little bit crude. And they were made by somebody that I knew. And I was sure, absolutely sure, that he had swiped the idea from me. And I got really upset. And then I said, Ah, screw it. They're crude. Anybody could see that I didn't do that. But it bothered me. But they were selling for a couple of bucks apiece, and I still had these pieces hanging around. And they were in the Whitney Museum. I think I sent some pictures after that to the museum, and I got back something from one of the curators—at least an answer—that they weren't interested in that kind of thing at this time. [Laughs.]

I was reading through the journal, the interview with Chuck Close, who was at Yale after I left, just after I left. And his describing about the visiting artists that were brought up there by the faculty to talk to the students. And how angry some of them got because they couldn't get anything out of them. You know, a New York Abstract Expressionist would come up, and they'd sit there, and they'd belch and fart and burp, and think that that had some meaning. And he said "They were asking so-and-so and so-and-so to come up, and we wanted Edwin Dickinson." Now there's a painter's painter, one of my ultimate, all-time, great American painter heroes.

MS. RIEDEL: And why?

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Why?

MR. SUPERIOR: I just loved his painting. I fell instantly in love years ago with a painting in the Metropolitan Museum called *Ruin at Daphne*, something he worked on for ten years.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: So naturally I looked up everything he'd done. I went and saw everything he had painted. They had one of his paintings that was hung upside down in the Whitney for years before they discovered it. I loved his composition, I loved his minimal color sensibility. I loved the drawing, I loved the—I loved everything about it. I loved the fact that he could take something like a chair sitting on the floor sideways, and make a poetic statement about it in a little painting that he dashed off in no time at all. I wished I'd had the opportunity to study with him on Cape Cod where he was in Provincetown. I finally got to meet him once. I loved the way he looked. I loved the— Do you know who I'm talking about?

MS. RIEDEL: I know the painting at Daphne. But I don't know—

MR. SUPERIOR: Edwin Dickinson had—I'll go get a catalog in a minute or two. Or actually—

MS. RIEDEL: No, please. I'm concerned about time.

MR. SUPERIOR: He had a beard that he would comb this way from the center. And he wore kind of Victorian clothing. And he liked to dress up in Civil War uniforms and paint his self-portrait that way. And I just thought this was really the coolest thing of all. And his style was very recognizable, very unique, very personal. Followed no trend or anything else. And yet he started in the twenties, and it was all very contemporary. I have a book of his drawings, which are very, very minimal, but way before there was Minimalism. He violated every rule. He put a vertical line down the middle of his canvas for the window, and you're not supposed to do that, somewhere it was told it was boring. When I was teaching in Hartford, we invited him up as a visiting artist. He was about in his eighties at that time. And he comes, and here's my ultimate hero, painting hero. And he gave a little talk in the gallery. But all I remember him saying was: When you build a studio and you have a window, make it face northeast by 115 degrees. Or whatever. And then he said, when you put out your palette, put out just little bit of alizarin crimson. That's all I remember. Plus after the little talk, he came, and he had lunch with us in the faculty room. And all I could think of at the time was, he's got a piece of tuna fish stuck in his beard, and I wanted to tell



him. I couldn't take my eyes off it. That magnificent beard with the tuna fish. [Laughs.] And he was a little guy, a little skinny guy. I thought, you know, he'd be eight feet tall.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. SUPERIOR: His paintings were monumental.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: And I loved the idea that that painting was on and off for ten years and kept changing and growing. So that it had a physical three-dimensional quality to it because of the layers that had been built up. And yet there was such an unbelievably wonderful solid Renaissance perspective structure underneath it all. So it took in everything, and it was pure fantasy. It was based, I think, on the ruins at—well, I found it on the Internet somewhere, somewhere in Egypt or something. I forget. But it's a painting that has stayed in my visual mind ever since the first time I saw it. So whenever I go to the Met, I try to get a chance to see it if I can. Also I used to subscribe to *American Artist* magazine way back when, when it was valuable. I long since gave up my subscriptions of that. And *Art in America* had a big article on him. And *American Artist* did an article where about that painting and all the different stages it had gone through in the ten years. So that added so much more to it. And he taught at the Art Students League. I never did, and I go and I should've. But I was always someplace else. So, yes, that's one of my ultimate heroes. I can't believe I forgot to mention him before. And as uncool as it is, I still have a thing for Andrew Wyeth.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. You did mention him.

MR. SUPERIOR: Always did. What are you raising your eyebrows for?

MRS. SUPERIOR: You've mentioned him a hundred times.

MR. SUPERIOR: Well—

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's hard to remember after the course of two days. I don't know exactly what we've said on disc and what we've said off. But I think we have gotten into that.

MR. SUPERIOR: I started doing watercolors. It was in my last year at Pratt. There was no such thing as a watercolor class. There wasn't even a painting class. It was illustration, advertising design, period.

MS. RIEDEL: Really!

MR. SUPERIOR: And industrial design. No painting.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm.

MR. SUPERIOR: Whatever painting was done was done during the illustration department. And I saw a book on 20 watercolor artists culled from *American Craft* magazine, *American Artist* magazine. And I thought, oh, gee, these are some really neat things. So I bought my first watercolor set. I was working in an art supply store at the time. And I still have a Winsor & Newton No.—

MRS. SUPERIOR: Thirty?

MR. SUPERIOR: No. 14 sable brush that I got there for \$25 because I worked in the store. Those now sell for like seven hundred, eight hundred dollars, when you can find one. I'm not about to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: As a matter of fact, I've retired the one I had because it doesn't come to a point anymore. But who cares? It's a beautiful thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. SUPERIOR: But I would go up on the rooftops in Brooklyn and paint watercolors, teaching myself how to use them. It was a tricky medium in the beginning especially. And I remember just before I graduated, I showed them to one of my faculty members, and he got very excited. And when I went to Mexico, that's where I concentrated on the watercolors, and I was really thrilled. I felt I had taught myself how to do that. And for years I continued with watercolor really, well as, not my secondary medium, but equal to the oil paint. And I kind of got tired of doing what I now refer to as watercolor watercolors where all the books will come out, and they all look the same. You know.

My first teaching experience was before I went back to graduate school. A very prominent watercolor artist, and I can't remember his name, he was giving classes. And everybody would sit there, and he would do demonstrations. And he asked me if I would take over one of his classes. And he would—his method was the class would go out to a location. He would sit down, and they'd all watch while he painted a watercolor. And at the very end, he would take the chisel-shaped brush, manipulate it with his fingers so it was a little V, and he would dab in birds. This is the level of a lot of that stuff. And I said, "That is not for me." You know. And I had come back from Mexico, and I'm doing very free wild things. And he's doing like that. So I followed his procedure, everything but the birds, and I did my style, which was very, very—completely different. And it puzzled everybody because there was nothing for them to imitate or copy. But that was my very first teaching experience, that one class.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think we have done a very good job of covering most of these questions. I just have a few final ones.

MR. SUPERIOR: I can't think of anything else.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Did you mention Homer?

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MRS. SUPERIOR: Did you mention Homer.

MR. SUPERIOR: Oh, Winslow Homer, of course.

MRS. SUPERIOR: Jesus! I mean—

MR. SUPERIOR: Winslow Homer the watercolorist. He invented American watercolor. He and along with Turner, who invented watercolor as well. But they're very different.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: Plus nobody ever caught the spirit of the sportsmen the way he did and the country and the guides and the fish—still as fresh as if they were done yesterday. Amazing painter.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look back on your work over decades now, do you see it in terms of periods that are distinct? Or do you see a thread of continuity running through it?

MR. SUPERIOR: I see a very logical flow of continuity. It's all one thing that just evolves and has no sight in end. I have no way of knowing where I'm going to end up, which means stop at the end when I die. I have no idea. I have no specific goal of an image of something I want to make at the end. I'm curious to see how things turn out. But I'm usually so busy doing one thing at a time that I only see them really long after they're done.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. What about the work in particular matters to you?

MR. SUPERIOR: What about the work matters to me? It's important to me that they're well done. It's important to me for some reason that nobody ever be able to fault me on my skills. It's important that they have credibility. That I can control. That's about all I can control. What impact they have on other people I have no idea, and I have no way of controlling that. Anytime I ever tried to make something that was powerful and intense and an important statement, it came out to be really corny. For example—or illustrative—when in my first year of graduate school at Yale, one of the very first paintings I did was—I'd just seen *The Seventh Seal*, which I've now seen about 35 times, and the image of the Night playing Death, chess with Death, stuck in my mind. And I made a painting of a naked man playing chess with a death-like figure. And at the time I thought it was really profound. And one of the other students came in, a student who I admired greatly for his drawings, and looked at it and said, "Gee, I always wondered how you guys did that." And he walked out.

And I thought about that for years and years and years. What he was referring to was being able to paint figures fairly realistically because I was an illustrator beforehand. And I realized that this was just one corny illustration that might have been used on a movie poster. It wasn't that bad. But this is how it rings, the credibility it seems to have to me now. So it's one of the reasons why when I really started painting in any way that I felt was mine is because I was looking at things, not trying to reinterpret somebody else's image or idea or artwork. So it was always finding something in what was in front of me. And it wasn't until I was at Yale that I really understood, and it wasn't because of Albers. It was all the other people and seeing certain things in their work. Where they consciously were aware of the formal issues: shade and form, color, abstract issues, composition. And what I was talking about before, about seeing, as Albers said, not seeing a head as a head but as a shape and form. So I really began for the first time to find that in history. And, you know, what makes a great Italian painter like—

MRS. SUPERIOR: Botticelli?

MR. SUPERIOR: —Caravaggio—what makes Caravaggio so much stronger than so many of the other painters who painted almost as well, realistically. It was the abstract qualities and the shapes of the light and the dark. I began to notice how in a Rubens painting, the shape between the arm and the elbow was a beautiful shape. And that he must have not just observed it, but made that shape because—and altered this and that. And I discovered this in art school, in graduate school, for the first time consciously. And they may have been doing it unconsciously. But I don't think— they'd never been to art school. They didn't talk—they didn't have courses in composition, you know. And that's one of the things that I really loved about Andrew Wyeth. It had all those qualities. His compositions, you turn them sideways, upside down, they're beautiful abstract paintings. And that's what separates him from so many imitators who just paint barns with all the barn boards as realistically as they can. No vision. No point of view. Just picturesque. And I was desperately concerned that that's what my work was being. And that's one of the things that drove me to start doing these things.

MS. RIEDEL: The constructions?

MR. SUPERIOR: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: The constructions, the furniture?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, the drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, the fantasy drawings.

MR. SUPERIOR: It's really at that point that the transition becomes logical to me. So it's from these to the three dimensions to the scale, to backwards to the incorporation of painting again. But, you know, I don't think I've found it yet. It just seems like I'm going down the road, and I'm trying different little paths until I find one that seems to be the main road. Who knows?

MS. RIEDEL: Would you discuss what you think of in terms of wood as a form of expression and what it does better than anything else? What about it—what draws you back to it each time?

MR. SUPERIOR: Well, the only thing I can think of that it does better than anyone else is hold up your body if you're sitting on it. An oil painting won't do that. You can't sit on a piece of conceptual art. [Laughs.] It used to bother me when I'd say to myself—I'd go to a sculpture show, and I'd see people at the opening putting their wineglasses down on a piece of sculpture. I'd think thank God they can't do that on a painting. So it's ironic in a way that I first started making furniture, sculptural furniture. So I really can't think of anything other than that that wood does that's better than anything else. But I will say it's a lot more difficult than a lot of things because there's so much preparatory work, so much technical, mechanical put-in before you can really get something out of it.

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

MR. SUPERIOR: You know to—

MS. RIEDEL: Is it—

MR. SUPERIOR: Even if you're just carving like a piece of marble, unless you start with a tree trunk, you have to like Wendell Castle glued up a whole bunch of pieces or Leonard Baskin did that same thing. He didn't invent lamination of wood. That's been going on forever. When you carve something out of a tree trunk, it'll crack eventually—inevitable. So no matter how directly you want to work, the most direct way I can imagine is, like Baskin, starting with a big hunk of wood that he had to glue together first, had to sharpen all the tools, had to find some tools to remove the big pieces of wood first because it's ridiculous to stand there with a mallet and chisel and have to carve for five weeks before you begin to expose something that might eventually become an elbow. Wood is not that direct a medium. Until you get people who started using found materials and began putting them together. And what's his name—

MRS. SUPERIOR: Whittlesey?

MR. SUPERIOR: No, not Whittlesley. The sculptor. Makes big gigantic sculptures mostly out of wood.

MS. RIEDEL: Martin Puryear?

MR. SUPERIOR: Yes, Martin Puryear. Whose work I really like a lot.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I do, too.

MR. SUPERIOR: It's got wood in it, and it's mostly made of wood. And it varies from really skillful techniques to very crude putting it together. But everything seems to make sense. Or who's the other guy? Westermann

whom I mentioned before, whose work I really like, and who prided himself on his craftsmanship. And it's interesting because his craftsmanship was sort of 1950's style joinery. Things looked like they were made at that time. And they probably were. But it's not refined. It's like on the level of a fairly skilled cabinetmaker. But he got all of this criticism for putting too much technique into things. And then it turned completely around, and people would start writing about the great skills that he brought to his work. And I see that as ludicrous in both respects.

When I had my first show at Allan Stone, simultaneously Westermann was having a show at another gallery. And I was going to go over and meet him and bring him up—I wanted him to see my work. And he died before the show opened. So that kind of disappointed me; broke my heart a little bit. But he was a down-to-earth, world-traveled sailor. He came up to Hartford once as a visiting artist. And you never heard so many four-letter words in that gallery before—or since probably. And he smoked cigars the entire time. I thought this guy is great. And then I see his drawings and his letters. I have a whole book of his drawings and letters, and they're wonderful, personal, cartoon-like, but not cartoons: images of his vision of the war and all the things that he went through. Fabulous! Fabulous! His drawings of things he was making and his descriptions of them that he would send to his dealer and the curators and so forth. A total artist through and through. Just like Tommy Simpson in a way.

Now you keep hearing me refer to Tommy many times. Tommy, his biggest influence on me has been my envy and appreciation for his work attitude and his working process. And the speed and the continuity and the continuous dedication, in spite of everything, that he brings to it. You know we've seen him through several relationships. And all the way through, no matter how much emotional turmoil there is, he's still working. I remember when he lived in Collinsville, up the road, and with his first relationship after his first marriage, we all became—we were all good friends; we all hung out together, Mara and that woman. When they broke up or she left him for a couple of weeks, Tommy was still working every day down in the studio. I know because it was in my basement. When she came back, he was still working. [Laughs.] No going off and pouting and moaning and giving into his misery.

He's just an absolute total dedicated—I don't think he's a workaholic. I think that's just all he knows what to do and all he ever wants to do. And I think that is the essential—quintessential—artist. And that's why I talk about him so much. You know I don't necessarily want to make work. As a matter of fact—horrible thought—that I might make work that people would recognize as his ideas. On the other hand, he's made a few things that I think, because of their scale, look to me as though he might have been a little inspired by some of the things that I made, which is a great compliment, you know, to think that this artist I admire so much might have learned something from me.

MS. RIEDEL: That's all I have. Any final thoughts?

MR. SUPERIOR: That's all she wrote! [They laugh.] That's chapter—the end of the chapter. The author stopped here and then croaked. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you.

MR. SUPERIOR: You're welcome. [Laughs.]

[END DISC 7.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]