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Oral history interview with Kay WalkingStick, 2011 December 14-15

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Kay WalkingStick on December 14, 2011. The interview took place in Jackson Heights, Queens, N.Y., and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project For Craft and Decorative Arts in America funded by the William and Mildred Lasdon Foundation.

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

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Kay WalkingStick at the artist's studio in Jackson Heights, New York on December 14th, 2011, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is Disc Number 1. Good morning.

KAY WALKINGSTICK: Hi.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's start with some basic biographical material—take care of that and move on to the artwork. You were born in Syracuse in 1935?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. What was the date?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: March 2nd.

MS. RIEDEL: March 2nd, okay. And would you discuss your childhood and your family, your experiences growing up?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think there's a book there. [They laugh.] I was born in the Depression. My father was a very special guy, but I never knew him. I was raised by my mother.

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

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Simon Ralph Walkingstick.

MS. RIEDEL: And your mother?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Margaret Emma McKaig—M-C-K-A-I-G. As far as I know, my father did not capitalize the "S." His father was Simon Ridge Walkingstick. He was a prominent lawyer in Oklahoma. He was the first Indian lawyer in Oklahoma.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: He was—practiced before the supreme court, apparently, of the state. So he had a maybe not a traditional Indian background.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: He [Father –KW] was raised with and educated in American jurisprudence, so he went to Bacone, which was a school for Indian students, and then to Dartmouth. He was one of the few Indians who actually went to Dartmouth during that period, that early period, even though it was a school that originally designed for Indians.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They didn't—well, there's a book about it by Colin—what's his name? [Dr. Colin Calloway]. Shoot, I'll get you the name. But there's a book about Indians at Dartmouth and there's a picture of my father in it. [… - KW]

MS. RIEDEL: Fascinating.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—who was able to go there, partly because it was expensive. Even though they had Indian scholarships, to live there was expensive. And he had oil money.

MS. RIEDEL: Oil money?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oil money. There was oil on the Oklahoma Cherokee land. So he was able to go to Dartmouth. And there's a beautiful picture of him in this book by—I think his name is Calloway and he teaches at Dartmouth. He's Dr. Calloway, I believe. At any rate, the reason I'm mentioning this is that my mother met my father when my father was traveling around with the YMCA. He was, I think, lecturing. And he was very active in the Y at Dartmouth. He was also a football player. He claimed he was All-American but I'm not sure that was true because he wasn't mentioned in this book—that I just read, actually—about Indians at Dartmouth. [He was not on the football team according to Dartmouth records –KW]

At any rate, my mother met this great big handsome Indian guy on the train. She was going to Philadelphia to visit her grandmother there. And, as I say, he was traveling the country giving lectures to the YMCA groups. He was still at Dartmouth. He went into the service with the YMCA as a captain in the English Army because he was not a citizen of the United States, and therefore was not drafted because Indians were not citizens—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—until '24. So he joined the English Army and went to the Middle East with the English Army. [He was actually attached to the YMCA with the British Army –KW]

MS. RIEDEL: You're right; there's a book. [Laughs.] Gosh.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But he and my mother married prior to his departure.

MS. RIEDEL: From meeting on the train.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, and then he started visiting her in Syracuse, New York. I'm sure her parents were not for this. She came from a middle-class family. And my grandfather worked for the jeweler—what was it? Howe—H.J. Howe Jewelry Company in Syracuse, New York. He was the accountant/comptroller, but they didn't call them that in those days. But he kept track of everything that came and went in the jewelry store. And so, you know, he was a clerk, which was a kind of a middle-class sort of job. She came from a big family, churchgoing, and here was this, you know, handsome, strange man out of the blue who was coming to visit her from Dartmouth.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: He was—well, maybe I'm a little prejudiced, but he was an unusually beautiful man. Sometimes these Cherokee guys are just gorgeous. [I believe - KW] Johnny Depp is a Cherokee, for instance. I mean they can be just gorgeous. And he was big. When he was in Oklahoma they used to call him "Double Biceps" because he was such a tough guy. Anyway, they married. She [worked –KW] during the rest of the war. He went off to Mesopotamia, came back to Syracuse and took her to Oklahoma. So they were in Oklahoma until '35. [My mother was a "farmerette" during the war.]

MS. RIEDEL: Where in Oklahoma?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, Muskogee; I don't know where else. Muskogee is what sticks in my mind. They had four children in Oklahoma. My mother got pregnant with me. By that time my father was drinking heavily. He was—his was not the usual Indian story—

MS. RIEDEL: Clearly.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but he ended up in the same place—very tragic in my mind because he had such potential. He was a geologist. As I said, there was oil money there. I think he traded his oil shares just to get booze in the end, so that there was no money. It was the Depression.

MS. RIEDEL: Boy.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: He was drinking heavily. As I said, he was a geologist and, you know, he was best friends with the Phillips boys of Phillips Petroleum, you know that kind of thing. It was like the beginning of the oil industry in Oklahoma, that was when my mother was there, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: This huge industry that started with a bunch of people just staking claims, really. Anyway, my father focused on alcohol instead of the oil. And so she finally decided that she had to leave—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—because they were literally starving, apparently—the kids. I mean it was very bad times.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So my Aunt Lil sent them some money and [my mother –KW] went to Syracuse pregnant with me. And so I was born in Syracuse. I never knew my father. I mean, I met him a couple of times but I never knew him. When I was a kid I regretted that a lot because my siblings had all these wild stories about Oklahoma, right, all these wild stories. And my mother had some interesting Indian stories about, you know, visiting Indian relatives and stuff like that. But I was raised in a white protestant culture in what was then considered an excellent school system in Syracuse, New York. We were poor. My mother took in washing, scrubbed floors, things like that. We lived in a flat—a two-story house, little two-story house on Woodland Avenue. It was 114 Woodland Avenue. And I have very happy memories of my childhood. I did not have a bad childhood in any way.

MS. RIEDEL: You were the youngest of four.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was the baby—everybody's baby.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: My grandmother sent a roast over every Sunday when I was little. So we always had meat on Sunday and we ate well. I mean I'm not saying that we didn't eat well; it's just that we didn't have a whole lot of meat. But, hey, my granddaughter is a vegan. [They laugh.] So you can eat well without meat. Loving family. My Aunt Lilly lived with us. And she was the church secretary, so she had a regular income, and so did my mother. I mean, you know, it was just not perhaps the classiest kind of job. My mother always said, "If it's an honest job, it's a good job," and that's true. My—

MS. RIEDEL: You just—sorry, go ahead.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: My mother was—you know, you talk about big influences in your life. My mother was the big influence in my life.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It wasn't a teacher, wasn't an artist; it was my mother.

MS. RIEDEL: And why?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Why? Well, she was a Victorian lady. She was a little Victorian lady. She had this kind of Victorian sensibility, in a way. But in another way she was really very modern. You have to think—she was born in 1898. She was—that's a long time ago.

MS. RIEDEL: That is a long time ago.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And it was a different culture.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And every day she said to me, "A smart little girl like you ought to make something of herself."

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And then she'd say, "You know, it's a man's world, Kay. All you have to do is be better than the men."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: She said, "And you know you can be."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That was unusual for that time.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You bet.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm floored.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You bet. And it wasn't that I heard it once. I heard it over and over and over again: "Stand up straight. Be proud you're an Indian." She was proud of the fact that she had Indian children.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I mean, interesting lady—interesting, complex lady.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And, as I said, sweet little kind of Victorian little lady, so—

MS. RIEDEL: But adventurous. Off she'd gone.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But adventurous.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: She was a reader. She was very into nutrition. So here we were, not a lot of money, but boy, we ate right all the time. She was very involved in the idea that I could do something with my life important. Now, she didn't encourage me to be a doctor. She said, "Oh, why don't you become a nurse? That would be wonderful."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: "Or a teacher." Well, by that time I had much bigger ideas. [Laughs.] But obviously she was sewing these seeds of growth in fertile field. But she was adamant that I do something with my life that was important. And I got this, you know, from day one.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you spend a lot of time when you were young drawing—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—looking at art?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes. Everybody in the family drew. And I have a brother who is an artist and I have—

MS. RIEDEL: What's his name?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Charles. Charles WalkingStick. He draws like an angel. He worked for the Post Office, I think, for many years, and also GE [General Electric] doing illustration for their various publications.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And he paints and, you know, he's just a neat guy. He's going to be 90 this year.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my gosh.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And he looks like he's—he could pass for, like 65, right? He has jet black hair, except a little teeny bit of white here. And I think it's natural; I really do.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think it's natural. I don't think he has the patience to dye it. He, like my father, very handsome. The men in the family are just good-looking. And he's—did he encourage me? I don't know. I guess he did. He just took it for granted that I was going to be an artist just like everybody else, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Your brother did?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I think he—and I think—

MS. RIEDEL: He was quite a bit older than you?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes. Well, he's not that much—I'm 76 and he's going to be 90, so there's—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, a few years.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, a few years. He was a teenager when I was born. I have a sister, Betty, who is going to be—oh, Jesus, I think she's going to be 88 or 89—88. I'm not sure. I'm not sure how much time there is between her and—actually it's between her and Mack. And then I have another sister, Joy, who is nine years older than I am. So they all came—in Syracuse I had this family that was all older. That's why I was the baby. I mean everybody took care of me. And my sister Joy threatened me all the time, but—[they laugh]. There is this need

at this—you know, you get threatened by somebody.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But as I said, I had a very nice, pleasant childhood. I was kind of spoiled by everybody. And the truth is that I was wearing hand-me-downs, but I thought they were lovely, you know. I thought wonderful hand-me-downs.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And, as I said, we ate well, and I just had a nice childhood.

MS. RIEDEL: And was there much art involved? You'd mentioned that you did a lot of drawing.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: A lot of drawing and I loved paper dolls. My Uncle Murray was an artist. He was my mother's youngest brother, Murray McKaig—Murray Peterson McKaig. And he, like my mother, was little. The two of them were about five-two. And he taught art in the public schools—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—in Horseheads, New York, which is south of Elmira—I think it's called Horseheads—and other schools, but that was the last school he taught in.

MS. RIEDEL: Any trips to museums? Anything like that?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, it was mostly seeing my family's paintings. I had paintings all over the house.

MS. RIEDEL: From your siblings and your uncle?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Mostly Uncle Murray.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Because Uncle Murray was at Syracuse University getting his MFA when—

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative] He got it in illustration, I think, not in painting. But that must have been—I remember his graduation. But that must have been in the [late 30's –KW] because I remember I went to his graduation. But he had a lot of his paintings stored at our house, and we hung them around the house. And so I saw paintings all the time. And my Uncle Charles was—I think he was Charles Henderson [McKais]. He was a designer for Syracuse China, and he also painted. We didn't have any of his paintings but I used to see them at his house. He was a really more of an illustrator kind of painter, but wonderful stuff. I mean, at least I thought so then.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you spend much time out in the natural parts of Syracuse, any of those wonderful waterfalls, the Finger Lakes area?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there a strong sense of nature?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No. Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I had a very closed childhood.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, well, there was zero money, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Okay?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So there was no summer camps. There was no—you know, Dirk talks about going horseback riding in Colorado, and stuff like that. You know, there was nothing like that—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—in my childhood.

MS. RIEDEL: No summer swimming holes, that sort of thing?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, yes, there was some but very little—very little of that sort of thing. I mean, I did not have a rich childhood in that kids today expect to have these childhoods that are—you go to summer camp and do painting there or horseback riding, and you do all these wonderful things. I didn't have that kind of a childhood.

MS. RIEDEL: But I'm just even thinking running around the hills in that area.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, we used to go play in Oakwood Cemetery.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oakwood Cemetery was beautiful. And we used to—of course it's winter, you know, it seems like three-fourths of the time there. So there was a lot of wintertime sledding.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Sledding was wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: All right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I remember tobogganing down Colvin Hill [On Colvin St., Syracuse, NY]. That was just terrifyingly wonderful. So a lot of that sort of thing—sort of simple old-time kind of recreation—

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—not this organized recreation that kids have today.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. It's just that nature has played such a significant role in your work, really—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I know. It's interesting, it's it?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it's interesting that you didn't have a strong sense of that as a young person.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I did not. I used to go out to—my Uncle Charles had a farm in—shoot, I'm sorry, I can't think of the name of the town. It begins with a "C." Isn't that terrible, the way the brain goes? [Camillus, NY –KW] Anyway, my uncle had a little farm—it was sort of a gentleman farmer kind of farm—and a little old farmhouse. It had no—when I first went there, there was no indoor toilet and there was an outhouse and there was a pump in the kitchen, you know, and it was really charming. And slowly but surely he built the house into a modern home. But he had—he farmed a little of it, sort of, and he kind of kept animals sort of once in a while. And he worked full time at Syracuse China.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So he really didn't do this except as sort of to entertain himself.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And he had two daughters, Anne [ph] and Charlene [ph]. And we used to—sometimes I'd go out there, and that was kind of bucolic. And there was a little pond that we used to go swimming in, but I saw a snake there once and I'd never go in again, typical of me. I didn't like snakes. I didn't want to go back in after that. Anyway, it was probably not a Water Moccasin or anything horrible like that. Anyway, that was fun and I really enjoyed that a lot. And we'd have family get-togethers sometimes there. Of course my mother, as I said, was from a very large family, so I had a lot of extended family—uncles and aunts and cousins and like that. And so that played a big part in, I think, my general good feeling about my life, was having that extended family. That sounds awfully corny but it's true, I think, in this instance. I mean, I wasn't a single child in a lonely place at all. I was surrounded by family a lot of the time. My Uncle Howard and Aunt Elsie [Aunt Elsie McKaig Volk –KW] lived quite a ways away. I mean, you couldn't walk it easily, but Uncle Howard had a car so he would take us driving sometimes on Sunday afternoon, and we'd go out to, oh, tour the Onondaga reservation, and it's very

pretty out there. And I can remember when I was about 8 or 9 saying—and I wanted to paint it, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I was always talking about painting, or making paintings. I was just into it really young.

MS. RIEDEL: And you painted as a child.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No.

MS. RIEDEL: But you talked about painting?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I talked about it. I've been talking about it all my life, and still am. And we were sitting in the back seat—I remember this so well—and Onondaga Valley I guess is what it was, but it was this beautiful valley that you drive past, maybe not any longer. I think it's on 611. It used to be—probably all homes now. And the reservation is over here, and you're driving and you can see this long vista of rolling hills, pretty Upstate New York, you know, look.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I said, in this big chirpy voice, "Oh, I wish I had my brushes." [Laughs.] And I was kidded about that until my mother died. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's pretty funny.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Little Kay.

MS. RIEDEL: "I wish I had my brushes." [They laugh.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Isn't that silly?

MS. RIEDEL: Precocious.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So, anyway, I was thinking about painting for a long time before I actually did it.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did you come to focus on paining? Were there art classes in high school that got you interested?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, as I said, I had paintings around all the time as a child. And I thought, oh, shoot, I can do that.

MS. RIEDEL: When did you actually start to paint?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I painted a little bit on my own before I went to college, but I really didn't paint until I went to college.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I did watercolors.

MS. RIEDEL: In high school?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: As a kid, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Landscapes primarily?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't know. I don't know what I did. I won a—oh, shoot, what are those things—Scholastic Art Award.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Scholastic Art Award. And in junior high school—I must have been about 12—about '48, I'd say.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was 1948. And I think it was a city scene, actually, that I won with. I don't know. They had a show but I think—and I couldn't figure out what they liked about it because I didn't think it was very good.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Were you the class artist? Were you recognized for your art ability?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I guess I was, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: When I was little, the teacher—I can remember the teacher making fun of me because I couldn't follow her directions. She'd give these stupid directions that I thought, well, if I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it, you know. And I'd make my own way to do it, and she didn't like that. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, she didn't like creativity. She liked knowing your colors.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So you graduated from Syracuse High School?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No, no. No, I went to—I went to Onondaga Valley Academy, which is a public high school in Syracuse.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: [First I - KW] went to Roosevelt Junior High School—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—which was a really good school in those days. One of my great regrets in life is that I didn't take Latin when I could have because they had a good Latin program, and I didn't take it. I didn't want to do it. And that's one of the things my mother should have encouraged me to do: "Oh, for goodness sakes, Kay, do it."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But, hey, she wasn't perfect. So I went to—and then my brother died in the war. My oldest brother, Sy [Syvertsen Ralph WalkingStick - KW], died in the Second World War in Luzon [the Philippines –KW] in '45. He was—I think his birth date was the 6th—or the 3rd of July. It was right around the 4th of July. I think it was the 3rd of July. And my mother was the 13th. And he was killed, I think, on the 7th of July, right before the war ended. And then they dropped the bomb very shortly after his death, not exactly because of his death, you understand. [Laughs.] But anyway, and then the war ended in August of '45. So my mother, brave, stoic, brokenhearted—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—she—we started moving. And I don't know; in the five years after my brother's death we must have moved four or five times.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't know. She just decided she'd have to go somewhere else. It would be better somewhere else, you know, that sort of thing. So we'd go someplace for a year, year-and-a-half and then we'd move on.

MS. RIEDEL: Always in the same general Syracuse area?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, mostly Syracuse, and then she decided that my sister was having—my sister Betty, who was the older sister, was having trouble with a pregnancy. She had married a Presbyterian minister. They had a church in Huntington Valley by then. She'd married right before the war. And she was about to have her second child. It was Peggy [Theobald]. And she had a lot of trouble. She spent a lot of time in bed. So mother decided that we would go down there and be with Betty for a month or two. The child was born in—January 27th, I think. And, anyway—when was that? That must have been [1950 or –KW]1951, right? Something like that. Anyway, we went down there. My mother decided she liked it there. She got a job with a physician, working in a physician's office as a secretary and just sort of general—and she liked it being there and she decided we'd move there, right? So that was really our last move.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And we moved to Huntington Valley, Pennsylvania in—as I say, it might have been in ’50, maybe ’51. I’m not sure. I went to Lower Moreland High School. They tested me and they said—which shows the difference in the school system—“Well, we could actually graduate you and just not take you at all, but since you’re only 16, we’d better.” I mean, they—I tested as high as their graduating seniors in all the fields they tested me in, and that was because of the school system I came out of. So I went to high school in Lower Moreland for, I think—and I had to skip a semester because I was on January to January years in Syracuse and they were only in September to June.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I had to skip a year, and--or a semester. So I think I was there a year and a half. I think they put me in the second part of the 11th grade, and then I did graduate right there.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did you come to decide on Beaver? And were you intent on studying art?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, as I said, Lower Moreland—I shouldn’t rag on Lower Moreland. They gave me an award a couple of years ago, which I thought was awfully cute of them. But the program just wasn’t very good. I mean, nobody was really—I had a year’s scholarship to Penn that I refused because it was only a year and it frightened me that I couldn’t—you know, what if, what if, you know? Well, somebody should have said to me, “For God’s sake, Kay, take it, and when it’s up we’ll think of something else.”

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know? My mother did not have that knowledge to do that. She just—I mean, she was a big booster but she didn’t really know how to manage things like that. And there was no one in this school that had the sense enough to say—tell me to do that either.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They just didn’t know what to do with me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I wanted to go away to school. It frightened me. I was kind of a homebody. That’s one of the things that—those experiences with kids that are shipped off to all sorts of things when they’re in high school to do things. You know, I have a niece who went to Peru, and things like that. That’s great because they have the courage to take on things when they get out of high school. I really didn’t. I was kind of a chicken, and frightened of things. And these what ifs were always looming. And if I had a kid who was offered that, I would push them into it, you know. But anyway, I decided that I didn’t want to go to school. If I couldn’t go away to school, I just didn’t want to go to school right away. So I didn’t. I worked at Quaker City Gear Works as a receptionist. I thought about things I could do and just had some of—a mindless time for a couple of years.

MS. RIEDEL: When did you graduate high school?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: 1952.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I didn’t go to—I guess I went to Beaver in ’55.

MS. RIEDEL: And Beaver is now called Arcadia, is that correct?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Beaver College in Pennsylvania.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, it was a girls’ school.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know why they changed that name?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I do.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Damn computers, you know. I don't blame them. I mean they did the right thing. It's just so sad. I liked the name of Beaver, those little furry animals. I like them. Anyway, so I was working at Quaker City Gear and I met—maybe—I didn't meet—well, actually—oh, I was dating a fellow named Jerry Moyer. I happen to remember his name because he contacted me recently because he was laid up with a bum leg and he was just contacting anybody he'd remember from his youth. And he was going to Princeton. And I met him at a dance, I think. And he was a nice fellow, and part Cherokee, as a matter of fact, and good-looking like all those darn Cherokee men. And he took me to a sort of a boarding house kind of thing that they had for girls that visited [Princeton –KW]. And there were all these girls there talking about their school experiences at Smith and Vassar and blah, blah, blah, blah, you know, on and on. And I thought, darn it, I'm as smart as they are. Why aren't I in school? Why aren't I going to college? Why am I not—why am I working at a dumb job? And this was in February, I think, maybe a little earlier than that. And I thought I have to do something about this. I have to do something about this. And I went home. And I didn't see much of Jerry after that. I mean, we dated a couple of times, you know. In those days dating was—how can I put this? It was certainly virginal on both of our parts, it was really just dating.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The '50s were different. It was really just dating. And so you got to know somebody before you hopped in bed with them, which was sort of nice, yes, actually. I won't tell you any more about that because that's a whole can of worms, because I think that there are some very positive things about the changes. But, anyway, I dated Jerry a couple more times and that sort of ended. I've forgotten why, but it sort of ended. And maybe it was because I met Michael. I decided to go to Beaver because it was there.

MS. RIEDEL: Because it was there. [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was there. That was the primary reason. I had a car. I could drive there in 10 minutes. I could live at home. By that time I realized that if I was going to go to college I had to make some concessions—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—that I couldn't go away because it was too expensive. I had to live at home. I had to keep my eye on the donut. I had to keep my eye on going to school, and that was what was important, and I would just do it. And I'd do it in the easiest fashion I could, which was to go to Beaver. It wasn't a bad school. It wasn't the best school—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but it's okay. They had an okay art department.

MS. RIEDEL: Any teachers or fellow students that were significant?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, Benton Spruance was significant, for sure. You know he was—did he—he could have been a lot better, but he was the only art teacher I had. I mean, like Beaver, I went there because it was there. It was right there. You know, if I'd lived in Bryn Mawr, I would have gone to Bryn Mawr. It didn't really matter. And that's perhaps a terrible reason to pick a school, but that's the truth.

MS. RIEDEL: And you finished there in '59 with a BFA?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: A BFA. And Ben Spruance was kind of—I don't know whether he took any of us seriously or not, but I thought he took me seriously. But I'm not sure of that, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: And you had decided to major in art?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, well, there was never any question about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That was all there was—never a question. And I was going to be a costume designer, dress designer. I like clothes. Still do. And I wanted to be a dress designer, and I knew somebody who was a dress designer, had gone to Moore, which was another women's school in Philadelphia. And I've forgotten her name, but she made these really swell clothes. And my sister, Betty, could sew. And when we first, as I said, went to Huntington Valley, we lived with my sister and her husband Don and their, by then, two kids, you know? And I was very close to those children. And Betty could sew. My sister Betty sewed and she taught me to sew. And then she had this girl—whether she was babysitting or whether she was a friend or what, I'm not sure exactly, but anyway she would be around. And she was this designer and made these wonderful clothes, and she was going to Moore. And so I thought, oh, that's a wonderful thing to do. So I wanted to be a dress designer, and went to Beaver. They did not have a designing department, of course, but they did have a fashion illustration

department. And I thought, oh, well, I'll major in that. And then I didn't. And I thought, well, I'll major in design because there's—you know, you can get work out of that. And I just didn't like it that much. I liked painting. I started—I took a freshman painting course and I thought, oh, my goodness, so all the rest of it just didn't interest me at all. My other courses interested me, sort of, but it as all, as I saw it, sort of just preparing to be a painter.

MS. RIEDEL: What were the strengths and the weaknesses of the program?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Of the art program or the program in general?

MS. RIEDEL: The art program.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, the strongest part was Ben Spruance taught lithography, so you could get an opportunity to do lithography. But he wouldn't let us actually pull the prints or use the etch because we were girls and we might hurt ourselves. So, you know, there was—as I said, there were some big problems. I taught myself how to do silkscreen because—apparently because of that. And what were the strengths of it? I suppose it was a good basic education in Bauhaus design, actually. I mean, it was the '50s.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And certainly not contemporary painting. I mean, Ben Spruance was a draftsman/illustrator. Nice prints. I don't know if you've ever heard of him but he was—you can look him up. He's a good—I think known for the prints that he did in the '30s more than anything else—'30s and '40s, so a social realist, right. But we had figure classes and we had, you know, very, oh, expectable—that's what you'd have to say for it: expectable, predictable. They just gave me a doctorate.

MS. RIEDEL: I read that, yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And which is awful sweet.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I was, of course, thrilled. And I gave a silly speech. Did you hear the speech?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The speech was on the YouTube and still might be. I talked about love. Nobody talks about love at graduation.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I did. Anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: Weren't you recently remarried at that point?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, Dirk and I have only been together for a few years. We got together in 2008, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, it hasn't been long at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And so, anyway, they gave me this [doctorate –KW]. But I met a lady there [… - KW] and she said, "Isn't it remarkable that there are so many women in the United States who came out of Beaver who have done so much with their lives and it was such a mediocre school?" [They laugh.] And I think that's an interesting view. [But I don't agree. It had many good aspects—those women prove it! –KW]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That somehow, in spite of [this reality -
KW] it's a much better school now apparently than it was then [and –KW] I got educated.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They gave me a half scholarship. I was able to design my program so that I could work nights, Bell Telephone. So I was a telephone operator throughout my entire—I taught modeling for a short time at the beginning, but I didn't make—dress modeling, not nude modeling. [Laughs.] I couldn't make any real

money at that because I couldn't get enough jobs in Philadelphia, you know. So I stopped that and I got a job with Bell Telephone, and worked there full time in the summer and half time during the winter, and made enough to pay for my—every year I'd have this huge bill at the end of the year for art supplies, so I'd work during the summer and pay off my bills so I could go back to school in the fall. I mean, you know, I just—I did something that I don't think you can do now because school is so expensive. When I went to school I think it was $800 a semester. That sounds right. Yes. I mean, really cheap. Now, of course that was a lot more money then. I was making $1.25 an hour.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And that was after a raise at Bell Telephone. But it was something that one can do.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't think you can work your way through college anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't think it's possible. You have to take out these huge loans. So maybe life was easier. People always get annoyed with me when I tell them that the '50s were really great. The '50s were impossible for women in some ways—annoyingly so, you know, like, "Who the hell do you think you are, behaving that way to me?" I've had people say terrible things to me, mostly men, and unable to take you seriously because you're a pretty young woman. That kind of thing was common. But there was a grace to the '50s. There was a grace. And you could set out to do something like [attend college] and afford to do it. I don't think it's possible today. But, anyway, I got a relatively mediocre education but I got an education. And I love books and I love learning and I love educating myself. And I got out of college and realized I had to teach myself how to paint.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I did.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Basically I did.

MS. RIEDEL: So you finished your BFA in '59, and there was a lapse of 14 years or so—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL:—12, until you went back for an MFA at Pratt?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Were you painting that whole time?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I was. I was actually showing a little bit. I had a show—

MS. RIEDEL: Were you still in Pennsylvania?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No. I married right out of college to a young man who lived nearby. There was a Swedenborgian community right up the hill.

MS. RIEDEL: Swedenborgian.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] My mother worked for [Michael's –KW] Uncle Andy. Uncle Andy was the town doctor. I met Michael—I was at—I was working at a place called the Chatterbox, which was a little restaurant across from where I lived on 2nd Street Pike [in Huntingdon Valley, PA –KW]. And this little place was right next to a beautiful house that George Washington had visited. So it was this beautiful little old Pennsylvania town with these modern buildings right in between—modern life '50s modern, you know—so that it was kind of incongruous. The whole thing was a little bit incongruous. But, anyway, [Michael –KW] would come in for grilled cheese sandwiches at night, and I always managed to burn them and he always forgave me. And we started dating. I was working up to going to Beaver, so we met around my birthday, I guess. I turned 20,

1955. And he was just out of the Army. He had gone into the Army. He had messed up at school. He was going to this [… - KW] school in Bryn Athyn, a Swedenborgian college. They actually had a college. And he managed to just mess up, so he was drafted into the Army for the Korean War. Never went to Korea, which was a blessing. And we had just been—he had just gotten out of the service. The war, you know, was over. And I met him, as I said, he would come in for grilled cheese sandwiches. And we started dating. So I was dating Michael when I started at Beaver, and he went off to Penn State, where by that time he was sensible enough to do well. So we'd see each other the way kids managed to see one another. I would sometimes go up there on the train, or he would come down, but not very often. It was certainly not a hot and heavy romance for a while. As I said, it was the '50s. And we broke up for a while and then went back together and, you know, like that. And when I graduated, within the next two weeks we married. We had a—so we dated all the way through college.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And the last year we dated—we were really serious about it, but it was a four-year romance before we actually married. And I was pretty sure that this was the perfect guy, which is nice. It was, like any marriage, not perfect, but I certainly thought he was perfect then. He died in '89.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So then we were married—we were together over 30 years, but we were married 29-and-a-half years, not quite 30. And we had two kids. So we married and went to New York, where he wanted to be in the—he wanted to be a journalist. He wanted to be in the magazine business. And so he got a job at McGraw-Hill "Engineering News-Record", or something like that. And we lived in New Jersey, and I had a kid. And we lived little—various rental places in New Jersey, because it was a lot cheaper in Jersey.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I tried painting all the time. You know, the—as I said, I was teaching myself how to paint, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: There was no—you didn't have to work at this point? You were staying home taking care of your child and painting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I probably should have worked. I mean, we certainly lived in penury, because I didn't work. But, as I said, it was the '50s and one did have this notion that it was appropriate to stay home with your children—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—and raise them yourself rather than going out to work and having somebody else raise them.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you going to New York museums or galleries, and familiar with what was happening in the painting scene in the city?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, gradually, yes, but not immediately.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Not immediately. It was—when I had a baby at home I just didn't. Once my kids were a little older and they were going to school, yes, of course. But those first years—those first years were hard—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—because I really—I mean, that was one of the first things I told you. I was bored to death in Ithaca. It was not exciting for me to be home with babies, to tell you the truth.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, I still don't particularly want to hang around with babies, you know. I may be a grandmother, but that doesn't mean I have to act like a grandmother, right? [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. So those were hard years. And, as I said, there was not a whole lot of money because I was starting in this business that is renowned for not paying well. And I really thought it was important that I stay home and take care of my kids. And he wanted me to also. I mean, he really did. He felt that this was what

a guy should do. He had this ’50s mentality.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And later on that ’50s mentality probably caused us problems, but at that point I certainly accepted that. I mean, I didn’t think that I could go out and make very much money anyway. I mean, if I’d had some set of marketable skill, but a BFA from Beaver College is not marketable.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I knew that. I mean, I could get some dumb-ass job making nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: But that’s why you’d gone to college in the first place, was to not have to do that.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I’d become a painter because I wanted to be a painter. I went to college because I wanted to be educated.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I wanted to get it when I read something that was complex. You know, I wanted to be educated. I had this notion that that was tremendously important, probably from my mother.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Were your paintings at this point figurative?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, when I first got out of school, yes, sure. And I think I actually have some—there might be something on that disc—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—of something that my sister has. It’s a little landscape I did in college.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I have some other little—there’s one that—if you’d like to, we can go look at them, but the—there’s one of the backyard of our house in Huntington Valley, and it’s a—I guess it’s a stable. It was originally a stable, and it was actually studio. There was an artist that lived next door named [Mr. Saint –KW]. And he was—actually did stained glass for cathedrals—the perfect name. But, anyway, there was a studio next door that’s in the painting. So they were both from ’59, I think. And I did some self-portraits in school. When I got out I tried all sorts of horrible things. Most of them were just terrible. Jaune Quick-to-See calls those paintings “the paintings I did for myself.” I think that’s a good way to look at it because, you know, you get out of school and you realize that you’re not quite good enough yet.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And then once I—once my kids were in school and I—we got a little bit more established and we moved into little bit better places, and still, you know, flats and houses rather than apartments buildings, which I never really liked. I did things—you know, I would get a babysitter or—and I was doing some dumb things like teaching—substitute teaching to pick up a few bucks. And I was—I actually taught in—my first teaching in painting was for the night school, adult night school, in the high school. And that was probably 1962 or something like that, you know—really early. But I would go into New York and look at things, then go home and look at that canvas. But I wasn’t doing—money was always an issue when it came to the paints. And so I was—I wasn’t perhaps painting as much as I would have liked. I was painting all the time. I was also making all my own clothes, because I can sew well. I don’t bother to anymore, and I enjoyed that. And I enjoyed cooking. I mean, I sound like a little “Suzy Homemaker,” which is fine. I mean, this was part of my life then. So I spent about 10 years trying to hone my craft and being a mother.

MS. RIEDEL: When you were honing your craft, were you experimenting with different styles of painting, or were you experimenting with materials, scale?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was mostly styles—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL:—rather than materials. It was mostly styles. I was trying all sorts of different things. None of it looked very good to me. But in—let's see now; I graduated in '59. In '69 my work was developed enough. I think I was using acrylic by then. So I did change materials, come to think of it. I think those were acrylic. I was doing cloud paintings. It's funny, these clouds here because they're so—those clouds are so Southwest Tiepolo kind of clouds, and they're so romantic and so opposite from what I—in contrast with anything I thought I'd ever do, but there you are. Never say never.

So '69 I had a show at—actually a gallery called—no, it had a number like 69. Anyway, it was a street number in Leonia, New Jersey of nudes, big nudes, and some sky paintings. And I also had a show—was it '69 or was it earlier—at Cannabis Gallery, which I love. I just love—[laughs]—the notion. It's called Cannabis Gallery. I guess the owner was big into the smoke, but it was those days of marijuana. I had a show of these nudes that was actually reviewed in *Artnews* by a fellow named Martin Last. And he did a radio show and he would talk about some of the things that he saw—just a few, you know, like three or four out of all those shows he saw—and he picked mine out to talk about. And I was ecstatic—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—absolutely ecstatic. It was the most exciting thing to happened to me—I mean, I've had wonderful things happen to me over the years, but that feeling then was like, oh, my god, somebody noticed. Such a big deal. So huge. And at about the same time I read in a—God bless Beaver—one of their newsletters that there was a scholarship—a fellowship available to older women—"older" meaning, you know, a few years out of college, to go to graduate school. And it was one of these things that paid for everything, offered by the Danforth Foundation/Purina Dog Chow, right? God bless Purina Dog Chow. And actually they made their big money in cattle feed, I think. But the Danforth Foundation had this wonderful fellowship and—oh, I'm not sure how one was chosen but I got the particulars on it. I read about it and I thought, well, I want to go to graduate school, and it's the only way I can get better fast. I wasn't getting good enough fast enough—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—right on my own. I needed that impetus of graduate school. And I asked Michael, "How do you feel about this?" And he said, "Well, fine." He'd been out of work for, like, a year-and-a-half by then, two years. He had just gotten—that's a whole other story too, but it was very difficult those years that he was—he was driving a cab. So, about 1972, or '71, he got this—it was—I guess it was 1970 he was out of work. I was up at—and I went to MacDowell in '69. I went again in '70, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: MacDowell?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I went—yes. I was at MacDowell in '69 and '70. And you had to have had a professional show, and I had this show in Cannabis so I could come. And I shipped my children off to their grandmother and went off to MacDowell for a month.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I felt it was really necessary by then.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, I'd grown up a lot. I realized what I really wanted to do with my life. I had a husband that was kind of a '50s guy but would adjust. [Laughs.] He would adjust to things. [Note: Michael was hired by *Consumer Reports Magazine* in 1971 or early 1972, where he worked until his death in 1989 –KW]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think that was difficult for him, but anyway, he didn't complain. I went to MacDowell and did a couple of really nice paintings there. And then I got this thing about the Danforth, and I thought, I really want to try for this: "Will you support me in this one?" I said, "We'll have to be living on roots and berries, but how do you feel about this?" I said, "They will pay for everything." I said—because by then I was teaching part time somewhere, you know, Montclair Museum or someplace. I was teaching at Montclair Art Museum and also the Art Center of Northern New Jersey, so I was teaching about two or three days a week by then. And my kids were 10 and 12—10 and 11. And he said, "Fine. We can do this." And at about the same time we decided to buy a house. [Laughs.] And, luckily, when we applied for the loan I was actually working. And then as soon as we got the loan I started school and I stopped working, because that was one of the requests of the fellowship that I not work.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, so you really focused.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So Michael helped me study mathematics. I used to—

MS. RIEDEL: Mathematics?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I had to take the GREs—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—for the fellowship.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I had to do well, and I knew it, god damn it, you know? So I studied math all one summer, and I also memorized vocabulary because—Dirk is always telling me I have a wonderful vocabulary. It's because I've memorized so much for the damn GREs. I used to ride around the cemetery—there was another cemetery nearby; totally different cemetery but another beautiful cemetery. I used to bike around the cemetery in Englewood—we were living in Englewood, New Jersey—and memorize words while I was biking.

MS. RIEDEL: As you were—you were reading and biking and listening to—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I had little notes card in front of me, you know, and bike, because there was nothing there except muskrats. So, me and the muskrats—and that was neat. But I did fine on the GREs. And apparently—oh, and my application was—I talked about the influence of God in my life because I realized that that was important to the Danforth Foundation, that you have some sort of—I mean, they don't care what religion, but they want you to have some sort of spiritual life. And so I talked a little bit about the importance of God in my life. And I had been raised in a very religious atmosphere.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you go to church every week?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: As a—oh, yes. Oh, yes, twice a week as a matter of fact. We went to prayer meetings on Wednesday.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was a very religious—and I would call fundamentalist except fundamentalism today implies a political fundamentalism, and it had nothing to do with politics.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Politics was never mentioned.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was about the saving grace of Jesus Christ, actually. It was not about politics.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So, I was raised in Christian fundamentalism—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but it was not the Christian fundamentalism that we have today, which I find abhorrent, just abhorrent. And I'm not a protestant. I go to a Catholic Church now when I go. So I'm—you know, my views on religion have changed a lot, but I still believe in the power of spiritual life.

And I think that it was something of what I said in this essay, but I also talked about art, of course, a lot. And I guess all artists talk about art all the time, but Dirk and I wake up in the morning, have coffee in bed and argue about art. Isn't that ridiculous? [They laugh.] It's so ridiculous. But two old teachers, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: We can't keep our mouth shut. And my father was a lecturer, and I think it's just in the blood. You know, you can't keep your mouth shut. But, anyway, I went to graduate school on this wonderful fellowship, just wonderful. Is it two hours yet?

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, I was just checking and making sure everything is recording fine, which it is.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I went to the Danforth Foundation I just thought was just—they were absolutely wonderful. They were looking for women who were smart and could make a difference, and who couldn't otherwise go. And had I had desire to get a Ph.D. they would have paid for that too. I mean they would have gone the whole distance, whatever I wanted to do.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And it was not something that went on forever. It doesn't exist anymore, I don't think, partly because things have opened up so much for women—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but in 1970, '71, I mean, that was really just the beginning of the women's movement.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So that they were there from the beginning, and they stuck with it for, I would think, at least 10 years, maybe longer. So I had this wonderful fellowship. They would have paid babysitting. They gave me a stipend for material and travel, as I recall. It was just wonderful. It was a tremendous blessing. And, you know, it changed my life to go to graduate school, I think, because it just pushed me to another plane that I don't think I could have done alone.

MS. RIEDEL: The work had a drastic shift during this time too.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Huge, huge, huge.

MS. RIEDEL: Talk about that, if you would, please.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I think part of it was that I was looking at art all the time. It wasn't that I wasn't seeing art before that. I was. You know, I'd always gone to the galleries and everything. My primary teacher was Gerald Hayes, who is still showing New York. He was five years younger than I. No, five years older. No, he's five years younger than I. [Laughs.]

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL:—the Pratt?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I had this money, right? And I had to live at home so I couldn't—I mean there's no point in thinking about Yale.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I had to go to a school that was nearby. So, Yale would have been the ideal place to go, especially then, I think, but too bad you can't do it all, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's like Beaver: It's there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And Pratt was there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The other places were Hunter, Queens College. What else did I look at? I didn't even look at C.W. Post. Rutgers and—

MS. RIEDEL: NYU?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I did look at NYU, and I actually applied at Columbia, I think. I think I applied at Columbia. But I looked at a lot of schools. Pratt smelled right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: NYU didn't. It didn't. It wasn't about making art. Maybe today—I know nothing about the program today, but it didn't feel like it was about making art. I was old enough by then to know exactly—I was 38 years old.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was a big girl. I knew what I wanted to get out of this. I knew what it was costing me and my family in just change and upset. You know, like, my whole household was going to have to work differently. I had to have—we had to have another car, which was—I got another car, a little Fiat—a little teeny Fiat. So, you know, I was very sure about what I wanted. I wanted change in my work. I wanted an intellectual focus in my work. I wanted to make work that was important. I mean, I wanted so much by then.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was 24 when I got out of college, I guess. By that time I was 38 that's a lot of years to think about what it was you wanted from your art, and what you wanted from the art world, and what you wanted to do. And I came to realize—and it sounds arrogant now but I wanted to be a major American artist, god damn it. And I had to make huge changes to do that, in my work, in myself, in my home, everything. I didn't want to be a putzy artist in New Jersey showing in ditzy little galleries for the rest of my life. Why bother, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Had the women's movement had an impact on your thinking, or had you had those thoughts long before?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think I had them long before, but the women's movement probably sharpened them.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, I've read all the books that everybody read then, and I went to a few meetings, although I was in New Jersey so I wasn't part of the New York clique, you know? And I was busy, besides. I really didn't have time—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—for a lot of meetings at night, ragging on our husbands. [Laughs.] I mean, I just didn't want to—I just didn't want to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But, sure, the ideas of the movement were important to me, and they came at the right time for me because I had been going in this direction anyway, thinking these lines anyway. In fact, you know, I think that I always had those ideas. It's just that they strengthened over the years from painting all the time, from going to places like MacDowell, showing in, you know, Cannabis and places like that. I mean small, kind of mediocre galleries. But having that encouragement from somebody like Martin Last, who I have never met, was huge—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—for a young woman.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think that young women today expect a lot more a lot earlier. I didn't. I knew that it was a man's world and you had to be better than the men, god damn it? So I went to Pratt expecting a lot of those people. And I wanted to change—oh, I don't even know how to explain it. But I remember I had a gallery dealer tell me once that—you know, the dealers sometimes said really weird things, and I was trying to show my work before I went to Pratt. And I remember a dealer said, "Oh, well, you're just a dilettante woman from the suburbs." And I was furious.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

[… - KW]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So people would say terrible things to me, and it was because I was a woman. They wouldn't have said it to a man, and I know that in my heart, you know. I had a gallery just say to me openly, "Oh, well, no, we have too many women artists already." Now, what the fuck does that have to do with it?

MS. RIEDEL: Had you kept your maiden name?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, that's interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. I did that almost immediately. I used Echols, my husband's name was Echols, for a couple of years. And I thought, "This is so awkward." And when we married I said, "Wouldn't you like to change your name to WalkingStick, Michael?" He said, "No, I'm really used to this name." And I said, "Well, I'm really used to WalkingStick too." So eventually I just dropped the Echols altogether. But when I went to—was it Pratt—I would get letters saying, "Well, this isn't your name. You're married." I said, "It's on my birth certificate. It's my name." But I did get a—usually from—secretaries would complain. And it was my name.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And so, once other people started doing that, it was kind of nice. I mean, they usually thought they were incredibly original to do it.

MS. RIEDEL: The Pratt program, what were the strengths and the weaknesses of that program?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The strengths were that you were painting all the time, and that you were expected to paint all the time, and that there was intelligent criticism and a certain amount of give and take among the students in crits. There was also—Jerry Hayes was a conceptualist, so he was involved in what was really going on at the time. And so, of course I had a wonderful time. It was just wonderful being around that all the time. It was thrilling for me to be there.

MS. RIEDEL: And the work shifted drastically. You began to work abstractly. Is that correct?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I did. And I was—one big thing that happened then—I think that we were really encouraged to articulate what was really going on in the work and why. And it was important that the art had a reason behind it, some sort of intellectual basis. It was not about picture-making. Even if you're making pictures, it's not about picture-making.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And that it had to have something that was original, that was creative within it. And I was experimenting a lot with different uses of material, but I also got very involved my Cherokee heritage then, which I really hadn't been. I mean the earliest paintings—these paintings—I guess they're in here—some of the earliest paintings that I showed, like these—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—they were much more about—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL:—and *Fantasy for a January Day*, '71.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. They were much more about sexual enlightenment, which was happening then.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And just accepting the fact that I'm a woman in a woman's body, having a good time in a woman's body is in these paintings. And the feminist kind of view of ourselves as being potent, strong individuals, sexually as well as everything the other way, was in these paintings. These were not about my heritage at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They were about other things that I was dealing with—

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—that I was going through these changes that—I don't think girls go through things like that

anymore because by the time they're, you know, 19 they have these certain amount of power? I didn't. So that all of those feminine feminists—you know, feminine/feminist ideas about my own power as a woman comes through in those earlier paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But the paintings from—at Pratt started to get involved in my thoughts about my own Indian heritage and dealing with that. And I think the truth is that I hated my father for not being around. And yet in a way it wasn't his fault. I mean, he didn't leave my mother; she left him. She had to leave him. But it was time to reconcile that. My father died in '72, so it was not long after my father passed.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: My mother died in '67.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: She was young. Yes, she was 69, which I think is young. I was the last kid, of course. I was 33, I think, when she passed. But I was trying to deal with the acceptance that I'm an Indian woman and that I look like him. I'm big and strong like he was. And I'm verbal like he was. You know, I have a lot of his traits, I think. Thank god I don't have a problem with alcohol. It was time that I figured out that whole relationship, and I made a teepee called *Messages to Papa*. And I wrote a letter to him that I forgave him and I hoped he forgave me for hating him all these years. And—now, perhaps "hate" is a strong word but certainly there was an anger there that I hadn't had a dad, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. This was a painting, this piece, correct?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No.

MS. RIEDEL: It's actual sculpture?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: This was an actual little teepee. It was about 8 feet tall.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, good.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And a true teepee is huge, huge, huge. And I painted it with—I just threw paint on it, really slung stain, paint. My neighbors—I made it at home and I remember the neighbors said, "Oh, isn't that sweet? You're making a teepee for the children." And I said, "Yes." Why tell them? And I put a black band around it because he was dead, but also because I didn't want people going into it. And I, as I said, hung this letter inside. And it's kind of a heartfelt rag, nothing more, just, you know, kind of a big rag. But it kind of—it was important for me to make that—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—to deal with these emotions, but also to stimulate ideas for paintings. I made a painting called *Teepee Form* after that, which I think is in there, which is also stained. And then I started using wax with them, and I did some paintings called *Chief Joseph.*

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: One of the few things my dad ever said to me was that—I asked him who he thought were really important, good Indians, you know, like—because I was raised [hearing the –KW] idea, the only good Indian is a dead Indian, you know. So, "Who's a good Indian?" He said, "Oh, well, Chief Joseph, of course." And so that kind of got me on this trail of looking at Chief Joseph and what he had done. And I've used that theme over and over again. I used it a lot in graduate school, and started a series of small paintings of—and they're really kind of an elegy. They're masked. You know, there was originally I think 36 of them, and they're all variations on a very formalist idea of two small arcs and two arcs on a rectangular form, painted with anything but brushes, and stained and then overlaid with encaustic. And very much out of '70s formalism, really. And all the marks I made showed. I mean, everything was there—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You could see everything. They were objects. They were not paintings. They were—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—all those '70s ideas were in those paintings. And the difference was that they were very

emotional, whereas the formalist paintings, the goal was to not be emotional, to not be—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—show any of the angst of the age. So, those were done at the very end, but it was my period at Pratt.

MS. RIEDEL: Seventy-four?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Seventy-five. I left in ’75, so it must have started in [’74 –KW]. And that was a big change for me because I changed the subject. The content was totally different. The content was the personal content again—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—you know, of me, me, me, but it was about my heritage rather than my views of the sexual revolution and the feminist revolution. In [’74 –KW] was the takeover at Alcatraz.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And so, the American Indian movement was taking place at the same time as the feminist movement.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And there weren’t very many feminists who were Indian, as a matter of fact, which is interesting but I suppose worth a doctoral investigation, but not for me. So I would have gone to Alcatraz had I been able to. I felt strongly about that Indian movement. And my father said—and here I’m quoting him—I didn’t see much of him, but what he said was important to me. He said that, “In the old days, if you stood with the Indians to fight, you’re an Indian.” And that struck me when, you know, that thing with Alcatraz came up, that I belong there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I didn’t, of course, go, but I think that was important, and it kind of all came together in my head, that I had to come to terms with all this in my background, that in spite of the fact that my father certainly didn’t fulfill any of his potential, he was still my father, and still the Indian raised in Indian Territory, not born in the United States even. His father was very involved in the change to statehood. The Indians were numbered, you know, in the 1890s, 1900, and the Dawes Commission was commissioned to number all the Indians. It was a —

MS. RIEDEL: [Sneezes.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Bless you.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was a way to put the Indians all in camps—reservations or simply camps.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They’d get them all on reservations, take their land, and do it in a nice, official, bureaucratic way. It’s a nice, bureaucratic way to destroy the Indians, right? So that it was just one more step in the demise of the Indian nations in the United States. And so the Dawes Commission was active. And in 1906 I believe Oklahoma became a state, and all that Cherokee land was divided up into small parcels rather than just being the Cherokee nation. It was divided up into parcels and each Indian, registered Indian, was given a parcel of land, which of course was horrible for the Indians because they weren’t used to having private property. They would share property, and it wasn’t enough to really make a living on. And it was about real estate.

So my grandfather, the lawyer, was hired to be the translator and explicator of this law for the Cherokee people, so that they were all numbered. And it’s not the nicest thing he did, but I keep telling myself he was trying to get a fair deal for the Cherokees. I’m not sure whether he just wasn’t working for them, you know, just to make money, but who knows? I didn’t know him at all. So, anyway, he was involved with the Dawes Commission. I don’t know how I got on this story, but he—so, my father and all of us are registered as Cherokees, but a lot of the Cherokees who were very traditional didn’t want to have anything to do with the Dawes Commission and wouldn’t sign up because [… - KW] Those white people have just destroyed us and it’s just another game to take advantage of us,” which of course it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this all tying in somehow to the *Chief Joseph Series*, because I think that's what started us off, yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think it was, yes, I think it was that. But, anyway, I think that part of my father's attachment was that Chief Joseph really tried to fight all this.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And he did it in a very noble way. But this is all very personal history, oddly enough, because my grandfather was so involved with it, and my father had Indian land because of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I have a friend who says, "You get a bunch of Cherokees together and everybody knows who's Ridge Party and who isn't." And most of the rest of the world doesn't know what the heck Ridge Party even means, but all the Cherokees do, yes. So it's tribal personal history. So, anyway, I did these things about Chief Joseph and have been—

MS. RIEDEL: Did you intend these as a series? Did you intend them—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The little ones I intended to show together—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—as a series. You know, as a group.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I called it the *Chief Joseph Series*. The big ones—there was two large Chief Joseph pieces, I believe. Was there two or just one? One of them is called *Homage to Chief Joseph*, and I think there was another one but I can't recall for sure.

MS. RIEDEL: And at this point you were painting with your hands?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was painting with a knife mostly.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: A knife and other tools. You know, there are—and there's just—and there's some lines in those Chief Joseph pieces that are remainder drawings, which is—you know, you just leave it. They're found lines, in a way, and they have a nice edge to them, a found line. I realize that there's a lovely piece—years later I saw this lovely piece by Frank Stella: little black piece that has these fine layered lines, and they're just beautiful, beautiful. I always liked Frank Stella.

MS. RIEDEL: Whose work were you looking at this time? Was there anyone who was particularly influential?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, yes. I supposed Stella, but also Rothko. I loved Rothko. I loved [Antoni] Tapies. What was the woman who did the horses?

MS. RIEDEL: Butterfield?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No, not Butterfield. She put something—a painter—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yes. Susan—yes—Rothenberg?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Susan Rothenberg.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, Rothenberg.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And—oh, and Gorky. Gorky was very good—very good. I love Gorky. You know, his work is very personal. It's all about his Armenian roots and all that. And I really just enjoy that work so much. There was a spareness to it, and it wasn't like anybody else's work. I think I really wanted to make art that was totally

mine, god damn it. I really want this to look like mine and no one else's in the world, please.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there a spiritual sensibility to the work at this point?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, people always look for it because they think that Indians are so spiritual. [Laughs.] I'm a Catholic; I'm sorry.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Which I think is a lot of phony baloney mostly, and the Indians themselves have taken advantage of it. There's, you know, Indians out there doing sweat lodges and stuff with white people. And well, there's nothing wrong with a sweat lodge but I do think that there is a lot of encouragement of people to think of all Indians as spiritual.

MS. RIEDEL: I think you mentioned that on your Danforth application.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I did. I didn't.

MS. RIEDEL: You grew up with a value—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I didn't and I did. I grew up with a very religious home and a very—but I think at that time—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—I had kind of turned my back on all of that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So it was more the influence of the feminist movement and the Native American movement and the New York school.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And the New York school was probably as big as anything, really.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So—

MS. RIEDEL: And those pieces, did they get a lot of attention early on, because they certainly, over time—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No, okay. So it took a while for them to be recognized.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And people sometimes said really horrible, stupid things, and, "You know, gee, they all look alike."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Okay. And I would usually show them in groups of five or nine, odd numbers. But it was hard to show the whole thing because I didn't have the room. I mean, they happened to be at the—the NMAI [National Museum of the American Indian] ended up buying them, and out of a show that I did in about 2006, '5. [2003 – KW]

MS. RIEDEL: They're all fairly small, aren't they?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: 20-by-15.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay. Not that small then.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: 20 by—is it 20? Yes, it's about the size—that's the size.

MS. RIEDEL: Eighteen by—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So it was 20-by-15, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But the—I think it's in here. Maybe not.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think they are. I don't think they're in any of the catalogues.

[Cross talk.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: No, I don't think so.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—they were never shown [all together –KW] until I did this show at the NMAI in—downtown at Bowling Green. I'm sorry. And I told them I would do that show if I could return to that theme of Chief Joseph, because I didn't think I was done with it; that I wanted to go out to Montana and trace his battles from place to place. And I wanted to make—

MS. RIEDEL: And that was 30 years later, right? Or did you go to Montana that early?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No, I think it was 30 years later.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Because it was from—I did those in '76—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—'75, '76, '77, and it was 2003—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes, so almost 30 years.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—2002. And I made a series of drawings, works on paper, in oil stick based on it, with encaustic. And then I told them that I wanted to—there's two things I wanted to do with the show, and if they'd let me do it, I'd do the show, because they wanted me to produce it in five months and they wanted it all new work. And I said, "I will only do it if I may hang all of the Chief Joseph pieces that I can put my hands on. And I want to paint the wall. I want to do a painting on the wall, of the mountains." And they said, "Okay." So I did a series of works on paper. I did about 15 of them with encaustic and gouache, based on drawings that I did in Montana. I went out to Montana for about a month—no, I mean about a week.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's interesting, I think, especially in relation to your career, for a couple of reasons. Number one is the cyclical nature of the work, I think the way—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—the figurative arrives and disappears and comes back again, and the landscape, the abstract, all of that, but then also how the travels have really played a large role in content and in inspiration for the work, yes?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. I think of Montana, I think of Italy—all these we'll get to but, yes. And the sketchbooks that you sketch whenever you travel.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I didn't start that until the '90s, until I went to—

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: To Italy?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, no, I went to—

MS. RIEDEL: Before that?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I went to Cairo in '95 and—

MS. RIEDEL: They're beautiful.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, they're fun, aren't they, to look at?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yes. We're looking at a sketchbook now from Montana from 2002—October of 2002.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. But this is how I made the wall painting. I did this copy of drawings in here and then projected it and painted from that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. But it was—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And these of course are prints that I didn't finish for, you know—

MS. RIEDEL: And this is all of Bear Paw?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No, they're different places.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Bitterroot Mountains—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—because they [the Nez Perce, Chief Joseph's band –KW] crossed—an awful lot of history, but across the Bitterroots—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—and then they came over to Bear Paw and then crossed the state, went up through the—we're just north of Yellowstone now—and then went up to—maybe that's Bear Paw.

MS. RIEDEL: So we're talking the actual trail that Chief Joseph took.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Walked.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And that's what I drove around to see is these various places they had been.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And then I—and they'd had battles at—Big Hole I think is the first one. Bear Paw is the last one.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Have you always made sketchbooks?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No. No, I didn't.

MS. RIEDEL: So it started with travels.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Mostly with travels when I was traveling alone. It's hard to keep a sketchbook when you're with somebody else—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—unless they're also somebody who is going to sketch. This is his brother, who was killed at Bear Paw.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Bear Paw. Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Beautiful young man. And I met his, I think, great-great-grandson.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Grandson, yes. They ended up in various places, and some of them are on the Umatilla Reserve. And there's a print shop at the Umatilla Reserve where I went called Crow's Shadow. And they did a program for some of us to go to New Zealand to do a show there, and one of the young people who went on this trip to New Zealand was a—I think he was a Nez Perce, but his—Ollokut? Is that his name, Ollokut, the brother of Chief Joseph who was killed? I met his granddaughter at Crow's Shadow, also an old lady, of course. She's my

age, you know, but an old lady by then—sweet old lady. But, anyway, the family is still there. He started—his original home is in what we now think of as Oregon, eastern Oregon. A fascinating story. Fascinating story.

MS. RIEDEL: And interesting how that has surfaced so early in your work and then went underground for a while. And it has come back and been reincorporated with things that have developed in the intervening—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. I don't know why—

MS. RIEDEL:—few decades.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I don't know why I got involved again with it. I mean, I don't know what got in my head that I really wanted to show those again, but obviously I really wanted to show those pieces because I thought they still had the same kind of strength they had originally. You know, sometimes work, well, is just dated.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, you look at it and you think, oh, well, why did I do that? Why did I say that? Those pieces still spoke to me, and they spoke to people who saw them. And, you know, they're really just abstractions. Why is it that they could carry all that? Is it just because of the name? But there's something about them that carry a mood of—well, of tragedy, I guess. They have a dirge-like quality, you know, this repeating song.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And they're fragmented, they're fractured.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And the shape, that simple crescent shape, comes out of my original "teepee form" that has a drape at the top. It's a painting that's kind of a teepee, kind of partially unwrapped. So there's this drape, this festoon shape. And that festoon shape is used over and over and over again in my early work.

MS. RIEDEL: And you did, at this point, begin to develop a language or a collection of symbols and shapes that would be used repeatedly in the work for the next 10 or 15—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Ten years.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Ten years.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, and more. I used mostly that arc shape, portions of an arc. And those early pieces were just always two small and two large arcs, but I would usually use two arcs. It was on a square format with a line, an implied triangle. And I would design them on a graph paper. In fact, I still have all those designs stashed away someplace. They should go to an archive.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. So, the ideas about these are very formal. Designs negating the space through flattening and through ignoring those Renaissance notions about a window on the world. It is a flattening out, and very formal. They're very formalist, minimalist even.

MS. RIEDEL: How important were the titles?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, you know, the titles were important.

MS. RIEDEL: I had that sense.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, they were important. And sometimes they were humorous, like *Me and my Neon Box*. I just thought that was hilarious. [They laugh.] So dumb. But, obviously, how are you going to know what's going on in these pieces that are obviously tragic, obviously dirge-like, obviously, you know, have this sense of handedness, which was important, that sense that the artist's hand is involved, that there is even a kind of tribalness about them. How are you going to know it's not something else completely? I mean it is a way to give a person a key into the understanding of a work of art by naming it.

MS. RIEDEL: There's a real eroticism to some of them too.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: To the titles?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, to the pieces.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes. Oh, I think that's erotic right there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, it just is.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think landscape is erotic. You know, it suggests that, no doubt about it. But those pieces that are—those earliest Indian pieces were really about Indian history any Indian—and the sense of who I am.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Now, are you talking about the *Chief Joseph Series* again?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, not just those. I mean, there were others that certainly had related to Indian history.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: There's one called *Little Crow*. And, you know, there was a number of those. And they were really about this tragedy that had happened to the native people here, and my own sense of being an integrated person. I think—I don't mean integrated into society; I mean integrated within myself about it. I'm an Indian lady who looks white, and a white lady who thinks Indian. You know, I am both of these things. I am biracial and very comfortable with that. And when I speak to people I always start out by saying I'm biracial. And it gave me such pleasure when Obama said he was biracial. I mean, how many other people talk about that? But I don't think of myself as just Indian, and I certainly don't think of myself as a white lady. But I am this—[ringing sound]. Is it your phone or is it—

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, no, it's the timer.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: Go ahead and finish your thought and we'll change the disc.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'm not sure what the thought was but it was about biraciality. But I was addressing these questions that were very important to me at the time of seeking a real comfort and a real wholeness in who I was a biracial woman.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, and immediately I think of the layering of those paintings too. You would build up to 30 layers, if that's correct, on some of those pieces. But there would always be some crack or—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The cracks—

MS. RIEDEL:—mark going to the core—

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—mark, to show—gouges, yes. So that there was a lot of this history within the painting itself, implied the history of Indian history but also my own.

MS. RIEDEL: So very personal and somehow objective at the same time.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: One would hope.

MS. RIEDEL: Historical.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: One would hope, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Let me pause here and change this disc.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

[END OF DISC.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Kay WalkingStick in the artist's studio in Jackson Heights, New York on December 14th, 2011, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, card number two. We were just starting to talk about the diptychs, which began in the mid-'80s? Is that right?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did that come about?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I seem to change direction about every 10 years.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And the directions are very often extreme, abrupt, big changes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't do little changes, it seems to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Big changes. I've always kind of admired people who stayed on this exact same path for 60 years, but that's just not who I am. So, how did that all come about? I was making big abstractions—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—which we actually haven't talked about—with my hands, layered [acrylic and wax –KW], using those shapes that had derived out of the teepee form and combining it with this very kind of diagrammatic, actually, kind of view of putting together these forms on a graph and then painting them so that they were very reduced.

MS. RIEDEL: These were things like *Catching Device with Sweepings* or *Solstice* or—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. They were very reduced in their number of formal elements, very reduced in the way they came about in their design, very complex in their construction because it was multi-layered paint—double-layered canvas glued together with raised shapes. And then I would paint on it with a saponified wax mixed with an acrylic to get this very heavy-bodied, very beautiful, I thought, material that I painted with my hands and layered and gouged, right, sometimes. So they were—the goal was to be very simplified in their formal aspect and very complex in their emotional impact. That was the goal. And I had been doing these for years and I was very involved in this very dense paint. And I love paint; I mean, what painter doesn't? But, you know, I just loved all that glop. I had a show out in California. And I should back up and say I've been to Montauk at Edward Albee's summer camp for artists out there. It's called—I can't think of the name of it, but anyway, his summer camp for artists. [William F. Flanagan Memorial Artists' Center of Montauk, NY –KW]

And so I was very taken by the landscape. I always loved landscape but I hadn't done it for years. I was a city painter. You know, the paintings oftentimes had very city colors in them—grays and browns. And I went out to Montauk and started doing these things that were influenced by this wonderful landscape out there—the colors and the sense of space and—you know, I can practically smell it. It was just lovely. And so I came back and was thinking about all this. And I had a show at Bertha Urdang's, and I had a show—there was a number of Montauk pieces in it, influenced by that landscape of Montauk. And they were abstractions in the same—they were all in the same format as the earlier pieces but they were a different kind of color palette. Some of them even had cut lines that looked like drawn lines. They were cut and gouged but they could have been spindly trees, right? And there was a sense of space even though they were flat. They're wall-like and yet there was a—you had a sense of space nevertheless. And of course there's more color in them so that when you manipulate color there is a manipulation of space. So I went out to California to have a show. I'd never been to California—a show at the Wenger Gallery. That was their name, [Sig and Muriel –KW] Wenger—W-E-N-G-E-R.

MS. RIEDEL: Where was that?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: In La Jolla.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I walked around La Jolla and it was just gorgeous. And I did some sketches and I took some photographs and thought, boy, if I lived here any length of time I'd be a landscape artist. I mean, how could you not be? And, as I said, the landscape in Montauk had affected me a lot. And this was about '84, '85. I don't know. And I came home and I was still thinking a lot about this landscape, and I did some drawings, I think. Then a woman came to my studio and said that she was interested in doing a show about the American elm. And I said something about, "Well, they all have Dutch elm disease. They're dead." She said, "Well, I know that Indians honor the elm." And I said, "Well, actually, Cherokees don't. And I think you're thinking of the Haudenosaunee, who honor the pine tree." [… - KW]

And so anyway, I said, “Well, I’ll try to make a painting about the American elm.” And so I did this, I said, “But, you know, I don’t work realistically.” She said, “Don’t worry about that. Just make a painting for me.” I said, “Well, I’ll try.” And so I made this painting of—it was white and had some kind of pearly stuff on it because it kind of looks like mold, you know? And then I put copper on it. Copper—raw copper changes color.

MS. RIEDEL: Powder?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. [Actually grains of copper for grinding –KW]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And it changes color. It takes on—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—as it patinates it becomes green.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So, slowly but surely this painting was going to look moldier and moldier, right? And then I thought, you know, I’ll try painting the elm. And I did a painting of the elm with my hands. And they’re fan-shaped.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And so I thought, well, that’s kind of neat. I put them together and I thought, ah, you’re brilliant. [Laughs.] I felt brilliant for about two-and-a-half minutes, and then that passed. And I thought, but, you know, there is something there that—those two talking together—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—that little dialogue that’s set up between that tree and that moldy surface is kind of exciting. And I ended up—I don’t think I actually showed that one. I did something else for the show, but it was the same thing. That was really the first diptych.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And then I did some diptychs of—I must have worked from photographs, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: And let me just dwell for a moment there, if you don’t mind. What about that struck you as brilliant, that particular first instance of putting those two together? We’ve talked about dialogue—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It just looked terrific! [They laugh.] It was just that it looked right, that somehow the tree alone was nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But the tree with that—it’s like two stanzas of a poem or—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—you know? And you see something in contrast, you see it more clearly.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yin is nothing without the yang. I mean, you need that—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—contrast.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And that’s what got me was this white, pearly, beautiful, moldy surface with this tree that was just—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I painted with my hands, so it was sort of just an expressionistic kind of tree, you know? And they were very different in the way they were done and in the—it wasn't just the subject or the realism versus this abstraction; it was the whole thing together that—I just loved it. And a lot of those early ones, that one included, have been destroyed. I just destroyed them. I just couldn't—I have photographs but I didn't like it later. I mean, I liked the idea—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but I didn't like the thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I showed it a few times, but I just didn't want to do it again. And there were some other things that I have shown and then gotten home and decided I hated them and just cut them up.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Better I do that than somebody stores it in perpetuity. But that's really how it actually started was just this magical epiphany.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I really appreciate—as I say, the woman—it sounds like I make fun of her, but I really don't mean it that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: She said it in all innocence because she just wanted the painting.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I appreciate that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

[… - KW]

MS. RIEDEL: Did this allow you—this, quote, unquote, "discovery" of a diptych as a format, did it allow you sort of a new and expanded opportunity—thanks, I'm good for now—to explore a new way—a new—well—

[Cross talk.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was time I changed, and I knew it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'd been doing [abstraction –KW] for 10 years and I needed to get on to something else.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I didn't know where it was going to lead me. [Also in 1985 –KW] I did a painting that the Heard has, actually, called *The Cardinal Points*. It's a big red painting, has a cross in the middle. The reason I used the cross is because it's one of the few symbols that is Pan-Indian.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The idea of the four directions is a common notion of Native Americans. And [the painting is –KW] bright red and has gold all over it, gold specks. And it was very much about this unity between—I suppose within myself that I was expressing this feeling that I am an Indian woman and a white woman. I'm a biracial woman—and this notion of uniting Christianity with Indian tradition, with the cross. I mean, there was a lot of things that were very meaningful to me about that piece, but it was kind of a final piece, and I knew it when I did it, that I've kind of done everything and said everything I want to through these abstractions. And they were over. It was over for me. And I had no desire to make any other kind of abstraction. I mean, I have friends who have been making abstraction all their lives, and I just had nowhere else to go with it because I didn't want to. I didn't—it wasn't there for me. But these—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: Sorry, go ahead please.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But these—the notion of combining it with a kind of realism—I mean, it's obviously not realism but a kind of realism, a kind of painting something that is stimulated by the visual world, with these abstractions that had carried so much meaning for me made sense to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. It was a way of commenting and exploring on both.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I could—somehow the abstraction was enlivened and enriched by the realism, but the realism also was intensified—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—and made more profound through the abstraction.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So that they came to need one another, in my view. And I started them in about '85, '86.

MS. RIEDEL: Was this—the work has so far certainly been an exploration of the feminist movement, both on a personal and a more objective basis: Native American personal identity, history. And I know at some point spiritual does, consciously or unconsciously enter the work.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, sure. Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Is—yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: My spiritual life has always been--it's ebbed and flowed, actually, but, yes, that was always there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And was that more prevalent in one of these periods than another?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I used to talk about it a lot, when I was talking about my Indian ties, but—

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking of the cross now, as both a Pan-Indian—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think that was about personal history. You know, I was raised a Christian. And I think that's what that was about more than my, at that time, being involved—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—in a spiritual life.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. It does make me think of what we discussed when you were discussing your Danforth application, which is sort of the confluence or the intersection of different religions and your experience of that from Christianity, from Native American, from just a general overall sense of a spiritual or religious tradition.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I didn't have any kind of tie to a Cherokee tradition or a—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, I read about it—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—I knew about it—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but I had no personal—

MS. RIEDEL: Personal experience.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—experience. And the once or twice that I actually went to a kind of Cherokee ceremonial, I thought it [wasn't authentic –KW]. I shouldn't put that on the tape either, but it was sort of made up. It didn't have a genuineness.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But it was because it was in Long Island and it was [… -KW]—it didn't have a genuineness. I've been to Hopi ceremonials that were—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: These were real things.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, those were gods dancing and I had no question about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They were real. But I haven't personally experienced that ritual life of Native Americans. I was really not a participant in the Hopi. I was a viewer.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And the only reason I was there was that I am an Indian. They wouldn't let [other –KW] people in. So it was the real thing.

MS. RIEDEL: So the diptychs began with that fortuitous meeting of the elm and the abstraction—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL:—and they—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL:—have continued ever since.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Continued—I'm still using that in a way—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but not with quite the same—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—intensity.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Let's see, I was using acrylic on paper at first to do the realistic portion, and I found that I couldn't do it well enough with acrylic; that oil paint, because it's more malleable for a longer period, was much easier. So I would do one portion with oil and the other with acrylic, and then acrylic and saponified wax. I did that for a number of years. And when I went to Rome, I realized that I was sick of the thick paint, that I—

MS. RIEDEL: This was '96, the first trip?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, the first trip to Rome was '96. The first time I lived there. I'd been there before as a visitor, you know. So that those acrylic and oil paint diptychs lasted from '85 to '96, so another 10-year period, approximately—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—during which I produced a load of paintings, actually. And they were really, for me they

changed their intent. At first they were just about two views of the natural world, sort of a long-term view and an immediate view. And I was very much involved in this notion [… - KW] one side looks like a snapshot and the other side is an abstraction, not of that place but of the idea of the Earth. It was very important that one not be the abstraction of the other to me. That seemed too easy, too obvious. I wanted them to be different but related, like—

MS. RIEDEL: One being more a physical image and the other more a psychological state, something along those lines?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right. Right. And then it became more the—and I think this is when my religious heritage came in, is that one became—after Michael died—after my husband died—

MS. RIEDEL: That was ’89?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Yes. You’re good. One became the corporeal and the other the incorporeal.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: One the inside and one the outside.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know there’s a wonderful painting by Manet of the dead Christ, which I love, in the Met. And I talk about it all the time in lectures because it was what made me realize that you could paint the corporeal and the incorporeal, because he did it, damn it. And once that I saw that I thought, that’s what those things are about for me, those paintings I’m doing now—and that’s a real alternation from what they had been. They were much more about this in fact, one of them became—in one painting it was really about life and death, and yet the death wasn’t empty, that there was something else there other than blankness. And it’s of course abstract—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but there is something there. So it became much more about a religious experience, if you will, at least for a while. I did a series of paintings around that period from, like, ’89 to about ’92 in which they’re very much about the corporeal and the incorporeal for me, about life and what else there is other than life—what is outside, what is not part of our diurnal world, so that they changed in character very much. And then—

MS. RIEDEL: Did technique change as well with that?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I did stop using—I was, for a while, using one very thin surface and then one very thick, because I wanted the—in a sense, the abstraction to be more real than this passing world you know, this passing daily experience of world, so that one was a window on the world and the other was a concrete object. And who was it—that woman that became the director of the Whitney for while? Or was it of the Guggenheim? I’ve forgotten. But, anyway, there was a woman who came in and said, “You know, I don’t see any sense in doing this.” She said, “I don’t get it.” She said, “I don’t think you need it. It’s very object-like without being [deep –KW].” And I thought, of course she’s right. Of course she’s right. So I stopped doing that, and it was—because it was inconvenient anyway, difficult to maneuver, to make happen. So it’s so much easier to have them on one surface. And she was right that because the abstraction was so wall-like and solid, it’s an object.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Her name will come to me. But then, that kind of—that whole emphasis seemed to pass and I went to Rome and fell in love with Rome. I absolutely fell in love. And that first experience living in Rome—you know, visiting is so different from being there for a big chunk of time.

MS. RIEDEL: How long were you there for?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think it was six months the first time, at least five. And I hated to come home. Oh, dear. I went over to the Tiber and cried.

MS. RIEDEL: What about it spoke to you so?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, just about everything. Of course the art itself was a huge—had a huge effect on me. After I went to Rome, everything about my art changed, really. I mean, it maybe took three or four years, but everything changed.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I stopped painting with my hands and went back to brushes, which I hadn't used for 40 years, something like that, 30-some years. I started working figuratively—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—instead of just this suggestion of the real world.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I started using figures, which I hadn't used since 1970—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—because all those figures in Rome—and I was looking at those damn Caravaggios and you just die over them. I mean, you know, one after another; they're everywhere. And I'd go and look at them, you know, and make sketches. I have a lot of Rome sketchbooks. Anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: Pattern—did pattern enter—

[Cross talk.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, I loved the pattern and oh, I went to—it's Sicily that has the pattern. Oh, my god. Anyway, all of that was just—it was awash in my brain, right? And I realized finally at that point that the landscapes that I had been using were really a stand-in for my body. You know, they're all these lovely, sensual, round forms and these marvelous mountains. And once I realized that, I was somehow freed to do figures again. It was just—it sounds ridiculous to me actually now, but it's true. That's what happened. And I think I wanted to be free because I wanted to do figures because of all those Caravaggios actually.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But I had to find a way to make them somehow contemporary without being super romantic. And I really—I wanted to make them mine, and I didn't want to give up the landscape, and I wanted to continue with this idea of sort of the magical and nonmagical—or to call it corporeal and incorporeal is—it's sort of incorrect. At that point it's all corporeal, but it also has a magic to it. You know, and I think that gold—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—implies another reality.

MS. RIEDEL: And the gold really came into full force with the trips to Italy, yes?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, leaf—you began to use leaf at some point, didn't you?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I have—yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I have a whole lot of paintings that have leaf in them. And so, the dancing figures really came in after Rome. I was doing figures in Rome. I did a series of drawings in Rome. I think they're in that catalogue, those—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yes, that sounds familiar. Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: These pieces were all done in Rome. They're gouache.

MS. RIEDEL: *Cotile*, yes?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: *Il Cortile* is "the courtyard."

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Because I had a—where I was working overlooked a courtyard. I was living in a 16th century

building on the Corso Vittorio Emanuele. It was just unbelievable. It was just unbelievable. God bless Cornell. You know, the politics were awful but there were some wonderful things about it. But—and [the paintings –KW] become very sexual, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And there are just—you know, these juicy women, you know, doing their thing there. ACEA [Art Center ACEA Montemartini] is the name of the museum [This is an abbreviation of the museum name in Italian –KW].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's an old power station—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—that they've made into a museum, and they've painted all the equipment in these wonderful—so that the backdrop for the sculptures are these wonderful power machinery—old, you know, 19th century machines. Just marvelous.

MS. RIEDEL: How fabulous.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Marvelous. But, anyway, these were done in Rome. And these were 2003—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—so they're not the earliest ones I did in Rome, but it was—they were—there was just a lot of excitement for me in Rome. The cityscape itself was wonderful. I found the people marvelous.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you speak Italian?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, sort of.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'm not great with Italian but I studied Italian and I try. And I studied all the time I was there as well. And I got so that I could talk to people, sort of. I mean, I don't think I could lecture in Italian. But I've lost it again. I mean, if you don't keep it up—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but I spoke well enough. I had an Italian boyfriend for a while that was, I think, 40 years my junior but I don't know about that.

MS. RIEDEL: Forty?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That may be a slight exaggeration.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No, I think he was probably 30 years younger. It didn't last very long. It was brief. But, you know, while I was there—I mean, the idea that a young Italian man would even want to be with me is not—you can't imagine that here.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It just doesn't happen here. I mean, it was such a bizarre experience, and jolly fun. [They laugh.] Goodness, what a shock. So, the culture—the difference in culture I found exciting and fun and invigorating.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I found getting around Rome wonderful—the walking, the city itself, the—I mean, I became a Catholic partly because of Rome.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I didn't know that.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Because I couldn't go to a protestant church and be comfortable anymore. It just was very uncomfortable for me. "Praise the Lord," you know, that kind of thing, I just couldn't handle it. [… - KW] I was going to the churches in Rome, and they're so moving and so beautiful. And the Roman liturgy—the Catholic liturgy is beautiful, and the ritual is beautiful. […- KW]

But I was very drawn to the church when I was in Rome, and still go to church, to mass.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't go every Sunday. I mean, I'm not particularly devout, but I certainly enjoy going to mass.

MS. RIEDEL: We're talking about Italy. It's probably a good time to talk about some of the other travels that have really had an influence on your work. I'm thinking in particular, of course, of Montana, but you've mentioned Cairo and a couple of other places that I didn't even—do your travels traditionally impact your work? Is that one reason you travel?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, they have had a huge influence.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Huge.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was in Santa Fe this summer.

MS. RIEDEL: This past summer?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. And that is that painting.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, that we're looking at here on the walls of your studio.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It certainly is. And where are—where are we?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's—

MS. RIEDEL: South of Chimayo?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Chimayo is a little town, sweet little town.

MS. RIEDEL: I know right where it is.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. And I have to put in all the greenery and all the sagebrush and the junipers and all. But it's—that one is also from that Santa Fe trip, the one back there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: This is going to have a pattern on it—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—at some point. But it's easiest to put it on the very end when [the painting is –KW] a little dry so that I can use a stencil, because to free hand that it would be just a bitch. So a stencil is easier.

MS. RIEDEL: When did the patterns, the Native American patterns, begin to appear on the landscapes?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That really started with that show that I did about Chief Joseph and Montana.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It really started with Montana.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so mid-2006, something like that?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: 2002.

MS. RIEDEL: 2002.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was—because the Nez Perce women painted—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—beautiful parfleche bags, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I used a lot of those parfleche bags in the paintings. And, in fact, I did an installation for the Montclair Museum of facsimiles of the parfleche bags—really big and hanging from their ceiling. It was kind of cool. But the patterns to me in the landscape declare that this is still Indian land, even though the rest of the world comes here and visits, the rest of the world lives on a—I know there's Spanish people in Chimayo. It's a Spanish town, really. And yet at its heart the land is Indian land. I don't mean in a real estate sense—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—I mean in spiritual sense, I guess, you'd have to say, or a—anyway, so that's why the pattern. I used a lot of pattern in that show with the mountains. I think the patterns are as important as the mountains.

MS. RIEDEL: You've talked about that too as an indigenous American form of abstraction—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—which I think is interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, it is. And it's—did I say that?

MS. RIEDEL: I think so, along those lines.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I think so too. Yes, I did. I think I did.

MS. RIEDEL: It also feels very gendered in this particular case.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: In this instance it is, and the name of that show that I did at the Montclair was really about the fact that this is women's art—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—that the earliest abstractionists in the United States were women—[laughs]—and they were—and here they are.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, that sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think it was called dialogue with the—oh, god, I can't think of the name of it. [*Dialogue with the Cosmos* –KW]

MS. RIEDEL: I think of some of those Native American bowls too in the Southwest—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, heavens.

MS. RIEDEL: Some of those highly abstracted—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Highly abstracted, yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—patterned bowls.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. And in fact, I was—that pattern over there is from a bowl. It's from a—I don't know exactly. They don't know exactly which group made that pattern because it was collected in 1905 in a canyon in New Mexico, so presumably one of the New Mexico Indians. Anyway, getting back to Rome, I think we were

talking about Rome in relationship to the diptychs, weren't we?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: And how it was such a huge shift in your work. And we tried to figure out if the gold—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: A huge shift in my work when you think of material. I also started using more oil glaze, so that I hadn't ever used an oil glaze at all. I had been painting very rough, dense oil paintings, very heavy paint, impasto paint, really. And these are relatively thin. So that the material changed, the surface of the painting changed, and I always felt that a lot of the message in the painting was through the material itself and that surface. That dense surface was always important to me. And the truth is, I got kind of tired of it. I just didn't want to do it like that anymore. And so this surface has also a different kind of message in it. I'd see this surface as kind of serene as opposed to that very dense manipulated surface of the earlier paintings. They were not serene.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They were agitated, if not angry.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Now, did I—was I an angry person? No. No, not very different than I am right now, you know. But there was that edgy level of anger or agitation in those very impastoed works that these don't convey, I don't think. So that there's an awful lot that changed; it wasn't just the imagery.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The imagery was still mountains. It happened to include figures—dancing figures, one or two, and the dancing figures were joyful. I mean, I was, I think, celebrating Rome—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—and this wonderful new life I had. It brought in my life and enriched my life in wonderful ways. And Ithaca is a sweet little town but it certainly isn't loaded with excitement. It's a quiet little town for the adults that live there. I don't know about the kids. It may be exciting for the kids. But it's just a quiet little town. And go from that—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was traveling a lot at the time. When I was in Ithaca I did a lot of lectures around the country.

MS. RIEDEL: You started teaching there in '88? Is that right?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You joined the art department? How did that come about? How did you—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well—

MS. RIEDEL: You were living here still in—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was in Englewood [New Jersey –KW]—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—with my husband.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And he was talking about retiring: "I want to get out of this place." And he was getting more and more depressed, I think, with it, with the situation there. He just wanted out, and he'd had enough. He had been in the magazine business for all of his career. He was a senior editor at *Consumer Reports*, so he was in what he wanted to be. It was an honest magazine, you know. It wasn't dependent on advertisements. And he liked that. And there was—but he was just sick of it, I think. He wanted out. He wanted to start his own business. And I said, "Well, Michael"—and I was working part time, which I had always done. Most of our marriage I had

worked part time.

MS. RIEDEL: You were teaching?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was teaching at the Montclair Art Museum—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—still, and I had been teaching at Upsala College for a while. And I was also doing some curating for the William Carlos Williams Center for Performing Arts in Rutherford, New Jersey. That's a mouthful. So I was doing all these various jobs, part time jobs, and I think I was still teaching on and off at the Art Center of Northern New Jersey. Mostly it was the Montclair and this Rutherford job. And I was painting maybe four days a week, something like that. So I was getting a lot of painting in too. And the nice thing about a part-time job is you can just walk away from it—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—you know? "I'm done." And you can go home and do your thing. You don't have to go to meetings and all that stuff. So he was talking about leaving his job and I said, "Well, Michael, if you're really going to leave your job, I should get a real job. I should get a job that has a real income, a monthly income." He said, "That's a good idea, Kay." I said, "How would you feel about Cornell?" He said, "Oh, that would be nice." Because there was an ad in the CAA for a job at Cornell.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I had not been able to get a job in the New York area that was a full-time job. I could only get part-time jobs, which is pretty common. That's what most people say. And I said, "There's a job up there. The director [of the Johnson Museum –KW] bought a piece of mine [… - KW] from Bertha Urdang so he might give me a little bit of a recommendation. Maybe I can get that job, Michael. How do you feel about moving?" And he was in love with our home in Englewood. He loved that house, so it was hard for him to leave, I'm sure. It would have been. But anyway, so he said, "Sure, Kay, do it," I think thinking that I wouldn't get the job. And so I got the job. And so I moved some stuff up there and rented a little apartment.

MS. RIEDEL: This was a full-time, tenure track position?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And it was actually quite a coup.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But I do think that the director gave me a little recommendation. And I said, "You don't have to write anything. Just call the chairman up, would you?" I mean, I, by that time, knew how things worked. I had taught in Ohio at Ohio State for a semester, just as semester gig, and they had asked me to stay. I didn't want to move to Ohio, but I certainly knew how colleges worked. So I went to Cornell. And Michael came up to see me and I would go down, so we saw each other about every other week, which was hard. But I said, "Well, you're going to retire. You're going to leave, right? You're going to leave. You're going to leave." "Oh, yes, yes, I'm going to leave." And he kept putting it off, and then the next March he died—up and died. He had, seemingly, a heart attack next to me, right? So, it was like he was going to leave. So that was a big shock.

MS. RIEDEL: And he was relatively young, I would imagine.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: He was 55 years old—54.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my gosh. Wow.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Yes. And he really believed he was going to live until his 80s because all of his family had. But he had, actually, a pulmonary embolism that killed him, and I don't know why. He certainly was not in good shape.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, he did a lot of sitting and reading. He smoked, drank a little, you know, did all the things that everybody loves to do, but still, it was really bizarre.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was a bizarre occurrence—very bizarre.

MS. RIEDEL: Shocking, I'm sure.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Shocking. So here I was at Cornell, and around Christmastime I'd said to him, "You know, I have to get another car because I can't manage these hills with this," and he said, "Don't worry, we'll do that." And he said, "You really don't want to stay there do you, Kay?" And I said, "Michael, I love teaching. I love it here. It's wonderful." I'd just come there and it was just marvelous—and these wonderful students I had. And they gave me a nice big studio, which eventually I lost, but I had this nice big studio at the school. And it was—you know, it was what I had been prepared to do, and I had been looking for a job. Ever since I left school in '75 I'd been looking for a full-time job and could only find them outside the city.

MS. RIEDEL: The city, yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And now that he was ready to leave the city, I thought—well, he didn't like Ithaca and he didn't like the apartment I chose and he didn't—you know, like, any excuse. And I guess that he was sick the whole time and didn't talk about it, didn't want to talk about it. I mean, an awful lot of men are that way about illness, you know. And I shouldn't—it isn't fair to make it a gender thing, but I have experienced the fact that many men don't like to talk about—deal with it. And he had been to a cardiologist who had said, "Well, we should do this and we should do that," and Michael said, "Oh, no." He said, "I don't want to do that." So he didn't pursue it properly. When he should have been taking better care of himself he didn't pursue it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So I assume that he had been probably ailing for the last couple of years, which is why he was getting down on his job, because he was tired.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Anyway, that's how I ended up at Cornell alone. And I stayed for another year and then I decided I couldn't stay up there anymore. I just couldn't stay up there anymore, and I got a job at Stony Brook.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Which, again, I got rather easily, rather quickly. It just happened. You know, I applied for it and got it, and was out there for two years and—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: How long were you at Cornell?

MS. RIEDEL: I had been there only two or three years. Let's see, I went there in '88; I left in '91—'90, and went back to Cornell in '92.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so you left for a year to go to Stony Brook.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was there actually two years at Stony Brook.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you resign at Cornell?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I did.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And they said, "You really want to resign?" I said, "Yes, I really want to resign." And they said, "You can take a leave of absence, Kay." I said, "I don't want to do that." So I took this job at Stony Brook and found that I really either had to move to Stony Brook—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I couldn't commute from New York anymore. I was living in Long Island City, and it was just killing me, that Long Island Expressway, you know, three days a week. So I decided that I would just as soon go back to Cornell—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—get a job that I knew was secure that I'd really get tenure. And Stony Brook was going through some bad times—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—with the legislature, et cetera. Good school, though. Good school. Good people. The students were adorable. They were just charming. You know, they were just charming kids—very different from Cornell students. They weren't the privileged kids from Cornell but wonderful kids anyway, you know. So I went back to Cornell and bought a house.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were you teaching at both Cornell and at Stony Brook? Were they similar courses?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. I was teaching studio art, painting and drawing. I love to teach drawing. I really do. But at Cornell I mostly taught painting, as it worked out, because there were not that many people who could teach painting, but there were a lot of people who could teach drawing, supposedly. I didn't think so, but—[laughs]. I thought the painters were the ones who should be teaching the drawing courses, but the printmakers and sculptors disagreed. Okay, but it was similar, and of course graduate students.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And the graduate students were always interesting and challenging, but it was fun. It was fun.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, were there specific—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Teaching was always fun for me. I always loved it.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there specific courses or projects, syllabus that you developed that were something you carried through for a decade, things that you felt were important to instill in either grad or undergrad students, other than the basic skills, or course?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I really think the craft—the basic skills were key, and an awful lot of people don't teach those today.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It galls the heck out of me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But an awful lot of kids come out of school and they can't paint. They call themselves painters and they don't have any idea how to paint. They don't have any concept of painting, really. And so that's one thing I really pushed. I like to teach figure painting, so I taught figure. I like to have a naked person in the room, basically. You know, I think it's stimulating for kids to have a model. I like to teach about how to conceptualize our—how to think about it and conceptualize it, and why are you making that the way you're making it, and what is it you're really saying to people with the painting? If painting is a language to express ideas, what are the ideas that you're expressing? And I tried to teach them how to think about that so they could do that. I don't think I had any magic bullets, I really don't, but that was my goal. I had the kids talk about their work a lot publicly, even freshmen, so that they would develop some skills in thinking about their work and expressing those ideas. I mean, there's a lot to painting that's intuitive. We all know that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, there's a lot to any kind of experience that's intuitive, but they also have to know what to—how to think about it rationally.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And the other thing that I thought was absolutely key to making art, and probably making anything, is focus. I mean, if you can't hit a ball with a tennis racket, it's because you're not focused on the damn ball.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So that if I could get those kids to fully focus on what they were doing, I thought that I'd won.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Those were pretty simple ideas. I mean, Dirk has all these, you know, elaborate things that

he taught. I was—that was not for me. I didn't teach those elaborate things. It was very concrete. And one of the reasons I thought it was time to leave was that there was all this critical theory coming in that I didn't think made very interesting art. It's interesting criticism, perhaps, and interesting books and it's back to Tom Wolfe's book about the—*The Painted Word*, I think it's called. You know, that what has become important is really the talking about and writing about the art, not the looking at the art. And I want to make art that people can look at and say, "I get it." And I always did, whether I was making an abstraction or not. I want people to be able to enjoy the ideas visually rather than having to read about it.

And that whole—and all those theories of critical theory and this—they have a new department at Cornell that's visual something or other. I forget what they call it. But it's really about this kind of approach to art through the theory and the writing, the verbal rather than the visual. And I didn't feel that there was a place for me in it. I would go into somebody's studio and they were making absolute crap and were expected to be taken seriously because the idea was, they thought, valid. Well, the junk I'm looking at isn't, you know? I had trouble with that. It seemed I was inadequate to deal with it because I didn't want to talk about it, but there was something almost—it was against all of my views of what made art really important. So I had to leave in the end. And it just happened that I was 70 years old. It was the prefect time to get out—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—because I'm the old girl anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Time to move on. And it was a time that I knew that I could still paint eagerly and didn't need to have the students.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you seeing a huge shift in terms of technology affecting their way of working and their way of thinking?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I think so. I mean, certainly photography, but photography—I mean I have photographs on the wall myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, photography affects us all, always has.

MS. RIEDEL: You know, I'm thinking about digital media and—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But certainly digital media seemed important and was taking on importance that I didn't—I couldn't give it. But, you know, I like the hand in the work. I like the sense of the hand, the sense that this is made by a human—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—who has feelings and energy and vitality and all those important things that you can read into a handmade object.

MS. RIEDEL: Has technology affected your work in any way?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, I don't think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I didn't think so either, but—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'm an old-fashioned girl, I'm afraid. I really am. But, you know, I think that my work has gotten more traditional as I've aged, which I think is interesting. And I don't have any excuses for it. But I do; I think it's more traditional in a sense in that, okay, it's about a little bit more than just the pictorial [… - KW].

You have to—you can't make realism [unless –KW] you make realism that's got some sort of exaggerated edge. I mean even Dana Schultz, who everybody adores [and she's a good painter –KW], you know, there is an exaggerated edginess that is important. You know, it's like the *fin de siécle*—well, end of the millennium "we're all going to explode" kind of view that mitigates realism, or mitigates the real world. So somehow the real world isn't enough; it has to have this edge that horror is coming or some sort of maniacal beauty that—it's kind of interesting, but I think that there's more there than just that. [… - KW]

MS. RIEDEL: Do you, when you look back on your career at this point, do you think of yourself as part of an American tradition, part of an international tradition? How do you think about yourself and the work?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, right now I feel very related to John Singer Sargent because I adore John Singer Sargent. And he definitely is an American but he lived in Europe most of his life. You know, I love Marsden Hartley—very involved with his German lover, you know, very involved with the Southwest. I love (isn't that awful the way—this is the second or third time I've done this) but there are a lot of painters—Kitaj [R.B. Kitaj – KW]—Kitaj is a wonderful painter. Max—not Weber—I'll think of him and I'll tell you tomorrow [Max Beckman – KW], but there's a lot of—you know, I see the paintings in my head, and I can't think of the name, but there's a lot of wonderful, wonderful painters who have worked realistically who have said so much through their paintings. The written word is not necessary. All of the energy is right there, and you can see it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, there's a painting—I've been involved in the Montclair Museum a lot. I was on their board for a while and they have a couple of pieces of mine. And they have a collection of George Inness' work. And George Inness is just a landscape painter, you know? By the way, it's Singer Sargent landscapes that I go for. It's not the portraits, although they're wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: He's a marvelous landscape painter.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, he did some Venice things you could die over. But George Inness is just this wonderful American painter, just wonderful painter. And just this guy from Montclair, New Jersey, you know? And he's just wonderful. So, yes, I see myself as an American. I kind of see myself as a patriot, as a matter of fact. I believe in America. In spite of the horrible things we're doing in Afghanistan right now, and should get the hell out, I see myself as a patriot. I believe in what we have here. I certainly don't believe that we ought to give it back to the Indians, I mean, you know, as an Indian. [Laughs.] American democracy is largely based on Haudenosaunee democracy. I mean these early fathers studied the Iroquoian democracy. So, I believe in what we are here, and I believe that we as Americans are a wonderful polyglot mass of people. I wish we were smarter in who we elect, but I'm sort of an avid Democrat who's angry right now. But I am very much of this place. This is really home. And I would have liked to have lived longer in Rome. I would have liked to have lived there a couple of years at least.

MS. RIEDEL: But you were there multiple times—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I was.

MS. RIEDEL:—in '96, '98.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. I was there in '97. I was there every year for about 12 years.

MS. RIEDEL: And for varying periods of time?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Varying periods of time. The times I went with Cornell, they were usually five or six months. The time I was at the academy I was only there for two months. I didn't have a prize, of course.

MS. RIEDEL: That's the American Academy—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Yes. And I was there on trips, you know, for two and three weeks at a time.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So that I've been there often.

MS. RIEDEL: Primarily Rome, or throughout Italy?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Primarily Rome, but throughout Italy as well. I mean I traveled a lot. But that was wonderful, and I would have liked to have retired there for a couple of years, but I couldn't. I thought it was a bit too risky, you know, at my age to make those changes. For instance, it was a good thing I didn't because I got cancer the very next year, and to get cancer in Rome—I mean, it might not even have been diagnosed properly. I mean, I'm sure there are good doctors there, but I felt more comfortable about New York. The great doctors are here. And it's just complex living in Rome—you know, standing in line to pay your bills and things like that, that you have to do. Or you pay somebody to go stand in line so you can pay your gas bill. I mean, wacko.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So it would be nice to live there for a couple years, but I didn't want to just be an ex-pat. So I'm an American, very much.

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

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think the Indian community has, but I don't have any close friends in it. We're all—you know, those of us who are showing all know one another. And there's not that many of us. It's not that big a group. I've been involved with those people for years, but, as I said, not close friends. I mean, not close to them. I've had friends—close friends over the years, like I have a friend named Rachel Friedberg, and she and I used to go to the galleries together, before I went to graduate school mostly, but afterwards as well. And she's always made art. She's primarily self-taught, has done very well. And she's had a lot of shows. She shows at a fancy-pantsy uptown gallery; I forget which. But she's really done very well over the years, and I've always thought of her as a close friend. I don't see her very often anymore, haven't. And she hasn't been well. But she and I kind of got each other through those early years that were difficult, you know, when you'd go to a gallery and they'd say, "Oh, dear, we have way too many artists." And then they'd flash the slides in front of their eyes like this—you know, shoot a slide. They go that fast. So she and I did that together, and she was a big help. And I think I was a help to her and she was a help to me. We kind of leaned on one another, because we were in the suburbs so we weren't part of any of the women's groups here. And, you know, I know a lot of those women in the women's groups. I mean, but—and we occasionally went to meetings, various groups, but it was unusual.

MS. RIEDEL: You talked about being a Democrat. I'm wondering, do you see social or political commentary in your work?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No.

MS. RIEDEL: You don't.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I never have done current political commentary, but a lot of my work in the early '90s, especially at the Columbus Quincentenary Celebration, I did a lot of political work then about, you know, this notion of why are we celebrating this man, who was the first slave trader, for instance? He took Indian slaves back to Spain. A lot of them died on the way, of course, but the ones who made it made lousy slaves. [Laughs.] They weren't very good at it. [Too independent –KW]

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting to me, though, that when you paint some of these landscapes—and there's the Native American patterns, talk about the land as being Native American land not in terms of real estate but in terms of presence—that doesn't strike you as political or social commentary of a sort?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, it is political. It is a political. I mean, my son says, "You get out of bed and you're political."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think he has a point—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—in that, sure, it's political in that it's making a statement about a long-range political viewpoint and a historical political viewpoint, but I don't deal with today's politics—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—in that I'm interested in today's politics but not enough to make paintings about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The paintings, they're about historical issues and bigger issues than day-to-day politics, I would think.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I've done some paintings, and I actually did an object, that are about the genocide that happened here. And there was a kind of genocide that occurred here, not quite as efficient as what went on in Germany but—nor as politically determined, but there was a kind of genocide that went on here. And it was mostly about land grab. You know, it was mostly about real estate. But the Ridge Party that I talked about—stop me if I'm giving you too much history, but that happened. The Ridge assassination happened because the tribe

was split up, and part of the tribe blamed Ridge for their being moved—the Cherokees being moved to Oklahoma. And part of the tribe stayed in the South and part went West, and Ridge led it and then was blamed for it. And that was highly politicized. Oh, Jackson himself was involved in that—you know, Andrew Jackson. He's the one that put the final stamp on the removal. It was voted down by the Senate and he vetoed it and then sent them away. So, highly politicized history.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I did a piece—I don't own it anymore but I think it's in this.

MS. RIEDEL: So when you do paintings about, you know, Bear Paw, you don't consider those social or political?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, absolutely, in a historical way.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But not in a—I don't see them as political in today's politics.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They have to do with the history—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—of our country.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Absolutely. But this is called *Where are the Generations*, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Right. This is '91, I think, isn't it?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: This is—you know, absolutely, it's about the Columbus Quincentenary and the genocide. I can't quote it for you now, but anyway, yes, yes we—

MS. RIEDEL: And there was a poem that went with that, isn't there?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. "In 1492 there were 20 million of us. Now there are 2 [million]. Where are the children? Where are the generations never born?" The population growth is greater in third world countries with all their disease and with their problems than it has been among Native Americans. It's the lowest population growth because they were decimated. I still find that very upsetting after all these years of dealing with it. I still get really upset talking about it.

MS. RIEDEL: And does that continue to inform your work, do you think?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Not really, not in that way. I had to stop making those things about the Quincentenary because I just couldn't bear it any longer. I made a little sculpture of a funerary scaffold in leather. And what else did I make? I made a book that opened up that told about the massacre at Wounded Knee. And it was just too many things to deal with and I just stopped—just stopped making them. And, you know, these are—they do have a political input in that they are, you know, a statement of who we are. I've done a lot of paintings about the fact that we're all still here. I mean, we're only 2 million, but we're still here. And most people think that the Indians are all gone, and they're not. They're not. So that idea has been prevalent in a lot of the works that I have done. And I think these are still about that notion of we're still here. It's still our land. You may own it and farm it, live on it, but it's still our land. This is where we really come from.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't think I would call that a political statement but I guess it is.

MS. RIEDEL: I just did a couple of interviews in New Mexico last month with a couple of women artists who also are Hopi, and—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Did you do Ramona Sakiestewa?

MS. RIEDEL: No, but she has been done. I think somebody spoke with her earlier this year or perhaps last. But they—sorry, not Hopi. Pueblo. And the sites of land, the land where they actually live today, it has been—you know, they talk about going back a thousand years, just so many generations. There is such a profound sense of the land. So, what you were saying is resonating especially strongly, given those recent two interviews.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Who were they?

MS. RIEDEL: Roxanne Swentzell—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—and Jody Folwell.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Nice.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They're very nice.

MS. RIEDEL: They were—

[Cross talk.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Have the Archives intentionally been trying to get more women?

MS. RIEDEL: You know, I don't know because I don't put together the list. There's a board of people that put together the list. I think they're—I don't know so I shouldn't say anything one way or the other.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Interesting. Yes, interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: I would imagine it depends on who is on the board.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, for sure.

MS. RIEDEL: But I think there has been a real effort to be as inclusive—to be inclusive—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—on many levels.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, because I noticed in the book it's mostly guys.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, in that brief series of excerpts?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I'd say probably—I would imagine close to half the interviews I've done have been female—

[Cross talk.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, good.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That's good.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll have to go back and look, but quite a few.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That's good. Yes. You know, I wanted to say, getting back to the book and seeing Robert Rauschenberg's beautiful photograph—he was a beautiful man, beautiful-looking man. I wanted to say that when I first came to New York and when I started showing, or trying to show, especially after I'd gotten out of

school, after I got out of Pratt, I really wanted to show as a woman, as a Native woman, as an Indian, but to show as part of the mainstream. I wanted to be accepted in the mainstream using the name I've got—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—because I could have easily used my husband's name—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—or my mother's maiden name and be seen as just another white girl—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—and I don't know what would have happened to my art, actually, because it certainly wouldn't have gone in the direction it went. But the point is that I couldn't do that. I had to be who I was. I had to be—stand up straight and be proud of being an Indian like my mother told me to do, you know. And I wanted that for everybody. I didn't want it just for myself, but I wanted other Native people to be able to show in mainstream art shows. And the Native Indian movement was just starting when I graduated. You know, there was—

MS. RIEDEL: From Beaver or from Pratt?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: From Pratt.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was the '70s.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I mean they were all affected by the same things I was. And people like Jaune Quick-To-See Smith and Emmi Whitehorse and—oh, who else was in that early group? Peter Jemison and George Longfish and—oh, Larry Emerson was in that group too. I mean there's a group of Native people trying to show. And, you know, I really wanted that to happen, the sense that they can show and be accepted in standard mainstream galleries—you know, everywhere. And I was invited to show with some Indian people right after the first show I did at Bertha Urdang's. And it was the show of the Chief Joseph pieces. And Jaune contacted me and said that she figured I had to be an Indian, and would I be interested in showing with this group in the Southwest.

Both of my then-dealers, Wenger and Urdang, discouraged it, saying, "All the Indian work is kitschy and it's going to look like work that you see on the Santa Fe Plaza, and it's not good enough, Kay. You shouldn't show with them because it's not good enough." And I said, "I don't think that's right. This is who I am, and I have to be part of these people. I mean I have to stand with the Indians, you know?" And they kind of backed up, but they said, "You know, you're going to be sorry because this is a huge mistake." And I think that that's the way a lot of people looked at it—I mean, Rauschenberg didn't ever talk about being an Indian because you're going to be pigeonholed and you're going to be thought of as a kitschy artist no matter what you do, because there's so many Indians out there making feathers and beads.

And I just sort of stumbled along and insisted upon going my way and doing what I wanted to do. And I think for myself I have perhaps done that. I mean, I show in, you know, mainstream places as well as Indian venues. But I think that there is still—I mean, I don't think I've succeeded in my goal of overcoming that for everyone. I really do not. And I think that's a great shame. I don't know where that takes us.

MS. RIEDEL: At the same time, you've managed to do that for yourself—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That's what I said.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I've managed to do it for myself more or less, although—and the truth is that when I was a kid I didn't expect to have any success at all, really. I just thought that if I could be a painter as long as I live, that's a great gift. That's wonderful for me, you know, and that's really what I wanted and what I expected. I didn't expect anything else. So, I feel I've done really well in that I've had a lot of wonderful experiences as an artist. I've had a lot of teaching. I've influenced a lot of people. My work has been seen in a lot of museums. I feel like I've done really well. But I don't feel that I've done this other part of my goal, which was to open doors for other Indian people. And I don't think I have.

MS. RIEDEL: Even by doing it yourself you don't feel like that door has—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don’t know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. We’ll see.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Well, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: It may be too early to tell.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Maybe it’s too early to tell, but it’s 40 years later. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: I think that—[inaudible] slowly.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Be patient, Kay. Be patient. *Pazienza!* [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: How have your sources of inspiration changed over the years?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, golly, I have changed over the years. I’m much more confident and much more at ease with who I am in the world. I think that has affected the work in that I’m—I mean, I’m perfectly willing to make paintings that look like they were made in, you know, 1940. That’s all right, you know? I have the confidence that I can do exactly what I want in the art, and if people don’t like it, fine. We can take that out too. But I think that that confidence that I’ve gained from teaching all those years and making art all those years—and I think that changes the work, because I don’t have to perform—I don’t have to make art that suits the art world at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I just don’t care anymore. I don’t have to make art that answers those requirements, whatever they are now. I don’t know what they are.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: So it’s more work that speaks specifically to you?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I can’t say more than the other work. I think the work has always been at my core, always.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But I can take the chance of making what looks very much like realism to me, and I don’t think I ever did before.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems the landscape, though, has been a source of inspiration for decades. Is that true?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: For decades.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, the figure—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: For decades.

MS. RIEDEL:—also up and down but—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—an abstraction.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But the abstraction very often related to landscape, in my head—

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—if not otherwise. And there is painted piece called—I think it’s just *Homage to Chief Joseph*, and it’s a poured painting with a big hide shape, kind of like the big, square hide shape in it. And the sides are black and the center is black with other colors in it. And I look at that and I see a landscape. And at the time I thought it was a kind of abstraction, and I looked at it and it’s not. It’s a kind of landscape. So—

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: For me, because it has a sense of receding space.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's a very simple black with purples and dark reds. But they're very horizontal. You know, they say anything that's horizontal is a landscape and anything that's vertical is a portrait.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. [They laugh.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't know who first said that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Probably Thucydides or somebody. But it's always been an interest. As I said, when I was this little kid, this silly little kid being taken with the vale of the Onondagas—you know, it's always there.

MS. RIEDEL: The vale of the Onondagas?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The Onondaga Valley, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: So landscape in many ways has been a metaphor for you to work with. It's been a doorway to other places. It's been a—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—a way to examine psychological states. It's been a parallel to the human body.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. It's sort of filled in everything, in a way, and yet there was 10 years that I didn't do landscape, when I did not—

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like it's the focus has changed. It's coming more specific focus. It's gone in a more abstracted focus.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And this landscape is more specific to a place than—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: In the past, the place wasn't always so apparent—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—the specific place. It was a general place. I did a bunch of watercolors of waterfalls in Ithaca because they have waterfalls everywhere, and they have a specific look. I was doing a lecture someplace or other and David Penny was in the audience. And David Penny is the assistant to the director of the NMAI. He used to be—he was at the Detroit Institute for 25 years or 26 years. And he's a scholar of Native American historical objects, as well as contemporary. And he was in the audience. And I really didn't know him then, and he piped up with this voice: "That's in Ithaca, New York!" [Laughs.] "I recognize those falls." And come to find out that David Penney was born in Ithaca, born and raised in Ithaca, and he knew the specific falls.

MS. RIEDEL: Some of those falls are specific.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Some of them are very—

MS. RIEDEL: They are dramatic and very specific.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, they are. So he was—I thought that was awfully cute of him. So I have done specific landscapes before, but these are definitely—and we were talking about traveling. I think of a lot of my travels as really image-finding travels to find images to paint.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, and not always. I mean, we just went to London and that certainly wasn't about image finding, although it was wonderful to look at all that art.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Wonderful collections.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you give some examples of places you have gone? I think of the Bitterroot Mountains—

[Cross talk.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I taught in Durango—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—for—it was one of those jobs that I was getting experience teaching full time before I—because I couldn't get a job here. And I went out to Durango in '84. So it was just about that time that I was changing, and that was another one of those experiences that I thought, I really would love to paint these mountains. And I did—most of those [paintings –KW] I destroyed also. The early diptychs, I destroyed most of them—well, not most of them but a lot of them. Durango, Colorado—my husband came out to visit and we drove around the Southwest quite a bit, and I had never been to the Southwest before that. And it was very exciting for me to see the mountains, very exciting.

MS. RIEDEL: Because there aren't mountains like that here, that's for sure.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And there are mountains other places but nothing like the Rockies. I mean, the mountains in Italy are wonderful too, but they sure are different—different in color. Our Rockies have just wonderful color. So I think that the mountain paintings really started in Durango.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The Colorado mountains. And the last show I did at June's had a number of—I had one painting of the Colorado mountains, because Dirk is from Colorado. He was born in Denver. And we went back right after we were married. Someone offered us their place in—it was one of those little towns [Crested Butte - KW] in Colorado—that are wonderful, but you can't breathe there. You know, they're just beautiful but [I –KW] can't breathe. [Panting.]

MS. RIEDEL: Because they're so high?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: The altitude is so high?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I had bloody noses all the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'm not good in the heights, but I love it. I just can't—my body doesn't.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But they're beautiful. It's beautiful. Beautiful. Would you like to—it's 4:00.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: What time were you planning on—

MS. RIEDEL: I was thinking right about—I think the disc is about to end anyway, so I was thinking we'd just—yes, it's at 15 minutes. So why don't we call it a day and pick up tomorrow?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Does that work for you?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Okay, yes. What time—

[END OF DISC.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Kay WalkingStick at the artist's studio in Jackson Heights, New York on December 14th, 2011, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is Disc Number 3. So, we both woke up with all sorts of thoughts following our conversation from yesterday—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—things we wanted to address, add on to.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And let's start with what your thoughts have been.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I kind of felt that I had blown you off about the religious aspect overall. I think when I was growing up and when I was younger, I really thought that everybody had the kind of religious experience as children that I did.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, it might have been a different religion, but there was a religious experience. And of course that is simply not true. And I've also come to realize that people—many people do not take that into consideration in their work. And when I was doing those big abstractions, a friend, who was a writer as well as artist, said, "Oh, Kay, I think your paintings are a dialogue with God," which I thought was an interesting thing to say, even though at the time I thought of myself as a—oh, kind of a nontheist compared to what I was raised with.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And there was also this—throughout the period of making—of my art-making, this sense that art should be—it should have to do with mythic questions and, you know, it should have to do with God and death and birth and things that are unanswerable, the great unanswerbles of our life. Our own consciousness, for example, is an unanswerable.

MS. RIEDEL: These were ideas that you had or that you thought, somebody else thought, you read somewhere?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No, these were my thoughts, but I think they come out of that very religious childhood, that very religious education as a child. And there is also, among most Native people, this notion that one walks with God. But this is also a part of any religion that I've ever heard of.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So that it's a universal sense that one walks with God. And that was very much a part of my childhood and youth. As I said, my sister was married to a minister. My niece, by the way, is an Episcopal bishop. And in my sensibility I'm much more of an Episcopalian than a Catholic, to tell you the truth. [… -KW] But this notion that art should have a mythic quality—Ad Reinhardt called it "lifeless, deathless, endless." So it should have a philosophical intent—perhaps not everything, but painting for me is poetry. It is conveying ideas through visual means—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—and ideas that really can't be expressed any other way but visual. A lot of my problem with today's art is that that's not true at all. And a lot of my problems with abstraction today is that it really is simply about decoration and design elements working together. But, to come back to this other question, it is true that I kind of turned my back on religion for a long period in my life, maybe as long as 10 years. Of course, out of 70-some years I suppose that's not quite so long. But the presence of God has always been part of the way I thought about living on the planet. Whether I was in church or not had nothing to do with that, of course, and that childhood which was, as I said, such a religion-centered childhood—and my mother was not that religious, I mean, but there was—I recognized that, compared to others, it was religion-centered. You know, we were in church on Sunday [almost –KW]all day. We were—and not narrow-minded about our, you know, frivolity. We're not talking Quakers or Mennonites or anything like that. We were just Presbyterians.

But Wednesday night prayer meeting—those things you cannot say they don't affect you. I mean, even the—I know a lot of people who are Catholic who have turned away from the Church for one reason or another, and usually because they had a bad experience in schools. And those people are affected by that education. Most of them have a really good education, actually. And you cannot turn your back on what you got as a child, fully. It's going to affect you. And there is no doubt that my view of what art should be, this notion that it should have a mythic content, some sort of philosophical goal, some sort of message—and I don't mean Goody Two-Shoes message, but something about what we're doing here, [on the planet –KW] in the work.

And consequently I have probably talked about it as a spiritual force, but I'm not sure that's the right kind of wording to use, because it makes it sound a little woo-woo, a little—whereas what it really was about was philosophy of living. And I think that—I was just talking about the Earth as sacred, and I believe it is in that it's all we've got. This is what was given to us and this is all we've got. And I think that everybody with any sense at all sees it as sacred. But of course there's a lot of despoilers who are out there doing horrible things. So that there is, I suppose, a somewhat implied environmentalism involved in the landscape. And I think that this notion of what is implied through art has always been key to what was going in all of my art. It was not what was directly stated so much as what that leads the viewer to think. So, consequently I've always expected the viewer to give it more than the 30 seconds most pieces of art get.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting that you're saying this too, because I was having similar thoughts last night and this morning, that landscape really became the ground or the landscape, the physical and literal metal, so the metaphorical and psychological ground or landscape for exploration of a variety of ideas.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, you were saying—

MS. RIEDEL: Spiritual, yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—yesterday about that I had gone through different views and phases concerning the land—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—that became the bodyscape.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It becomes—and I think that that's actually true. But I was never simply making pretty pictures of the landscape.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That was never my goal. Now, it may have come off that way, but it was never my goal.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I think that there's also been an avoidance of any kind of heavy-handed message. I find message paintings tremendously boring. And there's a lot of—I have to be careful about the way I talk about this. There is a lot of work being done by Native people that I would say is primarily involved with identity politics. It's about message, you know, and ain't it a shame and ain't it awful? Well, usually it is awful so what's new, you know? But I've tried to avoid identity politics that are heavy handed. And it would be easy to slip into that. And I personally think it gets really boring after a while. You know, what else do I have to read, because all of them expect you to read a mountain of stuff about their work before you're allowed to look at it, basically.

I really want to make art that touches people's gut and heart with ideas. I want people to go home and think about, "What the hell was that woman talking about with that stuff?" And the paintings that are diptychs with an abstraction on one side and a realism of sorts on the other I think were really confusing to people. And when I first started to do them I didn't get a lot of huzzahs and there was not a lot of encouragement from people. It took a long time for people to come to them and—because they wanted it to be, oh, well this is a white world and this is an Indian world, which is not what it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was not about that. It was about the inside and the outside of the soul, to wax a little heavy. It was, you know, about our experience of these mythic questions of life, and probably missed by a whole lot of people because a whole lot of people aren't bringing that religious education that I have, or that desire to see it in any kind of philosophical light. My work has never sold like hotcakes, you know. It's never sold big. And it's actually—recently I have been doing quite well. But I really think it was because the work was—demanded so much of the viewer. It demanded a kind of education, but it also demanded a seriousness, a gravitas if you will, on the part of the viewer. And I think the things that I—the painters that I like—oh, by the way, I thought of that artist that I love that I couldn't remember yesterday. It was Max Beckmann, of course. I mean, of course it's Max Beckmann. But the—well, I think that now people—I've been doing this stuff for a long time. I think that those who look at art accept and understand and get it. But those first few paintings in '85, people would just shake their heads and say, "What on earth is going on?" Anyway, did I clarify a little bit about my religious experience?

MS. RIEDEL: I think so. Was there anything you wanted to say also about the political or the social commentary you'd mentioned?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Well, I think that—concerning the political, in a way I think as soon as you deal with important issues, you are not dealing with simply decoration. And, in a sense, I don't have any problem with decoration. It just—it's like some of these artists whose paintings are obviously just jokes. It's okay, but I have no desire to stand and look at it at any length of time. You know, I want something that I can get my teeth into. And I think that any kind of art that has some sort of philosophical underpinning, as I said, has this mythic quality that you see in someone like Rothko or others, and of course the great painters of the past like Caravaggio. There is a political—there is a political suggestion in all great art. It's always somehow a political stance, even what I would call religious art. There is something political about it in that it's dealing with society. These new paintings you were absolutely correct in saying that by putting in that pattern, you are implying a political issue, and it's true.

MS. RIEDEL: I was reflecting on the series of work over the past four decades and how it's changed and come full circle, and how it's taken things that were—I looked at a painting I think of Ramapo River back in '87, and so it's interesting to see that this is coming up again. So I've been struck again and again by themes that were touched on early on and then disappeared for a while, went underground, and have come back and surfaced in different ways. And I've been reflecting on that as well as on the diptych format, which you've used so successfully for decades now. And it seems to me that the one constant that I can think of, given the different series that we discussed yesterday and the drastic changes, but the one constant is this tension in the diptych, this sense that you can actually, in certain paintings, almost see the shapes shifting between the diptychs. I'm thinking of one painting in particular that was done I think right around 1990, and it had—it's related to—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: *Letting Go*.

MS. RIEDEL: It might be—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It has to come—

MS. RIEDEL: It could also be—it was right around "blame it on the mountain."

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes, that's funny.

MS. RIEDEL: There's another one where you can see the woman and the landscape actually almost fusing into each other.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So right around that same time. And then I think there's another painting where it was landscape and pattern, but as opposed to pattern it was actually deconstructed body parts—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—superimposed on the—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—on the surface of the painting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That's a very strange painting. I haven't done—

MS. RIEDEL: It is a strange painting, but to me it was really revealing. Do you remember what the title of that was?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That is called—oh, shoot, I can—[*Le Alpi e Le Gambe* -KW]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we'll look it up.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, I can look it up, but it is—they're gold. The legs are gold.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And, of course, when you look down at yourself, what you see is your legs. And that's what it's about.

MS. RIEDEL: But it's interesting to me because the—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And it's about—it's actually about the sex act. It's about sex because in—perhaps this is inappropriate content; I don't know, but in orgasm one feels an expansion of body, of coming apart. That's what it's about, is about that sense of coming apart. And when you look down, what you see is your legs. I happen to love legs. I just think they're wonderful. You know, they carry us around and they dance and they're beautiful. And men's legs are every bit as beautiful as women's legs. Legs are just beautiful. So that that was about my—you know, I really like legs, but also about sex itself, and very possibly missing it at times. I was not with anybody so it was kind of hard. And the mountains are the mountains in Italy. Those are Italian mountains. So there's a certain loneliness implied but a certain joy also, and the joy that we are physical beings, that we are these healthy physical beings who keep on being as we are, hopefully until we croak.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, this ties into a statement you made, too, that I was trying to find, that I couldn't put my fingers on. It was something about deciding at one point to use landscape as a trope for human experience—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—and to explore 21st century human experience with landscape as the landscape, literally physically and metaphorically.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think that that intersection of humanity and landscape—human experience, sexual experience, erotic experience, romantic experience, that's something that seems to happen repeatedly in the work, directly and indirectly, through abstraction, through a pattern—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, I think so.

MS. RIEDEL:—through figure, through narrative, through landscape.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I see it as my friend said, it was a dialogue with God, but it's also a dialogue with ecstasy—

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—this joy of ecstasy. And of course, you know, you see St. Teresa in Rome; there is kind of an overlay between the dialogue with God and the dialogue with ecstasy.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. And I think the cross paintings are especially interesting in this context. Can you say something about those, how they came about?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, the funny thing about the cross paintings is that my dealer doesn't like to show them because we live in New York, and it seems like to most people it is a solely Christian sign.

MS. RIEDEL: But of course it's not that kind of cross.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And it's not at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's not at all. It's not a Roman cross.

MS. RIEDEL: And it doesn't strike me that way at all.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It isn't even a Tau cross.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's in fact, a Celtic—[pronounces it "seltic"]—cross.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Or Celtic—[pronounces it "keltic"]—as Dirk would correct me. Then, the Celtic cross is oftentimes more—has more shape to it, but it's a cross like that. It's also the sign for Gaia, the astrological sign for the Earth, which most people don't know, so it doesn't really carry it, I suppose. It also means there's more here.

MS. RIEDEL: It's also—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, it's a plus sign after all.

MS. RIEDEL: And a metaphorical intersection of landscape and figure.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Good. Right, the horizontal and vertical. Yes, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: And then in abstraction it seems to me that your work is so much about that intersection of landscape and figurative and abstraction.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I would hope so. I would hope it's seen that way because I don't see a lot of difference between abstraction and realism. I never have. I look at something and I see it abstractly, actually, as well as literally. The sign is of course, originally in my head, the sign of the four directions.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And most Native people—and, as I said yesterday, there's not a lot of Pan-Indian symbols or Pan-Indian activity. You know, there was something like 350 different languages here, all of them so different.

They're as different as English and Chinese. So, you know, the Indians were not all the same.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But they did, most of them, use this plus sign as the four directions sign. And it is of course, to me, a Celtic—[pronounces it "keltic"]—or a Celtic [pronounces it "seltic"]—sign of Christianity, so that it had that unity but also this unity of there's more here. I really like the notion it's a plus sign. There's more to look at here than just what you get the first time you glance at it, whether that gets through to people or not. You know, one of the interesting things about making any kind of art, I'm sure whether you're a poet or write, or whether you make visual statements or whatever, you never know what people are seeing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You never know what people are getting. They bring their own stuff to it, their own education, or lack of it. They bring their own desires to it: "I want to see something about the environment," so they're going to see something about the environment. You never know what [they are –KW] seeing. And I really —I find that exciting. And, you know, you can look at those abstractions and say, "Well, all it is I think, red paint layered with a shape in the middle," and see it as nothing more than that. And I understand that, that I am assigning meaning to it. I would hope others assign meaning that maybe is a little similar, but there may be people who do not assign anything at all. There you are. Speaking of these cross symbols, I don't know if I've answered your question for you—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but I—for a time I decided that I was going to do something entirely different. I just decided I was going to do something entirely different. I had been very ill, sick unto death as a matter of fact, and as I said, Dirk said we both were [sick –KW] and both pulled through fine.

MS. RIEDEL: This was what year, roughly?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: 1970 for me.

MS. RIEDEL: 1970?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'm sorry, not 1970. How can I say 1970? The brain is a funny thing. It was—I was 70.

MS. RIEDEL: You were 70, okay. So six years ago.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I was 70, so six years ago. Anyway, Dirk was, I think, only 63 when he got it. So he was a lot younger when it happened to him, but I was 70. And I tend to see numbers in my head, which is what happened just then. I think that the shock of that made me want to do some different things, that, "Gosh, there's so much I haven't painted about, and maybe I'm dying, you know. Let's do it now." And that painting of Jesus as an Indian —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—which I happen to love, on the top of it, it says "Jesus Christ" in Cherokee. It's written on top of it. And it has a little dove on it. It's really—

MS. RIEDEL: It's a little icon, different than anything else.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's a little icon. And I did it because, oddly enough, I did it because I'd seen a painting by Dieric Bouts, for whom Dirk Bach was named.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I saw this painting by Dieric Bouts of Jesus as a German. He looks so German in this. And, you know, nice-looking German, a little teary-eyed, a little watery-eyed, but—and it's a gorgeous painting. It's just gorgeous as a—I think it has a gold cross, not the red cross, against red. So the background is opposite. But I thought, shoot, if he can do Jesus as a German, I can do Jesus as an Indian. And of course Indians, they don't have any hair. [Laughs.] We're a hairless bunch, you know? So, anyway, I also decided that I—what do I really love? Well, I love landscape and I really love Italian painting, Italian Quattrocento painting. I love Giotto and Duccio [di Buoninsegna] and—you know, and the Lorenzetti boys [Pietro and Ambrogio] and all these people that you associate with early Italian painting. Oh, and I also love Botticelli, who of course was later, and I decided that I would do a series of paintings that have to do with these artists—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—about these artists. I don't know if they're on the CDs or not.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So I did a group of probably eight or 10 paintings. And they were small, and I would take pieces of a painting and use it, and a piece of another painting and use it. And there's a wonderful Duccio at the Frick, a place I love. I have always loved the Frick. And, you know, I go there and look for the paintings in exactly the same place, and "What did you do with my Corot," you know—"my" [Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot].

But anyway, there's this wonderful Duccio, and Jesus is pointing to the devil and—like the witch in *Snow White*, the devil is always the most interesting figure in it, and the witch is always the most interesting figure, you know, this "bad" woman. I love that movie. And so where is this wonderful picture of Jesus with this hand like this, and pointing to this marvelous devil that has the legs of a heron, the head of a satyr, Roman satyr, and the wings of a bat. I mean it's just a superb devil. I mean, just superb. And so I painted the devil—painted the devil, probably even bigger than the Duccio at the—and it's a predella, so, you know, it's one of these long, thin pieces. I mean, his is a predella; mine is not. And there is the devil, against a flat ground, I think. And then the other side is the painting of mountains in the style of Duccio.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, there are these stylized mountains that I just think are grand. And I've done the one that Christ is—also a Duccio predella of Christ walking on the devil. And all you see is his feet and the bottom of his gown with this wonderful, wonderful devil. And I think that one has the pattern from behind the Cimabue maybe? Anyway, it's a pattern that's from behind a Madonna [in the Uffizi –KW], of silk—one of those wonderful silk patterns that they imported in that period and only the aristocracy had it. So she was—she was the queen of heaven, so she has this wonderful pattern. And I did, as I said, a group of them. And these were just two but I certainly did others. I did something based on Masaccio and [they –KW] totally [did not interest –KW] my dealer [… - KW]. And I think it's because they were blatantly—now, I'm not certain, but blatantly religious rather than—I don't think it was because they were obviously taken from old masters.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, Dotty Attie has made a career out of that for, you know, all of her career. It isn't about that. I think it's about this—that it appears to be Christian art.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Whereas—and, you know, perhaps that's part of the attraction for me. But I also did one that's based on a Botticelli—I guess it's *La Primavera* because it has the West Wind with his girlfriend, you know, flying in. But they were not interesting to my dealer, and I suspect they wouldn't be to any dealer. And part of it is I think because of their blatant religiosity or blatant Christianity, except of course from Botticelli. But I think also people expect me to make work that is of a certain type.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: "Why isn't it landscape? Why doesn't it have any suggestion of a Native heritage? Why is it not edgy?" Not that my work is [agitated –KW]. I don't think it is. I think it's downright serene, as a matter of fact, nowadays since meeting Dirk. But, you know, it's been serene for quite a while. But I think that the—and maybe this is just my beef about the art world in general, but I think there is an expectation that I should be making art that has an edginess that implies my Native parentage.

MS. RIEDEL: That's actually a perfect time to ask about your relationships with dealers over years.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I've always had really nice relationships with dealers. I have a wonderful relationship with June. You know, I'm not really criticizing her.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'm simply saying that she knows what the market, the art market, expects of me and what she can sell, which is—you know, dealers are running business. I think that that's something that many artists don't see. I was reading that book—that book you gave me; the catalogue you gave me—from the Archives.

MS. RIEDEL: The excepts of the interviews.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Uh-huh. [Affirmation.] And I was reading about a dealer, a female dealer, whose name has just escaped me—Parker maybe? I don't know. Anyway, she was saying how that most artists just hate dealers. They're just terrible to deal with them—you know, difficult and blah, blah, blah. And she may be right, after all.

Dealers may have a lot of trouble with artists. I just don't know. But I do know that we are working together. I mean, I see that I'm working with June, but that her goals are different from mine, and that's a reality. She wants to sell work and promote work. I want to make strong paintings that have meaning for me first. I paint for me first.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And so, consequently, by making all those paintings that were about the paintings that I love. They were such fun to do but [… - KW] they're small and they're—I mean, they're not as lusciously lugubrious as something like this, you know. They're just these tight little paintings. But I understand that she wouldn't be able to sell them, and I get it and I just accept it and that's fine. I would never question her judgment about what's appropriate for her to sell because it's her gallery. And she's always been honest and she's always been straightforward, and she treats me and my family and friends with respect. What more can you expect of a dealer?

MS. RIEDEL: How long have you exhibited with her?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Probably 17 years.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's a long time.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. And I've never had a difficult relationship with a dealer. I've had some things that were a little bit off-putting, but nothing horrible. And I've learned some really important things from dealers.

MS. RIEDEL: Such as?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Keep your mouth shut. [Laughs.] Bite your tongue. I learned that from Bertha Urdang, who was a difficult woman. I think anyone would agree with that. And yet she certainly served me well and we had a very good relationship, but part of it was because I didn't argue with her. I bit my tongue.

MS. RIEDEL: Over what sorts of things?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, political things—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—primarily. She was an Israeli and had a very aggressively Israeli viewpoint on things. She didn't particularly like realism. She liked abstraction. That may have been—you know, I can't ascribe that to any kind of orthodoxy on her part. I think that she simply saw it as "the" contemporary language—the contemporary language of art, and I respected her judgment. I mean, I respected the woman tremendously but she was difficult. Some people are, so you bite your tongue. And I laughed at her jokes. She was a good storyteller, and I'm still telling some of her jokes and that was, what, 30 years ago?

MS. RIEDEL: Have the nature of your exhibitions changed over time?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: What do you mean?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, just the—well, certainly from the Cannabis Gallery early on I'm sure things are quite different, but you've had exhibitions in the city. You had a gallery in Santa Fe for a while, correct?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I did.

MS. RIEDEL: You had a gallery in La Jolla.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Another one in Hudson, New York. Is it all—well, your work has changed constantly.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: My work has changed. I see my work as not changing as much as other people see it changing. I think that there are themes running through all of it that—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—you know, are there. And this goal of making art that carries some sort of meaning and art

that speaks to people, and art that has implications that if you give it time, that they will hit you? But it's true I've done it in different ways. The earlier galleries were showing abstraction, like Bertha. And she was adamant about showing abstraction. And she was—when I left her she was a little annoyed because I said to her—maybe a little more than a little annoyed that—I just felt she didn't—wouldn't like my current work and that I was moving on. But, [she said –KW] "Well, you could have given me a chance. How do you know?" Well, I knew. There was no point in getting into a discussion about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Because the work was going more landscape than abstract—

[Cross talk.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It really was. It was changing a lot. And I was with her for many years. I think I was with her for seven years or something like that. So it was—and she was highly respected, and she certainly had people coming in from all the museums. She was showing in her home, actually. She actually lived in this gallery, which was bizarre, but a whole other story. And they were forever trying to get her out of the building. She was tough and she was smart and she was strong, and I really don't think you have to be in love with a dealer to get along with them. It's as simple as that. My La Jolla dealer—wonderful, lovely people—certainly encouraged me—certainly sold a number of the abstractions and the early works on paper that are also abstractions. I don't know if you recall them, but they're only numbered and they're very dark. They're dark—all of them are very dark. I was into dark. I think that was partly because I had a studio that had—it was in my attic and it had the old beams. It was an old home and we had this old late Victorian in Englewood, and the beams were brown, so I had a brown studio. [Laughs.] And I think that that brown affected me all the time.

MS. RIEDEL: I've really been struck by how much place has affected the work over the years—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—the palette in particular.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It's shocking to see—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, yes, hugely.

MS. RIEDEL:—paintings done in the same general timeframe but shockingly different palette and sensibility. I'm thinking of the difference between the Italian pieces and, say, the Bitterroots, or Sawtooth—I can't remember, but some shockingly monochromatic gray and white, very austere, and then those brilliant sunny pieces, for example from Sicily.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, just totally different. It is true that I'm highly visual. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, there you are.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: That's what it's about - I'm highly visual. Even when I'm doing abstraction, the place affected me tremendously, like those Montauk pieces that it's the Montauk color and the Montauk light—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—that you see in those paintings. Yes. That's good. I mean, I think that's nice.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, I like to think of myself as an intellectual, but I'm very—the visual and intuitive is always strong in the paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Always.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They're not purely intellectual paintings. They're just not. And I like it.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about the Cherokee basket.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, the wonderful Cherokee basket.

MS. RIEDEL: It starts out round and ends up square and is bound together in that transition by a changing pattern.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I love that metaphor.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it's so suited to your work.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's such a beautiful metaphor. And I usually show it when I lecture.

MS. RIEDEL: Where did you first see that basket and when? Do you remember? Not that particular basket but that *WalkingStick Basket Made by Cherokee*, and it's very—it's very—it's traditionally—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Traditional.

MS. RIEDEL:—starts round at the base and ends square at the top. Is that correct?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right. In fact, yes, that's how they're identified as Cherokees: "Oh, the round bottom, square top." I went to the South with my then-husband Michael Echols, and I must have been 35 maybe. Was I out of graduate school yet? I don't know. Maybe 40. I was still young, you know. I think of that as really young. And we had a lovely time. We were—the kids were old enough—my kids were born in 1960 and '62, and they were old enough to be left home with somebody or, you know—they were not at home so I must have been—maybe I was older than 40. At any rate, we went down to Qualla and we drove through the Smokies and through the old Cherokee land, you know. And my sister-in-law lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee—where, by the way, there's a WalkingStick cabin in the park.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The WalkingSticks are originally from Tennessee. And so we go to this place and there was this basket, and we bought it. And I was so taken with it that it was made by a WalkingStick and here it was this beautiful thing. And it was after that that I really did more research in this whole basket thing. Susan Power—it's not Powers; I think it's Power—wrote a couple of books about—she wrote a Pre-Columbian book about the Mississippian people, people who have actually migrated to the South so that the Cherokees, the Choctaws and those Indians that are Southern Indians would come out of that. And she did this wonderful book about the art of those people, the Pre-Columbian art of those people. And then she also did a book about the art of the Cherokee that it goes from Pre-Columbian gorgets and things like that to—and they did wonderful engraving on shell. Oh, just to die for stuff. But, anyway, up to the present, and she has marvelous baskets in this book. She also used a painting of mine, which I appreciated. But there is a certain amount of literature available about, you know, these styles.

And so I started to—her book hadn't been written yet but I certainly looked into why these baskets were made and how they were made and things like that about that time. So it hasn't been forever that I knew about them. It really hasn't. You know, maybe 30 years ago. But I think that this notion that going from one basic geometric shape to another, which is wholly different, and yet there is a unity in the thing is, in a way, what I've been doing. I've been trying to combine two what I saw as disparate sides to make a unified whole. And if that's a metaphor for anything, it's a metaphor for who I see I am, in a way—

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—in that I am this—as I said yesterday, this biracial woman raised in a white protestant culture who sees herself as an Indian woman as well, a Cherokee woman very specifically, because we have a very specific look about us. You put a bunch of Cherokee women together, they all look the same. [Laughs.] This is how we look. So I think that that metaphor of that basket was powerful for me. And the paintings echo that. I mean, there's a lot of things going on in a diptych. You know, it isn't just my own sense of myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's about how I see the world. It really is my worldview, that the disparate can be unified and somehow serve a single idea.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because I think of it also on a psychological level, that you have this square form and this round form. It makes me think of two sides of your diptych. And they're absolutely connected. They're connected through a pattern, which in some ways the pattern creates both of them.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: They're exactly the same thing but they're completely different things. And it makes me think of the way you've looked at landscape—the way it looks one way, feels another way, the way one looks like landscape, looks like a figure but actually they are expressing similar ideas through two different forms.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: There's a lot about that Cherokee basket that just really resonates—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It really does.

MS. RIEDEL:—as an object—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—as your diptychs. Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I don't talk about it perhaps as much as I should because I think it's a little difficult for people to get it, that these two sides of this diptychs really are the same thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They're the inside and the outside. That's all.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: These new pieces are much more about a single view—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—and there's—this has been going on—started really with those water paintings that I just did, the Ramapo paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But there has been drawings right along that you'll see are like this, that they are a single image. For instance, the drawings or works on paper, I suppose I should call them—those encaustic and gouache things that I did for the NMAI in 2002 and '3, they had also this—very often a single image. You mentioned one of the Bitterroot pieces, for instance. Bitterroot is like this in that it's a one single view combined with pattern beneath it, rather than one side and another side.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think that by using the pattern you still get a sense of there is something disparate involved. I mean, it's an abstract pattern, but it's placed in—it's not placed on one side and the opposite side.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So this is—and I've been doing these like this—oh, I did one of the—as I said, the Bitterroots. So that last show was in 2007. That certainly was probably—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—the first show of paintings that were not divided as strongly.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'm not exactly sure what was why that happened. It just seemed at the time the appropriate thing to do. And some of them are more divided than others.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: There's one called *Our Land*, or something like that—I've forgotten; I'm sorry, which has a

Nez Perce parfleche bag on one side and purple and orange mountains on the other, and there's a purple line at the top. And I've always really liked that painting a lot. It's very, very strong. But I think it was the only piece in that show that actually had two totally different images on the painting.

MS. RIEDEL: I want to ask about some of the Italian paintings, before we leave them completely, where the figures are so interestingly cropped, and in particular we're looking frequently at the bottom half of a group of figures. The figures—sometimes you have a solitary figure, often it's a whole figure, then occasionally there's a couple dancing. I'm thinking of that one in particular. But there are a few paintings where there are seriously cropped figures on a patterned background—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—just perhaps the bottom dancing.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Is it a—the figure is deconstructing to different degrees over time.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Yes, it is, and not consistently.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Not consistently at all, like that painting called--that you mentioned, *Blame the Mountains.* I love that title because it's such a conundrum.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. [They laugh.] It is.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I really love it. That is—you know, I really think looking back, I think it's an image of me at 18, because I'm kind of bony. I actually was bony at one time. But you really can't see her.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Her legs are cropped. It's like a snapshot, and yet of course it's not from a photograph at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: None of them are. The figures are always just from my head. You know, I remember there's one that is owned—it's just the lower half of a man, and on the genitals I have my handprint. And it's on one side, and the other side is the mountains, the Dolomites, as a matter of fact—Dolomite—[pronounces it with an Italian accent]—and it's called *My Memory*. And I drew these legs—just drew them. And I like to draw a figure, you know, so I have this good memory for figures. And I drew this figure, and I stood back and I thought, oh, my goodness, it's Michael. And Michael had [then –KW] been dead for 10, 15 years. And I looked at these legs and they were absolutely his legs. So I put charcoal on my hand and covered him, because he's my memory. And so that there was this—I guess, you know, the legs that I thought of for whatever reason became his, or were his, because we had driven through the Dolomites together and I said it was that memory.

I think you don't need the whole figure to identify the figure.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You only need—and of course what he had that was the most beautiful was he had beautiful legs. This man had gorgeous legs. So does Dirk, actually, but we probably shouldn't talk about that. [They laugh.] We don't have to swell his ego any more. But these gorgeous legs identify this person completely to me, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I look at my paintings of dancing legs and they're my feet, for instance. You know, they're just my feet; that's all. They're my funny feet. Or what is there sufficiently identifies it completely. And they have also a snapshot quality. It is not this—common in snapshots that you pick up something, anything: "Oh, god, where's the head?" But this cropping is sort of a photographic thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I think it's what I focus on. [The body part –KW]

MS. RIEDEL: Do you work from photographs for figures?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Not for figures.

MS. RIEDEL: Figures are strictly in your head.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, figures are strictly in the head. The only time I used photographs is for clues on how to go about—for instance, with these [landscapes –KW]. These photographs have much less to do with this painting than the drawing I showed you.

MS. RIEDEL: Does this painting have a title yet?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think it's just going to be *New Mexico Desert* or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Something very just simple, descriptive. I think this is called *Late Afternoon on the Rio Grande*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. It will be helpful for people, I'm sure, as we've been talking about it for the past day or two, to understand what painting it is that is continually referred to.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Yes. But this desert painting was—my memory is of a yellow desert with gray hills in the back, and is covered with a chenille-like—you know, chenille bedspread-like puffs of green juniper and sagebrush. So this is what is in my sketchbook. What I'm using the photographs for primarily is those junipers and cactus and whatever bush that is, because that helps a lot to have an identity, you know. There are specific kind of flowers that are vegetation there, and I don't want to make it up.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's new—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—that specificity?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Some of the drawings have it early on. I did some drawings from Colorado that have pine trees in them in black and white, the charcoals—winter charcoals is what they are. But, yes, I don't actually like trees. They're awfully fluffy. They're too cutesy-pooh. You know, they're just too—I like kind of—I like rugged landscape. I like tough vegetation. So there's something tough about these little junipers, especially those wonderful cactus. They're just hard as nails, you know? Tough. I don't like—and this is all probably silly, but I don't like rolling hills with fluffy trees. I find that boring as hell.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And, you know, people say, "Oh, well, you must have loved it. I think it's so beautiful." It's beautiful to picnic in.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't want to paint it. It's just too cute. But give me a nice waterfall and a rocky gorge—now, there you go.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So I like rugged. I like desert.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd like to talk a little bit about working process—your description of painting the Dolomites and Michael, and putting your hand over it just made me think it's a question I want to address. But is there a ritual quality to your working process? Has one evolved?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't know. I mean, I'm not—I love the idea of ritual because, you know, it gets us through a lot of shit, actually. And I think there's a ritual to my day, just as Dirk and I get up and have coffee in bed and argue about art.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, there's a lovely ritual about that. And I thought after my husband died, I thought, well, I don't have to cook dinner anymore at 6:00. I can stop that. I was trying to think of positive things about being alone, you know? [They laugh.] And I thought, oh, that's pretty good. And of course I've eaten at 6:00 every night since. [They laugh.] I mean, there is a ritual pattern to my daily life that I'm very content with. When the ritual is altered a lot, it's discomforting. It's like having, for instance, work done on your house—reconstruction done on the house. It's very discomforting. And it's mostly because your ritual is messed up.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I come in, I usually sit down for a minute, look at it, get really upset about something and change it. And that's how I start. I have to change something.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And then I go from there. Is that a ritual? Maybe so. I have certainly—now these young people are talking about their "process," and I kind of want to gag over that. I hate that. It makes it sound, I don't know, like they're Cuisinarts. I just hate that notion of, "Oh, my process. I have to get"—you know. But I suppose I have one too. I like to draw a lot, so I've always made some sort of preparatory sketches. I have oftentimes taken photographs at the same time as what I'm drawing so that I have notations, like with this for the bushes. I usually work from drawings. I have done drawings. When I was in Italy I did a lot of paintings in the Pre Alpi outside of Venice. But from those drawings, in that sketchbook, I have probably made a dozen paintings so that I can use the same mountains, for instance, or the same whatever over and over again in different ways—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—combined with different things. There are some mountains outside of Taos, New Mexico that I've used a number of times, and they happen to be just very beautiful, and you can see them from the roadsides. You can stand there or sit there in the car and draw them, you know? There's one that is called—I think it's called *We're Still Dancing/Taos Variation.* And it's someplace. I think it's the Hunter Museum. But it's a rainstorm. The sky is absolutely—and it was raining the day I was there, and I thought it was so gorgeous that here I am sitting here drawing this gorgeous place where that sky is so black and ominous, you know? It was just very beautiful. So, part of my process is to make drawings of things. When it comes to the figures, I just sit and draw figures until I get something that I think has some sort of meaning for me. So the drawing part—and when I was doing a lot of black-and-white drawings, somebody said, "Well, I think that you're working out the values there," and I thought, well, that's kind of a good way to look at it. She was probably right. I think that was Ann Williams.

But the notion that there is—that a painting needs a value pattern has always been an important one to me, and it's, I suppose, not something that one needs to talk about. But certainly the black and white were very much about grays, about the values of these things and the gray patterns that were created by these things. So that at one time I would make sketches in my sketchbook, make drawings using charcoal, very often very large. The drawings were very often more specific than the paintings, rather than the other way around, which is kind of interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They would be quite specific. And then I would make a painting that was—I would simplify: "You know, what do you really need in there, Kay? What don't you need? You know, can you just take that out and make a stronger painting?" So, with these [new works –KW] I have not been doing the charcoal drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? For how long? Is that a recent development?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I would say, yes, pretty recent, because those paintings in 2007 were based on the drawings that I'd done for the NMAI show in 2003. So there was a direct correlation.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: They weren't primarily charcoal, those paintings--those drawings at the NMAI; they were gouache and charcoal and encaustic. So they were more finished, in a way. But I have not done charcoal drawings much in the last about three years. And I don't even seem to miss it, which is weird because I've done charcoal drawings throughout my life.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And so there's been some big changes in the last three or four years. I see this—doing a

whole landscape rather than divided landscape is a big change—

MS. RIEDEL: Huge.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—I think—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—which really started with those 2007 pieces. So, you know, I've gone through changes all my life. That's the way it is. And I just sort of go with it.

MS. RIEDEL: And yet it seems important for some reason that these are still diptychs.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. Part of that of course is just ease of handling and storage. I mean, I probably shouldn't admit to things like that, but it's true.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I used to make paintings that would fit in my car, and the biggest painting that would fit in my car was a 36-inch square, so I'd make—or something like that—35 or—I guess it was—yes, about 36. So in order to make two of them, you'd get a 36-by-72. And that's about as big as I worked.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So there wasn't this—it's very practical reasons. I also happen to like the idea of the diptych and this dialogue between two sides. Obviously it's important that one side is slightly different in some way from the other. You can't have it exactly the same. Why make it a diptych then?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So it needs those patterns, but the patterns don't have to fill the thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Anyway, for me. And I suppose I could stop doing diptychs now. I mean, I don't have a car to put them in anyway, but I really—maybe I like the speed bump. You know, it stops your eye a little bit, that line. Why is that there? And I kind of like that. It maybe slows you down a little bit, slows your eye down looking at things. Maybe it's just because it's mine. And a lot of other people do diptychs, obviously, but—

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting too that you've talked about diptychs as being the interior and the exterior. Maybe they're also more similar now.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Oh, I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think so. Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: More of a unified whole.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: More of a unified whole.

MS. RIEDEL: Or the insides become the outsides; the outsides become the inside.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, and that's good. That's not a bad thing. That's good.

MS. RIEDEL: No. It looks like a good thing.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It looks like a good thing. So there has been changes, but, as I say, I just kind of go with it. There's something wrong with this painting on the far left, and, you know, so I sit here and look at them and think how I would fix that so it wouldn't be quite so boring over there. But there are parts of this I like and I even like the silly Tiepolo sky. As I think I said yesterday, I don't worry about being part of the New York art scene as far as being au courant. I really don't care much. I must say that Dirk has helped me there a lot with seeing it that way. I just do what I do.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, back from lunch, and we're going to talk a little bit about the Ramapo River.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: As is recorded, this first appeared in work in 1987, I think, right?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Or mid-'80s.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, mid-'80s. It was the beginning of the period when I was working in diptychs. I didn't really start the diptychs until about '86. A lot of those pieces--I destroyed, those early pieces. I just—five years later I couldn't take—handle them. But that was one of the pieces I kept because it was—but it had something in it that I didn't like and I didn't want to do again. It was this feeling that one side was the abstraction of the other. And I really didn't want to do that. That was not the goal. I wanted one side to be the extension of the other. But I love the piece anyway because it was very colorful and up, and it was very summery in color.

MS. RIEDEL: When you say one side to be the extension of the other, could you elaborate on that?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, like a poem, you know, the stanzas are not the same—

MS. RIEDEL: Right, okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—but they're extensions of the other, but they're similar, right. So they work together as a whole but they're not—they're not exactly the same thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And so this had a shape in it that I thought echoed the shape that was in the river. Now I look at it and it doesn't bother me at all. So, it was just a little annoyance for me at the time. I went out to the Ramapo on New Year's Day. My then-husband, Michael, and I would go out to the river just to walk. And it's very near—it's in Bergen County. It's very near where we lived in Englewood. And it's up near the New York State border, actually near Ramapo College, of course. And it's just a beautiful, beautiful trout stream. And I would not call it a river, but then again it's a wide as the Rio Grande, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

[Cross talk.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I mean, they're not wide rivers.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And this last time—oh, and Michael and I would go up there, and over about a year we went there four or five times, and we'd just walk. And then in 2006, I guess, I was—no, later than that, I'm sorry, more like 2008. I was looking for landscape imagery to paint. And I was kind of at a loss, to tell you the truth. I hadn't been out West in a long time. I didn't want to repeat those—anymore the mountains in Italy. I'd painted them enough. I really wanted an American landscape. And there I was in Queens thinking, where can I go? And I started researching places and talking to people, and what do they know about this and that? And a lot of people gave me a lot of advice about various places to go, some of which we actually went to, and pretty boring. And then I thought, you know, the Ramapo is still there. It isn't as far as most of these other places that people urge me to go see. And I think, oh, just go out there.

And so Dirk and I took lunch and went out there and trudged around and had a lovely time. He was going to write poetry. As it worked out, I don't think he wrote anything, but no matter; he was enjoying himself sitting on the bank. And I did all these drawings of the Ramapo, and then I actually sat and painted in watercolor or ink or something. None of those are particularly successful, although they look fine in a sketchbook, you know, because they're obviously just sketches. I took some photographs. I have since—by that time I had a printer so I could print out photographs large. So, using these sketches and the photographs, I did a painting. I thought, gee, that's pretty successful and kind of interesting; I think we should go again. And so, my goal was to go out to the Ramapo every month and make the—well, like the book of hours of the Duc de Berry, or the Breughel's of the seasons. I just thought I would like to do series of the seasons at the Ramapo. And I was going to do one a month. Well, I didn't actually do one a month. I think I did eight of them. But I did a lot of Ramapo paintings. I produced a lot of sketches and even more photographs. I have a package of 8-by-10 photographs of the Ramapo. And so, in that instance I used the photographs as impetus, as a springboard to make these paintings.

And when you're doing moving water, it's really nice to use a photograph. It's a good way to cheat, I'll tell you—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—because you can stop this moving water for a moment. So it was perfect to use photography for that. I usually don't depend so much on photography, but with the Ramapo paintings I did. And I like the idea of using this very complex, very—I mean, because the water is intricate, because you can see the surface and you can see into it and you can see the movement. You see the reflections and there's all these various things that you actually see. And so, to paint those was rather complex, which I enjoyed, of course. And, you know, solving the problem is always the fun of painting, is how the hell you do it. Well, of course, this is the way you do it. But I like this very, very simple reflective surface with this very complex painted surface of water. So I was showing these very—just basically empty leaf—gold leaf, palladium leaf, white gold leaf. I didn't use silver because silver tarnishes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It changes too much. I didn't want it to change, you know. And I don't particularly like the color of silver tarnish until it's really black, you know, and then it's really beautiful. So I used these different leafs—I used some aluminum leaf and a couple of big ones. The gold has gotten prohibitive.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So I haven't used gold in the last couple of years because it's just too expensive. It was expensive then; it's three or four times as much now. But I liked that emptiness, that void. I don't think it has anything to do with the void of eternity. But as I said that, I think, "Well, how could it not if you bring it up, Kay"—you know? [They laugh.] So I don't know. I honestly don't know, because when you say "the void," I think of this notion of this—actually it's a Buddhist notion of the void. I was very happy with that show because I felt it was very serene. And others say, "Well, it isn't serene at all, Kay. What are you talking about?" Well, it seems serene for me because there was a—it wasn't this rugged and agitated landscape that I usually use.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was fluffy trees, as a matter of fact, you know, which I claim I don't like. But I think that there has been a certain serenity that's come into my life in the last few years with Dirk. And I think it, in some ways, reflects that serenity. Now, maybe it's just the serenity of aging. I don't know, except I know an awful lot of people who don't age serenely. So I don't think it's that. I think it's that my life is really very complete. And he and I seem to complete one another. So I think it shows up in the paintings. I really believe that everything we are, everything we've ever been, everything we think, everything we feel is eventually in the paintings. I think it all comes out.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that your experience?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's my experience with my paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I can't speak for all those people who are doing those very reductive, abstract sculptures, for instance like—oh, Kelly. Ellsworth Kelly did all those panels of flat color. I don't think everything he was is in those pieces at all.

MS. RIEDEL: No. But even in your very abstract reductive early pieces, there was a lot of emotional content.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: A lot of emotional content. A lot of who I was in those. And there was—they're agitated.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: One other constant in the work over time is the metal.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The metals.

MS. RIEDEL: Copper originally—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—and then all of the different leafs.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. I used to tell people that I used copper because that's one of the ways that the land—one of the reasons the land was stolen—

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—and raped, actually. The land, the copper mines just destroyed the lands, you know. They'd take the tops off of mountains, literally. But I'm not sure that's true. I mean, it was a good story, but I think the real reason is because it's gorgeous.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's just gorgeous, and that copper in a painting, even if it's not polished, you know, the patina is beautiful in copper. And some of it I oxidized so it has black with it, you know, to make the letters stand out in that one that has writing on it. So the copper itself is beautiful, and the gold itself is beautiful. And it creates a reflection—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—which is—somehow I find irresistible. I just find metals irresistible. And I've tried not to be kitschy with it because there's—anything that's shiny and sparkly, it's real easy to get kitschy. Excuse me. [Sneezes.] But a lot of my paintings have gold sparkles in them—[sneezes]—

MS. RIEDEL: Gesundheit.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Thank you.

A lot of them have—and it's plastic, that stuff. They make it out—like sparkles—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK:—that you use on signs, and kids use them, you know. That stuff is—it just catches the light and it's wonderful, and a lot of my paintings have that in them embedded—those early paintings have it embedded in them. And I just love that, what it does to the surface.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It's just gorgeous. And yet there is this problem of how far do you go before it's really just kitsch?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The piece that you admired called *Venere Alpina*—it's "Alpine Venus" of course—with the steel—rusted steel on one side—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And the painting, actually it's the Alps but it's in the Rocky Mountain colors. The Alps are never that color. So, this American girl can't resist those Rocky Mountain colors. But within the--there's a slit in the center of the steel, and it's pulled apart so it makes sort of an arc shape. And within that are these blue plastic sapphires. And they're obviously—you know, they're not particularly shiny. They're obviously plastic. But it added a little fire within that dark space. But I did that painting when I either turned 60 or 65. Let me see now, it must have been—if I was born in '35, '85—no, I wasn't 60 until '95, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So it was after that—it was after '95, I think, but not much. I think it was, like, '96 or so. So I'd just about turned 60 and I was starting to think about aging, because what else is rust about? I mean, you know, come on.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So it must have been about my own aging, that painting. And so, finding the sparkles hidden was kind of like a little statement of mine: Well, there's still sapphires inside. You know, there's still "gems of purest rays serene hidden in the ocean depths" [Samuel T. Coleridge –KW]. [Laughs.] A little color for you.

MS. RIEDEL: There you go.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: So I think that's what's going on with the metals and the shiny.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think it's mostly just this love of—and of course I bead.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I don't bead for the money because there's—I don't make any money on it at all, it seems to me. Maybe I break even but I'm certainly not making money on it. But one of the joys of beading, for me, is handling these materials and putting them together in this shiny little coral with this beautiful turquoise. You know, you put them together with a little piece of something like rose quartz or smoky quartz or something so that you get these little variations in shine and color. And I think that it's—it's like a magpie. You know, you just love these sparkly little things.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you worked—speaking of—have you worked in other media besides painting?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Not really. I've done—I think I told you about a little bit of sculpture. I did that book that opens up that—I've done a lot of books—

MS. RIEDEL: Sketchbooks, yes?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Sketchbooks, but other books too. I have books. I did a book about aging actually again called *Sex, Fear and Aging*. And it's—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my gosh, it's big.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think, why do a book that's small?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And it's printed. I did a print, and so the cover is a print. I took a trip to Florida, so it has all it's little Floridian things with these images of abstractions.

MS. RIEDEL: What year is this, Kay?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Recent?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I don't know. It can't be too recent or I'd remember, don't you think? What is—can you read that?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, but I don't see a year.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, anyway, it must have been '94.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, here we go—'95. *Sex, Fear and Aging*, yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I felt like—yes, that was my 60th year, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. [About the book: - KW] But I thought I was having heart trouble, and I was drawing stuff around and this kind of looks like a vulva sort of—and I was doing my bits of bone that were creaking. This is actually a hip. It looks like a nose but it's the os coxae. And my heart. And here's the alligators just laughing. Because the alligators in Florida—we went to see them—my friend from the Heard Museum and I went there [to see them –KW].

And *Four Directions* [symbol –KW]—just a bunch of little funny things of my concerns at the time. And then these prints of the ferns and the various leafy things that I found around—and these are the laughing alligators. And I just—and, oh, and then the bugs. It's buggy. You know, these giant palmetto bugs and things in Florida.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, a visual diary.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: It was. It was all about this experience. And then I found these things, these sparkly hearts, and so I couldn't resist those. They were in a Michael's or one of those kind of places, you know? And the alligators are still fighting back there. And they're driven by their guts, you know? They're just—I imagined us as

in this part of the brain that's in the back of the head. I forget what it's called—chordate brain. We're just alligators, you know? We're just alligators in the chordate brain. And here's the arcs with this sort of vulva-like line. And this is rays. Then here's the drawings that I did at this wonderful alligator park. And they fed them [the alligators –KW] and they were absolutely somnolent. [Then –KW] they dangled these muskrat bodies in front of them and they fly through the air. It's just all these little "queries" around, flying "queries." Isn't that funny, the Q's? [Beads with Q's –KW]

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

MS. WALKINGSTICK: A little heart in the mouth. And the heart is pumping gems. But this is—I just had a wonderful time with this silly thing. And of course it's not something you can really show. But you notice the leaves turn into mouths, and here's the mouth. Oh, and this is—I shouldn't even say it on tape because he would have a hissy. [They laugh.] Anyway, this friend of mine said, "You know, that doesn't really look like a heart." He was looking at these other drawings. And I said, "Well, I'll draw a real heart." So there's the real heart. And his legs—skinny sort of legs. So I just had an awfully good time over this.

MS. RIEDEL: And have you done many books like that?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No. No. You know, there's another one there. Maybe there's three or four altogether. I've done little books as gifts. And this is the tamed alligator with a sparkly heart, a sparkly fan. And the patella turns into a ruby. But there was one that I wanted to show you that was, I thought, really funny. Now I can't find it. But the alligators kind of recline on one another, you know? Have you ever seen that—

MS. RIEDEL: Shall I pause this?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes, please.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: We're talking about dying—aging and—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Aging and dying, yes.

MS. RIEDEL:—coming out of this book.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And when it happens, it happens, and I suppose I'll be as ready or not as the next person. But I think what is worse to face, in a way, is the time—the passage of time, the passage of people that you love, and also the youth of your own, and your own children. There's a sense of loss that those children will never be again. And your grandchildren are not the same. They're different. They're not your own progeny. And there's that other generation between them, you know. And it's the one thing I can get really weepy over is this sense of time lost.

MS. RIEDEL: Time passed?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Time passed. It's truly passed.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: And I don't think about it very often. Why would you dwell on that, you know? Why think about it? But if something comes up that reminds me of it, I can actually get teary, and I'm not a weepy type at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Not a bit. Not a bit.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think so. I don't have that impression.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Yes. I mean I know people who are. They can cry over anything. I just don't. But there is this—it's hard for me to look at old pictures, for instance, of—

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, it is and it isn't. Some days it's fine, but sometimes I look at an old picture and I think, oh, boy, I'll never see that person again. You know, that sort of thing, that that whole history is over. But I have no real death fear.

MS. RIEDEL: It doesn't seem like it—

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No.

MS. RIEDEL:—looking at the book.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: No. No, I don't.

MS. RIEDEL: If anything, it's seems like curiosity and a sense of humor.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: Well, I would think.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You know, you kind of—hey, isn't that the best way to look at anything is with humor?

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

MS. WALKINGSTICK: But I don't look forward to it, you know, like—what do they call it—charismatics, people like that. Not at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'm just going to live every day.

MS. RIEDEL: So, in summary, a couple of final questions: What about painting originally appealed to you and continues to appeal to you? What is the essence of it that has held you attention over time? What does it do that no other art form can that's held your attention and you curiosity for four or five decades now?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: For one thing, painting is hard. And if it weren't really challenging to me all the time, I maybe would have gone to other things. I'm always impressed when people think that—or say, oh, painting is easy. Well, it's never been easy for me. In fact, it's gotten harder as I've aged because I've set up bigger hurdles to leap over. To find a way to make abstraction was, at least for me, relatively easy. It got harder when I expected the painting to express more complex, more profound thoughts than I thought were in the abstraction. You know, when you complicate the issue—I complicated the process, I complicated the content—everything became more and more complicated, partly to make it more challenging for myself. It might make it more exciting. I mean, but the wonderful thing about painting is that you can make it more complex and more challenging as you grow in it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I think that actually I'm a better painter than I was 50 years ago. I think I've learned something about painting. I think my paintings actually say more. They may not speak to more people—I don't know about that, but they certainly express more. And part of the appeal of painting altogether is the extreme challenge of it. It's not a simple art form. It's not click, click. It just isn't. There's a whole lot of it to it. And I love the feel of paint. I love the look of paint. I love the look of great paintings.

One of my greatest joys is to go to the Metropolitan and look at art. You know, what is more fun?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: If I go on vacation and I don't look at art, it isn't a vacation. I'm sorry, it just isn't. The idea of climbing mountains is nice, but I want to see paintings. So, this is so much a part of who I think I am, this activity. My identity and ego is in this work, for good or ill. I mean, I'm not sure that's the greatest thing, but this is who I am. I think that what first excited me was just looking at paintings. As I said, when I was a kid I was surrounded by paintings done by my uncles, especially my Uncle Murray. And they were wonderful paintings, very straightforward portraits and things like that, but just this luscious paint. And, you know, it looked like it would feel good and it looked like it would taste good, just beautiful stuff. And I think that that's what—and then when I finally came to do it myself, I just loved it. I just absolutely fell in love, and haven't fallen out of love with paint. There is still that lusciousness to it. And, as I said, it's difficult—it was difficult in the beginning and it's more difficult now because I set up bigger hurdles to leap over with it, more complex hurdles. I like—

MS. RIEDEL: What's the current hurdle?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: The current hurdle is to make landscapes that really look like what I'm trying to portray without being trite and without being 19th century, actually. And I'm not so sure I'm succeeding altogether. I would hope so. They are really totally mine, which I think is some sort of victory. I mean, I don't think it reminds

one of anybody else. I think that that has been a goal for years, to make paintings that were completely mine, that couldn't be immediately said, "Oh, well, that's derived from de Kooning," or whoever, you know? That is not to say I don't admire a whole lot of artists, but I really want to be my own person in my work—and in other ways too, as a matter of fact.

I don't think it was much more than just the love of painting that got me into it, and the love of the look of the paint. And as I grew in it, I realized that so much could be said through this visual language of painting. It took me a while, I think, to come to that, you know, to at least undergraduate school. What I like in painting, what I like in art, is this sense that you can speak through it, and I expect others to do the same. I want to look at paintings that talk to me, that tell me something, that move me in some way, that give me an idea about being a human on the planet. And, as a matter of fact, I think that is my goal in that I want people to come to the work and have a notion of what it's about being a human on the planet. You know, what does this mean to us? And I would like to think that my work goes beyond simply a statement about heritage, my personal heritage. I would like to think of it as it's about the human race, not just Native people.

And that's been important to me for years, this notion of we are all in this together. And I'd like the paintings to somehow express that, that this is a shared experience that we have, which was part of the reason for doing the dancers, by the way. It seemed like a universal image, the dancing figures. People dance all over the world, for all different sorts of reasons, mourning as well as joy. And I like the universality of that image, but I expect that of all painting. That kind of—it's talking to me from a specific era, very often a specific place, and yet it speaks of something bigger. Coming back to Caravaggio, you know, you look at those paintings and it's a specific story, very often, about a specific activity—sometimes a miracle, sometimes not—but it's impossible not to somehow see that in a larger picture of our present condition, I think. And I expect that of great art.

MS. RIEDEL: How or where do you see yourself and you work fitting into contemporary art?

MS. WALKINGSTICK: I'm not so sure it does. I certainly thought it did 20 years ago. In 1995 I thought I was certainly part of a—not—I was never part of a school, which is unfortunate because one actually—the work is more acceptable and shown more if it's part of a school. But it is what it is. But I felt that I was doing something new and something that was—those diptychs were perhaps hard to understand for some people, but they were not—they were—had a newness about them, I thought. I'm not sure anyone else did, but I certainly felt that they did. What I'm doing today I don't think has that sense of newness, although it certainly has an individual stamp of, this is Kay WalkingStick's work. Does my work fit into the "critical discourse," as they so love to say? I don't think so. Does that matter to me? Not a lot.

You know, I feel like I did that. I was part of that. Whether I was recognized for that or not, I don't know, to tell you the truth, but I certainly participated in that circus. [Laughs.] That's the only word I can think of. It was a bad word but it—I don't mean it pejoratively so much. It's just that there was this drive on the part of a lot of people in New York to make something theirs and new and current and all that, and I simply don't feel like I'm a part of that now. And it's largely because I don't choose to be. I'm not reclusive at all. This is not who I am. I get out and about all the time, but it doesn't seem that important to me anymore, and it hasn't for some time. And yet, the truth is I think my work is stronger than it's ever been, or certainly as strong as it's ever been.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you.

MS. WALKINGSTICK: You're welcome. I wonder what I'll be doing at 90. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: I'll come back and we'll talk about it.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]