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Oral history interview with Richard
Mawdsley, 2010 August 21-22

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Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Richard Mawdsley on 2010 August 21-22. The interview took place at Mawdsley's home in Carterville, Illinois, 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 funded by the William and Mildred Lasdon Foundation.

Richard Mawdsley has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Richard Mawdsley in the artist's home and studio in Carterville, Illinois on August 21st, 2010, for the Smithsonian's Archives of America Art. This is card number one.

Good afternoon—too late to be morning.

Let's start with some basic, early biographical data—where and when you were born and a bit about your childhood.

RICHARD MAWDSLEY: I was born in Oxford, Kansas. I'm sorry—I was born in Winfield, Kansas.

MS. RIEDEL: 1945?

MR. MAWDSLEY: 1945.

MS. RIEDEL: The date, July 11th, was it?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, July 11th. My mother was living there because my father was in the Navy in World War II. And that was her home, so I was born in Winfield, which was the closest hospital to Oxford.

MS. RIEDEL: And your mother and father's name, and what they—what they did?

MR. MAWDSLEY: My mother is Evelyn and my father was Richard E. Mawdsley. And they were both schoolteachers. I know my father was a football and basketball coach and taught math and business and mechanical drawings, you know, taught a lot of different things. He ended his public school career as a counselor and in the mid-1950s probably got a job with the U.S. Air Force at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas as an educational officer, which was [his] official designation—what he did was help people in the Air Force who wanted to better their education. He made arrangements for them to go to college or take college classes or—at the time, in the Air Force, if you didn't have a high school education, you were required to finish. And he would take care of that business, too, with those people.

And well, he did all kinds of stuff. I mean, he had—he had a staff of a couple of enlisted men that worked with him and he did that until he retired, probably did that for 20 years almost and worked for 40 years all together between teaching in high school and working from the Air Force.

My mother started—my mother taught when she first got out of college. And then she did not work until—again until my sister went to college.

MS. RIEDEL: So you had siblings?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I have a younger brother and an older sister.

My mother taught English at the junior high that I went to. And she taught there for 20 years probably before she retired.

My parents thought themselves as somewhat progressive people for Kansas, which is, you know—[they laugh]—well, does that say much? I don't know. But we had, like, Heywood-Wakefield furniture, which is now real collectible, which my niece has, and I'm happy she has it because I don't want—[inaudible]. You know, it's, you know, modernism. It was a modernism-for-the-masses kind of situation.

MS. RIEDEL: So there was a design sensibility?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, when we would go on vacation, which wasn't often because they couldn't afford it often, but there was always an art museum. When we went to St. Louis, we went to the art museum. If we went to Denver, we went to the art museum in Denver. Wichita has an art museum, which we would frequent—almost as often as we did the countdown, which was their recreation of their cowboy and Indian days.

And we all played musical instruments.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? What did you play?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, I didn't—I play at the French horn. [They laugh.] I was never very good. My sister was the one that actually was pretty good at it. She played the oboe and she was pretty good at it. My brother played the clarinet and he was as bad at the clarinet as I was at the French horn.

So there that sense of sort of—[inaudible]. But we all just dissipated in—well, I am not sure if my brother did in high school or not, but both my sister and I played music in high school.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there art classes in elementary school and junior high, high school?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I started drawing when I was—before I could remember. And I drew constantly and took—they had art periods. Every once in a while in grade school they would have an art project—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —once a month, once every two weeks. It wasn't often, but once in a while they had them.

And I spent a lot of time in classes, throughout college, throughout my education, doodling.

So in seventh grade, everybody was required to take an art class. And I had Mr. Bachelor, who was a weird old man—I guess you shouldn't say that—but a good—really good art teacher. And I had him for art in the seventh grade. Then, I took it as an elective in the ninth grade. I was a freshman.

MS. RIEDEL: Drawing and painting and in 3-D—[inaudible]?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Drawing and painting, no three-dimensional art whatsoever—and he had a very structured, traditional art class but he recognized and—by the same token, recognized and encouraged creativity and pointed out creativity whenever it happened. And so I got a really good structural base in terms of visual mark making from that man.

He was an amateur actress—actor, was in a lot of local theater. The parts he played, he was a little weird man—parts that did him real well. [They laugh.]

And my mother was always very proud of me and always kept him apprised of what I was doing. And when I would—you know, when my work was published somewhere, he'd be sure—she would show it to him. And so I don't remember the last time I saw him. It's been a long time. But you know, it was a positive experience.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like if—that's a long-term relationship, if that was a junior high and high school art teacher.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, and—well, junior high at the time was three grades; it was seventh, eighth and ninth grade or—freshman was also at the junior high at the time.

MS. RIEDEL: So he was really a junior high teacher.

MR. MAWDSLEY: He is a junior high teacher, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds as if art was something that was valued in the family as well. Many people paid attention to it.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I think so, yes. They gave me private music lessons, which I just—you know, I just didn't relate to music at all or at least didn't play it well, until I finally insisted that they stop.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, the teacher agreed with the fact that I wasn't doing or wasn't progressing or it wasn't doing a lot of good. And at the time, Wichita State University had a fairly well-recognized music program at the time—I don't know if it still does or not, so I had some pretty good—they were college guys or people in graduate school sometimes, too, that were pretty proficient French horn players. And they would often show me how it was supposed to be played, and it sounded really good when they played it. It sounded really bad

when I played it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: So anyway—and at one time, they were contemplating giving me private art lessons, but, oh, whatever happened to that? Never did pan out—

MS. RIEDEL: Was that something you wanted to do? Or was that a substitute?

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, I was sort of—you know, it was just something that I enjoyed. And if they would've done it, I would've gone along [with] it. And if it didn't happen, it was something that was not a problem.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I took art throughout high school, you know, teachers came and went. I had no three-dimensional work at all in high school, either. It was all variations of drawing and painting or classical, commercial design, which was basically 2-D. I shouldn't even say this, but I got a poster out in my shop that I made when I was in high school.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I have to take a look at that.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, it's really bad.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: [Inaudible.] Anyway, oftentimes, I was the art guy, and the band teacher liked to have a good time. We had concerts and we would oftentimes build stage sets and have little programs and activities that were, you know, surrounded.

And my senior year, he had a Spanish theme and he got together with one of the art teachers. And I would build—I designed and made the stage sets with this hacienda thing at the back of the thing. And the art—one of the art classes reproduced Diego Rivera murals on each side of the auditorium out of—out of chalk on brown wrapping paper.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's pretty impressive.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And they were, like, 20 feet high and 40 feet long.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And of course, no one knew exactly who Diego Rivera was—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: —the fact that he was a commie. And you know, during the 1960s, if they had known who he was and what he stood for, it would've been a real situation.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: But anyway, they were pretty—they were pretty magnificent.

MS. RIEDEL: And you designed the entire set—[inaudible.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: I designed the set that was behind the band. And I helped work on the murals. That was basically the first nine weeks of my senior year in—the second nine weeks—I don't know—of my senior year in high school.

MS. RIEDEL: So was this—the first sort of large-scale three-dimensional piece that you worked on was this set?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No, all three years I had built sets.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: That was the kind of the nicest for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And actually the poster that I have is the poster for that program.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I'd like to see that.

MR. MAWDSLEY: [Inaudible]—find out exactly when it is. I think it was—I don't know. So—

MS. RIEDEL: What was the name of high school?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Southeast High School in Wichita, Kansas.

MS. RIEDEL: So all through high school you were building sets. So the 3-D was coming in in another way?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, I was—it's, like—when I was a sophomore, the teacher said, we're going to have a work day on Saturday.

And maybe 15, 20 people showed from the band.

And they said, we're going to have another work day on Sunday. And I was the only one that showed up. [Laughs.] And so, from then on, he just wouldn't bother the rest of them,—whenever it needed to be done, I was the one. I designed posters. I designed handbills. I did—I don't know—I did several stage sets that were backdrops for the band. And so I was kind of the go-to guy when art needed to be done. And that always—I was in a coin-collecting [club] in junior high and made things for that, posters for that and—I don't know—other things like that.

When I was in college, I designed homecoming floats and seemed to have the skills to take—to actually make them out of something besides stuffed chicken wire. I actually painted three-dimensional—made paper-mache three-dimensional forms and painted them. And the person that I was doing this for hated those—you know, those—I don't know if you've—homecoming floats with—that were sort of sculpted chicken wire.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Then they [filled]—they poked crepe paper in the holes. Yes, she didn't—she thought that was awful. So I did that.

MS. RIEDEL: This was at college.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I did other things like that where—you know, where I seemed to have —

MS. RIEDEL: This was what—it was Kansas State Teachers College? Is that right?

MR. MAWDSLEY: This was—yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And you started there in '63.

MR. MAWDSLEY: They're now called Emporia State University. It's the same.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And were you interested in—had you gone there with the intention of majoring in art, or what were you—okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]. I was an art major from day one.

MS. RIEDEL: Actually, before we get into college, I want to just jump back because I remember reading that you would spend a lot of time on your grandfather's—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, yeah. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —farm as a child, and maybe we should address that briefly.

MR. MAWDSLEY: My grandparents' farm was 30 miles south of where we lived in Wichita. And we were—I don't know. Twice a month, probably, on average, we would drive down and attend church or spend the Saturday or something, always had fried chicken because they raised chickens. I could still take or leave chicken. [They laugh.] When we didn't have chicken, they would give—they would give my mother a frozen chicken, since, oh, we would have chicken at home, too, a lot, so—because it was free.

My grandfather was a—

MS. RIEDEL: What was his name?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Howard Wenrich. And he was kind of one of these guys that—what was good enough was good

enough. And so in the 1950s, he farmed with a 1931 tractor and cut his wheat with a 1927 combine, which worked fine. [Laughs.] And he never owned a rubber-tire tractor; he always had these track-type tractors. And when it rained real bad, he would go pull the other farmers out of their fields that had gotten stuck with their rubber-tire tractors because this thing, basically, you couldn't get it stuck in the mud. It was—it was amazing. At any rate, it was this machine that was a vintage machine.

And basically, he had inherited—he had taken over the farm in 1929, I believe, from his father-in-law. His father-in-law moved to town. And he had worked with his father-in-law for 15 years—about 10 or 15 years before that when they—when my grandmother and my grandfather first got married.

And basically he used for the most part the same tools that his father-in-law had purchased. And there were a couple of exceptions. But for the most part, he had things that had worn out that they had to buy new ones of, but basically it was—it was sort of this—and it was done in the—these machines were made when—with—when nothing was covered. All the gears and pulleys and transmissions and moving parts, unless they had to be enclosed, they weren't.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So when these things were running, it was just a menagerie of banging and crashing and movement. And things were bouncing up and down and in and out and making a racket, and it was wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And my grandfather lost—he was lucky, he only lost one finger to these machines. A lot of farmers lost arms and hands and—you know, you very rarely saw a farmer from the first half of the 20th century that had all of his fingers. It was just very nature of how dangerous these things were. Farming is one of the most dangerous things you can do, anyway, and these things just made it twice as hazardous—[laughs]—because yeah, there was no—there was no—you know, no consideration for safety at all, which made it visually wonderful, you know—[laughs]—but dangerous, you know?

So I spent a lot of time—I would spend a lot of summertime down there. And there were these hunks of rusting iron. And I had this big wrench that—I would take them apart and put them back together in different ways, and it kept me out of trouble, I guess. I don't know. So I made these kind of—whenever I could, I would—they weren't really fanciful things, but I would take—imagine this thing.

And I could climb onto this tractor or climb onto this combine. A combine is a wheat-harvesting machine, by the way. I used to give a lecture by—and showed my combine, and finally after three or four years somebody asked me what a combine was, and I forgot I wasn't in Kansas. [Laughs.] So not everybody knew what a combine was.

And I could get on top of these machines, and they could be spaceships or great, you know, earth-moving machines or weapons of, you know, destruction and war. And I could—I could allow my imagination to go—you know, and sit there and sort of be atop of this world, even though—even though it wasn't as high as I remembered. But, you know, so it was this activity between allowing my imagination and being atop of this massive piece of equipment that just sat there right under an oak tree.

MS. RIEDEL: So these were actually old pieces that were no longer functional, that you—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, they were functional. They were just sitting—you know, the combine was used three weeks a year.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And then the rest of the time, it sat out under an oak tree or under a walnut tree.

MS. RIEDEL: And your grandfather was just fine with you sort of disassembling it and reassembling it?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, that was—I didn't do that one. There was a couple of other things that I did that with. I never got around—[inaudible]. Things that he actually used, I couldn't take apart.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: He got upset when I'd take stuff apart. That was good, but there was a lot of stuff that wasn't.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: There were just hunks of rusting things that were sitting out there that he—you know, it was too much trouble to get rid of and—you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Wonderful raw material—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, after—it was metal. I mean, it was iron and they had all seats on them because they were all from the horse-drawn era. And you could—you know, you could sit on them. You literally sit on them.

And they had a lot of them had foot pedals or they would have a lever that would—you know, you'd move the lever up and down and—something that would go up and down. So there were—you know, sort of interactive—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —the ones that still weren't rusted to the point where they weren't interactive, you know.

So all this stuff was just sort of this fertile imagination thing, which I was allowed to—the kind of the—childhood fantasies that people had, I had this special environment for my childhood fantasies. It wasn't just that I was sitting in my bedroom having these fantasies. I was in an environment where there's something more than just my fantasy. It was—so that was sort of the importance of this.

And my grandfather, after he retired and quit farming, kept that tractor for maybe 10 years because he was saving it for me. At some point, I said, "No, I don't really want that." And so he sold it. And God, I don't know what I'd do with it because it was a small machine by tractor standards but it was, like—you know it would rip dirt up, you know, you couldn't drive it, but still, I'm kind of sorry that he sold it. I don't know how I would get it here and what I would do with it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: It's probably pretty valuable because I think it was a fairly rare—I don't know how big the Caterpillar tractors collectors' society is.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: But, at any rate, I sort of regretted that. At any rate, it could be a sculpture in the backyard. [Inaudible.]

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. I was thinking it would work pretty well out there.

MR. MAWDSLEY: It would be—it would be—yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So you had real—very real, tangible metal materials with which to—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Right, there was always that stuff. It was around me and there was no plastic at the time. It was all metal. If there was something on that machine, it was metal. It was that hard stuff and there was occasionally pieces of canvas or struts that were made out of wood, but the vast majority of it was metal.

So I always felt that was an important sort of breeding ground. And I didn't realize how important it was until my grandparents moved to town and then they passed—my grandfather passed away in his mid-80s. And then my grandmother passed away in her mid-90s.

And we went back to the farm, and I saw this thing. It wasn't in the way of—this combine was not in the way of the tenant farmer that was living there. He had all kinds of modern stuff that was sitting all around, but there was this combine in its little place that was still there.

And looking at it I realized how important it was in terms of the fantasy thing. But in looking at the actual machine, I realized that the way I relate shapes and forms together had a lot to do with the way the shapes and forms and lines—straight lines versus curved lines and things that cross over each other and so forth—had a lot to do with the way I assembled work. So I did take some slides of it and documented it before it ended up in the scrap heap, but you know, that was—always an important thing for me was that combine. So that's sort of pretty typical, I think, for Kansas people.

I attended a—early '90s—a conference of the Kansas craft society—Kansas Artist Craftsmen Association. Whatever it is, it was a state craft organization. Whether it still exists or not, I don't know. But they held a conference or a program at a junior college in Kansas City. And they had, like, Brent Kington] and Wendell Castle and, I think, Margie [Marjorie] Schick, Bill Helwig, Robert Ebendorf, some ceramic people—[laughs]—a couple of fiber people, the lady that was at KU for a long time—oh, God, I can't remember her name—God—well, a bunch of, you know, quite—

MS. RIEDEL: Ferguson, maybe? Ken Ferguson? Was he there?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Actually, Ken Ferguson was—he was actually in Missouri. He was kind of a Missouri guy; he wasn't a Kansas guy. I don't know. Was he from Kansas? I don't know. I don't know his history. But he taught at the Art Institute—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and lived in Missouri, so I don't know—he wasn't there. But, God, there was—there were several names you might recognize that were in ceramics that I just can't think of.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. We can add them later.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And a couple of glass people, too—Breucha—what was his—what was his first name? [Vernon Breucha] A glass guy—well, anyway, so there was a dozen of us. And we all gave presentations. And then we all had a—sort of this panel discussion thing at the end of—I don't remember much about the panel discussion, but—

MS. RIEDEL: The broader topic was arts in Kansas? Was that the idea?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, something like that.

And out of a dozen, there was, like, six of them that showed up with pictures of combines. [They laugh.] So I was—[inaudible]—

MS. RIEDEL: Part of the visual vocabulary.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And there were—their combines weren't as nice as my combines. [They laugh.] So I think that—like, one thing that occurs to me that—most people think Kansas is this sort of barren, flat—and they drive across Interstate 70 and they just can't wait to get to Colorado.

And farmers—I can't say farmers in general, but my grandfather sort of had this love-hate relationship with his activity. You know, when it rained and when the weather was good—you know, when it rained at the right times and it snowed at the right times and it didn't snow at the wrong times and didn't rain at the wrong times, he made a lot of money, you know. When it rained at the wrong time and snowed at the wrong time and didn't rain at the—you know, he didn't make a lot of money.

And the only time I ever heard my grandfather swear was at the weather, you know? [They laugh.]

So I think nature—I was always told that Kansas was not a beautiful place, you know, that the farming—farmland was just—you know, it was endless black rows of dirt most of time, which is true. And, like, half the year it's ploughed ground, you know? It's not—it's not—there's not anything growing there. And so I was probably directed at what man had made as far as aesthetic structure, as opposed to what nature had made.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Not that I don't appreciate, you know—Colorado is beautiful, you know? And for us, going to Colorado was the thing because it was—you know, it was accessible; it was before the time of interstates. And so driving to the East Coast or West Coast would probably have been like a one-week or a two-week affair, you know? So Kansas was—and when you went to Colorado, half the cars you saw were from Kansas. So, you know, it was sort of this natural—and I went to Colorado several times as a youngster, and the mountains were nice, you know?

But I sort of never—you know, my ancestry was—my grandmother gardened because she—that's the way she had to—that's what she had to do in order to put food on the table. My grandfather farmed because that's what he had to do. It had nothing to do with duty or anything. And when it worked, it was fine; when it didn't work, it was—it meant difficulties. And so that was—I sort of associated that mental attitude to nature. And so it never became a factor as far as—at least not a conscious factor. You know, the beauty of flowers never—you know, it was always nice, but I couldn't relate to it as far as, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: The machines really engaged your imagination.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, they did. And there was sort of this barrier that I grew up with, as far as the farm goes. So that was—I don't know what else to add to that experience.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, that's helpful. We can move on to college, if you like. I just wanted to make sure we addressed—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: I know—yeah, one little anecdote that my—at the end of the harvest period, my father would—

my grandfather would always come in and show my grandmother his hands, the fact that all fingers were still there. So—

MS. RIEDEL: That does sounds pretty brutal, actually—pretty scary.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And it was, it was, and—

MS. RIEDEL: He wasn't interested in one of those new machines that might have been a little safer, then?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, it was just—he had to spend money on it. [They laugh.] It's like, why bother when you've got this perfectly good machine that—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —but, you know—and the fact that all the farmers around him had all these new self-propelled combines and all this fancy stuff—you know, it's, like, this thing is good enough for me.

You know, as combines go, it was a fairly simple, straightforward machine. And he could maintain it. And there was a gasoline engine on it that was really a basic gasoline engine that—anybody with a—with even a little bit of mechanical sense could probably work on it and fix it. So there was nothing mystery—mysterious [sic] about it. And there was nothing that he couldn't do himself, basically. So it's, like, "Why?" You know, like I say, why bother? Just money—you just spend money on it, you know, so—despite the fact that it would be easier on him and faster and, you know, da, da, da, da, da, da, and—

MS. RIEDEL: A real sense of self-sufficiency and frugality, practicality.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. Oh, yeah.

And I went back down there last year. I believe it was last year. My mother died, and it was the first time I'd been to Oxford in maybe 25 years. I don't know but a long, long time.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And all of the farmhouses that were around my grandparents' farmhouse were all abandoned. My grandparents' farmhouse was abandoned. And the weeds had overgrown. The weeds were around five feet high. And it's the nature of—my grandfather had 450 acres that he farmed. And he was able to make a decent living with 450 acres. Nowadays, if you don't have 3[,000] or 4,000 acres to farm, then you don't make a decent living. And the machines are mega, massive things, and all of the fences have been taken out because you can't use these huge machines in little fields. You got to make big fields out of them.

So it was [a] sad experience that the farmhouse was—you know, was not—was neglected. It wasn't as a bad a shape as some of them—and somebody had been living there, you know, a few years ago—but it was still kind of—you know, it was a sign of the times. But it was still kind of a sad thing. And I just drove in, drove around and went back. I just didn't—didn't have a need to get out and look around. You know, it wasn't something that I cared to—you know, I'd rather remember what it was when I was, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: That makes me think of—not to jump away ahead, but it makes me think the sensibility of your water towers. Some of the more recent sculptures have that sensibility to them, that fabulous old artifact that—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —embodies a sense of history but in many ways has fallen by the wayside. Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Well, at least in some places it has.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So let's move back to college, then, because you weren't thinking about metal at that point. You were—what—you were just majoring in art.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, I was—all my experience had been 2-D, so I was, you know, going to be a drawer and painter. That was—and I had to take—this was at the end of my sophomore year, and I was one of the last people to enroll. And basically the only thing that was open was metals. [Laughs.] So there I was, you know?

And the guy that I took my first two metals classes from was named Ron Hickman. And Ron Hickman was

another KU graduate that was a pretty good metalsmith but a real—had this big, booming voice and was kind of a self-assured guy.

And once I got to know him, he was much more of a pussycat. But I sort of worried about him, because he was just a guy that pranced around and, you know, didn't seem to me like my kind of guy, kind of—[inaudible, laughs]—you know? But I had a good experience with him. And he encouraged me a lot.

MS. RIEDEL: And was it love at first experience?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, pretty much. I mean, I'd always worked with tools all my life, you know? And it was working with your hands and working with tools. And I all of a sudden felt much more comfortable working with three-dimensional forms, with, you know, at least at that point.

It was not necessarily the fact that bells and whistles went off. It's just, like, "Oh, this is—this is what I should be doing." It was kind of just—you know, it was just a natural thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you interested in hollowware? Were you interested in sculpture or jewelry?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I was—I did it all.

I need to go to the bathroom. Let me take a break a minute.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: Ron left Emporia at the end of my sophomore year and went and became the director of the Wichita Art Association, which had a national competitive exhibition for years and years, and one of the benchmarks in terms of the competitions—I don't know. Last time they held it, it was maybe 20 years ago, but—or 15 years ago. I don't know.

I think he talked himself into that job and talked himself out of it in a couple of years. And last time I've heard of him, he was in Phoenix or Flagstaff or some place as a—as a director of some kind of art institution.

MS. RIEDEL: But once you got into the metals program, that was it for you? You were clear that that's what—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, I was pretty clear that—and I took sculpture and enjoyed sculpture, but it just wasn't—you know, there wasn't that kind of tool involvement. There was—there was just this—you know, you had all these cool-looking tools that you used and worked on a scale that I'd never—when things got big, they got to be a lot of work. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, and when they're small, they're not? [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well—I guess. I don't know.

So that was sort of the criteria, even though—I had a wonderful education as an undergraduate. And I was a naïve idealist. I don't know. I was getting this art education, so I—and at the time, there were a thousand jobs that went unfilled in Kansas, so I had—the summer in between my summer and fall of my year before I went to graduate school, I had, like, two or three school systems calling me and say, "We understand by your records that you haven't placed, and we need—you know, you haven't been placed yet. We need an—we need an art teacher, you know?"

MS. RIEDEL: How extraordinary.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. So—and I—

MS. RIEDEL: So the world looks pretty rosy. It looks like things—yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I was—[inaudible]—naïve to me. And so the two most amazing experiences in terms—was the—one was a 20th century art class that I took under the man that painted—that painted—[inaudible, laughs]—Richard Slimon. And Richard was an abstract—still is, for that matter—and a good one, and a very intelligent, very literate—had very incisive—and very insightful opinions about it, even about metalwork, despite the fact that he didn't like it. But he had to like it because his wife did.

But at any rate, I took a 20th century art class from him. And what I learned about art and being an artist and the commitment that one has to make to be an artist and all these sort of abstract things that are part of the nature of art making, I learned a great deal about that and about him from that art—from that 20th century art class. And I got an A out of that, which was just amazing because it was—it was writing, and I just, you know, could not write at all.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was in terms of commitment and focus and breadth and history, context. Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: All that. All that. Absolutely. Yes. Right. It was all that that—you know, and he had not only talked about painters and about art; he had opinion about a lot of them. And we had discussions about his opinions to the extent that we—[inaudible]—as long as we didn't agree or disagree with him too much, that was okay and—but—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, so it was not—everything we learned about, even—you know, even, which started with—you know, we started with [Jacques Louis] David and that group. It was not just simply the basic history about it. What it was, it was his—sort of his personal take on things. And you know, there was—just the mere fact that it was not something that you observed and appreciated and admired; it was something that—where you had to have—where he had to push the relationship, that he either got something out of it or he did not get something of it, or it was just—you know, he liked it or he hated it. And there were a couple things that he sort of—could take it or leave. But, you know, there was something about that that—just to hear him talk about things, there was this thing about the fact that it was a part of his life. It was a part of his art making. It was a part-of-who-he-was kind of situation, all these artists that he talked about.

MS. RIEDEL: Was he teaching you about evolving a critical aesthetic?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, he was doing that. He was not doing that—it was—he was—he was us a history class, you know? [Laughs.] But that's—and that's—in essence, that's what it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. It wasn't just—it wasn't just history; it was that you should have an opinion about them; you should be able to have a critical analysis about why—what should—why it doesn't.

MR. MAWDSLEY: That's right. And those things should mean something to you more than simply, "Yes-that's-great-art" kind of thing; you know, that they should be a part of your psyche. They should be, you know, for better or worse.

And when we were discussing van Gogh, one of the students asked him if he would make—if cutting off his ear would be a better—he would be a—it would make him a household name as an artist, would he do it? And he didn't answer that question. He just sort of smiled. [Inaudible, laughs.] It was, like, yeah, of course he would cut off his ear, you know? Or at least, that was the opinion that I got from the smile. [They laugh.]

[Side conversation.]

Anyway, that was something that was, you know, invaluable to me in terms of the commitment to art, that you couldn't be an artist and be passed—you know, just be—you couldn't just be okay or just couldn't be something you're doing because it's something to do; it had to be something that you were—you were mentally and physically a part of. You were—you know, it was part of your life. It was ingrained into you more than simply just being a job.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like a sense of drive, too. It had to be a real passion and a drive. It wasn't something 9:00 to 5:00.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, oh, yeah. Yes. And part of that—you could hear—you could—you could feel and hear this passion. You know, and I had several undergraduate teachers that were, you know, that way.

And I had a young—I had a sculpture teacher that was just out of college. And to him, all things were possible. He was going to be an artist in residence somewhere. And he was—had his whole life planned out for him. You know it was all this upward spiral, because he had the world by the tail—kind of a situation, and he was as naïve as I was, but it was a wonderful thing to hear him.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Do you remember his name?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Bill Bagley. Bill, Bill was a pretty important guy. He and his wife Elaine—his wife Elaine was a metals person. So it's, like, every evening, I was at the metal studio making metals whether I had anything else to do or not. And Richard Slimon's wife was there. And Bill Bagley's wife was there. So Jane Slimon and Elaine Bagley were—all three of us were—you know, so—and then another student would show up. [Laughs.] But consistently, the three of us were there making metal.

MS. RIEDEL: And the studio was open for you to work pretty much 24/7?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: That's wonderful. In undergraduate? That's great.

MR. MAWDSLEY: This was before people were worried about burning places down. And it was prior to a lot of OSHA concerns, and you know, we-were-killing-ourselves-and-we-didn't-know-it kind of thing, and you know, before we worried about lawsuits and stuff like that. And I was one of the—it was three or four of us that were student workers. It was sort of a privilege to be a student worker. And I did all sorts of—I mixed clay, I did all sorts of things as a student worker.

MS. RIEDEL: Sort of like a TA sort of thing?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, I was sort of one of the grunt people.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] And what work were you looking at? Or what were you inspired by? Were there artists in particular or movements in particular? An aesthetic sense?

MR. MAWDSLEY: As a second-semester student, I was assigned—a second-semester metal student, I was assigned to make a book report on metals, okay? And at Emporia State University library, there was probably—I don't know. If we were lucky, there was maybe a dozen books on metal—[inaudible, laughs]—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and probably not that many. And by the time I got around, which was—which was at the last minute, the only book that wasn't checked out was a book on Karl Fabergé.

And so I spent five minutes, maybe—I don't know. It wasn't a very long book report—giving a book report on Karl Fabergé. And the instructor at the time, this was a—no, this was third or fourth semester. This wasn't second semester. This was, like, my junior year, I think—spent 20 minutes—15 minutes, at least—giving us this sermon on why anything done before Georg Jensen was irrelevant and decadent and not worthy of us considering.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I thought this stuff was just wonderful. [Laughs.] And I could—I was crushed. [They laugh.] And obviously it didn't stop me from my continuous love of Fabergé but it was kind of—you know, it was, like, with that book I discovered history.

And then in graduate school, we had a class in which, for eight weeks—six weeks—some time—every—once a week, we gave a book report or we—there was, like, half a dozen of us that went out to the professor's house on a Wednesday evening, and while he slept in his easy chair, we gave book reports. [They laugh.]

And, you know, I read a couple of technical books that—[inaudible]—but all the rest of them—I did this for a year or two years; I don't know—were history books. And so I got a—through that book report business, I got a pretty good foundation on the history of metals and certainly a pretty rich visual experience in terms of the books. I had never seen any, really.

So the history of metals—the history, I knew from a very early time, from that Fabergé book, that it was going to be an important part of my, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: What about it spoke to you?

MR. MAWDSLEY: The ornamentation, there was sort of this bodaciousness, this sort of over-the-top kind of thing that was just a lot of activity, a lot of glow and a lot of—you know, a lot of involvement and a lot of things to see and a lot of things to discover. It was just the same way when I saw the real stuff, you know? [Inaudible.] So—oh yeah, there it is. Yes, it's, like, oh, look around here, you-never-saw-in-a-picture kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, the intricacy.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So you know, it was basically who I am or who I was or what I—who I am as a metals person. What that embodied in terms of—I mean, I can't deal with the color the way he did, just never have dealt with color. But in terms of the ornamentation, it's been a part of it.

And I from a very early age realized that if you were—I had a junior—I had a senior high school history teacher tell me, if you were unaware of history, you were destined to live it over again. And so—and I've heard from—varying things from art history teachers as to about what art history should be to you. And you know, the basic idea was, you can't move forward until you know what's been happening before. And I sort of, you know—I guess I bought that.

And I think that for me to know what had come before was—and to be inspired by that sort of made me part of a continuum. And why that's important, I don't know, but—which is kind of interesting from the standpoint that I came from the abstract expressionists, which were—you know, if you didn't—if you had to think about it, it wasn't real art, you know? And you sort of had this visceral thing that you had to pull up out of your, you know, guts, and, you know, with undue spontaneity, throw it on the canvas and then try to figure what all that meant.

And I was completely the opposite. [Laughs.] And they liked what I was doing in spite of the fact that it was something that—and initially—

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting, though, that there was room for you to do that even though it was absolutely not what they were—of the moment or what they thought was of the moment.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, well, it was a—I don't know. The more I got into the history, the more you could see the influence from it. And at some point in the early '70s, it became really cool to be baroque. And it became—history became a real important part of the basic fundamental thing that people addressed in order to make art with. And it's still, maybe, but it's—you know, it was obvious then. And I don't know. Maybe it's obvious. I don't know. It's—it was—it was something where people—

And one thing that—I continued reading books or at least looking at pictures throughout my career. In 1972, I think it was, the SNAG had a—their annual conference was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And this was a—[sort] of an invitation, only there was, like, 50 places. And I was lucky enough.

So we would go into the storerooms and actually handle things.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, you wrote about that. It sounded extraordinary.

MR. MAWDSLEY: It was just amazing. It was amazing. And they would ask us questions. And people that were—you know, Arline Fisch and people like that that were—that were on top of the world and had opinions about everything would give them their opinions about how this was made or not made or whatever. And she—Arline, I shouldn't point out Arline, but Arline did have a pretty, pretty vast knowledge of history of metalwork, which was sort of surprising. And—

But, you know, there's this piece that we—in the Ancient Near East room—that was a beautiful little gold cup. I guess it was—[inaudible]. And this was one of the treasures of their collection. It wasn't the rhyton, which is this big horn thing that was probably—there's only seven of them, and it's just an amazing piece, but it was the next best—next best thing they had, you know. [Laughs.] And we were passing that sucker around. And—

So I had this thing in my hand. And what am I thinking about? I'm thinking about, maybe I—gosh, I probably—you know, there weren't that many people that probably handled this when it was actually in use, and there probably hasn't been that many people handling it since it was found. And I'm wondering if I'm the 10th or the—that's what I was thinking about when I was holding this thing. [Laughs.] It was, like—and then somebody tapped me on the shoulder and said, "It's my turn," you know? [Laughs.] So instead of examining this thing, I was having this fantasy about it, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, which is kind of—which after that happened, I started—I started not having fantasies; I started trying to really look at the pieces in a more critical way.

But after that experience, a lot of work started coming that was directly borrowing from historical structures for several years after that.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Just before we move on to that—I want to move onto to the work, but you finished at Emporia at '67 and then you worked at the University of Kansas. And you were studying with Carlyle Smith, yeah?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MS. RIEDEL: Would you discuss that a little bit? It would be nice to hear about that experience—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Sure.

MS. RIEDEL: —the strengths, the weaknesses.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, what was interesting: My father, when I was a senior and I'd been accepted to graduate school, he went up and had a meeting with Carlyle. He says, "You sure my son is capable of—you know, is good enough to go to graduate school?" And—which, you know, he was—he was pretty amazed that I would get into graduate school. I don't know. I mean, I was kind of funny. But he was worried. He was always worried about me.

And so my sister is a statistician—was a statistician, was very high up in a private research company—

[Audio break.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: [In progress]—life. My brother's a pediatrician, and then there's me, you know. So he was kind of worried about—you know, I was not the traditional track here—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and he was kind of worried about me. He thought, well, I could be a high school art teacher; that'd be a pretty safe, reasonable—and that's what he did, and it-was-good-enough-for-him kind of thing. So he stopped on the way back in 'Poria, and I had supper with him, and he says, you know, "This guy thinks you're pretty good. And he says that the department chairman thinks you're pretty good too, and that I—and the department chairman was very impressed and da, da, da, da, da and he says—he's—you know, he's told me that he was happy to have me and that he was looking forward and all this"—he just buttered my father up real good! [They laugh.]

So that was kind of a—I don't know if it had anything to do with anything, but it was kind of a funny situation.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So I went to graduate school, I had my own bench. I had built my own bench, and I had my own bench sitting in a little corner of a room where all the advanced and graduate—some of the graduate students worked, and KU at the time had, like, this humongous program for graphic design.

MS. RIEDEL: How had you decided on KU?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, Bill Bagley, the sculpture teacher—I was sitting there one December, January day, and he says, "Son, you're too good to be a high school art teacher. You need to go to college." And I said, "Oh, okay"—[laughs]—you know? And he said, "Well, you know, the best schools are Cranbrook da, da, da, da, da," and the—one of the printmaking teachers who was real young at the time was actually from SIU, and he said, "You know, SIU is a good place to go."

And so I wrote for information to all these places, and then Uncle Sam rose his head and said, you know, "If you leave the state, your chances of being drafted are greatly increased and why—well, why—and if"—I didn't even know if that was actually true. But that's what I was led to believe by someone in authority. So that sort of left KU.

And Bill had been a graduate of KU and so on a day when it was just snowing cats and dogs, he drove me up to KU and took me around, introduced me to people and drove me back to Emporia in the blinding snow storm the whole time. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I called him up early that morning; I says, "You're sure you want to do this?" "Nah, it's okay," you know. [Inaudible.] And so we—so that's, you know, that's what—I was sort of dragged to graduate school in a way.

And the first day, I got there, and the two other grad students were in there and in the office—Carlyle's office, and they were all smoking cigars. And I was invited in and asked if I wanted a cigar, and I told them, "No, I was from a teacher's college, and we weren't allowed to do this kind of stuff." [They laugh.] So I never had to smoke a cigar—he thought that was good answer. So I never had to smoke a cigar, and these other—every once in a while, the others had to do it—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and they were always—came back as green as a—I don't know; they didn't enjoy it at all. And I don't know—

MS. RIEDEL: This is Carlyle Smith who was the big cigar-smoker? Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, yeah, oh yeah.

And Carlyle—I can't say that physically I learned much from him. However, he was always extraordinarily encouraging and extraordinarily positive, and I knew what I wanted, and I knew where I needed to go, and I had the energy and the commitment and the will to do it, and he just stayed out of my way and let me do it.

MS. RIEDEL: And where did you want to go and what were you focused on at this point?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I was going to be a world famous artist. You know, that's what I was told I could be. Somebody told me I could be a world famous artist; I don't know. You know, I had this naïve, you know—and I told this to my undergraduate teachers years later, and they said, "What?" [They laugh.] "You got that out of this?"

MS. RIEDEL: So what was your work like in graduate school? Did you have a specific body you were working on?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I had this tubing thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I had discovered—

MS. RIEDEL: That started early, yes, please.

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, it was like the tubing thing was—I was first exposed to Pop art as a[n] undergraduate student in—oh, maybe 1965 or '66. After it had come and gone everywhere else, it finally hit Kansas.

And the faculty looked at this Pop art thing with great disdain. It was not real art. It was just strange and people making funnies out of funnies or something; I don't know what the—what the problem was. I don't remember. But all of the students thought it was really great because we didn't understand it either, but it would have allowed us to be more avant-garde than the faculty, and that was—[makes kissing noise]—that was more something: to be more—

MS. RIEDEL: That was worth doing. Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —avant-garde than the faculty, you know? Because they thought they were pretty avant-garde. And so I looked at Pop art, and I saw reality, and I saw action. And so reality to me in terms of—all of a sudden became mechanical. And I made a couple of really ugly things to start out with.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you mean "reality became mechanical"?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, the thing that I was most familiar with in terms of working the reality, which I hadn't done much of—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: —you know, I got pretty good at drawing people at one point in time and—you know, but that was just a thing that one could do. But it just all of sudden hit me that who I really was, was somebody that dealt with mechanical things. And so I dealt with my early two-dimensional stuff in undergraduate school was very influenced by cubism. I did sort of faux cubism things. And there was a sense of geometry that it sort of evolved into, and the geometry sort of evolved into—what was geometry to me was mechanical forms. So that's sort of where that evolved.

And I was never naturally good at anything. I always had to commit to something, and it took me probably 10 years of working before I was able to achieve the level of a craftsmanship that I was happy with or that at least was not irritating. [Laughs.] And so an easy way to make—an easy material that was ready-made, that looked mechanical, was tubing.

MS. RIEDEL: Got you.

MR. MAWDSLEY: It had that, you know, rigid, linear—when you slice it open, it was this round, very structural, and you could buy it in square at the time. And so it sort of became a sort of a shorthand way of making things mechanical.

So my culminating project my senior year was this exploding watch. And I wasn't very good at—I cut out some gears and stuff, but they weren't very good. But most of the stuff was this—just tubing put in surprisingly unexplosive-like forms. And, you know, it seemed to be easy to work with and, to my amazement, nobody else

—everybody else used it for hinges. [Laughs.] You know, it was all—you know, it was like, why do they make this stuff? It was like, oh, yeah, hinges, okay. Or what do they do with square stuff? It doesn't make—square doesn't make good hinges at all—[laughs]—you know? So—

MS. RIEDEL: What was the exploding watch?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, it was this pendant that I made. Now, I may still have that; I'm not sure. I might be able to find it. I don't know; I'll have to look and see. I've got this little box in my safe that might have that in it. That probably should have gone to the scrap like a lot of stuff did. At any rate, it was the first thing that I made that I was fairly happy with too, that was kind of doing what I wanted to do. I was kind of getting at what I needed to get at.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was that?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, a level of sophistication, a level of expression. I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: A functionality and a concept?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, yeah. It was wearable and so forth and—you know. So I could do this stuff. And so tubing seemed this natural material to me. It was naturally ornamental. You'd had this inside and this outside, and it was not just a—you know—it was like there was more of a complexity to it than there was just to wire.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So that worked sort of in my favor in terms of a loving ornament. It allowed me to be more ornamental easier. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Because it was sort of naturally—when you slice it open, there was a naturally ornamental nature about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: To my amazement, nobody else was using it. It was like, you know—the reason was that you couldn't be organic with it. And hitting it with a hammer was, you know, not much good happened with it—[laughs]—[inaudible]—squashed it! And in most cases, if you were not a real metalsmith unless you were hammering on stuff. I mean, that was real metalwork at the time.

[Audio break.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: Tubing became my signature, and it was pretty unique in the world because everybody else was, you know, if you weren't hitting on it—you know, and even the casting people were—sort of looked at it with—you know, looked down their nose at it because it was, you know, not real metal because you worked wax and not metal.

So there was a lot of people that admired my ability to do things with solder, like assembling things. They admired that, but they didn't really buy it because I hadn't really smacked it. [They laugh.]

You know, so there was, you know—there was all that, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: The function was important, though; the fact that it actually was mechanical and did something—is that true? From the start, that the function—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, there was something about the function—by being restrained or it being—having a format to work with that had bounds, even though there weren't really bounds—I guess I really like shiny metal. In order to like shiny metal, you could, you know—if you polished a big, life-sized piece of bronze, that would be a heck of a lot of work, you know? [Laughs.] And you couldn't shine some piece of bronze and still have it be ornamental; so there was sort of a dichotomy there that I couldn't relate to.

So I could shine up the tubing, and it would be shiny and still be ornamental and I also think there was something about that size restraint that I was able to, you know—sort of had this little world of mine that I could sort of hold in my hand; didn't need to be in a broader space or something. I don't—I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems that the narrative element was present very early on—[inaudible].

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, it was, and I didn't know what the narrative was—I've got to be honest with you. Because of

my abstract expressionism, I probably never really thought about what I was doing that much. It just sort of came out of me. As long as it was coming out of me and long as it was exciting, I didn't worry about it.

And, you know—so there were narratives about—you know, I did a couple of anti-war pieces, and I knew what that was because I was faced with it. And that had an impression. But there were other things that I had no idea what they were all about. And didn't seem to matter a lot to me, you know? I could come back and look at them and say, "Well, yeah, there was probably this and that" that I was responding to. But, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Was it—

MR. MAWDSLEY: —I don't know; it just, you know—and at some point, that sort of stopped. And it's like, do I need to look for something else that I can just have come out of me or do I need to start thinking about what I was doing? And at some point, I thought about, well, it's, you know, what it—it's like, well, okay, it's this and it's that; it's ornamental. It's tubing; it's hollow; it's this and it's that, and it's—and—

MS. RIEDEL: It's rooted in some sense of historical metal?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, and there's a sculptural nature to it and so on and so forth. And one thing that came out of it was this thinking of—was the fact that anatomical structures are basically hollow tubes, and they are—they are structures that are pretty complicated when you look at it in a certain way. And so I looked at the technical challenge of trying to make this hollow rigid material more organic, and it was kind of inspired by the fact that there was this kind of very decorative nature about certain—I—and so I found *Gray's Anatomy [of the Human Body]* and there were wonderful drawings of these structures, and there was a certain mechanicalness about some of the drawings in spite of the fact that they were this organic thing.

So I did a series of works based on anatomical structure. But the early work was just—it just happened. No one necessarily made me think about it. Several people tried, I think. [They laugh.] But, you know, it just sort of happened. And from that standpoint, it was sort of in the true abstract expressionist, you know, spontaneity kind of thing that was—that idea of spontaneity was always—was really ingrained in me, and I was sometimes afraid to think about it, afraid it would ruin it, you know? [Laughs.] So that was—that was just something that happened.

MS. RIEDEL: During grad school, was the work school predominantly jewelry?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: And predominantly figurative?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes—no.

MS. RIEDEL: No?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, you know—[laughs]—I was told by the Bagleys, by Bill, that the person at graduate school that I really had to impress was the department chairman: Marjorie Whitney.

And Marjorie ran that place with an iron fist and—which the other professors loved and let her do because they could just blame everything on her. [They laugh.] I think she loved to push people around, and—I don't know. But she had reviews once a semester, twice a semester, where she would go around and look at everybody's—every grad student's work, and say yea or nay. And the Bagleys said, "You know, you—that's who—the person you need to impress." And what she impresses—what impresses her is when you combine techniques. [Laughs.] So I knew casting and I knew construction! [Laughs.]

So I started putting cast figures in these things just because I was going to impress the person that I could put these two dispersed things together. That was the only reason they were there, and it sort of worked. Because I had to make this—you know, because I knew I was dealing with Pop art, or that's what I thought I was dealing with, they had to be real things. So I started making these kind of little funny figures and the more the work developed, the more the figures became relevant to the construction too! [Laughs.] And so that's sort of how the figures got into it.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there Pop artists that were particularly influential or Pop pieces or just the—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I kind of like Rosenquist.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, he was probably the one that was most—yeah. And—

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember what in particular?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, he did one piece that was a—that was a[n] airplane, and having grown up in the self-proclaimed air capital of the world, Wichita, Kansas, I guess I related to that piece. And I have a slide that I—I don't know if I still do or not. I haven't—guess I don't anymore because I don't do slideshow, but I had a slide of that show—that I would show and say, "This is," you know, "this was Pop art, and this is why it was—this is why I"—you know, in spite of the fact I never did Pop art. I mean, I thought I was, but I wasn't actually.

So—but the figures was, you know, this sort of—well, like, it kind of works; it's kind of fun, you know. And—

MS. RIEDEL: When you look back on the grad program, were there particular—what do you think of as its strengths or its weaknesses? Is there anything that stands out? Other than the fact that—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, the strengths—the strength was the fact that I was in an environment where I didn't have to take any art history, I didn't have to any bookwork stuff. The design department was not speaking to the art history department.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: And so undergraduates had a minimal amount of art history to take. Most grad students didn't have any art history to deal with. The art history was reading these books. And it gave me a lot of time to work. There weren't a lot of distractions. I chose not to make a lot of distractions. Spent a lot of time because I really was excited about what I was doing, and I was committed to it and wanted to really push the envelope.

I don't know that I did that, but it evolved and ideas came out and developed and things got better, and I was pleased about that. So it allowed me to do that, and Carlyle gave me the encouragement and the time. And he gave assignments to a lot of the grad students that, you know—God knows—design a piece based on such and so or make a piece based on such and so or, you know—I don't know. And [a] couple other grad students were really jealous of me because I didn't have to do the assignments.

You know, it wasn't an animosity, but it was—I finally got to be able to sit in the—there was a grad office where I got to move my studio eventually with a guy by the name of Jerry Krebs. And Jerry—as far as I know, he spent his whole career teaching at Radford College in Virginia. And Jerry was a graduate—undergraduate of KU and was an excellent teacher. And he and I had a fairly good relationship in spite of the fact he was doing assignments for Carlyle and I wasn't. [Laughs.] You know? I did some, you know.

And I think he was, once in a while, critical about my work, and sometimes I was offended by it and sometimes I was, you know, "You're full of—you're too full of yourself; you should listen to what he had—he made a couple of good comments—" but rarely, you know.

And Richard Helzer came—Montana State University—spent his whole career at Montana. He was a junior high art teacher that was—in Topeka, Kansas—that was getting a master's. And then he was—he was Carlyle's buddy. They were buddies. I guess he didn't have to do assignments either because he was Carlyle's buddy. And I think the fact that I taught as a graduate assistant and basically was left alone —there was no, or very little, guidance from above, so that prepared me for my eventual career quite well.

MS. RIEDEL: And you started teaching immediately after graduation?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I was, like, 23 years old. And—

MS. RIEDEL: Graduated in '69 and started teaching in '69, correct?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. I attended the first SNAG conference in '70. And my colleague and I drove a university station wagon to Minneapolis-St. Paul, and he went and visited relatives or something like that, and so I drove the car back. And, because I was faculty, I was the only one who was authorized to drive that sucker. And I was the youngest one in the car. [Laughs.] So kind of ironic, wasn't it? Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So you started right away at Illinois State—and that was '69—and went to the very first SNAG conference?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you recall from that?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I was told—one of my students, Tom Timm—I don't know what happened to Tom Timm—went along. And he said, you know, "You're pretty good. You need to meet these people." And I was real shy at first, real shy. I would have spent the whole conference in a corner—[laughs]—somewhere, you know? And,

you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Where was it, the first conference?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Minneapolis.

MS. RIEDEL: Minneapolis.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Or St. Paul.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: At the St. Paul—God, what's it called? It was at the Minnesota Museum of Art? Is that where it was? I don't know—something like that. They've changed—the institutions there have combined, changed over a while and I don't know what they're called now. But I met Paul Smith, and I met Olaf Skoogfors. And basically I was sort of dragged in front of these people and said, this is, you know, and—and they were all—[inaudible] —“Oh, you're that guy?” And, you know, they all had seen the exhibition and they knew who I was.

MS. RIEDEL: Your graduate exhibition?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No, the work that was at this—Goldsmith '70, which was a real pivotal exhibition for a lot of people—for Al Paley and for Eleanor Moty and for probably Bill Harper and probably—I'd have to look back at the catalogue and remember who all—but a number of my generation that were right out of college—Helen Shirk, probably. You know, all these people graduated in the late-'60s.

MS. RIEDEL: So the whole conference—the first conference—was held around this exhibition?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Pretty much so. I mean, some individuals gave sort of slide presentations. And we don't know exactly—I don't remember there was a lot going on in that thing because the founding fathers spent all their time in a closed-door, yelling at each other.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: At least that was sort of the gist of Brent's remembrance of it. It was—you know, they were trying to form the—there were the old-school guys, you know, that wanted to make this a European guild, and there were the new-school guys that thought that was silly because this was not Europe. So they came into someplace down—so they sort of came to a slight amount of compromise.

So at the end they wrote bylaws and sort of presented what the organization was going to be. And so I got to know several people there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. What an auspicious beginning.

MR. MAWDSLEY: That was, you know, I guess helped me put myself on the map, for lack of better way to put it. And that exhibition traveled on for a couple years. And a lot of people had, like, one piece in or two pieces in. You could submit four, and all four of mine got into it. And the Minnesota Museum, where it was, bought one out of it. So it was the first part of my collection, I could put that on my résumé, you know.

And, I don't know. So it was a pretty important exhibition. I think it was an important—[inaudible]—exhibition for a lot of people of my generation because it went to several places on the West Coast, and it went to the American Craft Museum and might have gone to the Renwick, being one of their very early exhibitions. But I don't know, I'm not sure, I'd have to look. But there was a lot of exposure.

And from that I got a lot of invitations to be in invitational exhibitions and when they would have press about this exhibition, I was pretty prominently mentioned, which is always very nice. And so it was a very good thing. And it happened at a very good time for me.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the work that was like that was in this exhibition? Was it along the lines of—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Graduate—my graduate school work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Your graduate school work.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I still have one of the pieces. So there may have been one piece that

I made post-undergraduate. I can't remember—I'd have to look to see. So that was a pretty pivotal thing in my career. And in 1970—the summer of 1970, we spent six weeks in Europe—saw a lot of metalwork.

MS. RIEDEL: Where were you? What were you looking at?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, we spent a lot of time in Paris, naturally. And so I saw the Louvre and the Museum of Decorative Arts and, I don't know, the Cluny was a real highlight. We traveled around France a little bit, we went to the Loire Valley, we went out to Mont Saint-Michel, but we also went to—where did we go? We went to Munich, which has some great metal collections. We went to Pforzheim, which is a big manufacturing center. They had kind of a nice little museum there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: At Pforzheim I bought tools.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: So I was exposed to a lot of things that I had just seen in books. And we went to several cathedrals and saw the treasures and that kind of stuff. So that was really nice to be able to experience.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds especially formative, too, to be able to see that work in person at that young an age, and at that extensive—

MR. MAWDSLEY: I saw my first Fabergé piece over there somewhere. It wasn't much of a piece, but it was a Fabergé piece and it was like, wow, that was pretty—you know, it had this wonderful enamel on it that was—you know, that he was famous for and—yep, there it was. And it was just like—it glowed just as much in real person as it did in those photographs, you know? [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk a little bit about the early work, and then the *Feast Bracelet* too, which came fairly early on—so before, I think—the work that proceeded that and then that piece, which certainly was exceptional.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, after the Metropolitan thing, I started making renaissance pendants, basically, and because the renaissance pendants was basically a three-dimensional figure. It was figurative, which I related to. And I made three or four of those.

And in the meantime—this was up at Illinois state—and neo-realism—I guess, where people started painting barns and everyday life and, you know, that—all that jazz—hit town. [Laughs.] After it came it went every place else—[they laugh, inaudible]—normal.

And all the painters got real excited about that. And so we started seeing corn cribs and we started seeing pretty Midwest stuff, sort of the same version as parking lots in California—whatever the people out there were painting, you know? And I sort of kind of like that stuff, actually.

And, you know, I had this real history thing and I thought—and I saw in one painting by somebody—it was actually a kind of neo—a 20th century still life done in the Flemish tradition. And I thought: This is really cool. So I made one. First couple things I made were pretty awful.

MS. RIEDEL: You made one in metal—this elaborate table?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. And then I had former students bring me a watch maker's lathe. It was actually Tom Timm and said, "I want to sell this; you need this." [They laugh.] And it opened my world to make these little miniature vessels and allowed me to—you know. It was like a—it was like wood lathe, you just sort of formed with the tool that was—you know, it was—it was wonderful.

And so I made two or three pieces that were sort of learning experiences. And the *Feast Bracelet* just—I always had this—I had this bench top full of little vessels. And the first one I made—I made a ladle. And it was a ladle simply because I had made this thing that had gotten too big to a pendant. And it wasn't the right shape for belt buckle. So I put it on—I painted as a finial for a ladle. And I was fairly happy, and the Hanes underwear people own that sucker—or they used to.

So it was kind of funny because Eleanor Moty—in one of her lectures she showed a ladle she'd made. And she says, "You know, every metalsmith sooner or later has to make a ladle." And I thought to myself, yeah, I got my ladle out of the way. [They laugh.] So the bracelet just sort of became a format that I could work and, you know, it was still a wearable—because somehow that was important to me—even though it wasn't really wearable.

And when I was done with it I knew there was something special about it. And I thought—[telephone rings].

[Side conversation.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: So once it was done, it was like—I've been there, done that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So I moved on.

MS. RIEDEL: And was the response to that immediate?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: It was—in the early-'70s I did some art fairs. I did art fairs because I felt as an instructor I needed to find out what a real art fair was. And so I went to Chicago. I think we did three or four altogether.

MS. RIEDEL: What would have been in Chicago then? It was before New Art Forms in the '70s, wasn't it?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh yeah. It was like at a mall.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: There were several of them in malls—pretty high-end, ritzy malls up there. And the second one I did—the first one, I was so naïve that I didn't even have business cards. And Kathy went into the bookstore and bought thank-you notes, and we tore them in half and hand-wrote business cards. [Laughs.] And so the second one I did was another mall. I can't remember why I did it, but it was judged by Lloyd Herman.

MS. RIEDEL: Uh-huh. [Acknowledgement.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I didn't even know who Lloyd Herman was—I may have known who he was. But he came and went; I never saw him. And he gave me best in show. And there was, like—God, there were some—it was like Don Reitz was there and several pretty big-name potters. And my friend who I went with was Tim Mather, who was a really good potter. And he taught at Indiana University for a long time. But he was teaching at Illinois State at the time that I was there. And there was somebody else, several other people, as a matter of fact. God, the people used to do the ink spot thing—what were their names?

MS. RIEDEL: We can add them in.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I don't know. It's like I can't remember—I may not be able to—I don't know if I've got any paperwork that would have a list of people or not. I don't know if I even came up with the names if I at least could tell you about it. Anyway, I had my *Feast Bracelet* sitting in a little box.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Of course, that was—[an] absolute no-no, because if you have something that's a lot more—you know, people will concentrate on that and not concentrate on the things you want to sell. That much I knew about marketing. But after the thing was over—oh, not after the thing—at the end of the judging, Lloyd—

MS. RIEDEL: This is the *Feast Bracelet* was what Lloyd Herman gave first prize to?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. He came up and said, "I'm Lloyd Herman, and I'm the new director of the Renwick Gallery—and the Renwick Gallery is this fairly new—it's an arm of the Smithsonian. And I really like that *Feast Bracelet* and I want you to save it because the Renwick's going to buy it." Now, it took him like seven years to do [that], but yeah. So I said, yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: I still remember the first time I saw that piece.

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, he came back about 10 years ago because it was—something bent on it—took me all of about 10 seconds to straighten it. And even I was impressed with how small it is. [They laugh.] So that was kind of the first experience I had with Lloyd Herman. And I got a real nice Don Reitz pot out of it.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll pause this here, the disk's about to end.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Okay.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Richard Mawdsley at the artist's home and studio in Carterville, Illinois, on August 21st, 2010, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art—card number 2. We're just starting to talk about the next significant piece or series that followed the piece.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, prior to the *Feast Bracelet*,—after that trip to Europe in 1970, I saw a collection of fibula. And it was important for me to do a fibula. And I did a really nice fibula that—I don't ever know what—it got sold somewhere. I don't remember what happened to it. But I did a couple of them, and then I started doing the renaissance pendants. And the first one was called the *Pequod*.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Which was part of Helen's—Druett's collection. I guess it's in Houston then. And I always found that to be kind of a pivotal piece. Up until then I was basically decorating the surfaces. And it became more sculptural. It became more about three-dimensional forms.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that piece, it feels like it brought a lot of things together.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, yes. And I did a piece of—

[Side conversation.]

I did those anatomical things. There was the *Medusa*. That was the first major thing, and I was probably more happy with the series of pins that I did that were based on the eye.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] The *Oculi* or—yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, those pieces [*Oculi Rectus Superiorus* series].

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: I did—

MS. RIEDEL: Those were the '70s still? Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes those were—no, those were likely early '80s.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, early '80s, yeah, yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Excuse me a minute—hold on.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: That probably was significant, even though those works were prickly. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: The *Oculi*, how big was that series?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, they were—they were three or four—four or five inches long.

MS. RIEDEL: And how many in the series?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Five or six? I did a series of headdress pieces that were—

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the *Medusa* piece you were referring to, or was that something—

MR. MAWDSLEY: No, that was the anatomical stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: The headdress pieces were—

MS. RIEDEL: Early '80s.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, they were—yes. They were in the early '80s—or mid-'80s more maybe. And I started working predominately in gold with those things. And several of them just were awful. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: What do you mean?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, they just were clunky. And one I completely cut up and redid. It was so bad, after spending this long time. And it was just ugly. And—

MS. RIEDEL: What was the inspiration for those?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I saw a book, *Africa Adorned*, by Angela Fisher.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's a wonderful book, yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: That was amazing—amazing photographs, amazing photographs.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, and there I was—again, I could see sort of the mechanical nature of some of those forms and a lot of energy and a lot of things that I related to that I could work off of. But I also looked at Las Vegas showgirl outfits. And I looked at a little bit of the history of hair adornment and the gigantic wigs that were made for various reasons. I got a book on the history of wigs to check—I don't know. There were several things that were sort of related to that.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: But basically it was about the *Africa Adorned* thing.

MS. RIEDEL: I think you'd started talking about *Oculi*.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. Those were enough of departures that—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: All of sudden I was looking at something and I was sort of analyzing it. There was some thought processing happening. [Laughs.] It was more of a technical, how can I interpret these things, as opposed to, why am I doing it. I've never really been big on why, you know. I tried to force my students into telling me, why are they doing it, and never did—you know, never did do that myself.

MS. RIEDEL: And what had inspired the *Oculi* pieces? The fibula?

MR. MAWDSLEY: The *Oculi* pieces? There was a drawing in *Gray's Anatomy* of the eyeball, looking down from the top. And they were all based on that drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, and there was something—there was sort of a tension in that drawing where the muscles were kind of—looked like they were sort of slingshot-ing the eyeball somewhere or something, you know? [Laughs.] There was something sort of really nice, and there was a lot of kind of energy and a lot of tension in that drawing that I related to. And all those pieces were based on that.

MS. RIEDEL: You know, kind of much more abstracted than many other pieces—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, yeah. And I did—the headdress pieces partly were—1980 or early '80s. I don't remember exactly the date. I attended a workshop in California at Fullerton—at Cal State Fullerton. And Al Ching was the guy—was a guy that sponsored this. And he brought from Japan a master metalsmith who made the sword furniture for Japanese swords. And so most of the work was done with a chisel and a punch.

And there was Mary [Lee] Hu and there was Heikki [Seppä] and Bob Ebendorf, Eleanor Moty, Arline Fisch. God, I have to look at the picture and see, but that type of person was there. [Laughs.] [Val Link, David Laplantz, Jamie Bennett.] And so this guy—this Japanese guy spoke maybe, like, three or four words of English. [Laughs.] And we had the most wonderful educational experience because he taught by sort of example and sort of, you know, would make funny little drawings on the board.

And by—Al had taken the tools and—that he had had this experience studying with this guy, I guess, on a Fulbright—I don't remember for sure—and sort of had measured all the angles and made drawings of the tools. So it was sort of easy for us to—and the guy could just look at them and say, you know, take a hand and point and that meant the angles needed to be a little more this way; or it was a little too much, needed to be a little more that way.

And he knew the word "Okay." [Laughs.] When something was okay, it was okay. And he taught us a lot of things that were pretty cool things that—a metalworking approach that I had never—you know, the idea of carvings—you know, basically we're using these as carving tools. And he taught us a technique called *uchidashi*—and I have no idea how to spell that, but it's a Japanese word for repoussé, basically. And his technique was done all from the front.

And you started out with sort of a domed piece of metal that you domed and then you sort of raised it. You used big punches to raise it, to kind of push it around. And we were making faces. And we would form the metal with punches by pushing—getting the—the pitch would get hot, and we would basically form the metal with the pitch hot, and you basically chase it around the pitch bowl because the blow would move the pitch about as much as it moved the metal.

And at the end, we had this face. And I said to myself, what a great alternative to cast faces, you know? [Laughs.] So you saw one of those in that piece out there.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely, yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. And basically I started making faces. I just took what he did and—or what we did in that workshop, and it was—you know, it was—not that I used a lot of other stuff. I taught some of that stuff, you know, and—as did everybody. Mary Hu was at that workshop, too.

But the experience of learning from someone that didn't speak English, but was a very good teacher from the standpoint that he was able to make gestures and make drawings and so forth—and we all sort of sit there and said, does he mean this, or does he mean that? And we discussed what it meant, and it was just—it was just marvelous. It was just wonderful. And—

MS. RIEDEL: To just study with a master who was introducing you to something so completely different—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Completely different that was still relevant, that was something we could understand, because it was metalworking, even though none of us had ever approached metalworking by just punches and chisels, you know. It was kind of new.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible]—yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And why he didn't invite the Pijanowskis [Hiroko Sato and Gene Pijanowski], who were doing the same stuff and who spoke Japanese, I'm not quite sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

But, you know, that might have helped. But the language wasn't a big hindrance. And so that was a pretty special event in my life. And I would think that if you ask Eleanor or if you ask Mary and if you ask several other people, they'd probably have the same response to it. I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: So when you look back on all your educational experiences, including university, this one really stands out as significant?

MR. MAWDSLEY: It really was—well, it was a unique experience.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And was a very special experience because it felt good to be one of the chosen 10, you know? [Laughs.] And—

MS. RIEDEL: So it was an invitational conference of sorts—or—[inaudible]—invitational workshop.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, it was a two-week workshop.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I think it was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, but it might have been the Arts. But there was one of those agencies' grant involved. And I think we had to pay transportation. But everything else—we had to pay for our food—but they provided us lodging; and they provided us all the materials and all the other stuff—

MS. RIEDEL: How extraordinary! And what was the premise? The expansion of—[inaudible]—exchange?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, this guy felt that in Japan, what he was doing was becoming a lost art.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And he was hoping that we would as teachers expand the horizon a bit.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I don't know if that ever happened. But there are people that obviously learned from—you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember the gentlemen's name—the teacher?

MR. MAWDSLEY: [Satsuo] Ando. Ando, Ando, Ando—what was Ando's name? Oh, I think I have a book that has Ando's—

MS. RIEDEL: And the year, again?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I want to say 1980—but it may have been '81—[laughs]—or it may have been '82. It was June 1979.

MR. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: But it was in that—

MS. RIEDEL: At Cal State Fullerton—

MR. MAWDSLEY: At Cal State Fullerton, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: That seems like it was a very unusual experience.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Extremely unusual.

MS. RIEDEL: It's the only time I've heard of such a thing happening.

MR. MAWDSLEY: There were several things like that done. In the mid-'70s, Stan Lechtzin did a couple a workshops on electroforming, which I attended and was—God, it was—it was—I shouldn't say anything on tape, I guess. [Laughs.] But it wasn't nearly the experience that this was.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I know that several other people did things, too. And there was historical precedent that the silversmiths—the Manufacturing Silversmiths of America organized a couple of workshops in the late '40s—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —that—what's her name—organized. She lives in—lived in Boston. God, what was her name? Anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: Late-'40s?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, the late-'40s, that were—that—people like John Paul Miller and Fred Miller and Olaf and Carlyle attended them. There were several of them. And they were sort of the early—some of the early metals instructors after World War II.

MS. RIEDEL: So this would be the back and forth between the new designers and the—and the—and the silver companies?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Sort of—yeah, sort of, like, well—

MS. RIEDEL: In designing for—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, plus there were—they were teaching raising, and it was based on the technique of raising.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And why raising was a mystery was—I don't—raising wasn't that big a mystery in this country. But people who went over and studied in Europe thought that we didn't know very much about it. And so they brought people over—the idea that—what's her name was going to bring people over. And she got this organization of manufacturers to sponsor this thing, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Was she an artist or a patron?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, she's was about—she's a fairly well-known metalsmith. And I—and I met her once when I was in Boston a long time ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Did she teach there?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No. God, you'd recognize the name if I would come up with it. Actually, Arline—well, Libby Cooper [Mobilia Gallery] and Arline [Fisch] and I went and saw her.

MS. RIEDEL: Sort of the—

MR. MAWDSLEY: God. She has an—[inaudible]—

MS. RIEDEL: She didn't teach; she was just a practicing metalsmith? [Margret Craver Withers?]

MR. MAWDSLEY: Her husband was a—I can't—my memory was that her husband was, like, head of one of these big silver companies. I could be wrong about that. But he was fairly wealthy, and she lived in—you know, in a real exclusive old neighborhood in Boston in a really nice home, as I recall. [Laughs.] But she was in her 70s or so when I was—when I visited her.

MS. RIEDEL: She would have been a peer with sort of Mrs. Webb?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. She would have been—she would have been—yeah, she would have—

MS. RIEDEL: Aileen Osborn Webb, yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: She would have been probably, like, Margaret De Patta and—

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm. Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and, God, those—Harry Bertoia and—[laughs]—probably better names that I could think of than those, but that's kind the generation that she was in.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. All right, well, it'll come to us I'm sure. We'll figure it out.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. Trying to think, where I had something that I could access that name—anyway. So there was—there was—there had been precedent for this kind of an educational experience. And—

MS. RIEDEL: But that would normally be sponsored also by industry, right?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, this was.

MS. RIEDEL: This wasn't the NEH?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, no, this—the one I went was either an NEA- or an NEH-sponsored thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I thought because of the cultural nature of this guy, in terms of—he did—he did basically historical—he did some of his own design, but they were based heavily on historical imagery because there was certain things that you put on sword guards to make—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —you know, that had historical basis for whatever. And in fact, he was on his way. Bob Ebendorf had arranged for him to see the collection at The Met. And he worked for a pearl company—

MS. RIEDEL: Like a—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: —because after the war, he took his skills as a metalworker and became an executive in a pearl company—[laughs]—and sort of practiced this on the side.

MS. RIEDEL: Wanted to see that it wasn't lost—

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I guess he had sort of retired from the company and had done more of it after retirement. And this is also pretty fuzzy. So the pearl company had an office in New York—[inaudible]—what they had. And they were going to sort of host him because he was one of the high muckety-mucks in his company. And Ebendorf had arranged for him to go to The Met and see this collection of sword art. And I know that he was pretty excited about that, as excited as you could, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Convey—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, it's kind of funny—at the very first, we were told that he was having some health problems and that we shouldn't push him too hard. So we decided to take a break in the morning and give him a rest. And—because we were concerned about his health—[laughs]—and so after the first couple days, somebody came who spoke Japanese, in the evening, and he was upset with us because we were lazy! [They laugh.]

And so we spent that evening working until like midnight or so to get done what—so we'd be ready for whatever we had been lazy on, and he was much more pleased with us the next day. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's funny. Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: During this time, how were you evolving your own thoughts about teaching? Were you coming up with a—sort of a philosophy of your own curriculum that you thought was important?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well—

MS. RIEDEL: Or in retrospect?

MR. MAWDSLEY: —my teaching has sort of evolved from benign neglect to—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: —a more, you know, all a sudden, there was a very heavily—started out with sort of more heavily structured technique base because it was like people were—you were going to workshops and you were seeing people just do niello. You saw Phil Fike do niello. And you saw somebody else do this, and you saw somebody do that.

And so when I was at the Central Illinois, it was, you know, like 40 miles to the U of I and ninety miles to Purdue and 60 miles to Northern Illinois and 50 miles to Western Illinois and 110 miles to Iowa. And all these people were having workshops, and not all of them invited us; sometimes we just showed up. But we were going all over. In the spring, we would go every weekend somewhere, and the students would say, "Gosh, can't we just stay home one week?" And this was brutal, and then when things were better financially.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and, you know, so there was sort of that emphasis on, let's teach some tricks.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And expose them to a broader range of approaches and—techniques—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, so I tried teaching pewter, and that was just a disaster because I hated pewter. And so I sort of reined back on the things I couldn't do because it was, like—or didn't like. And I developed sort of a mutual-discovery-kind of approach to teaching with those. So—"and this is what I know about this, and this is someone that really does it, and I bet if you call them on the phone"—in most cases they love to talk about it, you know. "They probably won't write you; if you write a letter and ask them to write you back, they won't because they're"—because, like, art people aren't that way—"but you—they'll love to talk to you."

So I had several students—called whoever and some of them—most of them would be willing to, "Well, what's going on here" kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: That's wonderful. So you set up a network, and you had other colleagues or whoever who were happy to—[inaudible].

MR. MAWDSLEY: I called several people that called—got called several times, and I said, "Is this annoying to you?" I won't—stop doing this, you know. And they said, "Oh, no," you know. I can't—you know, I can't—in some cases, "they need to know a little more information before they give me the call."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: It's like, I—you know, "there's only so much you could tell you on the phone unless they—unless they have a basic"—and I said, "Yes, that make sense." So, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and this went on for a couple years, and then we sort of—and then we started doing—I don't know—inspirational things. And then we started doing marketing things.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you mean? Can you give examples?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I would do a class where I would say, "Okay, come in next time and have developed five words or 10 words that describes your work"—and probably five.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: Ten was a lot for them. And this was like advanced—this was, like, probably senior—junior, senior—senior, probably, people. We would have actual words they knew. And we would discuss why those words, you know—I would say, "Why does this mean this to you?" And so they had thought this—and that's sort of where we started.

MS. RIEDEL: That was the inspiration—[inaudible]?

MR. MAWDSLEY: And then I would say, "Okay," you know, "take one of the words that's most significant to you and design a piece that just oozes with that stuff." And that was usually not very successful; but at least it gave them something to do.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I would sometimes then assign—"Okay, then design me a piece that would be the antithesis of that," you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Huh.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And then I would, you know, I don't know—it's been a while since I've done this—

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: —because—but we would—"Okay," you know, "here's my slide collection. Find a piece of history that you can relate to." Or "Find another contemporary artist that you relate to and explain to me why you relate to that person."

And I was always reluctant to say, "Design a piece in that style." But I would say, "Okay, find me," you know, "two or three people and use whatever you've—those words that you've developed, to design a piece." I tried to divorce it from the actual artists and the actual work, but sometimes that didn't work. We never made those pieces; occasionally they did, but not often because you get a little this's and that's, and it was like—[groans]—kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: And the historical things were, you know, more interesting because they were less able to make those.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm curious too about the marketing aspect because it's not often that you think of both getting—[inaudible].

MR. MAWDSLEY: I was pretty—you know, I all of sudden became relevant, do you know? It's like, well, what are you going to do when you get out of college? And that sort of—I don't know when that came in. But I attended several workshops based on marketing ideas. And I heard lectures of people who were out there in the world talking about a, you know, marketing thing.

And I heard Ron Pearson give a lecture. I think it was Ron Pearson. Maybe it wasn't Ron Pearson. Somebody—no, it wasn't—I'm sorry, it was somebody that Ron Pearson brought to the table in terms of SNAG. The guy was from Pittsburgh or Philadelphia or some place. [Sighs.] What was his name? And he was real businesslike; he was real—and I don't know.

Just—there was—that information started flowing around and so we talked about, you know, designing—I actually used the word "distill"—"distillation." You know, okay, here's your art. Find something within that art you think you can make something that would appeal to a broader audience.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So, you know, borrow from your—distill that to a—or borrow an element from that and, you know, that kind of thing—

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and we'd talk about taxes, and we'd talk about, you know, places to market, and I'd tell them about what I learned about craft shows in terms of, "Yes, business cards are a good idea." [They laugh.] So some of those experiences were valuable to me in terms of, you know, "I need to go to a craft show to see what a craft show's like" kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like you didn't or you wouldn't recommend them.

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, if I get a big enough body of this machine-made work, it wouldn't be above me to take crack at, like, the Smithsonian or one of those big-time shows, just to see, you know, and do it again just to —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —you know, I could have enough pieces to actually make it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —credible showing, and I could do it. So I don't know. I don't know. You know, some—it's not out of the question.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, I mean—

MS. RIEDEL: It has its place.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —All that other stuff I had done—it just was, you know, it was silly because people would admire it and say how cool it is. But they wouldn't, you know,—I sold one piece. I sold a pair of earrings.

Out of the show that—the first craft fair I did, I sold one pendant. The second craft show I did, I sold a pair of earrings. I made a couple pair of earrings to have in the showcase, like, to have something that would be affordable or something that would be appealing, kind of—when—how did I know? The third fair I did, which was kind of a real strange thing in people's homes—

sort of like a garden walk, only art, in River—Riverwoods, Chicago. You know, a suburb of—it's a sort of a swamp with cool houses in it. And I don't think I sold anything there, but I traded a guy that was in the room with for a print, and it was kind of a cool print. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Have you had long-term relationships with any dealers?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Helen.

MS. RIEDEL: Helen Drutt?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. She first introduced herself to me at the goldsmith show in St. Paul, Minnesota, Goldsmith '70.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And shortly after she opened a gallery in the mid-'70s, whenever she—I don't know; maybe—you know, she'd contact me and I was real patient with her—and I shouldn't say this on tape either.

But she was always, you know, a supporter of mine. When her aesthetics moved on dramatically from what I was doing, I was always part of her projects. And I don't know why because, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Are you thinking of the Madeleine Albright show, exhibitions like that?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, that one and the—and the Chatelaine show and her collection and the fact that her collection toured for a long time and I was a part of [it]—and you know, in the publish-or-perish business, to be able to put together a—bringing to the table shows that were in, you know, in Germany and Australia and wherever they went, you know, so that was good for me in terms of showbiz and the scholar thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, actually, it has a real commitment to the field and its breadth and depth.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, absolutely. Oh, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: And so it was certainly beyond her own personal taste or gallery, yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I liked her. You don't meet many people like her—[inaudible, laughs]. So I liked her, and I thought she was a lot of fun to be around. And she was very good for my career. I think she was very good for the field and had a very interesting eye, a very good eye for things and so I have the utmost admiration for her and what she did or what she's doing, I guess. I don't know if she's still doing it, you know.

So, yeah, and—

MS. RIEDEL: I took us off of the teaching; I've sort of led us astray and to other territory. But we were talking about a teaching philosophy. I don't know if you sort of covered that or if there's anything you would like to add?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No, my teaching philosophy with grad students was always to be very encouraging whether there was anything to be encouraging about or not. [Laughs.] Unless it was just—you know, unless it was just like—"get your life together because you're in graduate school here" kind of thing, if they were just not producing.

MS. RIEDEL: You've taught both undergrad and grad?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

When I first came down here, Brent was very generous in the fact that he made it clear that he was in charge of the graduate program, but he wanted me to be involved. And so he taught a seminar class once a week. In spite of the fact that there was his seminar class and I got nothing for it, he wanted me there. So I was there every week for 17 years and learned a lot. [They laugh.] Learned a great deal. And I hope I contributed something to it too.

And he handled things in a very professional—I mean, he was to me, one of the utmost professionals. He was always very conscientious—well, maybe "conscientious" isn't the right word. But professional in terms of responsible and that kind of stuff, especially things that were important to him. For things that weren't important to him, he was not responsible; but that's okay. I'm the same way; so—[laughs]—if things that came along that weren't important to us,—between the two of us—they got downright neglected.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: But he taught professionalism, and he was very insightful in terms of being able to respond to students with their individual and unique problems. And his thing was that each of them—you were unique people, and we were handling each of you in a unique way and that, you know, giving assignments is not necessarily a way of handling people in a unique way.

And so we would make suggestions to students: "Have you looked at this, tried that?" kind of thing. And sometimes they responded to it, and they actually tried it or were influenced by it, and sometimes they weren't. And that was fine, whichever—whatever—you know, they were making the decisions, and so there was not a lot of structure to that.

We would meet individually with the students on a regular basis, depending on the student. Some people wanted once a week, and some people wanted once a month, and some people wanted to be let alone. And you know, we didn't exactly let them completely alone; but, you know, we would try to meet their needs in their own way, which is—sort of was my experience in graduate school.

And I'm sure there were students who felt neglected because they were so dependent upon being led around. And we tried to express the fact that, when they came, that we were not that kind of teacher, that we were people who were not going to lead you around by the nose. I mean, we were going to develop a professional relationship with you. You're going to be, in essence, a kind of colleague, and you were going to, you know—it was like you were going to [take] responsible for your own professional activity.

And when we get excuses like, well, in art history, you've been so—and you know, and to teaching things, then my assistantship in this and that, I was, "Well, you know, we're under the same pressure. We've got university activities, and we have a home life, and we have kids, and we have this, and we have that, and we still have to do this work, and we still have to be artists." So, you know, that's not much of an excuse. If it's important to you, carve out time to do it, you know?

We extend that to some of the undergraduates in terms of now you've—yeah, you're beginning to catch on, and you need to begin to direct your own life a little bit, even though I would still do these kind of, you know—wish I'd kept that stuff because this—I had some things that I thought or, even for me, were—and I had borrowed things from other people, and I did too. And all that's sort of gone out of my mind. So I can't give you specifics, this "been there and done that" kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe it'll occur to you tonight, and then we can talk about it tomorrow.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, I'm sure—[laughs]—you know.

So the first three semesters were basic kind of—most things happened. I mean, it was like an introduction class, in which we tried to cover the whole gamut of—I mean, the forging project, the fabrication project, the casting project and—[makes repetitive noise]. And second semester we kind of stepped it up a little, and we gave a little bit more advanced kind of—but it was all technically based.

And I tried when I—as a big—for a long time—and then I kind of got beat down by this and stopped doing it, especially when we had a lot of beginning classes—was to give what I called “appreciation lectures.” So I would give a lecture on art—I would give the history of metalworking one lecture. And I would give a lecture on what is possible—technically—and try to lay out the—as they existed at the time—the various techniques, and show examples of what we've made with this kind of technology.

Did that, and then I would give a lecture of what's going on now—to the best of my ability. And some students responded to that, and some students were bored by it. At some point I felt it wasn't making a whole lot of difference to their lives, so I sort of tapered off and quit doing it.

Then I got to the point where I wasn't teaching beginning classes anymore, which I missed.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you miss about it?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, there's something sort of basic about, you know, seeing somebody who's afraid of fire all of a sudden figure out how to do it and become—[inaudible]—you know, it's sort of this marvelous thing: “God, it happened just like you said it did. Gee whiz, you know, I can do this.” You know, this is sort of—whatever level it is, it's kind of nature of discovery, you know. And, oh, yeah, this does happen, you know.

That's always kind of—yeah—to see that kind of enthusiasm and kind of wild thing kind of—even though it's, you know, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Has that been an important part of your own working experience and process, or every so often?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, every so often.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: It's like occasionally I would say, okay, I want to spend a couple of weeks and just play around with tubing—see what it does. And all these wonderful ideas that I had just looked awful, you know? But every once in a while there would be—I'd be working along on a piece and something would come to me—or I have a need to make a certain thing and then I'd just experiment, and it seemed to be much more fun and relevant when it was actually for something, or it was a direct need and popped its little head up in the actual making process as opposed to trying to do raw research and then figure out what to do with it.

MS. RIEDEL: So the pieces normally began with an idea, or did they—okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: They came—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's an—yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Was sort of like one thing led to another kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: So one piece would suggest the next? One series would suggest the next?

MR. MAWDSLEY: To some degree. Then at some point it would be something else that would come in from the outside which would move me into—to what was for me, a different direction. But oftentimes there would be things happening within that piece that, wow, look at this, this is kind of cool. You know, I can do more with this or I can take and expand upon this or I can bring this to it and it'll be really—it'll be—in its own right will be something pretty amazing—or hopefully amazing.

So that was—you know, that. I try to be opened, you know. And I had a lot of students who would—well, sometimes students would—I wouldn't show them what I did, I never did. And every once in a while some student would come along and—[laughs]—would bring a picture they'd found somewhere. And sometimes the —“You can do that?” [Laughs.] No, that's my twin brother.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: A distant relative. And so I was always deathly afraid of influencing people too much through my teaching. So for a long time I under taught. And I actually had a grad student up at ISU, Colleen Lynch—and she finally—and I sort of hemmed and hawed about the wonderful work—she was doing wonderful work, afraid I was—you know, afraid I was going to say something—I don't know why—what I thought.

And she just sort of said to me, "Tell me what you think for god's sake!" You know? I did tell her what I thought. And it didn't hit her, you know, it didn't hurt. [Laughs.] It didn't make her something she wasn't, it was actually helpful. So that was an important lesson.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And how far into your career was that?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, three or four years.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, four or five years, I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were really very aware of either crushing their potential or producing multiple reproductions of Mawdsleys—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. Yes, little versions of me. And it was, like, you know, there was plenty of precedence at that time, you know? Some of Brent Kington's—some people like Brent, who was just out of graduate school, or Stanley or people that were trying to develop their own graduate program were giving buoyancy to these less-than-talented students by sort of giving them a formula. And they were producing little Brent Kingtons and little Stanley Lechtzins and little Heikki Seppäs and, you know, quite a range of very derivative work at that time, based on pretty influential high-powered instructors.

And Brent admitted to so much as this is what he was doing, this is why he was trying to do it. So I saw that happening, and that seemed to me to be sort of everything I—again what my educational background was, and sort of a little treasonous to me kind of situation. So I wasn't going to do that. And so I kept what I did very hidden. And I probably wouldn't even have participated in faculty exhibitions, but because of the nature of—you know, you got to be a part of the group, you got to participate—[inaudible]—[in] the exhibitions.

But, you know, [I] never did show my work, never talked about my work. Occasionally, later on in the senior thing, I would once a week give—so we'd talk about something. And I found things to talk about for a whole year. I don't remember what they were but, I showed people's work. I'd show historical work. And I'd talk about buying tools; I'd talk about professional things—all that kind of stuff.

And sometimes at the very end, I would give my presentation. And by the time I started doing that, people were aware of me enough so that no one said to me, yeah, you can really—you can do that? [They laugh.] I don't know. So I don't know what else to say about, you know, the education. Sometimes—

MS. RIEDEL: I actually—yeah, sorry.

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, sometimes I felt I was never doing a good enough job. Kind of—you know, I had issues sometimes with—you know. And sometimes trying to raise the bar a little bit [on] my own self just didn't work. So I guess that to the point where I found the—that the students that I—and I had some really good undergraduate students and some really good grad students. And the ones that responded to the way I taught were, you know, the ones that didn't, didn't, you know. That's regardless of what kind of teacher you are, you're going to have that same activity. So there are people [who] are going to respond to your style and people that are not. And so—

MS. RIEDEL: What do you think—what difference do you see between a university-trained artist and the one who's learned his or her craft—

MR. MAWDSLEY: The hard knocks?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, through an apprenticeship perhaps, or just on the road?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I think it depends. First of all, I get real upset with people who say "self-taught" and then on their résumé they attended 25 workshops at Penland. It's like, duh. [Laughs.] That's not being self-taught. You know, that kind of annoys me.

But I think people with natural talent and with natural enthusiasm—what we teach is not rocket science. And they can figure it out. Anybody can figure it out—anybody who has a certain amount of talent and a certain amount of stick-to-it-ness. Hopefully a university education will make that easier, and facilitate that. But is it necessary in the arts? Nah, it's not a bit necessary.

And in most art forms I think you find there are those natural prodigies that never went—you know,—that are amazing, you know. So I don't—you know. I find some people like that there's—maybe it's just my taste, that there's a certain kind of awkward quality about their work, in spite of the fact there's some very nice things about it. There's something sort of—there's sort of this naïve quality about it that's just, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you mean a lack of art historical knowledge?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, they're sort of—they're trying to do something based on historical precedent and yet they don't have a real firm idea of what that is or their idea is—[inaudible]—or it's sort of contrived—would be a good word for it. They've maybe make some kind of a hybrid of it, but it's not really taking what it was that inspired and really doing something with it.

MS. RIEDEL: So perhaps there wasn't enough critiquing that you might get in a university setting to help refine that?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I would think so, yeah. I would hope so. But I'm here to say that, you know, anybody can do it. And if you have the right basic—I basically, technically, learned most the stuff myself. I can't say I'm self-taught. I'm not self-taught, I self-discovered it. Things that were important to me I figured out because they were important for me to express—use as tools to express myself, or I was curious enough to see how it worked, whether I ever used it or not. You know, there was some reason why.

A lot of education is self-discipline. You can't teach self-discipline. You can be a tough disciplinarian but, you know, it's—unless they have a certain level of where they want to be disciplined and where they want to, you know, confront and deal with that kind of discipline it takes in order to be successful—you know, you can't teach that.

There are people that are just naturally bad designers. And I've had a few of them. And I thought we could teach them to be a little better than what they were, but we can't teach them to be good designers just because it's the nature of things. They're not going to be good designers. I've had students that have been extraordinarily creative and they have crowbars for hands. And—[laughs]—it's like—[groans]—kind of thing where, you know, if I had that kind of mind, it's just, you know. And I've had several students that have had their hands and all that stuff come together; it's like, whew, kind of—yeah.

And I was told because I was in art education and the one art education class that was truly an art education class—it wasn't a pretend art education class—it was taught by a guy who was teaching in high school. And he said to me, "You're not going to be a successful artist until produce—you're not going to be a successful teacher until you produce somebody that's better—a better artist than you are."

I'm not going to comment on whether I'm teaching these people to be better than I am; that's maybe not for me to decide. But that was always in the back of my mind—that I had to work pretty hard to make somebody better than I am. [Laughs.] That's kind of, you know, maybe a little—I don't know, hypocritical, but still was still something that was always kind of a goal, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, it also reflects I think a generosity of spirit as opposed to a self-centered focus.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Probably. I hope so. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And also, I think—[inaudible]—speaks specifically to, I think also, to not reproducing yourself in multiples, but helping give rise to an authentic new voice.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Right, right. Exactly. You know, that's a good way to put it. And that was what I felt was important.

MS. RIEDEL: And -- just to clarify for the disc's sake—was your bachelor's degree, was that a B.A.—a B.F.A., or is there an—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Bachelor of Science in Education.

MS. RIEDEL: Bachelor of Science in Education. And the master's—is it a master's of—M.F.A. or—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, it was an M.F.A.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Master of Fine Arts. I intended to teach. I attended a place that at the time was called Kansas City Teacher's College.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I bet—there was like 40—no, 20—probably 25 or so seniors in art. I knew of two that were not in art education—three. I knew of three that were not in art education.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Everybody else was—you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Especially in that era.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. Oh yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: It was—art education was—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. And I don't—there were two females and a male. And, you know, I have no idea what happened to them. But I know most of my other—you know, students—fellow students were—that's what they did or are doing or, you know, or—and there was some people there that I felt were extraordinarily talented as far as art goes—that I admired greatly as an artist, and that I thought were a lot better than I was.

MS. RIEDEL: Anyone who's still working that you're aware of?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No. I know one of the guys that was an extraordinary talented painter—I found a website. It was a very superficial kind of thing. And he was living in—I don't know—a small town in Kansas. And his occupation was artist. I don't know what he really did, but in Ark City, Kansas, there's probably not a big need for artists there. And he got an M.F.A. from the University of New Mexico, which at the time was a real strong graduate program in printmaking and in painting, as I recall.

So I don't know what happened in the forty years—[inaudible, laughs]—or 30 or whatever it was. And a couple—three years ago I—why I looked him up and, he came—but he was always somebody I looked up to—a very extraordinary talent. Everything that I got was—you know, I worked very hard because I never felt myself to be either extraordinarily gifted as an artist or extraordinarily gifted as a technician. But those things were important to me and I was able—I had enough talent so I could teach myself to be good at those things—or at least it seems that I've been able to teach myself to be good at those things.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think there is a specific place for universities in the metals field?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh yeah. I don't—I'm kind of—I kind of worry about—you know, that it seems to me that they're making an exit out of the university because they don't—whether it's relevancy or whether it's just the path of least resistance, whether it's an expensive program for the amount of bang you get for the—you know, I don't know. But the thing is, I don't know if the metals programs have evolved in what they—and I know that several programs that have tried to evolve have not been successful in doing it—that's kind of scary—because their colleagues don't understand what they're doing.

And in the case of Mary Hu, I think that was clear as to why she, out of frustration, retired, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: There was great potential there, too.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: For all sorts of new applications, too.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, I spent a week there because, after doing this, I said I want to—you know, I want to see what what kind of technology, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I liked what I was doing better than what they were doing in terms of not having to deal with that fucking computer. But, they had high-tech gadgets of all kinds there. And I don't know. And if she'd hired the second person, if she'd have hired someone who would have been another metals person, I think it might have—but she was trying to hire a tech person. I think that—I think people like in—people in some of the tech fields, industrial design.

[Audio break.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: [In progress]—they have something called “creative art,” which is—they're supposed to invent new art things, which is sort of, I find, kind of interesting and odd. But, you know, how can you—how do you

invent new art? I mean, it's, like, [in] my way of thinking, you don't go out and say, "I want to invent a new art." It's, like, new art just kind of evolves out of old art, you know? But maybe that's old and conservative. But—so I don't know what the problem is with metals [programs], but I know of some—they've eliminated some lately,—because of the budget situation but—or whatever, but, you know, it's—but there's—

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, too, because it seems like—that it is one field that really has enormous potential to develop along with all the technological developments that are happening now.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, because it's, like—you know, making stuff with metal is still one of the primary things that man does. [Inaudible]—you know, these amazing technologies that are—

I have gone to a—instead of going to art things, I go to industrial things now.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

Mr. MAWDSLEY: Well, I go to this thing called IMTS [International Manufacturing Technological Show] in Chicago, which is Industrial Manufacturing into Technical something or other, something Society. And they had this great exposition in Chicago at McCormick Place, and they basically fill it up with metalworking technologies.

And it's just—you know, it's an extraordinary visual experience because it's full of machines like I have. Seventy-five percent of it is just variations of my machine.

MS. RIEDEL: And what do you call your machine? What is that—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: It's called a CNC.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, A CNC, okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And it's a CNC milling machine, basically. And it's Computer Numerical Controls, what the CNC stands for.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And basically, it's a metalworking machine based on traditional metalworking machines whose movements are controlled by a computer. And because the movements are controlled by a computer, it can do extraordinary things, because with the traditional manual machine, you can only move repeatedly and repeat the action. You can only move in one axis at a time. You could move it two axes at a time, but you couldn't repeat the action.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —whereas this machine can move in five directions at once. Mine can't, but they make them that—they make them that can move in six directions at once and repeat that because it's a computer program.

So they can make extraordinary forms that—they can manufacture boat propellers is one thing. They're like marine propellers that, up until CNC machines, those things had to be molded and made by—you know, they were modeled and they were cast. They had to be hand-modeled. Well, there's a limit to what you can cast in terms of exotic materials. So now they can make those things out of exotic materials, and with a five-axes milling machine, they can sculpt those babes.

And it's just—and it's kind of this dance. The machine goes up and down, back and forth, in and out. That's three axes. That's what my machine does. And the fourth axis will rotate the work. And the fifth axis rotates the work in two directions. So you can rotate the work this way while you're rotating the work this way plus these other three things going. And it's like—it's like a dance.

MS. RIEDEL: It is like a dance. That's a good description.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, I could never program this thing. You have to have computer technology program to program five axes—[inaudible]—

MS. RIEDEL: How did you first get involved with technology? I mean, this is one of the questions we need to address, but how did you first get involved, and how has it affected your work? Let's talk about that a bit. Maybe we can end with that for today.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Okay. I used—since that watchmaker's lathe that I got in 1973 or 1972—

MS. RIEDEL: Which was—resulted in the *Feast Bracelet*, yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. I used that watchmaking tool, that lathe, a lot to make things round. You know, all of a sudden I got a lot more round things in my work than there was—[laughs]—before I got that lathe.

And so when I came to teach here, they had a milling machine. And so a few years after, I bought a manual milling machine, which is what sets beside that—the other one. And I stopped using a file. And I was able to make things really nice and—you know, the kind of things that I could do that I loved that are important to make right angles, right angles and straight lines, straight lines and all these things that were important to my aesthetic, that machine made it much easier to do. I can't say it made me more productive, but I could do more complicated things without driving myself nuts because it was just—and that line was nice and straight and nice and smooth and didn't need to be—maybe a little sanding, but no—you know, it didn't need any more filing. It didn't [need] any more handwork on it.

So from a real early stage, my work was never handmade in the tradition of, you know—it was, you know—and I don't know that handmade things kind of—you know, if you use a buffing machine, is it handmade, you know? But I asked that to a couple people that were really into handmaking and they kind of got indignant about that. [Laughs.] Well, hell, you could polish things with that if you run a machine.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that still an issue?

MR. MAWDSLEY: It used to be. You know, it's not—I don't know if it's—I haven't heard. I sort of dropped out of the metals conversation anymore, so I don't know whether it's an issue or not.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you retired in 2004 or 2005?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I had a grad student—at the end of my career, I had a grad student from Korea who was amazed that I was using a machine. He just couldn't understand that. It was just, like—it was, like—that was, like, heresy.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, yeah. That hand—that hand thing, he was ingrained into that hand thing. Man, it was, like, that was where it was at. It was, you know, doing things with your hands, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Beginning with that, you were saying—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I was saying that—so for a long time, I've used machines to make my work. And it just—because of the mechanical nature of the stuff, it was just easier to make with a machine, a certain basic kind of thing, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Have there been technological advancements in machines that have enabled you to do the things you weren't able to do before? Or are you just bringing in machines that were used—[inaudible]—for industrial purposes?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No, I'm basically bringing in the machine as a tool. And so I was—from 1970 on, this engine turning was—I first saw examples of it in Europe. And it was ivory. It was all done in ivory before the 20th century. And it was mechanical, you know? And I was always fascinated with that.

And so I would see the machines—the 19th-century machines that I thought was what was available from my research on—and the ones that were made in the 20th century, this—these engine lathes were really tacky compared to the 19th-century machines. The 19th-century machines were 50[,000], 60,000 bucks, you know? Big-time money—and so at one time, I was going to take my manual milling machine and buy enough accessories that I could put on that so I could rotate the work and I could do a lot of the same moves that these ornamental machines did. And so after getting a couple of expensive gadgets to put on that machine, I spent a week doing this and decided, God, this is—this is laborious. [Laughs.] This is—you have to pay attention to what you're doing, and it just wasn't fun, you know? [Laughs.]

So—but still, that work, there was a romance about that. And so I thought to myself, yeah, there's another way to do this where I don't have to keep track of which quadrant I'm in—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and how many times I've let that tool cut through that piece, you know, and all that—all that malarkey that I had to keep track of, which was, you know—that was that—you know, that was—what I have now is I just—plus it's the things that it will do, I would never have been able to do with a manual machine.

So the research shop at school got a machine just like what I have. And I probably spent six weeks learning and playing with it. And it was extraordinarily frustrating because it was—the manual for the thing was written for people who had—they assumed, a lot of knowledge, which I had none of, where they assumed a knowledge of the machine that was—that was beyond what my knowledge was. And I got a couple of textbooks, and there was also a kind of level of mentalness that I wasn't—I wasn't able to grasp onto.

But after two weeks, in spite of all that pain and agony, I knew this was it, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh yeah. I mean, I had managed to accomplish a couple of things that were exciting to me. Make that little cutter dip in and out a couple of times and dance about. It was, like, wow, that kind of thing, you know?

So I'm still learning—

MS. RIEDEL: This was recently. Well, wasn't it in 2006? Was it that recent?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I bought that machine in [200]4—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —late 2004 and almost 2005.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And had you experimented before you bought this one, then?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And it took me—that little box you saw, that almost took me, like, nine months before I was able to get that. And the candlestick, which was the second thing, it probably took me another nine months, maybe longer. That was too big a jump between the first and second—that was—the problem with that—[inaudible]—the fact that it's really—yeah, I really like the thing—it was more than what I—and the more I learn about it, it's, like,—I spent last week going back and looking at that program I'd done first. And I probably cut 25 percent out of it because it was not necessarily going to be there and do the same thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Gotcha.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and figured out a way to do it so I could be more accurate about laying the block—laying the program out on the block and add in another cutting action that will make it easier to finish the piece. So you know, I tried to take advantage of what I've learned from this.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like there's still a learning curve.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, there's a learning curve. It's still going to—and it's like—it's like, I now—I can't show it to you because it's not here, but I have purchased a fourth axis.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So I will be able to mount the work and rotate it, which will allow me a different—another kind of movement—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —that will allow the work to expand in a new dimension. So that will be another learning curve, and—

I don't regret doing this. I felt better about—there's that piece you saw out there, the mirror [*Four Faces of Beauty* hand mirror, 2001-2004]—and a coin bank that I did as a commission [*Oxford Dime Bank*, 2005].

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I felt really good about both those pieces in terms of—I've maybe—somehow we went beyond

the kind of prettiness that Fabergé was, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Lovely shiny metal, I think, is what I've kind of got—[inaudible]—with.

And so I was having a lot of fun making debris, making shards and making drips and stuff that would represent—I don't know, you know, something that would not be pretty stuff and felt good about that.

But by the same token, it was, like, Jesus—and I've got a piece that's half done that will probably always be half done.

MS. RIEDEL: Why is that?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Because I just don't think I have the time, I don't have the inclination, I don't have the energy to go back and spend another six months or—I don't know how long it would take to finish that thing. And this is a really nice piece—what there is of it. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll have to see it later.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Whether this will ever be as good as the other stuff, or be as a recognized, it doesn't matter. It just—this is fine.

MS. RIEDEL: I want to talk about that because you said that—and that is a question—how—it seems that fun is an important part of the work.

MR. MAWDSLEY: My work is so intense and so physically and mentally intense that if wasn't—if there wasn't something, you know, you were just—yeah, it would drive you nuts.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I learned early on that you had to make a lot of sacrifice and a lot of personal discipline and a lot of, you know, in order to succeed as an artist. I didn't quite know what they meant by that, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: I didn't know that what I was involved with would require that to the utmost.

But by the same token, it was, like—you know, certain things were happening that would come together, and something unexpected would show itself. And God, that was so wonderful and so neat. And the fact at the end of the day that I felt this—most of the time, I felt a sense of accomplishment—you know, sometimes I wish had I accomplished more and—just really slow going—

And then at the end of the day, to be recognized for what this was certainly was something that is encouraging. Just doing something you really like to do and having—being fortunate enough to do something you really like to do as in make a—make a living at it, you know, I've been fortunate. There was just no two ways about it, you know?

And so just—it's fun, you know? And this is fun. It's frustrating because I can't figure out how to do this; or, you know, it's, like, I should have put an X here; that should've been a Y. I just wasn't paying attention. And it's, like, now, I've got to go back and change that, make that—you know, correct that stupid mistake and then run the simulator again to be sure to bring another stupid mistake in there. So that gets a little frustrating. But at the end of the day, it's still, like, gosh, you know—

And, to see the amount of—the jump that I was making, able to handle that from the first piece to the second piece; and the jump from the second piece to the third piece that I'm working on now will be from the second piece—not as dramatic but still significance—and the fact that I've got this fourth axis that's going to challenge me in terms of—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I can make round things now, or I can convert square things into round things or I can make marks that are—[inaudible]—another kind of unique mark or shape out of things, so—

There's still a long way to go. And I don't know. I envy people that just sit around and read books and, you know, enjoy their retirement. I just—you know, I've got to be doing—I've got to be doing things. I can't just sit around and, you know, and watch life go by. There are times when I wish I could, you know? [Laughs.] But I'm

just not one of those people, you know, so I'll probably be doing that until I'm not physically able to do it anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

And it's like Brent. Brent's not physically able to do what he really wants to do, I think. But he's still involved in creative activities. He's simplified things to the point where he can work, and some of the stuff that he's done is just really—it's elegant. And, I mean, he has the ability to work with—[inaudible]—that's second to none in terms of elegance. And it's still—you know, in spite of the fact that it's not what it was, it's different, it's new and it's just as good.

So, you know, I hope I'm there. But now, I see, I've got to be able to lift the piece into the machine and clamp—have enough strength to clamp the thing in there so that it doesn't fly out, and punch a button. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Stop here for today?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Richard Mawdsley at the artist's home and studio in Carterville, Illinois, on August 22nd, 2010, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. This is card number three.

Good morning. Shall we start today with a—just sort of the tail end of the '70s, and your transition from Illinois State to—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, and one thing that I wanted to mention before we do that is that a very important early influence that needs to be acknowledged that I haven't done so yet is John Paul Miller.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: His work in the '70—in the '60s during sort of the casting craze or metal people trying to be abstract expressionists or however you want to look at that, he just had that—the classic goldsmith beauty and the sophistication and the refinement that was typical of historical goldsmith work. And everybody was sort of—he had this—the mystery granulation that was kind of this intriguing thing that was—that he was doing. This was—that was—everybody sort of speculated about.

He was this recluse kind of guy, and so there was sort a mystique around him, which was fine, but has sort of intrigued everybody. But the work itself is just something that—I wanted to be like John Paul Miller—[laughs]—you know, in terms of achieving that kind of level of sophistication and ornamentation and all the things that his—the historical—their classic beauty that, I think, is a good word to sum his work up. So he was an important aspect.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think we haven't mentioned Brent Kington and the toys on disk yet. And I think you talked about that—[inaudible]—that was—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, oh, okay. Oh, yes. You know, his influence on me was, you know, when I first saw those toys, it was like, you know, there is somebody else doing baroque stuff?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I think in terms of work that is specifically ornamental that—which the word baroque could be applied to—that he was one of the people that sort of justified that as a valid way of contemporary expression certainly as far as the crafts or metalwork goes. And those toys were, you know, always wonderful. And so I got an opportunity to get one at an auction.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah—got a small fish here with a—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, it's not a toy, but it's—

MS. RIEDEL: —bird on it, yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. But it's the—it's the—it's the closest time I've ever had an opportunity to acquire one of

those.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's wonderful. [Inaudible.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I had to pay a lot of money for that because somebody else wanted it real bad, too. [Laughs.] Yes. So anyway, that's circa the toys in the late '60s, so—

MS. RIEDEL: It reminds me of those birds that he would make for—to be stored in the pocket.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I'm not sure what exactly it was, whether it was a piece that never got put onto something or—I don't know what it was. And he was apparently cleaning out a drawer or something—[laughs]—and found a couple of those things and gave them to a fundraising auction. Maybe someday I'll have an opportunity to—you know, [get] one of his toys because he's got quite a few of them still that he has never, never gotten rid of.

Anyway, yeah, Brent was—

MS. RIEDEL: So it must have—yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Brent was that pivotal person. And had he not come along, it wouldn't have stopped me from doing it but there was a legitimizing influence on his work, and people would compare my work to his work, and that was always a very flattering thing to have happen.

MS. RIEDEL: So it must have been a thrill then to begin to work with him. You worked with him for 17 years?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. Yes, it was.

MS. RIEDEL: '78, right?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I met some of them.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I had been thinking about and looking around for someplace else to go because I knew that the limitations that—what Illinois State offered me in terms of—or my own—my own limitations in terms of what I could do at Illinois State were such that I needed to step up. And I considered jobs as they came along. And I sort of planned, maybe, to move out of the state of Illinois. [They laugh.]

It was an opportunity to work for someone who I've had enough contact with to know that had a very high level of professionalism, a very committed artist, someone who, you know, not only will walk the walk and talk the walk but did the walk in terms of being able to produce not only cutting-edge work and beautiful stuff but operate under a level of professionalism that was, you know,—there was a certain level of humility but a certain level of chutzpah also in terms of being able to get his work out there. And I talked to him a couple weeks ago, and he's still having exhibitions here and there and—you know, the energy and the activity has not subsided at least in terms of—that professional drive is still there and still, you know, still-going-strong kind of thing.

The transition was easy and the mutual respect was there. There was a lot of communication. The thing that, I think, always made things easy: We shared an office. And so I don't know. Ten years ago, 15 years ago there was another sort of saber rattling about building a new art building at a site here. It'll never happen, but there's still dreamers that are—you know. And I was on a committee to talk about this new building.

And I told them if you want to avoid a lot of conflict among faculty members, you make all your offices two personal offices. [Laughs.] And everybody thought it was an awful idea. [Laughs.] I told them—I said, you know, it fosters communication, and you know, when things have to be resolved, if you have to sit five feet away from the next guy, sooner or later you're going to—you know, it certainly helps that communication process.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, a sort of counterintuitive approach.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. But just the idea of us having a[n] office together and share the things that happened to us professionally and to be able to talk about specific students and their problems and what we should do and talk about the program and talk about—you know, I learned a lot about being a university professor and jumping over the hoops of the political and—part of that job. And you know, it was a real valuable education, being able to sit there in his office—in our office and talk.

So and, you know, we're both Kansans and we both have the same background, and I think we both had the same kind of educational spirit and philosophy of teaching. And I was happy to allow Brent to take on the leadership role and I did a lot of nuts and bolts stuff, which is what I was good at. And so I thought it was a very good working relationship. I don't know exactly what else to say about it.

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds good. And I was looking through your résumé, I noticed that there were quite a few research grants. And it seems that those may have been something that were frequent throughout your career that really helped you explore new material for a new series. Is that true or not?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: To a degree—one of the first—

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking of the headdresses and the—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, once I accepted the job, one of the first things Brent asked me was about research. I was amazed that the university would invest in research grants for everybody. I mean, I don't know if they still do it or not, but he had running research grants for the first 20 years of his life. And one of the things behind it was the fact that when you got a research grant, you got an undergraduate assistant.

And so we could offer more assistantship help to our grad students and we could get help for our—which was a pretty amazing—because the first year or two I couldn't—you know, being my grad assistant was pretty—[laughs]—easy duty, because I had a hard time, you know, kind of delegating, this work that had been, you know, right here. But I finally figured out how to use these people.

But—and it did make me more productive and did take some of the grunt work out of—out of what I did. I would send them over to the library to do research and come up with images or things that would relate to that. And so it was a nice thing.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: And the idea of these grants—well, I don't—early on, I'm not sure what the idea was. It was just a matter of you wrote a proposal and made it—made—not make it sound too ridiculous. I mean,—things I proposed were just—were sometimes I was almost embarrassed to do so.

MS. RIEDEL: Why?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I proposed at times basically doing what I had been doing. You know, that's what Brent said his—just tell them what you're doing and make it sound new and different. And so I basically just said, I'm doing, duh, duh, duh, duh, and I did—you know, I want to research headdress masks. I did a research grant on that.

And I wanted to address sculpture because at I thought at some point I should try a piece of sculpture. And I started making a piece of silver sculpture, and it ended up with a vessel on top of it, you know? [They laugh.] I couldn't wrap my head around something that wasn't functional.

So as the university evolved, they became grants that were used to help people develop research to get money from the outside world. And as soon as you got money from the outside world, those grants became much more difficult to get. So I got one of the last NEA fellowships. And that was enough money so that it sort of disqualified me. It didn't officially disqualify me, but it was something where it sort of—sort of disqualified me from getting those developmental grants.

And I tried again—

MS. RIEDEL: That was in the '70s, or did you get two—the '70s and '90s?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I got two of them. I got one in the—I got one in the '80s.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Or maybe—yeah. And sometime—I'm not sure when—

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I thought there was one in the '70s and one in the '90s.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, there was one in the '70s, too, but I was still up in Illinois State when that happened.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And that was for—that was, like, one of those \$3,000 grants. They were giving seed money to a lot of people. And then they started giving fewer grants, but they gave big ones. So I got a 20,000 [dollars], I think, was what—the money I got from the second one. But it was enough money, so it got the attention of the research people in terms—yeah, he's succeeded here in terms of what we did for him.

MS. RIEDEL: So no more research grants for you—

MR. MAWDSLEY: No more—well, it just became a lot harder to get. And I even tried at the end of my career to do this machine tool technology, and they didn't buy that. So—

MS. RIEDEL: You could have really used a grant for that. [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: I sure could have, you know. So I don't know where they stand now. My colleague, Rick Smith, got several because he was a young, new faculty member that needed—quote, “needed help” on his work. And when he became what they thought was successful, he sort of became—more difficult for him. So now they're kind of using that money as seed money and they're not supporting ongoing research to the degree that they did when I first came there. But it was really nice. I mean, it was really nice. There wasn't a lot of money in terms of materials and so forth, but there was a little money for that. And then there was this graduate assistant that I had for 10 hours a week.

MS. RIEDEL: So it sounds like a very wonderful way to help developing artists or emerging artists—artists that are still young and maybe mid-career further develop their careers and grad students as well.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, it was—it was a good—it was a good thing.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And it was valuable. And I was—and I don't—I don't know of very many other people in the university arena that have graduate assistants—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —yeah, that were helping them make art. I'm sure that, you know, Brent's political savvy probably helped sustain that because he was good buds with the guy that was in charge of that program for a long time. And then it changed hands and it was different. He was not a good old boy. [Laughs.] So he didn't have as much sway with those folks. So anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: Something you touched on just when you were talking about making—transitioning, making a sculpture rather than—one of the questions that we should address is about the function of objects and how important that is to your work.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, it seems to be pretty important.

MS. RIEDEL: It does.

MR. MAWDSLEY: From one standpoint, it's probably sort of how—sort of—there's something about that kind of anchor of function that causes certain parameters to take place that allows me to—the challenge of staying within those parameters or trying to push those parameters is a challenge for me. I think also the decorative nature of my work fits into that historical, decorative nature of metalsmithing—of metalwork that has pretty much permeated the—its entire history.

There's a comfort zone or—I don't know. I mean, I think that it just gives me something to work with as far as a place to come from and a place to go. And there's certainly a lot of traditional metalwork that was only a sculptural form—or its function was so subjugated by the sculptural nature of the piece that, you know, you could—you know, well it's a centerpiece for a table, you know, because that's where they put it—when basically it was a precious piece of sculpture. But I never was able to grasp that, you know.

And so I thought, well, you know, maybe I should because a lot of metal people were sort of varying in and out of the sculpture arena. And I got to the point where I made this piece, and it was this figurative thing. And then it was like I was halfway through it, and there was sort of the stem for this goblet. And I knew that. And it was a formal structural thing that was not a gesture—it was a post for a frigging thing to have on top of it. So, you know, that's what it had to be.

MS. RIEDEL: So those parameters have been helpful.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. It has given me that grounding which I feel comfortable with. And also I think it connects me with that historical continuum that's important to me also.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes sense.

It seems that there was a shift in your work in the mid-80s from more of a jewelry focus to more of a hollowware and object focus. Is that accurate?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. I was sort of a gradual shift.

MS. RIEDEL: No, not abrupt, but—

MR. MAWDSLEY: No—yeah, well, it was—

MS. RIEDEL: What prompted that?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I made some pieces that were—I started to do a corsage series. And the corsage piece that were sort of about—I don't know whether I should say this or not—my ineptness with social skills in high school is what it was about. So when you went to the prom, you had this picture of you and your date. And there was this corsage—[inaudible]. So I sort of put that together. And there were other things that were prompting this that—

MS. MAWDSLEY: You got me a very pretty corsage.

MR. MAWDSLEY: What?

MS. MAWDSLEY: You got me a very pretty corsage.

MR. MAWDSLEY: There. So, anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: Was Kathy your date at the prom?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, she was my date at one of the proms, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's great.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So anyway, I would make the corsage and I would make the frame for a picture that was in them. And the second one I made, the frame, I kind of made it that it was real architectural. And so I took the idea—I was taking a[n] organic form and sort of trying to ingeniously or in different way combine it with a structural architectural form.

And I made a couple of pretty nice pins that were in that nature. Then I made a couple that were, you know, that were only excuses to be pins because I was jewelry maker. And it occurred to me that—you know, why am I doing this? You know they were much better when they got more three-dimensional as opposed to—

And I felt a need to explore architectural structure. I had found the water tower book by the—by Bechers—Hilla—God, what's the guy's name? I'll have to—I'll look it up. [Bernd and Hilla Becher] German photographers who produced a book on industrial—they have a book on water towers; they have a book on smokestacks. They have three or four—two or three books that are based on industrial imagery, very sensitive photographs of—one that I relate to is towers—water towers. So I had that book for five, 10 years. And these were the—sort of the ultimate—the ultimate vessel, you know—[inaudible]—metal vessel is these frigging water towers, you know?

And here I was, beginning to sort of concentrate my work on architectural structure. And a lot of these water towers were either in architectural structures or on architectural structures or somehow had—you know, beside architectural structures. And so the whole idea of this standing cup vessel form and the water tower and architectural structures—you know, it's, like—this is—you know, I can't do this on a pin. So that's sort of where it shifted into. Vessels.

MS. RIEDEL: Architecture became an increasing influence in the work as well at that time.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there anyone in particular, anyone's architecture—any particular architects? Or just that sense of structure in general—space?

MR. MAWDSLEY: That sense of—it was more a matter of—a way of making ornamentation.

So I was looking at Victorian architecture or I was looking at classical, you know, kind of—you know, the way

columns and friezes and lintels and all those things were ornament and how that structure related to each other—and again, traveling in Europe and seeing cathedrals and all the buildings that were ornamented heavily, so—or even buildings in this country that have the same kind of ornamentation. So it was just another way of expressing ornamentation.

I tried to also express the bones of the building. I started using I-beams and brick and made—interpreted brick surfaces and brick—and using tubing and did a lot of bricks. [Laughs.] Graduate assistants made hundreds of bricks. [They laugh.]

And then that sort of became—the architectural sort of became a canvas in which I could use as a—as sort of narratives that seemed to be a convenient and often—historically often used—you know, whether it's putting—whether it's painting or graffiti or—and I often expressed the fact that on these vessels which I usually use—left the vessel unadorned, so there's a contrast to all the adornment, that at some point I always thought about putting graffiti on it by taking a little tool and stippling or scratching or something graffiti in—and always could not bring myself to do that. And so I was explaining this to somebody, to a student, and they said, "You got to give me a tool, I'll be happy to"—[inaudible, they laugh]. "I don't—I won't hesitate; I'll graffiti up that surface." So I did stop short of putting graffiti on things, but that occurred to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that when the sense of—that sort of random debris around the base of the water tower came in as well?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, there was the idea of, these water towers were in industrial areas or areas that were—and there was a contrast. Sometimes, there's ones in big cities that, at the time, there was a lot of general debris in the city from the riots of the 60s or from industrial decay and, you know, before the urban pioneers came back and started rehabbing old houses and so forth. So there was this idea of rundown buildings and things that stayed in decay.

And, you know, when you drive through—I don't know—I saw it in Chicago. And, you know, I don't remember specifically seeing it in New York when you were driving in from the airports, but there was that kind of things that sort of had this, you know—as opposed to Carterville, which is a—they keep that grass nicely mowed under that water tower and there's no trash in there and there's usually a fence around them to keep people out from getting under there and putting their trash or whatever. So there was this kind of dichotomy between what I was experiencing in the city and what I would experience in terms of—out there as far as that kind of activity goes.

So that prompted that idea of trash other than the pure joy of figuring out how to make trash.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: I mean, there were things that—you know, you figure out how to crush a piece of metal then unfold it so it looks like crushed—you know, something that crushed up and—or, you know, something—how do you make something that looks like a broken piece of concrete or a broken piece of plaster or, you know—that—all that was technically very challenging, and a lot of fun to do.

So, it was, like, figuring out how to make weeds—out of tubing that look like weeds.

And so there were all those things that became technically a lot of fun to try to figure out and stimulating when you made something that really kind of reminded you of what you were trying to do. So that was an aspect of it.

And I tried to make barbed wire and I wasn't happy with the barbed wire I made. [Laughs.] So—I don't know, it was just those kinds of things, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It seems that those water tower pieces ran for almost 10 years, sort of from the mid-'80s to the mid-'90s?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, they took a long time to make.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there one or two in particular that you were especially satisfied with?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, the one that was going to be the last one that I called *Alpha-Omega: Water Tower #4*, I was quite pleased with the way it—and it was, like, three or four years of work. And I don't remember—it was long. And it's 26 or 28 inches high. It was a big piece and it was a lot to work on. And it has the mahogany base. And the mahogany base sort of gives you this trophy kind of quality to it. And that's what I was sort of aiming at.

And it deals with these religious things that were sort of this commentary on—and both respect and critical, almost, of religious activities, as I had had experience—[inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Could you give an example?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, there was the organ pipe thing that—my grandmother was the church organist for the Oxford Methodist church for, I think, 65 or 55 years—a long, long time, from age 15 to when she developed arthritis to the point where she couldn't reliably play anymore. And it was almost—it was, like, every Sunday, almost every Sunday. And—

MS. RIEDEL: Was church a big part of your childhood?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. We attended church on a regular basis. And I guess the morality aspect of it—I don't know—there was sort of part of the fundamental good and evil kind of learning process. I don't know how to or whether it—you know, it—it doesn't have a profound effect on my—you know—

But I did [that] piece—first, out of great respect for the cathedrals of Europe and what they did and the—I always had a great respect for all the liturgical-centered work that was medieval in nature, as it grew towards the Renaissance, became even more incredible and more—and more kind of fanciful. And even the early stuff that was sort of this stiff—had this kind of poeticness about it that I always responded to—the visual nature in terms of one imparting a religious idea through a visual prop or tool or a teaching device. I loved that historical work that had been generated by this religious fervor, and the idea that all this work was centered around that, and to pay—I suppose, with the *Alpha-Omega* piece, I needed to sort of pay respect to that activity they had going on or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was both historical and personal—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —at the intersection of the two.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So there was that aspect of it.

And there are personal narratives on there that I know probably have some roots in my past, but I can't explain why those pieces—why that put—there's gasoline can on the side of that piece and I have no idea of why that gasoline can is there, but it seems like it should be when I made it.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And I'm sure there's some reason that this thinking about history and religion and so forth and formulating some of the decoration on that—you know, things that are there and there are things that I know exactly what they are and why they're there.

MS. RIEDEL: For example?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, the organ pipes—my grandmother's organ—and the fact that when she passed away, we had this organ that she had purchased because she wanted to play music and she didn't—in spite of the fact she lived next door to the church, she didn't feel it would be sacrilegious to play secular music in the church. She's be there by herself and no one would know and probably not care, but who knows; maybe they would've.

So we had this organ that my mother didn't want to get rid of, and it was this monster thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Did your grandmother, then, play that at home?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Played secular music?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, yeah. I heard her play a lot. I thought, even after she retired, she was pretty good at it, you know? So into her 80s, I heard her play.

And my mother recalls the times when she was in a nursing home. And my mother would come down into the nursing home and take her back to her home and she would play. And she would play very well; she was still able to play. And that was very comforting for her. And she was, you know, physically and mentally in not very good condition at the end, and this was something that sort of gave her some peace. And I never witnessed this, but from my mother's conversations, it was—it was—you know.

At any rate, we had this church organ that my mother didn't want to get rid of and we didn't know what to do with, and it was this big monster thing. So on this piece, I did a crate, a wooden crate full of organ pipes, and that sort of represented—in one way, respected my grandmother's commitment to that church in all those

years, and it also represented what we were going to do with the frigging organ—[inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, I think that's probably the most poignant example of my—of my—of the activities on ther—

MS. RIEDEL: Was it an interesting intersection of your personal experience and then the history of metal objects in religious settings or for religious purposes; and then the reference to both the organ and this religious service or this religious—the history of—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —metal—religious metal objects?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Right. It's all—yeah, it was not hard to put it all together. It all seemed to naturally come together.

MS. RIEDEL: And then of course the tubes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You know that you had another reason—another way to use tubes—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, oh yeah. It was like—it was always, well, how can I ornament this using this material—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —that I loved and used for 40 years? If I needed another material to interpret my ideas, I would certainly not hesitate to bring it in. But that was still that kind of underlying material and, when I needed an abstracted, you know, decorative element, that was always what it was.

MS. RIEDEL: How did your working process evolve over those 40 years? Was it fairly consistent or were there significant changes?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, basically I could say it was pretty consistent. It took me probably close to 10 years to develop the skill to make this work satisfying, really satisfying. I was always on the lookout for tools that I could use to affect tubing. And so as I was able to acquire and to experiment with different kinds of tools, I was able to make different shapes, different forms to transform the tubing into things that would add to my vocabulary.

For instance, at one point in time I saw and purchased a tool that commercial jewelers use to make stone settings, and it's—basically makes a cone form. And for a lot of years, there was a lot of cone forms on various shapes and sizes, and the dies that—which is what basically this tool is, coming in any kind of shapes there was like an emerald cut or a teardrop form or a square or octagonal—any way that cut stones, there was a tool to make that shape. So I had a vocabulary of different shapes that I could use. So I would constantly look to tools to sort of increase and vary my vocabulary—technical vocabulary. And then with the introduction of the watchmaker's lathe—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —that made life so much easier in terms of helping the craftsmanship. So I don't know when I got that tool. But there was a little tool that could file a perfect 90-degree angle on the end of tubing. And that same tool would file—I could file a perfect 45-degree angle. And before that, I had that—that was all eyeball work. And sometimes it worked better than other times. [Laughs.]

So to have that tool that would do those two perfect 90s or perfect 45s that—you know, that little tool changed my life and early on I took that to workshops, and I probably sold—I probably sold dozens of those tools to people who just—originally it was one company that had this—was importing it from Europe. And it was this obscure little tool in the back of their tool catalog, and I sold a lot of tools—I wish I'd got a commission for all the tools I had sold. [Laughs.]

Anyway, so that was it. And then the machine tools—when I started making larger work vessels that, you know, the watchmaker's lathe had its limitations. And so I bought a larger lathe to make bigger pieces with, to basically trim and shape and make things perfectly round or, you know, make things perfectly parallel to each other, and then I bought a manual milling machine, and I could make edges perfectly straight and perfectly square or at specific angles, and repeat that. Because being able to easily repeat things because there was—very rarely is there only one of something in my work. There's always three or four or 25 or 500 or God knows

how many kind of things. So being able to sort of easily repeat those forms and form them was always a—I mean, to have something to help me do that was always a welcome addition to the vocabulary.

But basically it was same kind of soldering it all together and, you know, forming—you know, did the same basic work, you know, slicing things up and so forth. It's just that I was always looking for easier ways to get it done and for new ways to shape and form and alter tubings, so that I—to expand the vocabulary. I think that pretty much answers the question.

MS. RIEDEL: How have your sources of inspiration or your ideas for pieces changed over time? We've talked a little bit about one piece suggesting the next, and we've talked about research grants. But how did those ideas come about? Do you remember? For example, the corsage being—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, for a long time I couldn't answer that question. I—you know, I didn't know. I could see obviously things that were—you know, after I did the idea, I could see where it came from, you know. But I never really thought about that.

MS. RIEDEL: So one thing really suggested the next?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, to a degree.

MS. RIEDEL: Or something you saw?

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and then there became, in the late '70s, it was sort of that flow out of my body sort of stopped, and I had to think about—I think we discussed that—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and sometimes it was the technical ability to make vases, repoussé vases that I learned from that Japanese master—

MS. RIEDEL: Ando—[inaudible]—mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: It was one of the—[inaudible]—in the Headdress series. The acquiring of that—the Becher book on water towers. Certainly, you know, it took me a long time to build up the—or be ready, I suppose, to start making water towers. But that book was sort of the catalyst that started the thinking process.

I suppose that it's still a lot like I'm going to make out and make a piece that—[makes repetitive noise]—you know? In some cases, it's like Helen Drutt said we got to, you know, the one—invited me to a *châtelaine* exhibition [*Challenging the Châtelaine*] and I, you know—*châtelaines* were these historically wonderful little box containers, and I don't know. I—you know, just to take that piece, and—you got that from *châtelaines* is a pretty big jump. But that started the thought process, and it's like, well, here I was at a certain point in terms of aesthetic things and, you know, what did I need to do to express my admiration for those historical things or whatever. So I'm, you know—had that challenge happened 20 years ago, it'd been something completely different.

MS. RIEDEL: So it sounds as if the work has really come from multiple different sources from a technical curiosity, from a book, from an invitation to an exhibition—that it really has come from a variety of different sources and experiences.

MR. MAWDSLEY: It has, yeah. I suppose the technical grounding has always been a, you know, can I do this and use the vocabulary? Or do I have an idea

where I can exploit my vocabulary?

I was trying to think of thematic exhibitions I turned down, and I can't think of any now. But I did turn down a number of them—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —simply because I couldn't see how I can, you know, do that kind of thing, you know. And yeah, that's probably a reasonable answer to that.

MS. RIEDEL: We talked yesterday about that first trip to Europe and seeing all sorts of historical metalwork where you mentioned the cathedrals. Are there travels in particular that have been significant to you or to your work?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, well, I'm a person who loves to visit museums. I'm an object person. I love Antiques

Roadshow—[laughs]—because I like objects, you know. And if you ask my wife, we spend much too much time in museums.

MS. MAWDSLEY: We do?

MS. RIEDEL: She's protesting—[inaudible]—

MR. MAWDSLEY: I really liked the object to—and to experience and to see objects no matter what they are.

MS. RIEDEL: What about them? Do you know? Can you put your finger on it?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No, it's just that I'm-an-object-maker-too kind of thing, or the curiosity to see exactly how people have made objects over historical eons and just strangeness and the uniqueness of objects that, you know, what-in-the-world-did-they-do-with-this-thing kind of thing, you know? So yeah, if I go to a major city, if there's museums there [I try] to frequent them or to visit them and look at the objects, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Along those lines, do you think of yourself as part of an international tradition or a tradition that's particularly American, or do you not think about it in those terms at all?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I don't think of myself as in that tradition. Now I once, long time ago, I attended a lecture. And Stanley—I think it was Stanley Lechtzin—he was giving a lecture, and he was showing international work. And then he—then he showed a slide of my work, and he said, "This is American work." And I was kind of—it was sort of gratifying that my work was the quintessential, according—to [Bernie ph] and Mr. Lechtzin what American was. Whether that's true or not, I don't know.

And his basic take on it was, well, we're—America's doing a lot of three-dimensional work where the Europeans are a lot two-dimensional work—come on, you know, you—at the time I could find three-dimensional examples of European work too. But my work was probably more ornamental and probably more—I don't know—whereas theirs was sort of more of a classic kind of—restrained, very direct kind of—I can't, you know—I can see international work that's—and perhaps because of the world's internationals—just, you know, that there is no national identity anymore—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —that people from—you know, the cross-fertilization that takes place is, you know—which may be too bad and—or it may not be, I don't know. But I've never thought of myself as being quintessential American or being a part of an international scheme of things. It just never has occurred to me.

MS. RIEDEL: You do see it in the historical continuum—or the historical timeline of metal objects?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, and most of that stuff that I really respond is European. But there's some pretty interesting pre-Columbian stuff, and there's some pretty—you know, the Oriental tradition has got some amazing things that I respond to also. So it's not—as the stuff that came from Africa. But in terms of the core thing, it's—that's still the European sort of dominates my historical vocabulary.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything in particular, any particular pieces or artists that stand out?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, well, I haven't had to think about this in a long time.

There was a school of Nuremberg—Nuremberg? There was a European—German European Renaissance—God, was it Nuremberg? I can't remember. Augsburg, that was the city. And there was a—what was his name? Wenzel Jamnitzer or something like—I can get you the spelling because I have no idea how it's pronounced, actually. And he was this really amazing—did some really amazing late Renaissance, early Mannerist pieces. And then in Dresden, there was—oh—[Johann Melchior] Dinglinger. What was his first name? And he made this—he made this thing that was—these things that were just over the top.

Most of the work I like, most metalsmiths thinks is just the height of decadence. [They laugh.] So the more decadent they are, the better I like them! [They laugh.] Those were a couple of names that I remember that from my sort of crawl out of the—I had a great respect for some of the figurative crosses done by the Limoges and *emailleurs* and by the early—that were sort of highly influenced by Byzantine examples.

I certainly—I loved the Sutton Hoo ship burial work and a lot of the—some of the energy of the Viking and Norse work. The elegance and sheer "tour de force" of some of the—some of the archaic goldsmiths' work done by the Greeks in the second, third centuries B.C. I'm trying to think who else. Those are a few things that come to mind—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's helpful.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —that have immediate impacts.

MS. RIEDEL: Is there a community that's been important to your development as an artist?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Community of artists?

MS. RIEDEL: Any kind of community really. Could certainly be a community of artists.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I can't think of a—

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like some of those early—for example, I'm thinking of the workshop, maybe in California, and there have been—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, I mean, there's a group of fellow professionals that I enjoy being around, not so much that I want to pay money to do it. [Laughs.] The reason I don't go to SNAG—I mean, I miss the SNAG conferences because was able to connect in some degree with some of those old friends that I have a great deal of respect for and, in several cases, have, you know—seem to have a rapport with. But by the same token, what I'm doing is really expensive, and it's—you know, the machine's expensive and all the stuff that goes with that machine is—that all stuff's all expensive. So I'd rather spend the money on the machines, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Over time perhaps.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about SNAG because you were president in the late '80s for four years?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, it's a two-year thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Two years, okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: You were president-elect for a year, then you were president for two years, and then you were the past president for a year or so. It was a four-year commitment. You were only the [big] cheese for two years, you know. SNAG survived that. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Do you feel that group has been significant in advancing the field? Has it been something that's—[inaudible]?

MR. MAWDSLEY: It's been helpful.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: I'm glad it's there. I think it's a positive force. I'm not intricate with it right now so I don't have a real close working relationship or knowledge of it.

I don't know. I'm still pretty much a solitary person. I mean, what I'm doing is a very solitary kind of, you know—I can do it all myself. There's something about the tradition of metalworking that where, you know, you kind of hide your secrets from everybody else, even though I have no secrets to hide. There's nothing that I'm not willing to tell people, and I have certainly been helped by people who have shared their expertise with me. But there's still that kind of solitary nature of—you know, as opposed to ceramics and glass, which are communal people—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —I don't think—they have to be communal people for whatever reason.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Have you had any involvement with the American Craft Council?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Not really.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there any particular publications that have been significant to your work? *Metalsmith*, *Ornament*, *American Craft*, anything like that that—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, they've all been informative. I don't know of a—I can't think of anything that was vital to my existence—[laughs]—in terms of publications. I mean, obviously when I was exposed to Brent Kington in *American [Craft]*—or in *Craft Horizons*, that was a pivotal thing.

And when I was exposed to several other artists that—maybe not had the influence but just to know that they were out there and to really admire their work and to be introduced to them; that’s always a nice thing that publications—a service that publications perform that is appreciated, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there particular writers that were significant?

MR. MAWDSLEY: [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like there’s a story there.

MR. MAWDSLEY: There’s this—well, Bruce Metcalf; sometimes his writing needs an editor real bad. But I first met Bruce when he was a graduate student—he spent a long time being a student—at Montana State University. And I went out there in 1972, and did a workshop with Bob Ebendorf. It was the first workshop that I ever did.

And Bruce sort of glommed on to me and started asking me all these questions, which I had no answers for—you know, about influences and life, and I apparently—he seemed to be happy with what I wasn’t saying to him, because I don’t remember what I said that was of any significance at all, but that conversation maybe sort of cracked open that maybe I should think about this more kind of thing.

It wasn’t his writing, necessarily, that did that. It was pretty much—

MS. RIEDEL: Conversation.

MR. MAWDSLEY: It was interaction with him.

MS. RIEDEL: The questions he was asking.

MR. MAWDSLEY: But it was—and Richard Helzer’s—“God, Bruce is hard case.” [Laughs.] You know, he was doing this wild, you know, kind of very wonderful work, but very much in the anti-metalsmith tradition of—you know. And it culminated in the beautiful sculptures that he made in graduate school at Tyler. So—you know, and the work that continues.

So that was—well, that was not a writing, necessarily. I got to tell you that I’m very dyslexic and reading is not an easy thing for me to do. And the—writing has to be pretty important and pretty significant for me to take the time to wade through it. So I do read articles in *Metalsmith* and other places.

I spend most of the time, however, looking at the pictures and if the pictures—to whatever questions the picture pose, if I can find that in the article I may skim through it and read certain passages that tries to answer my questions, but I’m not a scholar from the standpoint that I absorb people’s ideas through their writing.

MS. RIEDEL: I’d like to talk about the evolution of your work from the technical aspects of the tubing to the more recent work with increasing use of the computer program and the CNC machine—is that how you refer to it?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the—what was the motivation for that and how has that affected your thoughts about the work and the kind of—the work itself?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, its—this is a book called *Principles & Practice of Ornamental or Complex Turning* by Jacob Holtzapffel. This was written in—the first edition was like 18-something—1812 strikes my—first edition was 1884.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: And this work was the stuff—I had a really good example of it—that was primarily done by the aristocracy as a hobby thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Hm.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. And there were professional turners that made objects, and these were done on machines—there’s carving on these, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Primarily—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Primarily done on machines.

MS. RIEDEL: And wood and stone, primarily? Ivory—

MR. MAWDSLEY: This is ivory.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. All ivory then?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Pretty much.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Ivory—these days it's done in wood. And this is a contemporary example of it. This is African Blackwood that is the same wood that they make—used to make clarinets out of. And if you're first chair in the Boston Symphony or someplace else, you probably have a clarinet made out of African Blackwood because it's—I think most common clarinets anymore are just made out of plastic. But—or a plastic substitute for this wood.

And it's done on a lathe. I don't know if there's a technical explanation of—basically the lathe is—has the ability to index, which is take a circle and divide it into quadrants and then there's a—the cutter is connected to a cam so that as the—as the work goes around, the cutter goes back and forth. So some of the marks that you see made in that is by the wood turning and the cutter going back and forth.

There's a lot of other ways of achieving cuts. And that's sort of the basic thing. But it has to do with either the aspect of indexing, which is the dividing of a circle, or of using cams or something as moving back and forth. And this dates back—I'm not quite sure. I'm not terribly familiar with the history. But here are examples from—these are, like, 1630. And you can see while some of that's carving, a lot of that is—a lot of—you know, this stuff and this stuff and these things and that thing and this is all done by on a lathe—

MS. RIEDEL: Lathe, mm-hmm. [Acknowledgement.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: And this thing too is, where the head is moving—not only going around but moving back and forth. So this has a long historical tradition. And the machines are—I'm going to show you this one picture of this—

MS. RIEDEL: Had anyone done this in metal before that you're aware of?

MR. MAWDSLEY: It's—these machines that are—that—this is the machine right there—this is a—this is like an 18th century—or a print of somebody doing—

MS. RIEDEL: Somebody working on one these.

MR. MAWDSLEY: The angels and devils and all that other—you know, that's typical—that's not a good picture for me to show you—

MS. RIEDEL: Various muses.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes—

MS. RIEDEL: Trying to inspire or destroy, right?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Trying to inspire—let's just see if I've got a good picture of a machine here—[inaudible]—turning. These are some of the machines, through you can't—it—unless you know what you're looking at they don't make much sense. But it's a complex—this is—this is basically a bed, which is the basic thing that the lathe—and there's a headstock in which the tool turns in—in which the work turns in. And then—I'm not sure, exactly, what this is. Usually there's a tailstock which holds—which is—that the tool work is held between.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, sure.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And then there's the—this is where the tool post for the cutter takes place. And—

MS. RIEDEL: So the machine itself in this case is incredibly elaborate.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh yeah. Well, these were made for the aristocracy; so these were—you know, these were works of art within themselves.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And this book is in—this is a German book called *Sovereigns As Turners: Materials on a*

Machine Art By Princes [by Klaus Maurice].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So it was—it discussed various monarchs that are—or dukes that were—that their hobby was turning this stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Let me just write this down, so you saw some of these objects and were interested in—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. I—again, in museums—and you can see—[laughs]—why I was—why I was drawn to them.

MS. RIEDEL: They're about as elaborate and intricate as you can get.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, they had that kind of ornamental quality to them that I respond to. And they are, you know, out of a tradition that goes back a long time. And some of them are actually imitations of metal pieces or were highly inspired by what the silversmith or goldsmith at the time was working—was doing, only they were just simply ivory.

And obviously for this activity ivory is the most ideal material. But obviously for—[laughs]—it's not used anymore. And I have actually tried this in wood. And wood's not metal. [Laughs.] And there's a fairly well developed market for the wood varieties in this. And I probably would be in that—economically much better off to tap into that already developed market because my work is a variation of this.

But it's just—you know, it's wood and it's not metal.

MS. RIEDEL: And what about that makes the critical difference for you?

MR. MAWDSLEY: It's the feel, the weight.

MS. RIEDEL: Light at all?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh yeah, and the light, the light. Absolutely, metal has a certain glow to it. You you can make wood glow but not like you can make metal glow. But it's also there's—you know, it's not—I have to touch this and work with my hands. In spite of the fact the machine makes it, I still sand it and deburr it and even just, you know, feel it. And the weight and the coldness or the—just is something that I, you know, respond to. You know, the wood just doesn't feel the same. It's a pretty probably selfish and stupid difference. But it is what it is.

So I was exposed to several articles that talked about this. One was in *Metalsmith* a long time ago. And, I don't know, I've come across—I came across at various—going through—like a Diderot encyclopedia that has a whole section on this. And—

MS. RIEDEL: On this kind of ornamental turning?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, oh, yeah, a big section that describes and shows works and describes the machines and the tools that were used. So I tried to take a manual machine and buy accessories that I thought would allow me to do this. And I spent a lot of money on those things. And I experimented for no more than three or four days and found out this was—this was really too much like work. [Laughs.]

You had to keep track of things; it was a lot of concentration that I guess I wasn't used to. The kind of concentration that I had done was different than this concentration. And I liked what I did, but I just didn't like the doing. And so the other alternative was the CNC that, you know, let a computer do the keeping track of things.

I had, you know, sort of dismissed that as being beyond my interest and capability because of my—negative effect of computers in general. But it seemed like I was ready for a change—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: My life was transitioning from being an active member of a university community to being a retired person that I ended—that probably a new and different challenge would be a very stimulating thing at this point in my life, and I would have the time to really devote to it.

MS. RIEDEL: They feel much more abstract and much less narrative than what I think—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, that's more the nature of them. It's not a way that easily can create narrative forms that I—at least not—I don't have the ability—I mean, eventually, I might be able to carve things that will actually look like stuff, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: But you would—[inaudible]—if you were happy and ready to let that go.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I was probably—yeah, it was not something that I missed particularly. You know, the challenges and the excitement and the energy of doing this and to know that I was going to be able to do something that would have this—would create an ornamented object that is sort of the root of everything that I like was there. And this was a new way to do it.

And so it was not hard. It was not hard at all. I mean, you know, those big impressive standing cups, I had no problem selling those babes. So there was a big chunk of money laying out on that table that I could, you know, cash in on if—and, you know, if I was—wanted to go out and finish it. But that's not a priority in my life now.

MS. RIEDEL: And we're talking about the piece that we were just looking at that's about halfway through.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, that was not—it's not done. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: The last water tower.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So that's not a necessity.

What seems to me—and this is maybe a little self-centered, but you know, initially, I found this material that was readily available that no one was working with. And it was, like—originally, I couldn't have imagined that this was—you know, tubing is hollow. You know, trying to make things light is always a desire when you're making jewelry, and here was this material that was hollow. It was already light. And it was structural and it was readily available and it made cool things and I couldn't figure out—you know, I started looking around for other people that were working with it, and you'd find a piece every once in a while that were here and there that looked like Swiss cheese, you know—

And I just couldn't imagine, you know. I was naïve and young. I hadn't yet experienced the full impact of the idea of forging and a hammer as a—you know, as—metal as a plastic material. I mean, I had experienced metal as a plastic material, but I hadn't quite—the students, the teachers I had didn't quite ingrain that into me as much as a lot of teachers do.

And sort of the same thing here was here I am with this machine that makes life so much easier. And I'm working with a subtractive process, which is not the way most metalsmiths think.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: The thing grows out of—it's either an additive process or it's a transformational process that—where a piece of material evolves from one thing to another—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —whereas I'm taking it and carving away as a carver or a stone person or a wood person would carve.

And so that's kind of a foreign approach to things as a—as the tradition of metal working technical activity goes. It's not in there, up there in the—you know, there's people that make—[inaudible]—wax models out of blocks, and that's about as close to subtractive things as it comes to. So that's kind of cool to think about, that—you know, that I'm the only metal carver out there.

Yet there's this industry where there is literally—you know, there are places in Herrin, which is a little town over here. And there was a shop that has half a dozen of these machines that are making—they're making—they do parts for other places. And they make molds and so forth. And there's an auto manufacturing place or a parts manufacturing place that's over by Marion, like, five miles east of us. You know, I don't know what's—what they exactly make in there, but I bet there's a couple of those machines there and—you know, again, for mold making, probably.

We're not a big industrial area here. There's probably half a dozen places in this area, which is—which is a relatively nonmanufacturing kind of subsistence around here. And they're around here, and people are, you know—and—at Boeing aircraft in St. Louis, I imagine there's rooms full of those machines spitting out parts.

And so, you know, in terms of the metalworking industry, they're all over—[inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And they're our basic ingredient of manufacturing today.

MS. RIEDEL: But nobody's using them like this.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, and there are like sculptors and blacksmiths who use related technologies, laser cutters—or high-velocity—there are several technologies for cutting iron—cutting up sheet iron to make blanks. And a lot of sculptors and blacksmiths use that to—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —to make parts for things.

And there's a[n] article in the recent—in the recent *Metalsmith* that has the exhibition in print. There's a guy who made this bodacious whatever-it-is that's based on cathedrals that—it's all made out of laser-cut parts.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So there is technology out there, you know, that's related to it. But I don't know that anybody's—there's still an additive—there's still this additive transforming approach to metalworking. So I find that kind of cool myself.

MS. RIEDEL: But it's interesting because it goes back to your early, early interest in machines and machinery and what machines can do, how they can be programmed or altered, and your ongoing interest in incredibly intricate, detailed elaborate metalwork. Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —and then in an innovative use of a tool, in this case, the machine.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yeah. Yeah. I'm trying to put it to work to help me make my ideas easier. And the idea of just pushing a button and coming back two or three hours later and having this thing sitting on that machine that's done is kind of a pleasant thought—[they laugh]—as opposed to spending weeks and weeks and hours and hours laboriously putting stuff together. So that's nice.

MS. RIEDEL: How does it feel to have the opportunity to bring this much color in? Is that something that's—

MR. MAWDSLEY: That's scary. [They laugh.] I have to—I don't know. It's something which—I think it looks okay. Other people think it's a little—it's a little gaudy. I don't know. I mean, I may just have to—there's a deep blue and a—which I don't have examples of—and a dark bronze, which kind of looks like patinaed bronze but in an aluminum metallic sense.

The brass stuff—you know, I've got to do something with it because—while that brass tarnish is very slowly, it does tarnish. And I have experimented with some patinas and have not found anything that makes anything that resembles an attractive patina because of—the nature of that brass being a machinable material, it's—probably has lead in it or something like that that makes it machinable—makes it not want to—not want to respond to chemicals.

But I've got another former student who has a batch of commercial patinas that he uses a lot on bronze and this sculpture that he makes that's—he makes in—and he forges stuff in bronze. He's a blacksmith but he makes work with other materials than iron. So I'm going to go to his place hopefully in the not-too-distant future and experiment with his chemicals. And I've got formulas of things. I'm just going to have to find something that will transform that into a richer color that's more stable.

I've looked at the idea of—you know, most brass doorknobs and hardware now has some kind of coating on it that's a—some kind of spray, powdered metal. I'm not sure what exactly it is. It's some kind of real high-tech metal deposit that's, I think, some kind of titanium derivative that makes it basically—[inaudible]—they don't tarnish anymore. They they stay pretty stable. And I've—can't find anybody that does that on a[n] individual basis that has a—it's all hidden within the doorknob manufacturing industry or the various whatever-it-is. And I suppose they probably use those coatings, you know, to—they have a lot of high-tech coatings now that help preserve things and do things like make it less wind—less—[inaudible]—slicker so that wind passes over things or, God knows, you know, that stabilizes metal.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you see the possibility of designing for industry using this machine?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible]—think about—you know—

MR. MAWDSLEY: It wouldn't be something that would be above or beyond me. Given the nature of the

decorative arts in terms—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —of—the way things are going, it's becoming very modernist in nature, so I'm sort of the antithesis to what was popular in furniture and accessories at this moment. So I don't know if I would even be, you know, a viable—but if somebody asked me to, sure, it wouldn't be beyond the scope of giving it practice, see what happens, sure.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, certainly, in the history of metalwork, you know, it's happened multiple times, so—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, absolutely. Oh, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: And these designs and technique certainly are ideally suited to that sort of setup.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Sure, oh, you know, I could—[inaudible]—plug my program, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I don't necessarily have to even own that machine if I don't want to. I mean, I go over to Herrin, that company that does—that does contract work with—I could give them my program, and they would be happy to spit out my parts for me. Part of the fun of the whole process is dealing with the machine. I mean, I have to pet it and clean it and frap it and—you know, it's sort of as close as I get to the—you know, to the handmade process and the fact that I would have difficulties [to] say, "Here's the program; do it."

MS. RIEDEL: And you have to tinker as you go along. You ask—[inaudible]—yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, it's part of the machining. And seeing what this mark does when I do that mark, it's part of the creative process.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —but at some point, when I get the creative process done, to say, "here, make me a dozen of these," you know, there would be no problem.

I mean, I have fantasies of being so popular and practical that I have to buy a second machine in order to keep up with the production. And I would rather do that than—you know, at another \$50,000—than contract the work out simply because it would be—

MS. RIEDEL: So there's a real pleasure to the actual working and producing?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Of the actual—watching the piece transform from a block of metal to something that I actually have a design. And that's always been a great pleasure, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Let's take a break here.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Okay.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Richard Mawdsley at the artist's home and studio in Carterville, Illinois, on August 22nd, 2010, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. This is disk number four.

We're going to start this disk with a discussion of some of the pieces from earlier in your career that had more of a political bent than any others had, yes? And this was in the '70s. What inspired those?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I guess I could call myself a child of the '60s or—I was never—I was radical in thought—[laughs]—and sympathy rather than in action. I guess it was that—was that upbringing that could not allow me to be a bad person. The fact that the draft was hanging over my head, like most young men at the time, and at first it was, you know, the Vietnam War was sort of a[n] idle curiosity and a—you know, I suppose it's if the government thought it was necessary to do, then it was.

And then as things progressed—and every night on the news Walter Cronkite tells you what was going on in Vietnam. And it became more obvious that that was probably not a very wise thing to get entangled into. And I became more, you know, skeptical, I suppose, and then when I took my first job in Illinois, there was a time that I was—my draft status was pretty iffy. [Laughs.]

And it was not until the draft lottery came along, you know,—my number was 126 or a hundred and something like that, which was in the safe zone or close to the safe zone or—you know, was sort of—they never got past like 85 or 90, whatever the numbers that—I don't know, I don't remember—[inaudible]—but there was that time in there, and there was the Kent State shootings that happened when I was in the first year or two teaching.

And the campus protests and riots didn't take place in great fervor at ISU because everybody that was into that came here—either came down here or went over the U of I because we had much more fun doing it over—down there at the U of I. [Laughs.] And then of course this place was—I mean, there was a lot of damage, and downtown was decimated and—not decimated, but a lot of broken windows and—

MS. RIEDEL: In Carbondale?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, in Carbondale, yeah, there was a lot of them. After the Kent State shootings they cancelled classes two or three weeks early and we got everybody out of town. Basically, that's the way they solved the problem.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. And meanwhile, I was here and—

MS. RIEDEL: They cancelled finals? They just closed the university?

MR. MAWDSLEY: They just closed the university.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And whatever you got at a certain date was what you got for the grade. And it was just—you know, it was over with. That's the way they solved the problem. And they locked the dorms, and you had two days to get out or whatever, and they were locked and, you know—[laughs]—

So—but Brent—in 1970, Brent organized a blacksmithing workshop to kind of introduce the world to blacksmithing. That's sort of a simplistic view of it, but that's, like, kind of what it was. And there were quite a number of people here that were—oh, there was 50 people and there was—[inaudible]—Fred Fenster from Wisconsin, Bob Ebendorf from Georgia and Stanley Lechtzin and Jack—or Ron Pearson and Fred Woell, several others, you know.

But we were out at a—the university has a camp that's, like, 10, 15 miles south of the campus. And so at some point we were warned not to go into town—[laughs]—they would simply—thought it was, you know, that the town was going up in flames or—I don't know how Brent put it. But he was very diplomatic about being wary about going into town. And people were talking about going out to eat because—I don't remember the food being marvelous, but I don't remember it being bad, either, but—

And it was another one of those pretty unique experiences that—after two days of pounding on iron I could tell that was way too much work to be any fun at all. [Laughs.] But it was a great experience in terms of people getting together and sharing an experience. And he had invited this guy from Georgia that was—it was a blacksmith-slash—I don't know, what was he—a graphic designer or something—and then—but he had a great knowledge of blacksmithing and had studied it and had written a book and that kind of stuff.

And so he had kind of gentlemanly Georgia accent and a kind of a fun way of presenting things and kind of that unflappable, you know, aristocratic Georgia experience kind of thing. It was—that was cool. But you know, that was part of the thing was that we were sort of trapped out here. And—

MS. RIEDEL: Was he helping to instruct?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, he was sort of the instructor.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was his name? Do you recall?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Perhaps we can add that—

MR. MAWDSLEY: At some point, yeah. I could—I could come up with it maybe—Alex Bealer.

MS. RIEDEL: See?

MR. MAWDSLEY: There you go.

MS. RIEDEL: There we go.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So all of a sudden the war became more personal. It wasn't this abstract thing that Walter Cronkite was all upset about, you know. And I don't remember consciously making these things, but I do remember consciously thinking about, you know, and definitely had a change of mood. And my own life had gotten changed, took on a—taking a turn as it were—

MS. RIEDEL: Were these pendants?

MR. MAWDSLEY: These were pendants. There was one—the first one was actually a—was one of the first pieces that I did after I moved to Normal.

MS. RIEDEL: When did you move to Normal?

MR. MAWDSLEY: In '69—fall of '69.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were there for—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Eight—until 1978—and it was called the *Tank*. And it was basically a tank characterization that had a[n] enameled—a couple of enameled pieces on it that were kind of odd in that it was a sort of a precious tank. I had a pretty good working knowledge of what tank looked like. I mean, you know, you either played on them during air shows in McConnell Air Force base or seen them in movies and stuff.

I put a figure of Richard Nixon—you had to—I had—I would have had to have told you it was Richard. It was, like, as good as I could get Richard Nixon at the time. But it has this-sort-of-guy-with-his-arm-in-the-air kind of situation. And then I made a piece that was a little more—that wasn't consciously a—wasn't kind of consciously a war protest piece.

You know, it was called the *Mill*. And there were teeth on it that were—kind of represent cogs, and they were really sharp kind of gouge-y teeth. And it was a smokestack kind of situation and the—sort of a forbidding top to the smokestack that may have looked like some kind of defense mechanism.

And it was the piece that the Minnesota Museum of Art purchased out of that goldsmith '70 show. I thought it was—you know, in looking back on it, that it might have been a more poignant kind of protest than the tank piece was. I did a piece called the *Camera*. Whether that was the next one or not, I can't remember for sure.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the scale of these?

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know—

MS. RIEDEL: Four inches?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, four inches, that scale.

MS. RIEDEL: All sterling?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

And the *Camera* was—the inspiration. It was obviously a war protest piece in that there was this eagle on top of it, and it was just the head of an eagle, and then there was a couple of film can looking things, sort of showed the—represent the wing forms? And then there was this bellows on the bottom that kind of made a tail, and then down there was a sort of lens thing.

And again, it wasn't one of these obvious kind of things, but I sort of include that one—war protest pieces because of its—looking back on it, I was pretty sure that's what it was, in spite of the fact that I wasn't consciously doing it. I mean, I thought I had been there and done that with the tank piece. But it was sort of a residual thing. It was continuing—

MS. RIEDEL: Through the *Mill* and then the *Camera*.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, yeah. And I don't remember anything beyond that that I definitely could classify within that category. The other experience that I had in terms of the *Camera* piece was the initial story that I told about it was the fact that I had my grandparent's Kodak camera that has pull-out bellows on it.

MS. RIEDEL: Pull-out—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Bellows that—the way you focus the bloody thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Or—I guess that’s what you do with the bellows. I don’t know—I don’t know. Anyway, it has a bellows on it. [Laughs.] And those bellows related to the bellows on my—on my—on my *Camera* piece. And when I first starting think about that piece, it was—it was a matter of—my grandparents had a 40th wedding anniversary celebration. I was 5, 6 years old maybe? Yes. And in the evening, we went to a nearby town and had a group photo taken—several group photos taken.

And I can remember in that photo studio, my mother and my uncle had this knock-down , drag-out argument about God knows what, which were—which I had never heard before, because they were both pretty stoic people. And I—either in reaction to this really just—you know, six adults yelling at each other simultaneously—

MS. RIEDEL: Was it about the war? Was it about—

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, no, no. This was about—this was in the ‘50s.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.] Okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: This was about—I have no—this was family something or other. I don’t know what. I don’t remember what sparked the argument. But it was just this—everybody was usually, you know, real civil to each other. And we didn’t see my mother and my uncle lived a couple hundred miles apart.

And so they didn’t see each other on a regular basis. And so I’d never heard them [in] more than just polite conversation, you know? And this was real sort of startling that my mother was just—was livid about something, you know? She didn’t get livid about very much. You know, she was a pretty easygoing lady.

So I escaped that argument by kind of ducking into a room in this photography studio that was full of equipment. And I bet there was equipment there that was a hundred years old. And there was some—and I remember the visual of these lights that probably were, like, arc lights of some kind that you had to put fuel in, and they’d burn the building down or something, you know. There were those kinds of things in there. And there were probably old cameras and stuff that were—like a typical—a typical Midwesterner, he couldn’t throw anything away that was—still worked, you know.

And I remember that viewing experience and the trauma that kind of caused that viewing experience as a part of that camera piece. Whether that really had something to do with it, I don’t know. But that’s what—as the piece evolved, that’s what was constantly in—or repeatedly came into my mind. So in my slide presentation, I would show of the picture they took of the four grandchildren that night, and me at six years old and my brother at four or two or whatever he was. And my sister was the old one.

So that sort of—and part of that—as a phase of that protest piece, it’s sort of that came out of conflict—out of a conflict with—a family conflict, and the piece probably was about the war, too.

I did a bicentennial piece. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: In ‘76?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Everybody did a bicentennial piece. [Laughs.] The piece was called *Wonder Woman in her Bicentennial Finery*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And this was a piece that I really enjoyed. But it was kind of this overwrought kind of character of Lady Liberty or something like that. And the idea of celebrating the—America’s greatness when it—when it was involved in this silliness of the war—or had just been involved in the silliness of this war and the sacrifices that were made for no particular reason sort of made the bicentennial—I don’t know if it was something that could—that was ripe for ridicule or I felt like it needed to be ridiculed. And so that was sort of my other political piece that probably was about some kind of contemporary activity.

And you know, they had the bicentennial—“Bicentennial Minutes” on television, and it went on for five years or some—you know, you kind of just got sick of it—or anything that was—you know, it was, like, God, you know. [Laughs.] On this day in—[inaudible]—somebody did something. Oh, you know, a minor celebrity: “And I”—you know, “and this has been a bicentennial minute.” [Inaudible.] [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I remember those.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned Fred Woell a couple minutes earlier. [Inaudible.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, Fred's pieces—those found-object pieces that were made—there's probably a half a dozen of them that were made in the mid-'60s. The homage to President Kennedy and that assassination piece and several others were sort of the first exposure that I had to political commentary in jewelry. And I suppose if you look at campaign buttons, there's a long history of political activity in jewelry. But in terms of the artist—

MS. RIEDEL: Which button, sorry?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Political campaigns buttons or—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay. Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: you know, or that kind of thing.

And the idea that a lot of people—a lot of the old school people kind of look at that with great disdain because it was not metal work. It was staples and wood and photographs and popsicle—pop lids and whatever—all the stuff that he'd use on those pieces.

And I was—one the canons of my undergraduate education was to be open-minded. I mean, it was preached to me time and time again that if you got—you know, one of the worst things in the world was being too close-minded. Now, they kind of practiced their close-mindedness when it came to Pop art—[laughs].

So I was always open to those. I felt that it was new ideas—and I felt it was important for me to consider them on—and try to consider them on their merit and accept them and reject them on the idea that they presented as opposed to, well, why—what they were or were not made of or how they were or were not made.

And I think those pieces helped legitimize a lot of protest work that was done throughout the '60s and into the '70s. So I think they were very pivotal pieces. And so that was an important influence.

And I show a slide of one of those pieces when I give a presentation.

MS. RIEDEL: The Fred Woell pieces?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Fred Woell pieces, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: We've mentioned John Paul Miller; we've mentioned Fred Woell, Brent Kington. Are—anybody else that stands out as a significant influence on your work or your thinking? [Inaudible.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: On my work? Yes—

MS. RIEDEL: Early? Mid-career? More recently?

We covered a lot of ground. I don't know that there's anyone—yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, I can't—I can't identify anybody else that was—that had the impact that those folks did. I think most of the—my focus became pretty finite from a very early point, so influences were more peripheral than primary.

MS. RIEDEL: And certainly the history of metalsmithing, couple of—[inaudible].

MR. MAWDSLEY: As always, yeah. And when I would find images that I would find this as wonderful, I would try analyze what—you know, how the decorative elements or whatever elements was that I was responding to were working and how I could present that in my work. And I may have borrowed more closely from historical works than I obviously did from other contemporary artists.

And I think, also beyond the Pop artists painters that I mentioned, as an undergraduate I, again, became real focused, and a lot of the rest of the art world—I saw a lot of visiting artists and saw a lot of work. And I don't remember—I remember being admiring and feeling good that I had been exposed to this work, but I don't know of any of those people that ever—I ever said "ah-ha" kind of situation—"there is something that I can do or I can bring to my work." Whether some of it happened by osmosis, that's certainly possible, but I can't identify anything in particular or anybody in particular that came from the art world having much of a direct impact on me.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about commissions, if you accepted them and if there were any in particular that you felt were especially significant.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I didn't accept many. I did a few—

MS. RIEDEL: Any reason for that?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Most of them were—I made several—made some rings.

I did a couple of things that were—the—in the mid-90s or whenever it was, Pat Kane, who's the chief curator of decorative arts at the Yale University Art Gallery. I'm not sure which one they call—but it's the—it's the Yale museum, which has one of the finest collections of American silver. Her boss called me and said they had a chunk of money and they wanted a piece in their collection to commemorate her work. And she had suggested that I would be a good candidate.

And I said, "Well, I have this piece that's"—it was, like, three-quarters almost done—that I said that was one of the early water towers that I was really excited about that I thought would be really good. And I sent them some slides of the—of where it was at that point. And so—

MS. RIEDEL: Which piece was it? Do you remember?

MR. MAWDSLEY: It was, like, the *Beta*: *Water Tower #2*. And I thought that was a real prestigious kind of thing to do.

And I had met Pat Kane subsequent to that and she is an elegant, marvelous lady that I admire a great deal and she seems to know quite a bit about contemporary metal and silver and so forth. So that was a real honor, I think.

The other thing was more of an—was kind of an indirect thing, too, and that was that—

MS. RIEDEL: Quick question—do you remember what year that was? Mid-80s? Late 80s?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No, it was the mid-'90s.

MS. RIEDEL: Mid-'90s, okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

When Lloyd Herman retired from the Renwick—or whatever happened—they decided to designate a piece, the Lloyd Herman piece in their collection. And he chose my *Feast Bracelet*. And I thought that was—it's not a commission, necessarily, but I thought that was a great honor. And I know that—what's his name?—Monroe—

MS. RIEDEL: Michael.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Michael. He—

MS. RIEDEL: Michael Monroe?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Michael Monroe had a piece of furniture. And I don't know if—I don't know if that tradition has continued or not, but—you know, so I sort of—my *Feast Bracelet* is the Lloyd Herman *Feast Bracelet* or whatever they call it, you know? And I think that's really kind of cool.

MS. RIEDEL: Has someone approached you with their idea for a commission—would you make us this—a church or a university?

MR. MAWDSLEY: [Inaudible]—it would—it would depend on what it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Has that happened? Have you been—yeah, okay.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Uh-uh. Uh-uh. [Negative.] I was—I've been hoping that; it's never happened.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. I—

MS. RIEDEL: So you'd be open to that.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I would be open to that—maybe as not as much anymore; I don't know. Most of the commissions that I've done were just rings, pendants, little this-es, little of that. I had—you know, Grandma's rock that they wanted to set it in a ring or—you know, it was pretty easy money and a chance to, you know, get away from doing art—[they laugh]—for a few minutes. I don't know.

So yeah, I haven't done a lot of—and I suppose that the—I don't know why. Maybe people just look at those things and say, "Well, it's just—it would be so outrageous to do." I don't know. But do a mace [ph] or do some kind of chalice or something else like that? Sure. That would have been—I don't know it would be now—it would have been a fun thing to do.

MS. RIEDEL: Other than what we've talked about in the obvious transition in your working process from what you did prior to the CNC work, is there anything conceptually that's been an evolution in your working process?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, the idea of the fact that there are—there is content to my work and that I can think about that content and develop ideas and not have it be corny—[laughs]—it was kind of an evolution, as opposed to, if I thought about it too much, I got worried about the fact that it might be corny.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah-ha. Interesting.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So I would sort of, you know—and things that had narratives into them and things that had imagery into them—was more of a subliminal thing rather than a conscious thing.

But as the work developed, as my—I don't know—it's, like, I was told early on that I did narrative work, and I had no idea what that was.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: I had to go look it up and read about it, you know? So in 1984, I was on a panel at SNAG on narrative work that Jamie Bennett organized. And I kind of knew what narrative was, but I had to sit—I had a good research assistant at that time that brought a bundle of stuff, narrative work, that—so I kind of got—I kind of figured it out. And then I sort of looked at the history of narrative and gave a little presentation. And I was pretty happy with myself.

MS. RIEDEL: If the early pieces—I'm thinking of *Pequod* and *Wonder Woman*—and then certainly the water towers too—if you didn't think of them as narratives, what did you think of them as?

MR. MAWDSLEY: [Laughs.] I don't know.

I guess I didn't look at them as, say, telling a story or dealing with some kind of commentary.

The Pequod, which was the first piece in which I didn't put—where I put other kinds of realities into the piece besides mechanical ones and heads—

MS. RIEDEL: Such as?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I made a sail. I made oars. I made—I don't know—what else is there? Rope, things like that.

MS. RIEDEL: And they weren't mechanical?

MR. MAWDSLEY: And they had mechanical elements. It had a mechanical element to it also.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: So it wasn't that I completely left the mechanical element. But it did have these other things in it. And so that was a pretty important piece from that standpoint.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, certainly from a narrative standpoint, too—a direct reference to *Moby Dick* and to that story and those old ships.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Right, right, right, right. And there might've been some kind of subliminal war protest in that piece, too. But it was done at—probably was past that, but there was probably some element to it. I couldn't say yes. I wouldn't tell you what it would be and all that jazz, but I'm sure there's something there, perhaps, became—[inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: '71. That makes sense.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. So that was—that fact that I've started putting other kinds of realities into a—into a—was an important part. And it obviously led to the *Feast Bracelet*, which was—had a number of different realities in it that were—you know, food, basically.

MS. RIEDEL: What were some of the realities that you were thinking about when you made that piece?

MR. MAWDSLEY: What, the *Feast Bracelet*?

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, that neorealism movement in metals or in painting was a—I was responding to that. I was basically responding to the Flemish still lifes, to the way that they were—you know, the technical nature of those things and the fact that if you—if—I obviously didn't have the skills to make miniature fish and those kind of things. I eventually made flowers, but, to make something look like a pie that was, you know—and the artichoke, which I had—I had—we were in Bayeux—is that where were?

MS. MAWDSLEY: Bayeux Tapestry?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. We were in the town of Bayeux on our first trip, and we—the restaurant we ate at, we had one of these menu things where they had, you know, three things on the menu. And, you know, one of them was an artichoke and Kathy and I just kind of looked at it—[laughs]—it was, like, okay. How do you deal with this thing, you know? And the waitress was kind enough to show us how to deal with this thing. So—

MS. RIEDEL: Not a lot of artichokes here, huh?

MR. MAWDSLEY: So yeah, haven't been a lot of artichokes in my life.

So I sort of had this personal relationship with artichokes. And—you know, first one I made sort of looked like a cauliflower or something else. And this—that was, like, the third one. And—but it was a technical challenge.

And I had these vessels laid out on my workbench. I was making vessels, and I was, like, I got to do something with these. And so I needed a way to display them. And I had made a couple of pieces, I had made the ladle that was basically a two-dimensional form that became [three-dimensional], and I didn't think that displayed the vessels very well. So the bracelet was a natural way to deal without that display and be able to get the full impact of the vessel and around kind of situation.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that the first fully three-dimensional piece? I mean, I think of the pendants—the *Wonder Woman* and *Pequod*—as being much flatter.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, there was a actually a little—I wonder whatever happened—there was a little silver box that I made that had a still life on it that—it was a developmental piece that I probably have images of but I—it's somewhere. But the vessels were very crude. And I have a piece out in my scrap that's the first attempt to make vessels that were—you know, I was doing it with a flexible shaft machine. And they were a little clunky too.

MS. RIEDEL: So were you thinking—just thinking out loud, now—were you thinking about many of these objects as still lifes rather than narratives?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Where, that's where the—that's where the idea came from of making this sort of neo-Flemish still life. And I had these intense experiences with history, with traditional metalwork. And a lot of that—we looked at several silver departments in the Met where, you know, I got to pick up and amazed how heavy this—a French teapot was from the—from the 17th or—from the 18th century, I believe it was.

And you know, I've had the opportunity to handle several Paul Revere pieces and how flimsy they are—[laughs]—you know, in terms of, you know, just-enough-metal-to-make-it-work kind of thing.

So, you know, yeah, that was—that was—and I collected excellent [ph] books that were—that displayed that kind of 18th-, 19th-century silver work and gave me a good reference to the shapes and forms.

MS. RIEDEL: Because I can feel that—see that as a thread running through all the—many of those pieces through the chalices and the water towers, that sense of still life.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, they—those vessels, they come and they go, you know. I thought the *Feast* bracelet was sort of, yeah, I've been there and I've done that, and I should even—I mean, you know, and I—what more could I say with that. But then with *Wonder Woman*, she has a couple of salad bowls in her breasts. Why that was—why that was—why that was—you know, what made that a good idea, I don't know. But that's what's—there.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: And it sort of revived itself in the—in the *Water Tower* works—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —with the need for, you know, things that connected with or became a part of the narrative of the piece. So, you know, still—and I've got—you know, so what—[inaudible]—one of the workshops I did at MAKER—

MS. RIEDEL: Where was the workshop?

MR. MAWDSLEY: At the—at the [Marilyn and Jack] da Silva workshop.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay. In California?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, the pewter guy that was teaching—oh God, what's his name? Teaches at a Detroit—I'll think of it in a minute—and the blacksmith had decided to have a "stein-off." They were going to make the most outrageous stein they could and, of course, pewter and iron's pretty immediate in terms of making steins, and Marilyn decided we should compete.

MS. RIEDEL: You and she?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, well, there's three or four students that were—got together, and so here I was on this broken down drill press with files trying to turn a stein. [Laughs.] And I finally got one made that was, you know—and somebody made a little platter, and somebody made sausages—I don't know. Somebody made something that looked like something else, and I guess—I don't what. Marilyn did something, too. I don't know if she—maybe she made the platter? I don't know. But we had this little thing that was part of the "stein-off."

MS. RIEDEL: When was that?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I would say five, six years ago. I can't remember exactly which one it was—it was sort of distracting and annoying at the time because I knew I could whip this thing out with my lathe in like nothing flat. But here I was struggling with a drill press, you know, and files.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned this workshop. We haven't talked at all about Penland and Haystack and Arrowmont and your involvement with them over the years.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: And what role you think those play in the—in the field?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I know that they're a vital and important alternative educational source. I hope that they are a[n] enlightening source that people can come there who have—who may have some kind of advocational interest in doing something related to the crafts, but don't necessarily have an artistic—and they get an exposure to people that have and to an environment. I think it's a great place to make connections. And because of the more compartmentalization of the craft fields that took place in sort of the late '70s with—within NCECA and ABANA and, you know, SNAG and all the other ones that are, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: GAS.

MR. MAWDSLEY: GAS, yeah, and back out there and that there isn't as many opportunities for cross-media connections. And I always have enjoyed that part of it.

You know, there's a lot of people that are accomplished, you know, that are quote, "self-taught," that's spent a lot of class—took a lot of classes in one of those places—[laughs]—that, you know. So that is an important educational institution. And I've worked with a lot of students who have been able to take something that they've found—an interest that they have and go study with someone who's an expert at that interest. And I think that's a very valuable and this—would I—well, a good example, Sarah Perkins.

Sarah is a professor at Missouri State. And probably next to Harlan [Butt], but one of the best enamellers going—does just absolutely beautiful work.

I had her both as an undergraduate and a graduate student. She also has an undergraduate degree from San Diego State. And she took my—I did a[n] enameling unit in the second-semester class. And basically I taught everybody almost everything I know about enameling. And so if anybody wants to go beyond, you know—[laughs] it's like—I can't help you because I—you got it from me.

And so she did my little exercise piece, and she says, "I really love this." And she did a couple of other things that were sort of variations on what I did, and I says, "You know, you have a knack for this. You need to go find out about it." And I gave her a list of people to study under, and I think she started out with Jamie Bennett,

which is probably not the right place to start. But after Jamie Bennett, she did build up the courage to study with several others who were on my—or I don't know; maybe she found them herself. But she basically learned that foundation of enameling by doing three or four of those workshops.

MS. RIEDEL: At Penland or Arrowmont or Haystack.

MR. MAWDSLEY: At Penland or Arrowmont or wherever she went and did them.

And I've had several students who have a affinity for something that I can't [teach]— and this is one way to foster that interest that they have and to get them connected with an expert. So I think that's a valuable service that they played.

I had a wonderful time at Haystack. I apparently offended somebody because they never asked me back.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: In terms of tooling and environment, Arrowmont's really, you know, one of the better places. It's a little more—it's a little more "schoolish" than a lot of the places are. And you know, you were in beautiful—okay—beautiful downtown Gatlinburg. So there wasn't a chance to go outside and look at the mountains or the rocks or the ocean or whatever. And Haystack was pretty fascinating to me because I'd never spent any time by the ocean—[laughs]—you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: And—

MS. RIEDEL: Such an incredible location.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, I mean, it was a gorgeous place and hadn't probably—and I think it grew a certain type of person.

MS. RIEDEL: What type do you think?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, it was maybe more the northeast folks, the Boston and New York, New Jersey folks that were there and a little farther afield. But a lot—the predominance was that area and, again, a pretty diverse—like most of these places are pretty diverse. A couple of grad students, a couple of undergrad students—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —some people who were into art, but had never taken metal. You know, that typical—

MS. RIEDEL: Did you find that diversity of experience and technical skill could be somehow helpful, or was it very challenging?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I got to the point where, after a while, I would insist that no beginning students. It just sort of pulls you in too many directions—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —and I was getting too old for that. So I was trying to think whether there was any beginning students at Haystack or not.

I had one guy that was there that I never saw, and we tried several things to get him enthused about metal. And he was there because grandma was paying for it, and he was not really wanting to be there or not. And Don [Friedlich] kind of thought we should sit on top of him more, and I thought, you know, if he wants to go enjoy the rocks, that's [his business]. I had several people—this one young lady who's continued to be a friend.

And she was—but one time, when I first started, her bench was over in the corner and, next thing I know, she's sitting right beside me. And she was—she was, you know, there was nothing that I was going to get past her, and that she had questions and I was—I was the one that was going to make her life.

MS. RIEDEL: Answer those questions, yeah.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —it was an intense—and, you know, a New Orleans southern belle kind of person.

MS. RIEDEL: And did she go on to continue working?

MR. MAWDSLEY: She did; she got into glass and became pretty good at glass, and then she—her real passion

was acting, and her parents thought acting was—I don't know why art was okay, and acting wasn't. She didn't really get into the acting soon enough, I don't think, to really have a—have a reasonable chance.

MS. RIEDEL: This is your friend you were mentioning at California—[inaudible].

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes. So that was—you know, and Don Friedlich was in there—was—he was my studio assistant.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Don was a kind of a character also. I enjoyed Don, and I still like him and, you know—say hello several times.

MS. RIEDEL: All right. I have just a few final questions, and then if you have any final thoughts?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Just in summary, how has your work been received over the past four or five decades? Seems like it started with an extraordinarily good reception, and it's been fairly consistent throughout. Is that—is that fair?

MR. MAWDSLEY: I've sold everything I make.

MS. RIEDEL: That's pretty great.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, I have—you saw what I have left.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, there wasn't much.

MR. MAWDSLEY: [Laughs.] I don't know how to answer that question. I mean, I have had some things that have happened to me that have been very rewarding and very ego-building or very egotistically satisfying. I certainly have—you know there's—I can't think of anything in a major sense that would be an accomplishment that I have missed because I didn't accomplish it. I don't know what that—you know, accomplishments are a "who knows?" kind of thing—and more.

And I've certainly have never imagined a career that has been as rewarding as this has been, as, you know, in terms of stimulating personally and the kind of accolades that have seem to have come my way. I've never been a good self-promoter, and in this world, in this day and age, it's one of those things that's almost in a—no matter how good your work is, there's so much good work out there that you have to be—and we'll just have to see what happens once I get to promoting this stuff a little bit—what happens. So whatever the—my work has, has pretty much sold itself, you know, in terms of people recognizing or admiring or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: All right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: What changes have you seen in metals in your career? What change happened—what changes have you seen in the field? How has it changed over—past 30, 40 years? So there's a lot more really good work now?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Absolutely.

It's evolved a great deal. It's diversified a lot more. The work has become more conceptual; the work has become more diverse in terms of relating to the body or relating to something, you know, to jewelry or adornment only in a tangential way; and that work has been embraced, not universally probably, but at least has been scrutinized and exposed. And I think that's healthy.

I—it's my experience—exposures, and this is not saying anything derogatory towards the fathers of contemporary metal. But there was a sort of a good ol' boys clique about it. I mean, it was like Cranbrook was kind of that epicenter and not the only, but the, you know—it was like all the people that sort of made that, you know, the good graduate programs in the early '60s that sort of generated the expansion were all those Cranbrook boys.

MS. RIEDEL: You're seeing more women enter the field—[inaudible]?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, absolutely. I would guess there's as many females or maybe more females now than there were male.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems that way.

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know, in the 20 founding members of SNAG, I mean, if there was—I know Arline was—Arline Fisch was one of them. But I can't remember anybody else, any other female.

MS. RIEDEL: Mary Hu, was she there?

MR. MAWDSLEY: No, that was—that was—

MS. RIEDEL: Later.

MR. MAWDSLEY: You know—Mary Ann Scherr would have been maybe one. I don't know. But it may have just been—it just may have been Arline.

And to see a black student or see someone at SNAG that was black was very rare, and whether there are more blacks now involved in it, I don't know. And why blacks have not taken to it, I don't know. And whether that's changed or not, I can't tell you. But I think it's kind of a white European thing. It's been somewhat of a problem, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Certainly it seems there are a lot more Asian—right, absolutely.

MR. MAWDSLEY: There's certainly a lot of Asian—there's a lot of Asians now that are into it. And that's certainly healthy.

So I think the evolution, you know, away from this European model of metalworking to a more international model or maybe even to a more of an American model with international influences where it's a more democratic kind of—I think that's a word that's probably overused. But that might, for the lack of a better term, just describe what's happening.

MS. RIEDEL: You think that's what's happening?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Yes, and that's—the diversity and the—and the, you know, I worry about the fact that technology—

[Audio break.]

MR. MAWDSLEY: [In process]—of the world is, you know, so dramatically expanding and whether that eventually sort of implodes itself back into sort of the same thing that happened with the arts and crafts in the last part of the 19th century in terms of sort of a rediscovering of the hand and the rediscovering of those things that the arts and crafts were kind of anti, you know, mass production and anti this and that kind of thing. I can see that as a possibility—possible happening.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like that's happening a little bit already with the whole DIY movement, yes?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Could be, could be. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I'm a little concerned about the university and sort of the endangered species we are becoming at the university—or which has the potential of doing based on it's an expensive program that's not a—not a—you know, usually they aren't—generally are not big programs. Because of the nature of what they're doing, they can't be big programs, so it's not an attractive—or maybe unattractive thing for a bean counter to whack off. That's a concern.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MAWDSLEY: I think that probably sums that up.

MS. RIEDEL: On a related note—what do you see as the importance of metal as a means of expression: its strengths and its weaknesses and what it does better than anything else? What has kept you working in metal all this time when you could have gone to wood with the ornamental turning? What is—what is it about the material?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Outside of stone or maybe—it's the longest enduring human endeavor that we have records of. I mean, they probably, you know, dealt with wood and with fiber and other things early on. But none of that survived. So that long and predominal [ph]—you know, there was the Bronze Age and the Iron Age—and some great blocks of history are designated by man's ability to work with different kinds of metals.

And that whole historical umbrella is certainly something that is important. To me, it's the working with tools—the tool as an extension of your hands. It's one of those things where you can't do very much with your fingers; you have to have something to assist you. So there's a certain resistance that I find challenging.

There's a certain—the ability to make the material comply is kind of a nice accomplishment. There's that sort of metallic-ness—the ability for it to glow, the ability for it to be hard and cold and, you know, the ability for it to feel the feel of it in your hands. That kind of thing, I think, is an attractive part of it to me.

That probably kind of gets the major—[inaudible]—points here that comes to mind just off the top of my head.

MS. RIEDEL: Final question about—two final questions about your work: Do you see your work in terms of episodes that are periods that are distinct, or do you see a thread of continuity running through it all?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, a little of both.

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

MR. MAWDSLEY: I mean, there are definitely episodes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MAWDSLEY: —groups of pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. MAWDSLEY: But there's this string—there's this constant thread that becomes a pretty predominating factor that—you know, everything was hinged on that technical activity. So I don't see the distinctiveness like—you know, okay, some painter had their—you know, had the neo—the abstract expressionist period, and there was a neo-classical period, and there was a—there was a—this is the Pop art period or the—you know, the whatever—whatever came along kind of thing, you know.

I think for better or worse there's no schools of thought—the schools of thought anymore are not quite as organized and as predominate. Everybody's out there doing their own thing kind of thing. And perhaps the school of thought would have more force as a school, but the—everybody out there doing their own thing has more of a—you know, there's more of a creative spirit out there that's happening that perhaps, you know, makes the field as a whole less potent than it would if there were “groups of people pushing together” kind of thing. But, you know, that's—for better or worse I don't know what that means.

But basically, for me, it's just constant stream that has had its little subplots—[inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: What about your work in particular matters to you?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Wow. What matters to me? Well, it matters that it is done as well as I can. It matters that I have a certain pride in doing it. It matters that it sells. It's always nice to get a little economic renew—little economic benefit once in a while. I suppose maybe it's most important that it's admired by other people. And I got a feeling that it is. [Laughs.] I hear that once in a while, you know. So, yeah, that's probably what's important.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Sounds that it's been a contribution to the—to the history of metalsmithing.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Well, I hope so. I mean, in a hundred years, if 10 percent of it survives, I'll be lucky. That's a reality of working with precious metal. It's more likely that mine would survive because it doesn't have a lot of valuable rocks in it. But even as precious metal, it has this constantly—precious metal is constantly under assault for being converted into its economic form.

And that's a reality. However, I guess the beauty and the tradition and the mystique of precious metal was something that I was worth taking that risk in order to work with it. I know of at least one piece that's been melted down, you know. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh yeah. There was a robbery at an exhibition. And they only took the pieces that were made out of silver and gold. And you know that 15 minutes later they were in a melting pot.

MS. RIEDEL: Any final thoughts?

MR. MAWDSLEY: Not really.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. I think we've done a very thorough job of addressing these questions.

MR. MAWDSLEY: Oh, okay. Well, I can't think of anything else that the—I'll probably think of something at, like, 1:00 in the morning.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. [They laugh.] That's guaranteed.

Thanks very much.

MR. MAWDSLEY: It was my pleasure. I enjoyed it. Thank you for doing this.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, my pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]