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Oral history interview with James L. Tanner, 2011 October 7-8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with James Tanner on October 7-8, 2011. The interview took place in Janesville, Minnesota, and was conducted by Mary Savig 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.

James Tanner has reviewed the transcript. His corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MARY SAVIG: This is Mary Savig interviewing James Tanner in his house and studio near Janesville, Minnesota on October 7th, 2011, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And this is disk number one. OK, that sounds good. We'll start out easy. Tell me where and when you were born.

JAMES TANNER: I was born on July 22, 1941 in Jacksonville, Florida.

MS. SAVIG: Oh. Were you raised in Florida?

MR. TANNER: Yes, I grew up in Florida. I went to school there. When I graduated from high school I went to—what—it's really interesting to try to remember now. The University—[laughs]—

MS. SAVIG: I've got it somewhere. We can look it up.

MR. TANNER: Got it somewhere—Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, Florida.

MS. SAVIG: Okay.

MR. TANNER: Yeah. For a minute there it just goes, you know. Yeah, I studied art in high school. I was an outstanding finger painter in grade school.

MS. SAVIG: [Laughs.]

MR. TANNER: I just knew this was going to be what I wanted to do because my aunt taught me a few things.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, yeah.

MR. TANNER: She was very creative. My grandmother made quilts and she could sew real well and garden. I think all that—just about everyone in my family had some kind of skill that they were able to express themselves through, which to me meant they were mentally skillful, first of all, being able to translate that into a physical dimension. They cared about how—and the quality of work that they did, so that a great influence from the beginning. I think my grandmother was central to that.

MS. SAVIG: Did you ever watch her make quilts?

MR. TANNER: Oh, yeah, every winter. And I always watched her sewing on the Singer sewing machine. She had one of these treadle machines. So—

MS. SAVIG: Were they colorful like your work?

MR. TANNER: Yeah. You know, she made quilts that were colorful. They were also very expressive and—what would you say—joyful. Yeah.

MS. SAVIG: Do you have any anymore, or—

MR. TANNER: Do I have any?

MS. SAVIG: Yeah.

MR. TANNER: I think I might have just an old remnant somewhere. But for years we did, but you know, those things when you use them, they wear out.

MS. SAVIG: I love well-made quilts. So did she usually buy fabric, or was it found fabric?

MR. TANNER: Well, she did probably some of both, I'm sure. She bought some fabric, but she also used rediscovered fabric, in terms of clothing and you know, things—

MS. SAVIG: Oh, yeah.

MR. TANNER:—just like I do now. I take jeans or any other garment and deconstruct it and come up with raw material for the work. She was resourceful.

MS. SAVIG: Were your parents pretty resourceful too?

MR. TANNER: Oh yeah. Yeah.

MS. SAVIG: Well, I guess they grew up in the Depression, so—

MR. TANNER: Yeah.

MS. SAVIG:—everybody was. What did they do?

MR. TANNER: My mother worked first—she did days work house cleaning, and then later she worked in a factory. I think her last three jobs she was working for a pet production company, where they did Hartz Mountain food products for pets—packaging and shipping and stuff like that. And then she worked at a place where they painted palms and different kind of synthetic—well, I guess they were using the real thing and preserving it—but for decorations and stuff like that, and a meat packing plant. You know, my father drove a cab and he was involved with preaching and stuff like that and—

MS. SAVIG: Involved with?

MR. TANNER: He was a stump-knocker preacher.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, okay. What's that?

MR. TANNER: Stump-knockers—usually you don't have a church, but you visit churches, you know—

MS. SAVIG: Okay.

MR. TANNER:—and give sermons sometime, so—

MS. SAVIG: Oh, okay.

MR. TANNER: But he and my mom separated early on, so he was not a fixture in my life as such.

MS. SAVIG: Okay. So when you knew you were inclined to be an artist, was your family supportive?

MR. TANNER: Oh yeah, very supportive. I was really fortunate that way. My grandmother made a big thing of it, as I think grandmothers probably do. But it was important to me because she was quite skilled and smart. She had a really strong will and determination to do things. For instance, she bought her first house. After I remember, growing up 1618 Dennis Street she moved to 89 Margaret Street.

She bought that place and she made a deal with the person who was selling it to her and said, you know, she would pay him such and such, so much a month, and if—she would pay it off in, you know, some kind of record time. If she paid it down she wouldn't pay any interest. He didn't think she could do it, but the end of it was she paid for the place way ahead of schedule.

MS. SAVIG: No interest.

MR. TANNER: And no interest.

MS. SAVIG: Wow.

MR. TANNER: That's pretty savvy for a person who didn't, you know, finish school. I don't think she finished high school or anything. But—

MS. SAVIG: Did you live with her and your mom?

MR. TANNER: We did.

MS. SAVIG: Okay.

MR. TANNER: My mom and my brother and I think my aunt Naomi lived with my grandmother. Actually, when we were living on Dennis Street—1618 Dennis Street, a couple of my uncles lived there at the same time. They were kind of—when I was a kid, they were younger at that point, and then they married later and moved and that's how it thinned out after a while.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MR. TANNER: Seven.

MS. SAVIG: Oh my gosh, big family. Are they all in Florida, or has everyone dispersed?

MR. TANNER: Most of them are in Florida.

MS. SAVIG: Any artists?

MR. TANNER: I have a couple of brothers who passed away. Did you say artists?

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, any other artists? Or are you the artist of the family?

MR. TANNER: No, I guess they came along later, and some of the influence that I had was probably not prevalent at that time. And you know, we grew up in a residential industrial area. So I saw lots of work going on and materials being used and transformed into other things. So this really impressed my psyche a lot.

And the fact that work itself was something that was very, very interesting to me. Because I noticed that when people were absorbed in their work, there was this kind of peaceful nature and this kind of articulation that was going on that was more than just the physical labor but the thing of becoming a part of the process. And you know, you could see people developing a kind of sensibility about the material and the way in which you handle and go about doing the work—the material and doing the work.

I think in that particular neighborhood was really quite important. Then of course most people had backyard gardens. So you know, there was always something growing. There was an abundance of wild things growing like blueberries and raspberries and pecan trees and the like.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, yum.

MR. TANNER: So all that was pretty much magic.

MS. SAVIG: At the time, you were thinking about how the people you were watching were taking something of a material and transforming it into another thing. You were cognizant of that.

MR. TANNER: Right, exactly.

MS. SAVIG: That's really interesting. So this was when you were in high school. Then when you went to college you started just developing this yourself?

MR. TANNER: Yeah, I was pretty good in the sciences and art. I considered going kind of into the sciences, but I figured this was something, too—there was something about the independent nature of this whole environment with art and that people for the most part, kind of left you alone in terms of this. They looked at it, and it's always, what is this—something like that. So they weren't too eager to tell you how to do it, but—and also other things were just so disciplined in terms of, I guess, being managed from the outside. This appealed to me. I thought I could do some of what you call research. I could investigate in this world. I could articulate ideas. I could communicate. This was a little more insular, because I spent a great deal—even though I had brothers and sisters, they were not—my sister is 12 years younger—my oldest sibling is 12 years younger than I am.

So I spent a lot of time by myself in terms of planning and coming up with ideas and doing things, you know. So I say my childhood was really like a lot of kids'—investigative, you know? And that was, to me, really interesting. I would rather listen to conversations and pay attention to older adults and learn things than just to play with kids all the time. That was not as interesting. I did my share of playing and I enjoyed it fully but I realized that there were some things to be learned if you paid attention.

MS. SAVIG: You had keen observation skills when you were a child. When you went to college and were studying art, were there any professors that were especially formative in Florida?

MR. TANNER: Oh, yeah. Yeah, in high school, you know, she was a—chemistry—Mrs. Blossom.

MS. SAVIG: You remember the name. That's good.

MR. TANNER: Yeah, she was really quite an impressive person, very knowledgeable, and—such discipline, and manner was, you know, just astounding, and her ability to communicate. She just was very, very important in my formation. Then my art teacher, Mildred J. Hampton, she was there. She cared a lot about the individuals. She paid special attention to me, too. Fredrick G. Cash, he was a science teacher. I was fortunate to have these good teachers.

He actually hired me to work for him some after school doing a little gardening. But just the way his classes were and the questions that were asked and studying liquids, solids and gases and the atmosphere of the clouds and precipitation—all these things that gave you an idea about how things transformed themselves. And connective relationships were part of that in my art too, with Mrs. Hampton. When I got to Florida A&M University, I had a bunch of really interesting and good teachers there, too.

The first person I studied ceramics from was Amos White IV and we're still in touch. He lives in Florida now. He retired from being Provost at the University of Maryland.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, okay.

MR. TANNER: I can't say enough about how he and others were instrumental in my development.

MS. SAVIG: How so? In the nature of encouraging you? In the nature of guiding you?

MR. TANNER: Well, encouraging me—I guess, that's certainly guiding but also, example, which is—the strongest fundamental way I think people influence others is by applying themselves to the point that it's like an overwhelming bright light, so—

MS. SAVIG: In Florida you were drawn to ceramics because of the materials and also because your instructor was —

MR. TANNER: Well, in Florida, I actually studied—I was a fine arts major. So that meant you studied all of them—painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, the whole lot, because it's all important. I never considered myself to be a specialist. Fundamentally, I was interested in too many things to just narrow it down to one thing, because it all seemed that it was the same thing in different forms. So I guess you would call my notion being a generalist.

I guess that something impressed me that nothing in and of itself is important. Only in relationship to other things, that's where importance comes from. So you know, I could not ignore that. You know, like, now you can see the work I do embraces a lot of fundamental principles. It's not like it's all painting or drawing or sculpture but a little bit of all those things.

MS. SAVIG: When you had to take drawing courses, would you try to incorporate other media into them?

MR. TANNER: Well, I don't know that I did so much as to—you know, when I was taking a drawing course try to incorporate other media into it. I tried to learn about line and the use of it and how to think about it, not to deal with some kind of dock you pulled into when things were done. I realized the openness of that manifesting itself in other ways and material, because there's line and movement. And when you think about the imagery of anything moving, you get a line. So it was that kind of thing, looking at dimension in terms of—

[Audio break.]

MARY SAVIG: Okay, this is Mary Savig and James Tanner. We're on disc two.

We're going to back up a little bit and talk again about Don Reitz and Harvey Littleton at the University of Wisconsin. So if you just want to describe your early relationship with Don Reitz and then how it transformed into this friendship and how that was always very inspirational to you.

JAMES TANNER: Now I can think of a lot more things because—

MS. SAVIG: Oh, good. Maybe this is a blessing. [Laughs.]

MR. TANNER: Don was just beginning to teach at the University of Wisconsin when I arrived. Harvey had been teaching ceramics, but being that he was starting a glass studio at that time, the art department hired Don from Alfred University.

And so I think, coming from graduate school right out there, it was, like—that energy was fresh and exciting for him. He was popular. He did a lot of workshops, a lot of workshops. So we got—gained the benefit of that

exposure, because he'd come back and tell us all about this and that. He would have things to challenge us with in terms of the work we were doing and critiques and so forth. It was pretty obvious, too, that you could make a living doing this work and teaching at the same time.

Then the thing he did that was interesting about him then and now is that it's sort of like his communication was a very positive thing about energy and using it for positive purposes of being excited about the kind of creative research that he was doing and use of materials, form, communication. It was something that was almost like an evangelist of a sort.

MS. SAVIG: It's good way of putting it.

MR. TANNER: Yeah. I mean, he had a following, a huge following.

What happened with me is when I graduated and came to Mankato [Minnesota State University at Mankato] and started teaching, I invited him—he was one of the first people that I invited to come and do a workshop here. It just launched my thing into visiting artists and became an enrichment program and I ran that for a number of years. You could see how this influence was so big. I had many, many people come and do workshops because it was important that you need outside influence and that you need to get the students connected that way, so that things would work well in terms of their learning and confidence and connection.

But Harvey was a very unusual person, too. I mean, the way he had us work—there was a certain independence in terms of the studio. But he would have classes sometimes at his house, and he introduced us to the whole idea of how to keep records and how to prepare for the income tax because you will have to do that and eventually you will get audited—you know, that kind of thing. It was really important.

He talked about—he had plants. His wife Bess—they had a solarium that was pretty impressive, to see them growing things. He had a business, Paoli Clay Company. He sold tools and clay. He talked about good wine, which I did not appreciate at that time. I learned from Harvey to be interested in wine and to drink wine and then to make wine.

So he was very, very practical in a lot of ways. And his art—although he was very much into that and did well, he was known as the father of studio glassblowing—because he introduced that on a small enough scale—that it—could work.

He always had people come from various places too to work. I remember he had Emilio Vedova from Italy come and do a workshop, a residency at university. At that time, Vedova was doing something called plurimi, and they were paintings that you were—kind of almost like puzzles and they were on the ground, as I imagine, on the floor. And you walked on them and that's an interesting idea, you know, concept. But then he had Vedova come and do prints in his studio.

And—[inaudible]—after I retired. Janice and I went out there and did a couple of prints—two together for—I mean, he had been, like, a father. I'm friends with his whole family. I know them all and it's interesting. We went out and had brunch while Janice and I were there this year and visited with Harvey and it was just wonderful.

But yeah, these are some of the fundamental influences that are just important. You can't say how important because it's hard to measure. Some of these things are infinite. You just know they were very important. That's what you can say.

MS. SAVIG: At the time, did you sense that Madison was very unique—

MR. TANNER: Oh, yeah.

MS. SAVIG:—in what it was doing?

MR. TANNER: I ate it up. I knew what was happening. I was not in the dark or sleeping. You know, when these things are going, you take full advantage. Yeah.

MS. SAVIG: While in school, did you ever go to other art schools, like Penland [School of Crafts] or Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts]?

MR. TANNER: I taught at Penland in 1970.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, okay.

MR. TANNER: I was teaching glass working. I taught students some tai chi at the same time—

MS. SAVIG: Oh, yeah?

MR. TANNER:—because I was doing tai chi, and—

MS. SAVIG: How long have you—have you been doing tai chi?

MR. TANNER: Well, I don't do tai chi so much now but I did tai chi for a lot of years. I taught a few people tai chi locally and in Mankato, like, the president's wife, Nita Nickerson, at the time, and a few other friends. Because they were interested. It's not like I knew a lot but, you know, just sharing what I knew. Then they got Al Huang to come and be resident because of that. I guess, you know, the idea was kind of catching on. And—

[…]

MS. SAVIG: That would have been in the '70s, early '70s.

MR. TANNER: Early '70s? Well, you know, he's definitely been around a lot. As a result of getting to know Al [Huang -JT], I suggested that he be keynote speaker at the annual meeting for National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts. I was on the board at that time. And then he was keynote speaker. He did a fantastic job of talking about clay, centering, and he was familiar with M.C. Richards, that whole thing of how that is connected with the meditation. And he did a performance on the stage, tai chi. So I mean, it was a big hit. I think that was at our meeting, annual meeting in Louisiana, so—

MS. SAVIG: So Penland, what was that like when you were teaching there?

MR. TANNER: Well, it was really quite an influence for me. It was a lot of people from different schools and stuff, teaching. They were in a more primal level with their facilities then. We had a dirt floor for our glass working studio.

It was just one of a kind—close, intimate communion with the students there because they were from different places, too, and they were a bunch—and it was composed of sometimes older people and younger people and middle-aged and—you know, it was just a roundabout because some had backgrounds in art and some didn't. It was, like, we ate together in the dining hall, kind of, like, servicemen would or something like that. We pretty much lived together, I guess—you would say, for two or three weeks. It was intense because we were doing something all the time.

MS. SAVIG: All day. [Laughs.]

MR. TANNER: When we weren't teaching or something like that, in the afternoon, we would gather together that year and we would go down to the dance—well, I call it dance hall, but it was a little house. And Carolyn Bilderback, from New York, a professional dancer, had classes. We danced with one another and she encouraged to make up dance and improvise, and we did all that. It was a wild kind of intimacy that really excited the mind and imagination. Plus it was just good for the body. So, you know, all the plain people from the ceramic studio, printmaking and this and that would get on a little truck or something like that and they would haul us down there. It was just sensational.

But you were able to visit all the studios and see people working. They had presentations at night, slide lectures, where you heard about what people were doing and where they were from and everything. So it was a unique experience, very unique.

Later, I went and I taught at Haystack. You know, it was somewhat similar. But the environment—being in this reclusive environment had this overwhelming quality, a mystery of—potential of a kind of freshness that was isolated from the daily news, you know. The food was good and we played volleyball. You know, it was just—I guess what you would say, it was holistic.

MS. SAVIG: What was your art like at the time?

MR. TANNER: Well—

MS. SAVIG: Just out of school, still—

MR. TANNER:—right at that time, I was making some pieces that you call airships. They consisted of a main ball with a kind of tail coming off of it, and then kind of simulated wings, and it hung. It came from the idea of the witch's ball, which was pretty popular then in the glass studios around the country. And they said the witch's ball would supposedly catch all the evil spirit, had a little hole in it, of course. And when the ball broke, it would release all the evil spirits. So, you know, we all bought into that—[inaudible]—as a symbol. But I made quite a few of those. That's what my work was like in glass.

Then I think that went on to influence my making of PFOs, potential flying objects, which were ceramic. And these took on kind of a bird shape but very abstract. I think this is when my work actually started to be more

personal. And—

MS. SAVIG: So going to ceramics allowed you—do you think that's a change in going—

MR. TANNER: Well, the glass—the airships and the PFOs—I'm saying that is when the work, I think, began to be more personal. Because I had made some vessel forms all along, but I had not explored these other sculptural forms more deeply. And well, that's where I think it started to have more content for me.

I recognized that some things that had been influential—like, I took a Buddhist iconography course when I was at university in Madison. That was one of the single most important courses that I probably took. It was learning something about the concept of Buddhism and—one which I could identify a great deal with—just the notion, because, although I was raised Baptist and everything, I'm not what you would call a religious person. I'm spiritual with nature but I don't follow any one notion. So this whole influence of the Buddhist imagery, also, I think, influenced my work in terms of—

Some people say that the ceramic work reminds them of masks, but to me a mask is something you wear, and you wouldn't think of wearing these things. They are more than that. They're images. It's almost like portraits—you mentioned the autobiographical nature of things once, and I think I see that. But to me, the thing that became important is the meditative nature of consideration of time and space and dimension of being. That being is not just about one body or one mind, but it's a collective nature of awareness. And that's what influenced my work. It was this kind of concern.

MS. SAVIG: When exactly did you start basing your works with clay as opposed to glass? When did that transition —

MR. TANNER: Let's see. The last year I taught glass was 1979, I think. 1980, we moved from the lower campus to consolidate with was then called upper campus. So I decided that it would be better to build a stronger ceramic department than to have glass and ceramics and a weaker one and—you know, of course, budget and everything—hinged on that too.

Then just the practical nature of my time—you know, what you're going to do. Initially, I became involved in glass in order to explore some of the chemical relationship between glass and clay and color because I was intensely interested in color.

But I was also interested in working a material that you use tools as an extension of the hand and that was so fluid in this molten state and everything. And, you know, the whole nature of how you came to anneal that material and stuff and what the strength would be and all that.

But I guess I realize the combination of things, the whole thing about the consideration of budget, space. We didn't really have a good space for glass on lower campus.

MS. SAVIG: It takes a lot of space.

MR. TANNER: It was very low ceiling. So, and that takes it out of the picture. Then this space that was proposed for the glass studio on the upper campus was also another low ceiling, which is the gallery we were in. Now, can you imagine that—glass in that space?

MS. SAVIG: That's tough to imagine.

MR. TANNER: It's tough to imagine. It was a little better on lower campus. The ceiling was a little higher, but it was still constricted.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah—

MR. TANNER: It never was an appropriate place. So, you realize things like health-wise, it's not a good idea. You know, safety-wise, it's not a good idea—

But anyway, that led me to think about my work, consolidating the program and consolidating my work. So of course more ceramic work happened then. That was 1976 that the PFOs started. And by 1982, I was doing what I call them is wall reliefs.

MS. SAVIG: Wall reliefs? Yeah, they are called masks a lot—

MR. TANNER: Yeah, people who call them—I don't take issue with that or anything, because they are what they are to whoever is looking at them. But I'm thinking, they are not seeing what I see, of course.

MS. SAVIG: What do you see? What are those to you?

MR. TANNER: Well, they're images they call not a mask but a being. They are, not a substitute, not a covering, not a pretention or anything like this. They are what they are. And so I see them as that, the same way as if I would do a portrait that's realistic of you and stuff; you wouldn't call it a mask.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, yeah.

MR. TANNER: Yeah. But, you know, like I said, it's not critical or important to me that people see them as I see them, because nobody sees anything as somebody else does, anyway.

But I think—it's hard to gauge what people's response is to those images. But I know they have been interested. But you know, it may be, I think, almost sometimes that they are harder for people to penetrate or something like that, because I don't get that much response back from it, you know what I mean? But that's not to say that I'm not going to continue to develop that idea or notion because they are not done for the purpose of just solely a response.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah. I mean, they're your own response to the material and what's going on in your mind. When you started doing these, where did the ideas come from?

MR. TANNER: Well, like I said, initially, the big Buddha images—you know, the whole thing of the—what do they call it now? It's like the low relief carvings and stuff like this and all the things that are around the stupa, right? This whole idea of worshipping by walking around and round the stupa? Lots of icons. And, you know, that's—

Then the other thing is, when I was growing up as a kid, I always paid careful attention, like most people will, to the face expression. You could read that more accurately than just listening to the work, because a lot of times, we all are saying more with our expression than we're willing to reveal verbally. Sometimes we try to trick people. We try to trick ourselves, almost. It's, like, we say things that has nothing to do with what's really going on—or very little, I should say. I wouldn't say "nothing."

So communication is a key spiritual issue, and I think it's reflected a great deal through the eyes, the face, the expression, the gesture. You know, it's a landscape. For me, those images are landscape, too, because you look at the face. And reading these things, it's like a landscape.

MS. SAVIG: That's a great way of putting it.

MR. TANNER: And the landscape, you see from an aerial perspective sometimes, and that's really quite important, and you have a whole different attitude about it. All this stuff of time is such an interesting phenomenon that the physics of it is still challenging people because it cannot be contained, it cannot be measured, it cannot be even adequately described. It's the thing we allude to.

MS. SAVIG: How do you allude to it in your work? It is such a challenging concept, so how do you get at it?

MR. TANNER: Well, I think it's through a kind of instrument of patience. It has more to do with the nature of relationship, one thing to another. It's subtle.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, that makes sense.

MR. TANNER: It's something that you realize is both momentary and infinite at the same time, and that you think about it—energy is the common denominator between all things. You think this energy, being recycled and recycled and recycled again. That is kind of how you allude to time because since you cannot grasp it, you can only allude to it because you don't know what it is, ultimately.

MS. SAVIG: I can see that in your work. It makes sense.

MR. TANNER: But I think one thing it does is it helps you to be more patient that way. It's not going to be done in a day, right?

MS. SAVIG: Well, going from there, we're still talking about the '70s and early '80s. I know now your works take a long time. When you were practicing then, in your earlier works, was it a long process, a patient process?

MR. TANNER: Not as long of a process as it is now. That whole thing of practice was about learning and understanding the nature of time and the process, and that it was much longer than—and also to release yourself from some of the restraints, being that people do stuff for shows, so that modulates their work and people have deadlines. The other thing is, for show, being more concerned about how somebody else is looking at something or how it measures up with something else—you know what I mean—all these artificial measures that really are not important. It's more about this individual research and perception that demands whatever it takes. So I think that's kind of some of the ways that's changed. Because then, maybe—early on, I think, younger people maybe think about things like, "I'm not going to be able to get a return on this, is this cost-

effective," and stuff like this. But then you realize after a while it's not about that. It's about the fact that you have to do it, you know? That's more important and critical than some of the things that would impede your progress, I guess.

MS. SAVIG: When did you start to figure that out and let go of what other people were going to think of it?

MR. TANNER: Well, I think it was kind of all along because I grew up not being a fan of fashion but more practicality or I take function over style just about anytime. Because it's not like you need to draw that much attention to yourself. I think style is about drawing attention to oneself. But you can learn things and you can firm them up. So being that I was firming up some of these things that were fundamentally instilled in me growing up, I think when that work started to change during the mid-'70s, that's obviously when more of this was happening, in the answer to your question.

MS. SAVIG: How do you think your objects function when they're done?

MR. TANNER: How they function when they're done?

MS. SAVIG: How do your works function?

MR. TANNER: Well, I can only speak of how they function for me—

MS. SAVIG: That's good. That's perfect.

MR. TANNER:—is that they are a collection of smaller energies that have something to say about all of the things that are involved in the making process in the dimension being important, and how they function together. It's just more or less like this, this articulate whole and I guess why it's good. The importance of the collective nature and that that is what makes the whole. And in science, that was important to me, too, that you cannot create or destroy matter; you can only transform it. And that whether you see it or not it's there, and it manifests itself in ways, like the smell of the air, the taste that you can get from that air, how it feels, it makes a form. Even though there's nothing physical that you can grasp, you can feel it. This is what I think my work does for me. I guess you'd have to say it reminds me of all that is both good and bad. It's a powerful energy.

MS. SAVIG: That seems to you to be both spiritual and scientific. Do you—

MR. TANNER: Well, I don't think there's really a lot of difference between art and science. I think it's just the notion of how we conceive of it. But it's all about observation and details of collection, of reflection and kind of transformation. It has a strong relationship to being just involved in that life thing that's intense. I think it's all very important. But there are artists that are kind of scientists and scientists who are artists. People who do what they do best have these qualities that overlap.

MS. SAVIG: In other exhibition reviews I've read of your work, you've spoken—or the critic has talked about the spiritual nature that you try to develop in your work. Could you talk about that a little bit? I think we've touched on in a little bit, but—

MR. TANNER: Well, I don't think that I try to develop it so much as that it's just a natural part—

MS. SAVIG: It's part of it, okay.

MR. TANNER:—of it. It doesn't have to do so much with my intent, as it has to do with what results from that activity. As I told you before, I'm not much on religion, but I think we all feel and explore dimensions that are what we call spiritual. We're just a part of that. It's pretty much a mystery just what life is and how it maintains itself. It's interesting, you see an article and they say, "Oh, I don't know, cherries are good for you and they do this for you and that." Then pretty soon you see "Cherries will kill you." This is why—[laughs]—and everybody has a notion. It seems that things are continuously changing. It's like some kind of super liquid. Then it becomes solid and gas, and then it changes back all over again. But it's reforming itself. Then when it interacts with something else, you have totally another different form. You still have the same elements almost, but just one difference and you get something else.

So it's just interesting how what has happened with me and my work is by the nature of the decisions that are made relative to the parts and pieces and things during different stages. I guess the exercise I get from harvesting the bamboo or turning the lilac branch into a linear element that flows a little different than how it grows determines all that. In fact, the lilac—just taking one plant—when it is growing, how it takes water up, how it distributes that water and how it responds to the light, the sun and everything—I think things grow differently under different conditions. So you have an energy, a rhythm, and intrinsically in that is the spirit of that plant.

That has a lot more to do with it probably, than I do. I influence it in certain ways because I make some choices

or decisions, I'm sure. But fundamentally, the nature of energy itself is manifest in these details.

MS. SAVIG: I guess this would be a good chance to talk about kind of the qualities of your working environment. I think it would be great if you could give an overview of the land that we're on right now and how that plays a part in your work. This is a big topic, but we'll start small. If you just want to maybe give a history of—

MR. TANNER: Yeah, okay. The first thing is, living in Florida was this residential, industrial neighborhood that had a certain kind of tick to it and energy of rhythm—just what you saw when you came out of the house— the things that influenced you. My cousins had a little farm, a little place where they had alligators and pigs and grew a garden, a little larger garden—I thought, "Yeah, I really like the environment that I grew up in." But I thought adding a little bit bigger piece of land to it would be good, because you could have things—and I'd like to have geese and probably peacocks and some things like that. But I realized that I'm in over my head, my wife and I both. And you could never leave the place, as hard as it is. So we lived in Mankato, no place to grow anything. It's just I'm out on the street. I never thought that was any way to live. I need to walk around, so we lived out next to Good Thunder, and a little more space and air. I liked the fact that when I left school, I drove far enough that I could forget about it. That was important—not too far that gas became an extreme problem and something like that.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, yeah.

MR. TANNER: And the other thing was—some of these things, I told you about a little water because that helps to lower the anxiety level of just about anything, I think. Somehow it diffuses the tension and just a stream and being aware of it—even when you can't hear it, you can hear it.

MS. SAVIG: And we're right along the Le Sueur River?

MR. TANNER: Well, the Sueur River runs through our property, yeah.

MS. SAVIG: Okay.

MR. TANNER: Trees have always been important. You know, see some trees and to see a movement of wind, the sunshine, the shadow, stuff like that. Gardening—there's certainly a thing about turning over soil and seeing things grow when you plant and harvesting, too. So all these things—the birds, the animals, you don't see nearly as many birds in town because birds don't hang out in town—too much noise, too much whatever or something. But these things are critical. They remind us of something.

MS. SAVIG: So we're on about 7 acres that you've acquired over the years—and you grow bamboo, lots of different apple trees, beautiful flowers, colorful flowers. You and your wife do this together.

MR. TANNER: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. SAVIG: How has that changed your work? You've kind of gone away from ceramics.

MR. TANNER: Well, it has influenced my work all the time. It's just that you can either live within that environment, that kind of environment or you can live in town. We chose, of course, to live out here. It's because, the fact of it has always been important to me watching the farmers farm. I deduced from that whole need and relationship that if I couldn't farm, I could live where farmers farm. And you have to decide, what's your strongest potential. If I had thought that I could really make a living and do it, I may have become a farmer. But I know that one of my best traits were probably making art, and making art is what allowed me also to teach because, I have some skill and ability there. All these things influenced my work. Like you say, when the wind blows out here, it's different now in the fall than it'll be later in the winter with snow. There's something in that energy that you need to be a part of. So it's the way things move. Now, you see that willow out there, it moves a certain way and has these long hanging limbs with leaves. Then you go back to the driveway, and there's a corkscrew willow—big willow, it's kind of crazy.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, yeah. Those are great.

MR. TANNER: It moves a little differently. You watch the color in that in the fall, and it goes through all these shades and values and not only two. But what happened was you feel, just taking that tree, what it does in terms of its color, shape, and form and movement, and you think about, what is it. You think about the healing nature of that phenomenon. Now, you look at the roof we just put on and it's a metal roof. It's the same color as the backside of the leaves of the willow.

MS. SAVIG: You chose that to match it, I presume—or no?

MR. TANNER: We chose it because that's what we felt at the time. We realized it afterwards—

MS. SAVIG: Oh, okay.

MR. TANNER:—and the relationship between it, and why we've done that color many times. I think the willow suggested that, and some other things that are pretty close, too. When the sun shines a certain way, that light and that's easy, easy, easy on the eyes. It's so easy that most people who've been here before, they will notice the difference.

MS. SAVIG: I could see that.

MR. TANNER: But just the work, too. See, that's an important part of it. Maintaining a place like this is a lot of work. You got to be into it. You got to love it. Even if you complain about it, your complaint is just to respond. It's not like that's deep resentment or anything. It's, like, you chose to do it. And that maybe leads into something that's more fundamental about work. Work is good for you. It keeps you alive. It has been found that the more you work—unless you work yourself to death—the better you are, the better off you are. Because it does something like the water too. It helps to relieve the tension and anxiety. Work is where you get your sense of value and worth from, in the quality of work you do. So that is interrelated and kind of necessary. But you could spend your time—and some do—trying to avoid work. But you'd have to work at that, too.

MS. SAVIG: [Laughs.] Yeah, that's work.

MR. TANNER: So you can't get away from it. You decide, "Okay, am I going to give myself to this or am I going to fight it and probably expend as much energy?" But it has to do with the restless nature of the mind, the spirit and being, and accepting being and certainly being a part of something. I think these things—that connection is what makes a being whole. It's starting to sound religious.

MS. SAVIG: [Laughs.] No, I just think you're a deep thinker. I'm going to pause it for a second.

[Audio break.]

MS. SAVIG: Okay. So kind of transitioning from your work here to your work at MSU, I'd like to hear a little bit about your teaching career. After you left Madison, you took a job in Mankato right away.

MR. TANNER: No.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, no?

MR. TANNER: I went to Chicago for a year.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, okay.

MR. TANNER: It just seems like a place to go that was not that far away—a big city. It's kind of like—

MS. SAVIG: A lot of people do that?

MR. TANNER:—get yourself throwm into something big and see if you can swim, right? Yeah, I remember I took off on the motorcycle to find a place in Chicago—no job—

MS. SAVIG: Yeah.

MR. TANNER:—no money. So at the time my wife and I, we went around looking for places and we went to several places. At least one or two of them were kind of prejudicial, to put it lightly. Then we ended up at this place on the south side of Chicago. I went and told a guy—I said, "Well,we'd like this apartment. But we don't have jobs. But we'll have a job in a month and we'll pay you then." So we didn't have the deposit and they said, "Okay."

MS. SAVIG: Wow.

MR. TANNER: But I guess it was convincing enough. I had it all planned out. In a month my wife had a job teaching. I got a job working for this designer, and it paid all right. We paid our rent on time while we were there. So I got a call from Harvey Littleton that there was this job in Mankato. I was in Madison at the time because I was finishing up this paper I had. Anyway, came out here and started teaching. I think the thing that made me think I could do it was all the teachers I had, who were good communicators, they were dedicated to learning as well as teaching. Also, the good teachers I had were very respectful of the individual. They were not the kind of dogmatics who were trying to cram some program down a student's throat but realized their uniqueness. To facilitate the development of this uniqueness, you create an environment. It's sort of similar to gardening. You fertilize the area, you water it, you take care of it. One thing that was important to me—that the facilities were working at a very high level, that everybody felt totally part of that. And that is—your facility or

studio to come and work—it was important to have that open, available, accessible 24 hours a day. When I first arrived, they were locking the studio at, like, 4:00 or 4:30 in the afternoon, you know? How was anybody was supposed to get any work done? How were they to do their assignments and so forth? So I asked that the studio be left open and they locked it. So I thought about it a little bit and I put clay in the lock—the keyhole. They dug the clay out and they locked it. And I put clay in there again. Then from that point, they cleaned it out and they left the studio open.

MS. SAVIG: Oh. [Laughs.] Good strategy.

MR. TANNER: Not only my studio was left open, and then kids had after hours, but the rest of the art department studios became in sync with that. I had keys for the glass students who had to come in and work all times of night and morning, because they had to charge the studio furnace. We were using raw materials, so you know, there's a lot of downtime where you're just processing the material to be able to work with it. I had at the time—I remember Sister Baber [ph], she was a nun from Good Council. She, with the other students, before the studios were unlocked used to crawl in the window well into the windows to get into the building to work. Of course, when security guards come around, a lot of times they would run them out. So this was a new era for doing that.

Then, when I started having different people come and do workshops and stuff like that, that was something that I obviously learned from—the exposure I'd had what was important and how to profile this teaching, because you can't always connect with every student because of whatever the situation is. It's a short period of time and a very small target.

So you have to do these things that sometimes people wouldn't consider teaching, but it is, as part of your responsibility to expose your students—we used to go on field trips. I would actually drive a group of them to different places. And occasionally—I mean, well, one of our first trips we went out to Toledo, Ohio for a glass conference.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, cool.

MR. TANNER: And you know, they had fun. Part of that fun is dancing, is—I can't remember what the situation was, were there alcohol or anything, but you know, you always try—encourage that or anything. But people—a certain amount of time, they had freedom on their own. These are young adults, you know? Nobody got into any trouble. We never had any bad experiences, except for I think one time. And you know, that's a relative thing.

We were going to St. Cloud to a workshop and it was winter. We got to Klossner, Minnesota, which is not too far from Mankato, right? On a curb this guy had shut down his car. There was snow blowing. You couldn't even see him until you came around the curve. I happened to be the person behind him, hit him in the tail-end. Then one of my students in the next car hit my car, and then another truck hit that car. We got out and we ran back and flagged down a semi that was barreling down on all of us. So we averted a real bad accident.

We called the highway patrol. They didn't come, didn't come, didn't come. Finally, we had to exchange information and stuff like that. It turned out highway patrol, they'd gotten hit. They had gotten into an accident. Then, we were holed up in Klossner while they fixed my radiator so we could limp back to Mankato. So that was one funny trip. But we all had a good time. I mean, we weren't bummed out. We were just glad we could take care of business and do what was necessary.

A year later Elmer Fleege the guy that I hit, he had taken me to court. We went in, sat down. The judge read the thing, and said, "Elmer Fleege, do you swear this is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?" Elmer was an old guy, he looks around at the judge and people and said, "I ain't gonna swear to nothing." He got up and walked out. So I got up and walked out, followed him and went to the john. He was there taking a leak. I said, "Elmer?" "Yeah," he says. I said, "Do you know what happened?" He said, "No, that's why I took you to court. I thought you hit and run." I told him the whole thing. And he said, "Oh, that's what happened." And we go out—

[Audio break.]

MR. TANNER:—it's the same kind of day that it was when the accident occurred. I said, "Let me get in my car and get out of here before Elmer Fleege." [Laughs.] But anyway, we had a great time. We found—somebody knew somebody or something like that. We were in their living room. We were kind of laughing, talking, doing stuff. But I think that's kind of what teaching is about.

We went to NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts] together. We built kilns. We fired work. We critiqued. That was one of my favorite times, the critique, because it's, like, what do you see. What do you feel? And what do you understand from this experience? What kind of energy do we have here? To be critical and analytical is what it takes generally in life. Those kind of skills can be transferred to any kind of occupation

or any kind of discipline.

So my students were art majors, and some of them weren't art majors, but I wanted it to be important to them. In fact, it helped them find ways of thinking and developing good critical skills and a healthy respect for work ethic, you know? That's what I think helps people be successful in life, as well as understanding that all of these things are just tools and steps to this whole bigger thing we call life.

So that's how I approach my teaching. It's, like, during that time I was busy learning, too along with them, just like Don was and Harvey and Amos White and, I think, Mildred J. Hampton. You know, they were all involved in the celebration of life as well, you know? That was not divorce. It was not a static aspect of their being. Their personalities were clear.

MS. SAVIG: What do you see sort of as the role or place of universities in the craft movement in general? Or I mean, I don't know if you're necessarily—you speak just of being a craft artist—or just the role of American art?

MR. TANNER: Well, universities, I see as underrated, grossly underrated—I think are not appreciated enough. Because where would we be without them? I think that's the consideration. It is a place where people have the rare opportunity of having time for themselves and they'll probably never have again to explore, develop new ideas to broaden their being, consider others and other things, to have—well, for me, I had a lot of travel opportunities, a lot of organizational opportunities and experiences, and a chance to learn how to more effectively work with others—the value of that.

It is a unique environment, very unique. I'm not that familiar with other institutions in other countries and so forth, but I have traveled and done workshops and visited many of the university institutions across the country. And I've been impressed.

MS. SAVIG: Could you speak a little bit about some of your most memorable travels? I know you mentioned earlier you used to motorcycle across the country.

MR. TANNER: Memorable travels. Well, let's see. I was at the University of Dallas doing a workshop. This is just one that pops to mind. I was there for a day, I think. The reason I remember this one particularly is I had to both talk to the students, answer questions and complete this piece all in our day. It's the fastest that I've ever worked. I was working so fast that sweat was popping off. I was able to concentrate and focus enough to talk with the students, engage them in conversation, even be funny. I completed this piece I think it was maybe, 30 minutes before my plane took off and it was exhilarating. But I had really good conversation and communication with the students, visited their little workplace and talked about their work a little bit.

But it was quick. Maybe I was there for two days, but I had one day to work on this piece, and my pieces are more complicated and take a while. The clay is not always that fast in terms of being able to support itself. You know what I mean and everything? Because, I do a fair amount of hand forming for each section.

Anyway, it was interesting to me that that happened. I think it was just being able to connect with people. Because I believe you have only a short time to do these things sometimes. You don't have time to get to know people in the usual way. You have to do it in a manner that's really sped up. You can do it if you know what you're doing and if other people—if you're a cooperative bunch. I think that's what happened. Because I used to say to say sometimes, "Well, this is going to be quick, so we've got to focus, we got to such and such— and it's interesting what you can do in a short period of time sometimes under extraordinary circumstances. But I was really pleased that I was part of this experience.

MS. SAVIG: You've been to Russia?

MR. TANNER: Yeah, in 1987 maybe. I went to Russia with Dennis Parks from Tuscarora, Arizona. He mounted a trip composed of a bunch of ceramic artists and we were there. We visited Moscow, St. Petersburg. We went some place in Latvia and one other place. Anyway, it was, like—yeah, I went there. That was really important. It was, again, an eye-opener about how fortunate we are in this country, how much access we have to materials and technology.

We were at one of the artists' places where she lived, and the material was so weak that you could actually pick apart the architecture with your hand, with your fingers. It was sort of, like, some kind of crumbling paper-mache or something.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, my gosh.

MR. TANNER: But the thing that was interesting about that trip is we went to factories, we went to artist studios and we visited with them. We had a great time with the artists. You had to make sure you didn't eat a fruit or drink the water in St. Petersburg, I remember. So we drank vodka instead, and that was good.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah? [Inaudible.]

MR. TANNER: But we walked around, I think, in Moscow, didn't seem to have anybody following us or anything like that. They were shooting a movie. We wandered onto a set and that was pretty interesting. But the thing that was pretty intriguing, too, is, the artists there, they were just trying to make a connection that they could get their work or get themselves to this country. Everybody was interested in that, how they could make some kind of connection. It was kind of, like, throwing a rope or something to grab onto something. I remember one artist in particular wanted to me to take slides and give them to the magazine or something like that. It was hard to try to make them understand that it's not that easy, like, you don't have that kind of power or influence. So it was interesting to me the kind of perception that some people had about the U.S., of people in it and privilege and stuff like this.

But other things were interesting. You had to be part of this guild to even practice art. The artists who were accepted and—I guess given the official stamp of approval, they'd practice art and they were given some kind of a stipend or something like that. But it was interesting, ceramic artists being on the—I don't know what floor, way up—you could take this little elevator to—two of us could get on and then maybe two more, but—sometimes there were a few more people, and it was just sandwiched. It was just interesting that the clay they had was kind of tough working—they are really skilled— because it was not very refined. I forget what it was called—petunse or something like that, a kind of—between a porcelain and a stonewear—kind of rough.

Anyway, it was a good experience, though. I enjoyed the environment there. It was, like, in town, there were just few trees. It's almost like trees looked like a dog tethered at the park, and—

So the hydrofoil I think we rode, and that was—sits up on top of the water and skates along. I enjoyed that. But it was mostly the people. The people were really, really hopeful about something, but it just seemed kind of a little depressed, you know what I mean? So that was my experience with Russia. I didn't see that many black people. That's when like—the Black Sea or something. Anyway, they were—everybody would take a look just like I was landing from Mars. So it was interesting—just a different place. But that was a year before Khrushchev went down, I guess.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, yeah.

MR. TANNER: Glasnost, during glasnost, right?

MS. SAVIG: I don't know.

MR. TANNER: That's what they called it, "openness."

MS. SAVIG: Oh, yeah.

MR. TANNER: But you know, you don't know how things like that affect you, except, what I said is, like, you realize that ingredients make up the mix. This is certainly about—something about when you say, the happiness and the sadness—great pain and sorrow sometimes. So I'm sure that all that have influenced those internally. Then it gets into the work. How can it not? It's like contamination, right? That's what it means. Something has seeped into something else and changed it.

MS. SAVIG: That's a great way of looking at it. Have any other trips, either in the U.S. or abroad, contaminated—[Laughs.]—your work?

MR. TANNER: Oh, yeah. Well, you know, the cycle trips—what was—

MS. SAVIG: Oh yeah, your trips—

MR. TANNER: What was great about those cycle trips, when you think about it, is, this is an amazing country. The environments, the topographics, the wind—I went through Wyoming almost at a 45-degree angle on my bike. I mean, the wind was so strong. I've never seen so many dead rabbits on the road.

MS. SAVIG: Really? Why?

MR. TANNER: They had big—well, they're hit trying to cross. But the wonders of the landscape, going through Utah, the national monuments and the arches, sunshine, open road, highway zipping along on a line, it's something. Arizona, going across the desert, first of all, it was really, really, really dry. It was so dry and hot that the salt had just come out of my pores and dried and turned white on my skin. It was like I had makeup. But it's, like, California, the coast, like, Oregon, Washington state.

MS. SAVIG: So you've been everywhere.

MR. TANNER:—Yeah. New York; Virginia; West Virginia; North, South Carolina; you know, Ohio; and through cities, too, and backroads. I've just been about everywhere except mostly some places up in the Hamptons and stuff, that part of—you know, on a motorcycle. I don't know. It's stunning. It's inebriating.

MS. SAVIG: Mmm hmm.

MR. TANNER: Yeah. Okay. It makes you drunk. You realize how big this place is and we have all of it in this one little country. So many people along the way, talking, camping and stuff like this, a lot of outdoors. So those trips were really important. I'm sure the best—a great deal of where some of those qualities come from in my work were those fundamental days that—I'm glad I took advantage of it then, when I was that young, in my 20's and 30's.

MS. SAVIG: Young and hungry.

MR. TANNER: Hmm?

MS. SAVIG: Young and hungry.

MR. TANNER: Yeah, and strong, because those trips beat you up, because I was riding night and day. It wasn't just a day trip. What was just interesting about it—if I'm coming down the mountain in Northern California at about 2:30, 3:00 in the morning and just riding. Same thing—night trip down from San Francisco to LA in a convoy of semi trucks, and that's not the only time I'd rode with semis. At point—I think I was going down to see my grandmother in Jacksonville, Florida. I'm amongst these semis and somebody said, "There goes Evel Knievel," on my yellow motorcycle. We were on the CB radios. But, it's like a wild animal. You need certain things, right? I suppose that when you see them sometimes—the birds sailing in the wind, just sailing—and then they say sometimes, things are practical and sometimes they're just for fun because you have that—

Then part of that cycle thing was because it was necessary. I think when you have a job, anybody, where you focus and concentrate that much, then you need some time to balance that with other things. Tt's like why people talk and I guess they do research and say people need to get out more and away from the desk and just live a little bit and come back.

But that was a really important balance to me, as well as research. The trips were not just about happy-go-lucky, but they were research into this dimension that I've always felt was and is important.

MS. SAVIG: It kind of reminds me of what you said in the gallery about taking a nap, but over a longer period of time, because you wake up from your nap and sometimes you have to reevaluate where you are—

MR. TANNER: Yeah.

MS. SAVIG:—and that process is really—can really shape what your work is.

MR. TANNER: Mmm hmm. Exactly. You're always in that *en train de*, "in the process of." To realize that helps you to, what they say, balance yourself to stasis. It helps with stasis.

MS. SAVIG: Can you pinpoint how, maybe more formally, these travels and life experiences—can you see them in your work? Did you do—

MR. TANNER: Oh, yeah. Like I said, the sunshine—

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, so color and—

MR. TANNER:—and when I say sunshine, I don't mean just sunshine but the energy.

MS. SAVIG: Right. Your work's very energetic so—

MR. TANNER: There's a larger energy that these things fulfill. They complete a part of your being that you can sometimes not know that's there, if you're not a really grounded individual. You know, because you think mind and intellect, and we've come to feel that we should and can have control. There is no control; there's only influence. Quite often we have very little of that. But you don't ever underestimate that little bit. It's still something.

MS. SAVIG: Would you say then that you have control over your work? Do you feel in control of it or do you feel like your work—[Laughs.]—

MR. TANNER: I participate in my work.

MS. SAVIG: You're participating? That's a good way of putting it.

MR. TANNER: I cannot and will not take responsibility for all of it, right?

MS. SAVIG: [Laughs.] That's great, yeah.

MR. TANNER: I'm not that kind of ego.

MS. SAVIG: I think we talked a lot about the 1980s, and that's when you started teaching. You were also doing this traveling. How was your work evolving at this time from—changing first to ceramics and then where did you take it from there? [It was in the 1990s that I did most of my travel. My teaching began in 1968 –JT].

MR. TANNER: Well, let's see. I want to say that in the 1980s was a real separation because we left the lower campus and merged with the main campus—with them again.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah.

MR. TANNER: I think 1980. So, like I said, about 1982, I was doing the wall relief paintings, which I call it, because they involve color in way that is not always so familiar with people in clay. But it's like the content started to change and I think I realized the development in my skills and ability. And you know, like exposure to all these different artist and places and the demands on the workshops affected that. So that was clear, and that developed from 1982 to the '90s, probably in the middle there, something like that. I was doing clay more intensely.

Then it got to be a place—I don't know exactly when that happened, but I was getting involved with NCECA. I was on the board. I became, after a while president-elect and then president and past president. So I had a lot of years. I spent a total of about, I think 13 years on the board, and that affects your work because it's a lot of involvement.

Now, two or three of those years had been earlier in the '70s on the board. But then that was all packed together, and that was during the time when we built the house over here. And I think the end of my term was the year 2000, something like that. So you know, you think from 2000 to'90, right? 1990 to 2000 would be 10 years?

MS. SAVIG: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. TANNER: So during that period of time, my demands teaching and NCECA and so forth, I think, affected my work. Then I got off of doing regular studio work. I was teaching a mixed media sculpture course at the school. It just felt more—I mean, I don't want to say more natural—but natural for me because of my philosophy, because of my tendencies and concern for material energy and everything to use mixed media. I was doing that with my students. And of course you have to practice what you preach.

So you know, that got me into mixed media a little bit, because I didn't have as much time for the clay—the clay wouldn't wait that long and the mixed media does. So I think that was a natural kind of shift. Then over the years I've done a few pieces of clay. My studio got plugged. Now I got to get it unplugged because I have some more clay things to do, too. I'll probably be working in clay and mixed media.

But that's kind of how I got—it's complicated because of the—you can call it pressures or demands or occupation—that you kind of move around a little bit. It takes a while to actually articulate your components or parts so that you can do something. So the mixed media, when you start out, fundamentally cutting the things down and work, you know, shaping, and then tying and gluing every little tie, that was interesting because I learned that—by having bought some furniture from Mexico that was tied and it looked like kind of tar-like stuff, but it preserved the ties. I figured, "Okay, that would be good for it." So it really makes stuff strong and durable. But you go through that in layers, it's like watching grass grow because those—you know, it's pretty thin stuff. Then even when you get to cloth, it doesn't happen fast.

Some of those—it represents a lot of time, but that's not what I'm pushing in my work—want to make a big issue of it because that's the nature of the process. But it's interesting. That's when I decided—I think it was right around the time we were shifting—moving from over here—over there to here, building places. I decided, "Well, why not take and set yourself a goal of an open-ended amount of time to do this series, having to do with kites, which translates into birds or things that fly," you know?

Then I started working on some of the work you saw. There are a few pieces that I have hanging that I started a long time ago and they probably will get finished sooner or later. But it's like, the schedule is a little open-ended. Because I thought some things would happen that wouldn't happen are otherwise.

MS. SAVIG: So yeah, can you guess what's next? You might go back into clay a little?

MR. TANNER: Well, I could show you some work in clay. What I've been doing—during the early years I got a NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grant. I did some bronzes that must be early '90s. I don't know what I did with the first NEA grant—something good. But I had these pieces cast in bronze. I'd always wanted to do some bronze pieces, but they're pretty expensive. So I have those pieces, and what turned out influenced me. More recently, one or two of the pieces had been no color really but just that value. They're more metallic in their presentation. I think there's something about that. I don't know whether it's just—I don't know.

I've been exposed to art, so bronzes and stuff like that. It's something that's influencing my clay at this point, because a couple pieces that I've done that look pretty much like metal. Sheen and everything is pretty important.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, that'd be really interesting to see.

MR. TANNER: Turn your recorder off for a minute.

MS. SAVIG: Okay.

[Audio break.]

MS. SAVING: Okay, well we were just downstairs and saw a ceramic-piece wall relief that looked metallic. It actually surprised me because your work is so colorful. So I'm curious to learn more about—you mentioned it downstairs, but your—how you are being more drawn to the tonal qualities of—

MR. TANNER: Well, I've always respected and appreciate value—

MS. SAVIG: Right.

MR. TANNER:—because value is more important intrinsically—what you'd say—provocative, than color. That's not to diminish color one bit, because color's a powerful energy. But I guess it's just a different way of saying something. I'd just like to explore what it takes to, I guess, monotone some work or images in a way that I think gets back to some of the earlier influences—the early influence of Buddhist iconography, of course, I talked about.

I think one doesn't have new ideas so much as there is a play or a twist on old ideas. They are like the root of existence and you play off of that. So people who did the images of the Buddha and the iconography were influenced, too. And who knows? They could very well be the same energy. It's intriguing, this—like something that, of course, occurred after doing the bronzes, and you don't necessarily have time to get to the ideas then.

But it seems more probable at this point. At least I've gotten a couple pieces done. There's a piece in the living room that has some of the same character. It was done earlier. I'll show you that after a while. But yeah, it's almost like, can you do that. Can you cut the color for a while?

MS. SAVIG: I'm going to stop it for today.

[Audio break.]

MS. SAVIG: That should work. Okay, this is Mary Savig and James Tanner on October 8th, 2011. We're on disk three. So I just wanted to go back and ask you a few follow-up questions. I'd like to get a better idea of your philosophy on color. It's an important aspect of your work. Could describe that for me?

MR. TANNER: Well, I think color is a healing kind of power. It translates through nature when you look at the variety of ways in which it presents itself through the animals, the plants and minerals even. It's like a rock has certain kind of color and value. I think just drawing on these, being exposed to them, sort of like sunlight, is a very healthy thing. I think it's probably because I believe it has powers of dimensionality. That's very important in, I think, life itself.

That dimensionality of being exposed to color is sort of like fibers in structure. It creates a very complex kind of structural integrity. It's hard to explain it because it's like sunshine. We know we need sunshine, vitamin D, but we don't know exactly how it all works. It's like plants make their own food—photosynthesis. Well, I think we must go through a certain kind of thing like that, too. It's probably in the way of physics much more complex.

So I respond to color. I know I need it in that way. I imagine that I'm not too different from a lot of other people, being, matter. Basically, what we boil down to—and that was exciting, finding out that we're matter, and that there are all kinds and dimensions of matter. I kind of base it on—my color use on that theory. I guess, in my work, I look at it and I see all this color. It comes from this kind of response to nature and myself. I'm part of it, right? So I guess that gives you some feedback to that question.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, definitely. To kind of relay off of that, could you describe your process when you worked primarily with clay? Maybe how your layers of paint and color factored into that process?

MR. TANNER: Oh, just the color in terms of clay?

MS. SAVIG: Well, could you talk about the clay first and what your process was

MR. TANNER: Okay. Well, basically the ceramic wall-relief paintings that I do are constructed from slab, and I use paper pulp and clay, which makes the distribution of moisture more even and the drying more even. The work ultimately is lighter as the paper dries out. It's like it's thinner because I try to keep the weight down, just because you don't need any more weight than is necessary for the piece.

That philosophy is—I guess has to do with—— what do you call it? Using material wisely—not using more than you need or something like that. But I construct these things from slab, but it involved some patching and detail and use of coils and others. It's kind of put together that way.

I work from the point of view of creating a—I guess trusses over that basic slab, that then some of them are covered. Some goes down to the primary slab. You can get a little dimensionality that way because you have what I would call a double-wall construction on much of the piece. That gives it a little more strength and integrity than a flat slab, if you were creating and drawing an image on top of that.

When it gets down to my painting, with the ceramic chemicals, it's like—

[Audio break.]

MS. SAVIG: Okay, we're back—technical difficulties. When that disc stopped, we were just about to start talking about your process with clay. Could you repeat it—[Laughs.]—for us?

MR. TANNER: Now, this is where I talked about construction?

MS. SAVIG: Mmm hmm.

MR. TANNER: Okay.

MS. SAVIG: And then we'll talk about the layers of paint. So could you describe your process with clay?

MR. TANNER: Yes. My process with clay is mostly from slab-building. My clay has some paper pulp, and that helps with distribution of water drying and helps make it a little thinner—I mean, a little lighter, as I make the slabs. I make the slabs as thin as I can and still maintain structural integrity. That's not extreme, but anyway, I build from the slab—large slab to the base vertical structures that are kind of like trusses. Then some of those are covered in developing the imagery. It ends up being cellular and kind of segmented in terms of that structure.

The way in which I develop color after this is dried and fired is to do layers of color. I fire intermittently so that it's hardened and I add things to my ceramic chemicals to make that stick to the clay. I also thicken up the application by taking the water out. I use a lot of low-fire chemicals that are commercial. I mix some things myself. But this allows me to take the water off and get a very—just a heavy viscosity out of the material. I can actually extrude the material. Through a syringe, I can throw it on the surface. I have several methods of doing that. We use the palette and my paintbrush. I actually use some powdered metals, such as the filings from when they make keys from brass. I collect those things, like lead shot from, I guess, shell casings. And this stuff is fired over and over until I reach a point of satisfaction, I guess I would call it, where the piece has—I guess it exudes a kind of life force.

That's how I look at work, actually, when it is ready to be released, it's done, so people call it done. But everything's in flux and it's continuous. You move from one piece to the next, which is the same piece in my notion. It's like it carries over some of the history. Development have a lot to do with keeping the—what should I say—keeping the sewers open, not allowing ego to be omnipotent, and realizing that the materials, you, the process, the tools are all orchestrated to be in harmony in some kind of way, and that it doesn't depend on any one aspect but all of them. It's a cooperative, participatory act.

MS. SAVIG: So do you feel that an experiment can be unsuccessful?

MR. TANNER: Well, I think only if people quit. I guess success—what is success? It's an interesting notion, anyway, and it—gratification that I hear something has happened that I've done, something like that. Is it that things develop and, what I call, this kind of harmony—that out of that comes something that is discovered? It has to do with the reason people work anyway, sometimes looking for the things that they've missed, looking for the details of—I guess, clues from what makes life. What is it?

Reasoning—I guess, just being insightful. It's this thirst for what we call knowledge, but I think experience—I think, you know, too. It has something to do, too, with knowing. We intrinsically and inherently know that we are part of all these other things that we encounter and we participated within.

MS. SAVIG: So about 20 years ago you also started making mixed media sculptures. I guess they had been mixed media before as well but less with ceramics and more with a multitude of materials. Could you talk about that process?

MR. TANNER: Say that again?

MS. SAVIG: You started making sculptures less with clay and more with mixed media, a multitude. Could you describe the materials you've been using and the evolution of that?

MR. TANNER: Oh, yeah. I've been using all kind of materials that are very interesting to me. Like when I was a small kid, preschool, I remember—I must have been about five years old—when I discovered the most beautiful object I thought I'd ever seen. It was a handle from a spray gun and just a metal rod with a little, round handle and that screwed into the metal rod. And it's, like—I don't know why. It was black, and the metal was kind of like metal color.

But that started me. I can remember back then how I responded to this thing. It was like even I thought I was a little loony because I was so in love with this object. I think I just had a natural appreciation and fondness for materials and the shapes and forms they took on, and so forth. So my materials come from basically anything. I mean, it catches your eye. It's like it could be a piece of metal I find in the street, bits and pieces of string or something like this.

But I use fiberglass; old, deconstructed parts of clothing; different kinds of material that will absorb acrylic gel and harden. Bamboo—I grow bamboo a little bit here—and lilac, walnut—the walnut sapling. I've even used some ironwood and just various kinds of plant life for one thing, a lot of that, but—dryer lint, it just goes on and on. I find these things anywhere—pieces of metal. I don't use too much plastic. I kind of stay away from too much plastic. I don't know why that is. Maybe it's just its nature.

But anything that's able to be made part of a skeletal structure I can use to influence the form and shape of the work. Then it's covered with, I guess—what did I call that? Paper toweling—

MS. SAVIG: Paper towels?

MR. TANNER:—and with various—it seems to have—I've tried with other kinds of paper, but it seems to have this is for the basic structure—a kind of quality that makes it strong enough when it's covered with acrylic gel that you can stretch it across a space, and it'll tighten and be real skin-like, taut. Then you can build with other kinds of things on top of that. But I usually put maybe about two layers of paper on it before I then start adding these other materials.

It's really interesting talking about the material. I almost draw a blank, but I use all kind of materials. I guess that's where it'd have been good to be in the studio. But let me see if I can just talk about it. Oh, okay. Basically, my materials come from everywhere, but I expressly have metal rod—that's metal—wood, and that takes up some of the bamboo and all that and lilac—fibers— you know, cloth and so forth. And then I guess these other things kind of—and the variation of these materials because you can be redundant, but they come either in sheets broken or powdered. It kind of goes like that. But you asked me to talk about my process of construction, didn't you? Okay.

MS. SAVIG: Well, first, before we do that, could you just kind of talk about the strengths of using so many materials, maybe the flexibility it goes you?

MR. TANNER: The strength—oh yeah. Yeah. First of all, the materials and simplicity were representative of a voice—related to communication. They have certain qualities that lend their voice in a combination with other things of certain kind of values. I look at it like language. The metal rods have a certain kind of integrity, and fiberglass rods another. Then, if you use something like coat hanger wires or something, that lends you still a different kind of thing.

After you get from the metal, it's like these softer things like the fibers and so forth—it's like you have an integrity that's representative and inclusive of you can say just about everything. That's the way you're looking at it. It's simplistic, but it's one way of opening your mind. It's one way of acknowledging the value, I guess I should say—

MS. SAVIG: That's great.

MR. TANNER:—of acknowledging the value of these simple materials that are in various states—raw states—that would be cast away or so-called garbage. But they are retrievable, renewable and they still have integrity. It's just a different form. I think realizing that and recognizing these materials and their value and the various forms they take is important.

I think that's one of the things that excite me a lot. There's energy there. There's integrity. There's potential. It's like the form that you find them in is critical because it has a certain kind of—what shall we call it—encouragement, a certain kind of value in terms of what it inspires—inspiration, I guess. It's exciting to see those things and recognize them—and I did that as a kid—to recognize them and to get excited about them as if they were new, say, for instance. Because you are looking at something that has lived, that experienced time. I think it has experienced a kind of a use that has changed its nature somewhat on the surface.

That's another thing I'm really into that—because something has a certain kind of physical definition, you don't have a right to disrespect it and, you know, interpret it as useless because of your own difficulties, I would say. Yeah.

MS. SAVIG: Does that play at all into your practices living every day—

MR. TANNER: Of course.

MS. SAVIG:—does that kind of—yeah.

MR. TANNER: Of course, it is fundamental. This is only a way of being part of that. Well, you know, meditating on these kinds of qualities and values is what your everyday is. And I think your appreciation—we all do it when we observe nature, when we allow ourself to be at one with it—so you know, definitely every day. That's the whole point of this kind of connected relationship.

MS. SAVIG: So could you talk about when you start a new work and you start first with the shell? Could you just go through the steps?

MR. TANNER: When I start a new work—and ask me the question again.—

MS. SAVIG: You start with the skeletal structure.

MR. TANNER: Oh, yeah. Okay. It's interesting to me that when I'm starting new pieces, it's almost like I don't know I'm starting it sometimes because I can start with just tying something together or finding a piece and actually putting—laying it around and looking at it, living with it a while, while I'm working on and doing other things. It's like becoming familiar with it.

It's like looking at it and feeling it. Because the material and the parts, the pieces and stuff, suggest things to you. It's like a conversation that you don't know necessarily that you're having. But you look at this thing, and it says something to you. You say something to it and it's back and forth. And that's intimate it can be as much time as, say, eight months or a year to—and this thing is hanging around. You start to build on it and this is a piece, and before you know it you've got some kind of organ that's suggesting a body.

It keeps kind of building that way to until you have enough of it that it actually starts to generate, I should say, a considerable energy. That's when it's going. It's, like, you don't always sit down and intentionally actually decide I'm going to make this piece, and it's going to be like this and that's—you had some kind of epiphany or a vision. I've had things happen in terms of feeling about form and energy that way in terms of a piece. But it never—it's not of a copy, it's not like I made a drawing or anything. Like, it's only an impetus.

But tying structurally these linear elements, work starts with tying those things together. It's kind of like you put two pieces together crossing each other, structure. Then you do the X. You go around one way in between the members and then you go the other way. You've made an X, so to speak. Then after you do about three runs each way, you go through the metal, so, like, separating them. As you tie that together it becomes—you can do a box knot or something like that—it closes it down so that it's really tight.

Actually, the back part of my fingers, my little finger especially, they get calloused sometimes, and they've even gotten sort of tired so much because you pull it there. I've tried gloves. You can't do it with gloves—

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, this stuff—

MR. TANNER:—and you just have to be—have to work those up to snuff. Anyway, when that's tied and fixed, then you take something like—I've used superglue on those areas so that knot doesn't slip or come open again. And acrylic gel, medium, or something like that—it locks that down, so it's actually like a covered surface, that twine or I've used this thread that they use for repairing shoes or sewing shoes together. That just locks it down.

Then, once you get a structure of some dimension and size and you want to cover it, you stretch the paper towel and cover it with acrylic medium over the expanses, bridge those spaces. You might not be able to do it all in one shot, because you started a place where it can reach, and then you take something that goes across horizontally, and then you attach a piece vertically to that, and you pull it to the next station or stable area. You keep changing directions almost like plywood so that it pulls from every direction or other directions. Then dry it becomes the surface, then, that allows other layers to be laid on.

Then you can get into some of the heavier materials like canvas or denim or nylon or whatever. But fiberglass is really good because you lay a thin layer of fiberglass in there, and that becomes very strong, even though it's thin. It's light but it's strong, and sometimes I will use a hair dryer to intensify that because I think then it even gets tighter. But it's interesting with the hair dryer, if you start to dry this and you've got this air blowing on it, this force, it's sort of like you can see the stuff flex. As you flex it sometimes, play with it, it even seems to make those fibers charged with energy, and they get even tighter. So it's interesting watching the material behave and what happens in every step of what you're doing.

MS. SAVIG: What impact has technology made on your work?

MR. TANNER: Well, I think a lot because this whole thing of acrylic gel is like a locking device like tying and it encases things—so that it is in a certain stasis. It reinforces the strength of those materials because it forms like a skin.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, it is skin-like.

MR. TANNER: It's skin-like, yeah. That is pretty important in this process of thinking about its relative, paper-mache. It's really different from paper-mache in that you're not mixing the material in with the paper pulp and going about it that way. But it's just thin layers. I think that the acrylic just adds a lot to that.

Also even that thread for shoemaking is just really tough stuff. It's really tough. I mean, you don't break that with your hand. A lot of other materials are easy to break, so that being fundamentally basic, those are two really important things.

Now, the whole thing of technologies also points to the integration of these various materials that are involved knowing what we know about materials and everything and having developed materials, that there's a certain kind of awareness of integrity and strength and application, how you can apply that stuff. I guess you see a lot, I think, with respect to what you are exposed to. You see a lot of things and you hear a lot of things about various people—experimentation or scientific research, artistic research—ideas. So this is all technology because it has as a way of developing means to ends, a means to develop things.

So I think yesterday an atmosphere of variety, for instance, in the '60s that was the the word "experimentation" you heard a lot. You don't hear it as much today about experimentation. It's still going on, but it's taken on a new mantle or terminology or something like this—but experimentation—meaning you were looking for what was out there. I think the overall influence—just when you think about medically, socially—it's, like, it penetrates the way we think and feel about life today. Now you can Google just about anything, I think more than I can actually respond to, it is a tremendous influence.

MS. SAVIG: Yeah. You've been exhibiting pretty much since graduate school.

MR. TANNER: I have been.

MS. SAVIG: Exhibiting?

MR. TANNER: Yes.

MS. SAVIG: Can you recall some of the character of your early exhibits?

MR. TANNER: Boy, I'm a poor history student, I'm telling you, you know? Because it's—like, I guess I never took all of that as seriously as making the work.

MS. SAVIG: Okay, so—

MR. TANNER: Because the time—and the thing being more critical to me was showing the work or getting—having people see it more even than making any money from it, the activity. It's important that people see the work because that's where the effect of it is. I remember somebody who complained and said—you know, suggesting that I asked too much for the work or a piece or something like this. I said, "Well, you know, it's free to see it. It doesn't cost a thing." As a matter of fact, most artists pay to have their work seen because it gets into transportation or time and all this stuff. But the bottom line was, I was more invested there. The early exhibitions I had, I'm trying to think of. I can't even think—of an early exhibition. See, some things you draw a

blank about because—

MS. SAVIG: Right, well, if they weren't that important, do you recall any exhibitions that were memorable? Any memorable exhibitions?

MR. TANNER: Well, I think some of the exhibitions I was in earlier were traveling exhibitions. They're on the resume, but I can't necessarily refer to a specific one. But they were traveling exhibitions, and I was fortunate to be a part of several exhibitions that traveled internationally. They traveled in this country and they traveled in Europe. So I had the good fortune to have my work seen a lot of places that I would never go. And that, to me, was important because, like I said, having work being shown, being seen by other people is important. That is the impact or the value of that work. I can't say what it is in particular but I think people don't always verbally respond to things. But once you see it, you've seen it. And that in itself does a thing that nobody knows how much change occurs from that. But I know and I think it's powerful and I think it's just part of the ingredients, like what we eat, that goes into a system and makes its impression or contribution or whatever you want to call it. And to me, that's exciting.

MS. SAVIG: How do you think people have received your work over time?

MR. TANNER: I think by and large, positively. I think they have seen something and I think a lot of times it's—promotes silence, which is not a verbal response. I think a few people have been kind of upset by that. I even had a guy who once said, "Your work is like devil worship," you know?

MS. SAVIG: Why?

MR. TANNER: Well, I interpret it this way. It's interesting about everything—the power and energy in anything, and how it affects people. The guy was troubled, and so of course it excited his troubles.

MS. SAVIG: Oh, okay.

MR. TANNER: The next thing is you see what you look for.

MS. SAVIG: Right.

MR. TANNER: And he had some other things going on.

MS. SAVIG: Right.

MR. TANNER: It's complicated. It's not just an open system—you know what I mean—where you're open to seeing what's there or like, engaging someone. He was fighting with—I thought, "Okay, that's good, too."

MS. SAVIG: Yeah, that's really interesting.

MR. TANNER: It's interesting that it could affect somebody that way. Color can make people a little bit anxious and probably even angry. A lot of our culture is built around beige, you know? People can do beige all day, but you give them something more than that, and it's a little too much, you know what I mean?

MS. SAVIG: [Laughs.] That's true.

MR. TANNER: They can't handle it. Of course, you have to make justifications for things and so forth. So this whole thing of garish, because a lot of strong use of color—it's been termed that sometimes. People will say this thing or that thing is garish. But it's also a defense. It's, like, you hardly find too many people talking about that when you see the different kind of fish and the colors in the sea and all the stuff that's going on that's really beautiful, you know? So I don't know. I think these things have power. At first I didn't understand as much and I thought maybe people were dismissing my work. But I don't think so. I think it's another kind of work, and just the basic fact that it's not based on—in commerce makes a difference. I've always known that.

MS. SAVIG: Have you ever done commissioned work for—

MR. TANNER: I did one commissioned piece, and it was just a little one. It was for a local newspaper man and his wife—he wanted a newspaper— anyway, and she gave me—I think it was $500 that her husband had given her for a birthday present, and she wanted me to make her something in glass. And—[Laughs.]—I was apprehensive about it from the beginning, but she gave me $500, and it was the hardest thing for me to make that work.

MS. SAVIG: How so?

MR. TANNER: Because you have the money, and it's, like, you're thinking about it. It puts a little pressure on you, you know what I mean? You have the money, so you know, you're responsible. Anyway, I finally made the

pieces for her and gave them to her, but then I said I would never do that again- take money upfront for a commission. I didn't like commissions so much, anyway. Hers was really good because she said, "You can make anything you want," there were no strings attached.

But the thing of it- it just gets to be too much of a hassle about what is going to be done and how it's going to be done and all these constraints when people actually get into, I guess, wanting to influence the work too much. That for me is a turn-off. It's like making work by committee. I'm not saying it's a bad thing for certain people, but it didn't fit. That doesn't fit my personality. I was in a situation once where I was close to getting a commission—this was a bigger one—and I backed down because I could see it wasn't true to my nature so it wasn't going to be good.

MS. SAVIG: Well, I've reached the end of my questions. Any further reflections on your work that you've thought about the past few days?

MR. TANNER: Well, it's been good for me in that some of these questions and things, even at this time and age, are important to reflect on—to articulate verbally. It's surprising. I guess when you have the opportunity, I always say, to struggle with something, it's good because then it manifests itself in clearest form, and that is good. That's representative of what real good work is if it behaves that way. So I think, yeah, this is—it's surprising.

MS. SAVIG: Great.

MR. TANNER: Yeah. One thing I will say—back when we were talking about influences early on and teachers— was that I am really surprised, and it is amazing that I had so, so many good teachers, you know?

MS. SAVIG: You did. I guess that made you a great teacher, too.

MR. TANNER: Well, when you start with high school, G. Frederick Cash, then Mildred Hampton, Mrs. Blossom—I don't remember her other name—and then I even had a Latin teacher, which—I can't remember his name, but he was just as important. That Latin class, the little bit of Latin that I had, it's not I like learned a lot that I remember. But I can remember, *Agricola fīliam amat,* "the farmer loves his daughter." And let's see, I think they just made an impression and they were such role models. Then when I went to school in Tallahassee, there was Mr. Hooper, Gerald Hooper. I mentioned Amos White, of course. He was my first important ceramics teacher. [… -JT]

But there's a lot of people there still—and then to go to the University of Wisconsin with Don Wrights, Harvey Wilson, and Hal Lotterman, my three major professors were just incredibly important. But not only that—there were other teachers that made an impact. I can't remember having a bad teacher or what I would refer to as a "bad teacher."

MS. SAVIG: That probably says something about you as a student, too.

MR. TANNER: Well, could be, but I valued them and what they were doing. That did help my teaching a lot.

MS. SAVIG: Well, thank you. I'm excited—

MR. TANNER: Well, thank you.

MS. SAVIG:—to see your work—where your work will go with your barn studio.

MR. TANNER: Yeah, I think it will. See, that's another piece—

MS. SAVIG: Oh, yeah.

MR. TANNER:—that is kind of a little bit like that one downstairs—

MS. SAVIG: It's that metallic.

MR. TANNER:—but it had more sheen to it. It's shiny. I used to really—the reflection—reflected light and stuff like that, so it's trying to get away from it—the greasy feel, I always call it. But it's really interesting. I hung that piece. It's been there for several years now, and I look at it often. It's interesting how I had to accept it, that piece, in that state or form and the light and everything changes. It's just beautiful, the effect of it, the energy.

MS. SAVIG: It goes back to your ideas about continuity. It's changing.

MR. TANNER: Uh-huh. Yeah.

[End of interview.]