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Oral history interview with Steven H. Oliver,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Steve Oliver on September 2-3, 2014. The interview took place in Richmond, CA, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Viola Frey Oral History Project funded by the Artists' Legacy Foundation.

Steve Oliver, Mija Riedel, and the Artists' Legacy Foundation have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets appended by initials. The reader should bear in mind they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Steve Oliver at his office in Richmond, CA on September 2, 2014 for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is card number one.

So thanks for making time—

STEVEN OLIVER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: —for this talk. Let's start with some early biographical material and we'll get that out of the way. Where and when were you born?

MR. OLIVER: Born at Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, I was the first chairman of the board there that was born there.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MR. OLIVER: I had to preside over the destruction of the building that I was born in because it was so old and decrepit they had to build something new on the site.

MS. RIEDEL: You've done a lot of work with many of the hospitals in the area as well as all of the different art organizations.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll get to that too.

MR. OLIVER: About equally divided.

MS. RIEDEL: And what year were you born? Date?

MR. OLIVER: '41.

MS. RIEDEL: '41?

MR. OLIVER: September 21st, 1941.

MS. RIEDEL: Coming up [... -MR]. Your dad was an architect, right? Would you talk a bit about your childhood and your family?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, my father was an artist and architect. He taught art at U.C. Berkeley actually for a while.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. OLIVER: That was his passion as much as anything. He was trained as an architect, got his masters in architecture at Berkeley.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Came from a very, very modest background—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: His nickname in college was "Shiny Pants," because his parents lived in Santa Barbara, CA and they could only afford one pair of pants when they sent him to college.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. OLIVER: And they gave him some gabardine pants—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay—

MR. OLIVER: —wool, because they thought that would last forever and he wore them for five years and so they were just shiny.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MR. OLIVER: And that was his nickname.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. And what was his name?

MR. OLIVER: It took him probably 10 or 20 years for him to tell me that story. His name was Lloyd.

MS. RIEDEL: Lloyd.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Lloyd Oliver.

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And your mom?

MR. OLIVER: Dorothy Oliver was actually same age, but was a student of his.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh really?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: In art?

MR. OLIVER: In art, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. OLIVER: He graduated in architecture, got a job in design, working for an architect that was designing a very fancy home for the Boeing family in Seattle.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And then the crash happened in '29. He graduated in '28.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MR. OLIVER: And they thought it was too ostentatious to build this so they stopped and all the architects got laid off and he came back here and in order to support himself and his new bride, he got back and taught pen and ink, and watercolor at U.C. Berkeley.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary, how long did he teach there for?

MR. OLIVER: He taught there for just a couple years.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And my mother was a student actually of his. We always asked what grade she got and she always got As.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] I bet, one way or the other, right?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: And do you have siblings?

MR. OLIVER: I have two sisters. I'm the baby. I have two older sisters. Both are very artistic.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So, would you just describe your childhood? Did you grow up here in Berkeley then?

MR. OLIVER: I grew up in Oakland—we moved to Oakland.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And, I was telling somebody the other day that the first time I went to a school where I wasn't a minority—because Oakland was an incredibly diverse community—we lived in a modest middle class neighborhood, and all the schools I went to were generally 40 percent black, 40 percent white, and 20 percent Asian. It was a fabulous education because we learned—my best friend in high school was a black kid and an Asian kid and you never thought anything about it, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary. I grew up in a neighborhood not dissimilar from that—and I think it's not as common as we would hope, but it's extremely—

MR. OLIVER: No, in fact, it's becoming less and less common, so—

MS. RIEDEL: [... -MR] It sounds like the household was very artistic.

MR. OLIVER: If it was—and it probably was and I just didn't notice it and I mean, because my sisters were quite a bit older than me. The closest was six years and the oldest was 10 years, and so she went away to college when I was eight or nine—

MS. RIEDEL: Seven, eight, yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —and so, I wasn't that close to them. I knew they, the middle sister was a real star in school and everything, and so I had to follow her in school, which was very difficult.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And I was pretty much—got good grades and did well on tests but was pretty much a rabble—rouser in high school. Worse in college, worse behaved in college. So my interest actually, passion was just the opposite of the family. I mean, I didn't care anything about art—

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. OLIVER: I didn't have any interest at all. I was racing cars for a living—actually, motorcycles first—and then switched to car racing.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that start?

MR. OLIVER: Oh, I was just always interested in putting things together and fixing things up. I started with building stuff and then—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —and then eventually got a little more serious and got a little crazier than the next guy so all of a sudden you get a sponsor and then you work your way up. So, it was a big deal. There was 200 applications for a professional, what was called racing drivers school you had to get by, and only 14 of us graduated.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, so you went to school to study?

MR. OLIVER: Well you took the extra classes in parallel with your original but you had to do all kinds of testing things you had to go through, on the track and off the track, that sort of stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Was this in college or right after?

MR. OLIVER: This was in college. It started in high school and in college and then—I left home when I was 17.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: My parents thought, "Just get him out of here, he's such a problem."

MS. RIEDEL: So you'd gone to Oakland public schools and went to Oakland High School?

MR. OLIVER: And went to [University of California] Berkeley when I was 17, entered Berkeley when I was 17.

MS. RIEDEL: They tried to drag you to art [museums? Did you -MR] have any interest in drawing, painting?

MR. OLIVER: None, none, none. Not at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Nothing?

MR. OLIVER: In fact, I'm not sure I knew my father was an artist or taught art for—it until 10 years after I was married and graduated and actually went to work for him for a little while.

MS. RIEDEL: You must have seen him designing things. Did he build things?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, and he sketched a lot of stuff, but I thought he was in the construction business and he was an architect that's why he did it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, so no interest whatsoever?

MR. OLIVER: Zero.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. OLIVER: And then he worked all the way through for this construction company after he got a job finally for the construction company. He ended up being one of the project managers on the Golden Gate Bridge.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. OLIVER: And then after World War II, he left and, the big company and got a partner started a small construction company in 1946.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so he was an architect with a construction company?

MR. OLIVER: No, he was an architect who founded a construction company right after World War II.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Because he worked from the time of the Depression—late 20s—'29—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —through—all through the war.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: Through the Depression—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —for a construction company—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: —doing big, public projects like the Golden Gate Bridge. And then during the war worked on the Port of Chicago and all kinds of military bases building stuff, and when the war was over he wanted to be in business for himself. So he started this small construction company with a partner.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because there were two paths, he didn't start an architectural firm—

MR. OLIVER: Never.

MS. RIEDEL: —he started a construction company.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. OLIVER: Never was a practicing architect other than the first year after graduating school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Which was '28 to '29 when the crash came.

MS. RIEDEL: So, when you were growing up then you were watching him in construction [inaudible] but he could design as well.

MR. OLIVER: In construction, yeah. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Was your mother—

MR. OLIVER: But then he had sketches and he did a lot of sketches, did a lot of drawings himself—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —for people in the field. "Well here, I'll draw it this way," we'd understand a little better.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: Great teacher. He was a born teacher, really a born teacher.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: He wasn't a great businessman. He was a born teacher.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Was your mother a practicing artist?

MR. OLIVER: No, no, just the Sunday painter and both did a lot of painting with watercolor. Then she did other things, all kinds of things that you would do with your hands.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: From knitting and sewing and all that sort of stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: So it was artistic in that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And both my sisters were very artistic. And, I don't know that they still are, but they were most of their life doing things. Not as professionals, but as amateurs, so.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] So then you went to Cal.

MR. OLIVER: Yup.

MS. RIEDEL: And what took you to Berkeley?

MR. OLIVER: I could afford it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] That's always good.

MR. OLIVER: It was a good deal. \$212 for a semester, that's—tuition wasn't bad.

MS. RIEDEL: So you graduated high school in?

MR. OLIVER: Oakland High School in 1959.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And then went to university when I was 17 years old so I had skipped a grade so I was sort of there early and—

MS. RIEDEL: You skipped a grade?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So in the midst of all the rabble-rousing—

MR. OLIVER: Well, yeah because—

MS. RIEDEL: —you were pretty smart?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah, I was never—

MS. RIEDEL: You must have done quite well—

MR. OLIVER: I didn't have a problem that way, I was just—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Usually those are the worst troublemakers, the ones—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —that know how to talk their way out of it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs]. True.

MR. OLIVER: I was telling someone that the other day. I laugh because the University of California had a very nice dinner honoring Nancy and I.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: We tried to talk them out of it, but they did it, and I said you know, "Do you really want to check my background here at the school?" I was on probation every semester but the first one. You can't enter on probation, but I had two years of academic probation and two and a half years of social probation and everyone was in an alternate semester because you're in academics, you have one semester to make it up, or you're thrown out. So it was just a war for us.

I always say, they finally said, "If we give you a degree, will you leave?"

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: They kind of worked it out; they kind of worked it out.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] I imagine that came up in the talk.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, I'm sure. "My god, let's get him out of here," you know? But I had a good time; it really taught me to compete as much as I can.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were studying engineering, is that correct?

MR. OLIVER: I was in engineering first, two years of engineering and then three years of what was called Urban Economics, which was a switch to real estate. It was the beginning of the real estate program.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: So it was perfect for this business, it was really great.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. OLIVER: And then I went to work for my father and I worked there for four years.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And then left, made a big deal, made a few awkward holiday periods.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Took most of his employees with me and then too, about 18 months later, he came to work for me and worked for me the last 20 years of his life.

MS. RIEDEL: Your father?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MR. OLIVER: And most of the senior people—some of the people that have been here—I have a couple of people who have been here more than 30 years with me and he taught them.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. OLIVER: It was great. No, he was a fabulous teacher.

MS. RIEDEL: You two must have had an extraordinary relationship?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, it was great. It was wonderful. Once we sort of started out, and by that time I was serious, I had given up racing and my wife thought I ought to have a real job, so—

MS. RIEDEL: How long did the racing go on for?

MR. OLIVER: I really got serious as a senior in high school, and I quit within about a year of graduating from college.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: So about five years.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And that's what you did for the first five years following graduation? Oh no, in college?

MR. OLIVER: Oh no, mostly through college.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: In fact, I would take off and—

MS. RIEDEL: No wonder you were constantly on probation.

MR. OLIVER: Oh yeah, I was out there riding most of the time. I mean, sometimes the crew would leave on Wednesday for the race somewhere in the middle of America. I'd either have to fly out or take a train, whatever. Or a bus, whatever I could afford. Sometimes I would go with them, I'd sleep in the car. It was interesting, but I had a great time.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's one of the most unusual college educations I've heard of yet.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, right. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Well, what I was really looking for was a job—because I was racing Formula cars, like Formula 1—so, except in the United States it was called Formula Junior because they were slightly smaller engines. But I was looking for a factory to ride with a European factory.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Lotus, Ferrari, BRM, those—I was looking for a factory gig. But there was so few people got it that—I finally decided after—I got about 20, I said, "I got to do something else. I can't take a risk on this for another 5, 10 years and not get that," so.

MS. RIEDEL: So did you end up in construction because it was familiar from your father?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, I started at 12 or 14 years old, I worked every summer in it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: I knew it, I knew the lingo—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —I still would work for my father and he had a partner who had one son and I went to work with my

father and so it was one son. In theory, the two sons were going to take over except this kid was just a total flake. And so, after five years there—I was never paid as much as him, but my father wouldn't argue with his partner. He'd say, "Well you go talk to him, he's in charge of the staff."

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And his father always said that his son had more experience than I did because he was two years older so he worked there two years longer. I said, "Yeah, but last year I produced 60 percent of the company's income and I'm still not being paid what he's getting paid. And that's the four of us working and I'm producing 60 percent." So finally, when I said, "You've got six months to straighten it out." I went one more time at six months, at the International House of Pancakes at University Avenue in Berkeley, December 8th, 1969. I had been graduated now five years, four and a half years. And I said "Have you made a decision?" He said, "Well, let's talk about it next year," he said, "when you get more experience." And I said, "I'm sorry, I won't be here next year, in fact, I won't be here after Monday."

And I took the general superintendent and nine of their 14 foreman and started my own company the next Monday.

MS. RIEDEL: Had you been thinking that that?

MR. OLIVER: Oh, I had planned, I had been thinking about it for a long time. I had a partner.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: We talked, the two of us, both convinced we were overworked and under paid. You know, you start talking about that long enough, soon you start believing it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And so, we convinced ourselves that December of '69 to leave.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was also a partner at your dad's firm?

MR. OLIVER: No, no, this was somebody—some other guy I'd met—

MS. RIEDEL: Who you knew from someplace else?

MR. OLIVER: —who actually—it's just such a small world—his father and my father were friends and his father was the first person my father hired when he hired somebody in the '30s.

MS. RIEDEL: It is a small world. And it was really small back then.

MR. OLIVER: Such a small world, yeah. Quite an amazing guy. He went on to be the first non-Betchel to be President of Betchel Corporation, have you ever heard of that company? Biggest construction company in the world?

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MR. OLIVER: And so he came from the same construction family. His father wanted him to work for Betchel; he didn't want to do that.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. OLIVER: So the two of us hit it off right away.

MS. RIEDEL: So, when did you start your company?

MR. OLIVER: '69. December of '69.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And he worked 20 years and then he retired.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And they have a big wine operation in Napa valley.

MS. RIEDEL: So, how—

MR. OLIVER: How'd I get interested in art?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: [Laughs] We had been married six months or so.

MS. RIEDEL: When did you get married?

MR. OLIVER: No, no, we were married, sorry; we were married in '63.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And about—oh, my wife quit school, did not finish her degree, said, "One of us ought to have a real job," that's what she had said, and so "You stay here, whatever you're doing with racing, you just stay here and work at school to graduate so that next June you can graduate and you can go to work." So I said, "Okay." But she says, "Here's the deal we're going to make: When our youngest child goes to school I'm going to go back and finish my degree." I said "Fine." We had only been married six weeks and she wasn't even pregnant. "Where do I sign?" "Right here, sign right here." Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: And six years, about seven years later, that was '69, so '75, yeah. She came to me and said, "Hey, remember this paper? I'm going back to school next week and you're going to do the laundry on Tuesdays and Thursdays, that's the deal we made." I said, "Oh, okay." So she went to school. She actually went to school, it took her five years to finish that one-year because she was just enjoying it and it was a really wonderful time for women in particular because that was really the end of the women's, or really in the midst of the women's movement. Here was the 70s—

MS. RIEDEL: Mid-70s.

MR. OLIVER: So, a whole bunch of things happened that were what they call reentry programs so most colleges had evening programs or partial enrollments where you could come and have a full-time job and/or raise a family, whatever your choice was, and yet still finish a degree that you gave up because you got married or pregnant or something, and it was a terrific time. And so she took a class.

MS. RIEDEL: This was back at Cal as well?

MR. OLIVER: No, no. It wasn't Berkeley. The only one who actually offered that program was San Francisco State.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: The state college system offered it; the university system did not.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And so, she commuted and took a bunch of classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays primarily, to get this degree.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. OLIVER: I accused her of milking it after a while because she just was having such an enjoyable time and she took a class called American Studies which was a study of the arts and culture of the Americas, that was her degree, and she started going to museums and things like that and I thought, "I don't want you going out there at night," so I said, "I'll go with you." And I took her—going to the three stages of art appreciation. The first stage is, "Come on, that's not art." The second stage is, "I could do that."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: That nice Barnett Newman painting with the one red line in it. And it gets more, so the third stage is, "A monkey could do that." Then one day I saw a show with her one evening, Ed Kienholz show—at SFMOMA—and I was so angry about it. But the next day I left the office and went back to the museum. I never told her for another year because I got this impression that this guy was trying to tell me something and I wasn't getting it.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. OLIVER: And this contemporary artist, he was speaking, he was describing how he felt something visually without articulating it and it was just this road you—this line you crossed when all of a sudden the absurd

becomes intriguing. Or whatever it is, however you define what your philosophy was before.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there a particular painting or was it the general show?

MR. OLIVER: It was a Kienholz show. The show had two pieces in it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But the one in particular, you've probably seen it, you walk down this sort of hallway and you listen at doors like in a cheap hotel and there's something going on behind each door.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. OLIVER: It was just amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And it was a cross-section of culture and humanity and all of the emotional responses between individuals who are discussing something behind—in theory—closed doors in private. From arguments to emotion, all kinds of things. It was quite fascinating but I could never have imagined it as art. In that same show, was the Rauschenberg, the goat with the tire around its middle.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So—

MS. RIEDEL: And this was at SFMOMA?

MR. OLIVER: It was at SFMOMA.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: In the old building on Van Ness and—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. I think that's such [an interesting introduction to art -MR]—those three stages that you described so perfectly. And then I was reading in preparation for this [conversation, somewhere -MR] you also described this experience in terms of curiosity.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Curiosity was awakened and that was the start.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, that's what it was, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: I think that, and that's always been a part of me which sometimes gets you in trouble, sometimes you used to have these—but when you're not in trouble, you have these fabulous sort of interventions in your mind that really make it amazing. You say, "God, I didn't think about that"

MS. RIEDEL: That's such a wonderful story as the catalyst or spark for your—for this whole—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —incredible career you've gone on to have. It made me think of [... Jim Melchert—I collected his papers for the archives—and he had the most wonderful description -MR]—

MR. OLIVER: That must have been a joy because he is so—he is just terrific, just terrific. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: It was one of my favorite experiences in this whole project.

MR. OLIVER: The gal who's writing the book I started earlier was talking about this, we were talking the book.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And very famous woman, Joan Simon is the writer. You know, Joan, she had interviewed all the artists that were interested and there were two or three people that she was very concerned about whether she met with them and both of them, one was Jim Melchert, just dazzled her, she said. Was one of the most

enjoyable conversations.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely, he tells a fantastic story—he was studying ceramics and he saw an exhibition of Voulkus' work and he just hated it. He absolutely hated it. He may have told you this story.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And he said it was just everything he hated about California. [... The nerve -MR]—

MR. OLIVER: Right. I think it was in Michigan or it was somewhere in the Midwest where he saw it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, exactly. And he said, "I finally did the only thing I could do, I signed up for a class with him," and when I read this description of you seeing Kienholz—I thought that's the closest parallel I've heard.

MR. OLIVER: Well you know, the reason I'm very familiar with it is he told me that probably 20 years, 30 years, 25 years ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: But he also told Joan Simon because it was in the book.

MS. RIEDEL: Did he?

MR. OLIVER: Where he's relating this issue and how transformative it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, exactly.

MR. OLIVER: Because I think he had to come from Ohio, or wherever it was, to California, to Berkeley to take this class.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, exactly. I think it's extraordinary that you were intrigued enough by the Kienholz that something switched and you decided that you had to get back.

MR. OLIVER: Well, you know, thinking about it probably, it was less the Barnett Newman, the very, I'll say minimalist abstract—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —than it was this every day society that he was—was he making fun of this—or all those people behind the doors?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: And then here's this other goofy guy with the tire on the goat.

MS. RIEDEL: Right

MR. OLIVER: And you know, you thought, "These people, they're just like me. They're just doing the wacky things that I've done, they're just doing it in a different way. And here's somebody in a museum that thinks it's important enough for me to look at it."

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

MR. OLIVER: So, you know, it was really, it was a really magical time in some ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember when that was roughly?

MR. OLIVER: It had to be in the mid-70s, I guess some time. We married in ['63 -SO], so our child, you know, I thought this was decades away because she wasn't even pregnant and this is when the youngest goes to school. Our youngest was not born; he was probably born in [the late 60s -SO] because our daughter was born just three years after we were married so maybe that would be ['65 -SO] I guess. I'm guessing [mid-60s -SO].

MS. RIEDEL: So then—

MR. OLIVER: So, think that about that, [25 -SO] years later I was Chairman of the Capital Campaign for that same museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. OLIVER: So it's very, very funny. I never thought about that, but you, how much I've changed because then what happened is all our life changed. I mean, racecar got dumped.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: We bought a Volkswagen Bug because we could afford it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: And the funny thing is even today, we fight over a Bug that we have at the ranch, it's Volkswagen that's 18 years old and we still fight over who gets to drive it. And we've never had fancy cars. I'm so burned out on it early in my life, spent so much money on vehicles, that just didn't interest me anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So, it seems [that -MR] once you figured out you were interested in this, you really you dove in.

MR. OLIVER: The change from that to becoming a collector happened though because one of the first jobs I did after I left my father's company, we got a job to finish the Oakland Museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: The original contractor went broke and we ended up getting 19 little contracts to end up finish it, because they had to put it all up for public bid and we were the low bidder on all of them. And so I was there a long time and my wife became a docent there while we're finishing it, in the history department, not art. And—actually in science, not history. But she said you know, we have a—

MS. RIEDEL: Quite versatile.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, well, she said, "You know they have a rental gallery there," and we had bought our first house and we rented a painting that we liked. And then, at the 90 days if you rented it for 90 days you could apply your rental to purchase if you wanted at the end and we went back and said, "I think we're going to buy this." And they said, "I'm sorry, it's been sold to the next person in line who's going to rent it." Well, that just horrified us.

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MR. OLIVER: You know, because we had fallen in love with it after three months of living with it and we don't want to give it up, not only give it up to somebody who was just going to rent it, they had already purchased it before they rented it. So we thought, "Oh, this is terrible; we're not going to do that again."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And so we decided to save our money and buy something. And the first piece we bought, it was, you know, three or four hundred dollars, five-hundred dollars. Which in those days was a fair chunk of money.

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MR. OLIVER: We were newly in business and we had to decide we were going to go away for a weekend—to Monterey [CA] for the weekend I think—and that was how much we figured out that the motel was going to cost and lunches and stuff like that. And the grandparents were taking care of the kids, or buy this print. And we bought the print.

MS. RIEDEL: And it was Jim Dine?

MR. OLIVER: Jim Dine, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I remember reading that. And that was the beginning of the end.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That was late '70s?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And so, you kind of creep into these things, you know? You don't run. [Inaudible] the research because you've always got to trade. "What am I going to do if I do this or this," you know?

MS. RIEDEL: So that was the very first piece and now you have three or four hundred pieces in your collection—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, probably.

MS. RIEDEL: —is that about right?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: A lot have been given away, it's very funny. At SFMOMA, Neal Benezra, an old friend, we have multiple lives together at the museum—before the museum actually—gave me a list of the things he wanted me to donate when the museum reopened and I said, "I could have guessed this list." It was all the people we both like a lot.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: But some of them are artists who's work is at the ranch. Mirosław Balka, I know is one. He wanted all—everything I had of Balka. I said, "I'm going to give you some, but not all because the rest will go to the foundation," so.

MS. RIEDEL: [... -MR] We'll get to that. I don't want to jump too far ahead. So in the late '70s you bought a ranch?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. '81 actually.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, '81.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, [1981 -SO].

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, so at this point were you already at the—

MR. OLIVER: Let me think because we were just talking about that. We were trying to figure out when we—I know we bought it in 1981—

MS. RIEDEL: The ranch.

MR. OLIVER: —and it was really meant as a retirement home for the sheep. That's how it all got started, because we're in the sheep business.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: Oh right, let's tell that story—

MR. OLIVER: We bought it because my daughter was nine years old, so let's say that might have been mid-70s. Some crazy—

MS. RIEDEL: What's your daughter's name?

MR. OLIVER: Amy.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Two crazy cousins of mine gave her two lambs for an Easter gift. They were in the hide business and they were going to a place and they said "This is my couple of lambs; we're going to drop these off at Oliver's house." And I saw these two, "What am I going to do with these things?"

MS. RIEDEL: And you were still living in Oakland.

MR. OLIVER: We lived in Orinda. No, we moved to Orinda because our kids liked animals and so we moved out there and we had some rabbits and stuff like that—

MS. RIEDEL: So you had a little farm or a little ranch or you just had a big suburban house with a back yard?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, a suburban house with a back yard and some very forgiving neighbors, you know? It was a

good spot because it was up at the end of a dead end street so it had a big cul-de-sac and some extra land for us. But by the time she went away to college, there was, those two sheep had grown to nine and we had some goats—Angora goats—and a bunch of rabbits and some, again, very forgiving neighbors. I said, "We've got to get the animals out of here." So the ranch was originally bought as a retirement home for these animals and a weekend place for us, that's how this all got started.

MS. RIEDEL: This is up in Geyserville?

MR. OLIVER: Geyserville. And then it got, then actually after we were there a couple of years we got into the business and we raised sheep very humanely and highly organic sheep for high-end restaurants.

MS. RIEDEL: Who managed that? [... -MR]

MR. OLIVER: We had a ranch manager—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: —who was our kid's first 4H advisor. We convinced her to go up there and manage it.

MS. RIEDEL: Amazing.

MR. OLIVER: And—

MS. RIEDEL: And so you still had your company—

MR. OLIVER: —we lived in a trailer; we lived in a trailer by the lake.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And she lived in the house; the ranch manager lived in the house because she was there all the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Not the stone house?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, and we then, it took us a long time to build the stone house.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: It took us almost six years to build it because it took us three years just to do the stonework because it's a very complicated process.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. OLIVER: Because it's seismically safe.

MS. RIEDEL: And was [it built that -MR] away?

MR. OLIVER: No, it was built, Henry Degenkolb—who's the world's foremost seismic engineer in those years—owed me a favor money wouldn't settle, and we said, "Henry, you design me a seismically safe stone house and we'll call it even." And—

MS. RIEDEL: That's actually beyond extraordinary. [... -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Oh, it's truly an amazing story, just that house, because Henry had a 25 year contract with the government of Japan that everywhere he went in the world—everywhere—a Lear jet followed him owned by the government of Japan. He had to be in Japan within 24 hours of any 6.0 earthquake or higher, but if he's going to New York he couldn't fly that jet, he would take a commercial plane, but that jet would follow him owned by the Japanese government. And then if he—if there was a quake, he had to go to the airport, get on it, take him to Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: [... It seems striking to have a stone house at all in this earthquake-prone country ... -MR].

MR. OLIVER: It took three years to do the stonework.

MS. RIEDEL: Unbelievable. How is the—

MR. OLIVER: It's just all, they're all sort of tied together with, there's all steel and concrete inside it—

MS. RIEDEL: I would think.

MR. OLIVER: —and the stone's all wrapped into it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But this brilliant stonemason we met. That's why Puryear's work is in stone, the same stonemason's that did that house, built the Puryear.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, that makes sense.

MR. OLIVER: And Puryear saw them by coming all in the previous year before he did his work and seeing that work being done.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, perfect.

MR. OLIVER: So that's how that tied together.

MS. RIEDEL: The whole process of how the arts and the installations evolve over time up at that ranch is one of the most extraordinary stories.

MR. OLIVER: It's been a fun project, it really has been.

MS. RIEDEL: [... -MR] I can't imagine anything much more fun, actually.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: [... From very early on you also jumped into ... CCA, California College of the Arts, then CCAC. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: What pulled you in that direction? Were you hoping to accomplish anything in particular? Were you interested in learning more?

MR. OLIVER: I think, maybe I had just got rid of all the wild seeds and thought, you know, "I'd better behave and do this," and all of a sudden, finished the Oakland museum and then my wife became a docent there, and then it was funny though—

MS. RIEDEL: You were on the board, right?

MR. OLIVER: —because the CCA [California College of the Arts] was first.

MS. RIEDEL: 1981, I think?

MR. OLIVER: Yes, yes. And the Oakland Museum was later, '88 or so.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh it was?

MR. OLIVER: But a very funny thing was I was very involved in healthcare and I was on the board of Alta Bates Hospital and I got there because one of my sister's friends in high school was the director of the hospital.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: A guy named Bob Montgomery, one of the more brilliant directors ever. And he was looking for; he called her up and said, "Where's your brother?" He had a business in Berkeley and we're getting a little more known in Berkeley and he said "I need someone in the construction business because we're going to build this new wing on the hospital. Would your brother be interested in it?" And she told him how to trick me onto the hospital board, which he did. Which was bring me in on the advisory construction committee for this facility and eventually become the chairman of it and then you get him on the board, that's all—which is what I did.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: And on that board though was a guy by the name of John Perkins, who sat next to me. We had sort of assigned chairs. And John was an amazing, amazing human being. He was vice president of the University of California statewide, all nine campuses. But he was the roommate in college of Ralph Hitch I think was the name of the guy who was then the president of the University of California statewide. I'm not sure of that name, but I think it's right. But but then he was at the time—he was president of Dun & Bradstreet.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And later president of Columbia University and his wife developed a severe case of asthma and the physician said she has to go to a drier climate and he called Ralph and said what about any ideas on the west coast? He said, "I need a vice president at the University of California, why don't you come out and work with me?" And he moved here, and he was a Sunday painter, quite a lovely painter. He got assigned a seat next to me there and heard me mouth off for a couple of years and he came to me one day and said, "I want to talk to you." This is a sad and wonderful story at the same—he said, "I want to talk to you about something after the meeting, will you give me 10 minutes?" I said, "Sure." So we went in the coffee shop at Alta Bates Hospital and he said, "Don't make a big deal of this, but I have terminal cancer. I've just been diagnosed in the last week." And he said, "I have about six months to live." And he said, "I'm on the board of this school in Oakland called California College of Arts and Crafts and I've been on the board for five years." He said, "It's an amazing institution. It's been in business 65, 70 years," and he said, "but it's just in terrible disorder." And he said, "I had asked for one favor. I talked to the chairman of the board and he said, 'You can have two appointments to the board'." He said, "I have two. I want to nominate you and A. Alan Post." Do you recognize that name?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. OLIVER: A. Alan Post was an icon in California politics. He was a state legislative analyst—he was totally neutral politically but he analyzed every state budget and then was very honest about saying this is wrong and this is wrong, this is wrong. So he was an icon highly regarded and I said, "Okay, I'm going to think about that, but I'll do it because I'd like to meet A. Alan Post."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: And I joined that board and to show what disarray it was in, within a year I was asked to chair it,—but the people there—Alan and I worked together—but the people there were so nervous because I was such a wild hare, they thought, they said but I had to promise not to make any changes for 90 days. No changes. Be a president for 90 days, do your background check and then do it. At 90 days and two hours, I fired the president, four of the five vice presidents, and 33 people in the college and we started over again. I ordered retrenchment for all the faculty salaries. Everybody's salary was cut by 15 percent. They had been in business 70 years and had 90 days of cash left. That previous administration had spent all the restricted funds, all the endowment, they had spent everything. They had 90 days of cash left.

MS. RIEDEL: And I thought that school had been through big changes in the past 10 years, I had no idea.

MR. OLIVER: Oh no.

MS. RIEDEL: That's —wow.

MR. OLIVER: That's why I'm still on the board, because every day is better than the first day.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And so a guy who is also on the Alta Bates Hospital board, a guy named Toby Schwartzburg, had just sold a tech company. Had a bunch of money—in those days we thought it was a lot of money—three or four or five million dollars. I said, "You're not going to do anything for awhile, why don't you—how's you like to be a president of a college?" He said, "I don't know anything about that." I said, "I need you. You've been head of the finance committee, I need you to come in and be the president of this college. Just do it one year. Let's get the trains to run on time and we'll see where we go from there." And he did, became president of the college and we essentially started over again.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about that [since we're on CCAC. The school -MR] has gone through an extraordinary shift.

MR. OLIVER: I stick around every day because it's been amazing, just amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you see as the key, —there's certainly the curriculum.

MR. OLIVER: Key element? Key element was really simple. We hired the right person at the right time for the last 34 years that I remember. I can't take any credit for it. I chaired all—I've chaired six searches for President and they were all the absolute right person at the right time. And then when that period went away, it wasn't animosity. They had another opportunity to go to, so they went. And it was a time for us to make—before, I had to go and say, "Listen, Joe, don't you think it's time to move on?" They came to me first and said, "You know, I really think I've done my job here."

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. OLIVER: And I could run through them, but you know, for each one, each one did exactly—and I didn't know what I wanted from them—they just did it.

MS. RIEDEL: If you didn't know what you wanted—

MR. OLIVER: I just knew what I needed and this guy had the skill—the first guy had the skill sets. He was organized.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, [you got someone who –MR] would run the trains on time.

MR. OLIVER: He only worked one year and he so fell in love with college he applied for the permanent job. I said, "I can't do it. I can't do it." And I hired, I don't know, the guy from Chicago, Neil Hoffman.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Who I stole away from the Art Institute of Chicago. Neil was a fireman. I said okay, this guy got the hoses out; you've got to put the fires out.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And Neil just got everything done, but when he finished that he wasn't an academician. He couldn't take it to the next step.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Then I needed a fund raiser.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: So I got Lorne Buchman.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: Lorne was a charismatic guy that could talk you out of your last dollar and I remember we hired a big study firm for our capital campaign. They said, "The maximum you can raise is \$6.7 million, you might get \$6.8 million." We raised \$17 million. And it was just—

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary.

MR. OLIVER: —it was just the right person at the right time. And then we had all the money and we had the campus, we got the San Francisco campus, then all of a sudden we need an academician to raise the academic standards. Then we had Mike—Michael Roth—Michael Roth. And, then Steve Beal. And Steve Beal was just to calm everything down and let's just continue the academic growth. So, when I was there—when I was chairman of the board—your sole criteria for admissions was your check cleared the bank. Today they take one out of 17 applicants in their graduate program.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: It's just, ground zero. Did you see the—I don't know if you saw the article in the San Francisco Chronicle last Saturday?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. OLIVER: About this incredible growth, you can get an MBA in Design there, which is the only one in the nation.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: And it has this huge application because at tech companies,– there is a recruiter from Silicon Valley there every day of the year in that campus.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. OLIVER: And so they just created this incredible energy and it all started in the mid-80s you know? So I just hang around because 34 years I've been there and every day is better than the first day.

MS. RIEDEL: The evolution of that school is extraordinary. I don't know anything else quite like it.

MR. OLIVER: When I joined the board, the board was primarily made up of golf foursomes at the Claremont Country Club, which was a block up the hill.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And their average annual giving per individual was under \$300. The board put up \$10 million last year to buy the three acres next to the campus in San Francisco.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: I mean, it's just powerful, committed people from all over the bay area.

MS. RIEDEL: That seems to be something you've done repeatedly in your position on boards.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, but just trying to find the right mix of them, you know? Really the right mix.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And some of that is what you're interested in and I decided you're never really competing; your ego doesn't have to be soothed by them so it doesn't compete with them. They want to take the bows, or that's fine.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: I mean I've had arguments with people where I've raised money with different capital campaigns about the size of the letters, the font, and the guarantee level of foot—candle lighting that will be honored in perpetuity.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: I mean it's absurd.

MS. RIEDEL: You've had arguments about that?

MR. OLIVER: Discussions with people about doing it. "Okay, then how much light will be on it forever, in perpetuity?" I said, "What?" You know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And that's why I'm now chairman of the United States Artists Foundation.

MS. RIEDEL: Which one?

MR. OLIVER: It was started by four [foundations -ALF]—United States Artists?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh yes, I did see that.

MR. OLIVER: And, it's—

MS. RIEDEL: That just started [in 2005? -MR] [2006, per the website -ALF]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's 50 artists a year, \$50,000, right?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, right, right. In 17 different disciplines. It's not just painters.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, 17? I thought it was eight.

MR. OLIVER: Poets, dancers, writers. Yeah, they are, but they consolidated down and it eventually gets to that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But there are 17 actually different disciplines.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And is that still moving forward? I didn't see fellows for 2013. I saw 2012.

MR. OLIVER: What happened is we had a big change in the administration.

MS. RIEDEL: [Oh? -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Again, we had 34 people and now we have six. So I've made some changes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: I've moved the headquarters to Chicago. Fabulous new team. But they got sidetracked and the board just had too much gray hair to understand the sidetrack because they got sidetracked on something called the United States Artists Projects.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Which was to compete with Kickstarter.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But it was just flawed from the beginning.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And then they went through \$10-12 million of our endowment so—we offloaded that to somebody else and we're back concentrating on the original mission.

MS. RIEDEL: Which is?

MR. OLIVER: That was just for '13.

MS. RIEDEL: [Alright. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: The '14, next, a week from today we select the fellows for '14.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's going forward with that original structure?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Same original plan.

MS. RIEDEL: And what is the mission? How did that come about? Was it four foundations?

MR. OLIVER: Ford, Rockefeller, Prudential, and Rasmuson put up [\$20 million -SO] and then they got those four women who were their original—were on the board—two of the originals are still there. Then they got eight people like myself who had a different passion. Mine was visual arts, they had Chicago symphony, dance companies, all the disciplines and then two artists and then the 12 of us—they have 400 nominees. Seventeen panels get reduced to eight selections. They bring that last 75 to us and then they lock us in a room twice a year and we have to get 75 to 50, and the arguments are classic. I mean, they should just film the arguments.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: Because everybody expects me to be defending the visual arts, but, last year it was choreographer, the year before it was a poet, so.

MS. RIEDEL: The premise behind that organization feels very fresh. I haven't heard of anything quite like it.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, completely unrestricted grants.

MS. RIEDEL: \$50,000, 50 artists a year.

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And you're trying to set up an endowment into perpetuity that [Inaudible.]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, right. That's what we're working on and they're looking at some alternatives. We're actually flirting with the model, maybe we don't do \$50,000 every year, and we're talking about doing some other things—we flirted with lifetime achievement and we finally knocked that one out—but we were looking at a whole bunch of other things. I've lost track of the word for a second. There was a word, there is a better word than any substitute that I can come up with about trying to get something that was an instigator in some ways. To get somebody, maybe it's only a \$10,000 grant, but it's somebody who really hasn't become recognized yet who we think has potential.

MS. RIEDEL: So a sort of catalyst [... -MR].

MR. OLIVER: And one of the things we're doing this year is to bring in a convening of past recipients to rethink this and Ann Hamilton has just agreed to join the board.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And will be the chair of that and put together a group of people, sort of a think tank and so—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: —we all may do a partial, maybe 25 fellows, but then look at this and see whether we're just going to revisit the model. Not instigator. There's another term for it, I'll think of it. But it's a great idea and the really nice thing is there are no egos at all because— all of us are funding this.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: And none of us see our name in lights or anything which is really great, really fun.

MS. RIEDEL: When I look at all the different boards you've served on and the many different projects you've been involved in, in some ways it seems the perfect project for you.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, it's the least social—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —the least obvious and in some ways it's really, really great.

MS. RIEDEL: And extraordinarily effective, direct to the artist. How would you—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, the saddest part about it, if I have to say it? One of the really great things, every time we meet they bring in the six or eight or ten nearest fellows that have every meal with us. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

MS. RIEDEL: Fantastic.

MR. OLIVER: And always I say well, "What did you do with the money?"

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: And more than 60 percent—last year was 64 percent—more than 60 percent do something with their health.

MS. RIEDEL: With their health?

MR. OLIVER: Teeth, eyes, cataracts. I mean, that's quite sad, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And then some do some new things, which are great but what you realize is without us they wouldn't have even had that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. OLIVER: So one of the best lines, I can say this because I resigned. I was a McArthur Nominee for about eight years.

MS. RIEDEL: I was going to ask how those two compared.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, but McArthur, and they've lectured me about it, because I continue to do it. They prefer not to give it to somebody who's sort of over 45 years old.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And I understand. They don't want to give lifetime achievement awards. Their intent was to give something that is transformative.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But many of those who have received it have transformed their lives. So one of the very old guys that I fought for was a poet in Wasilla, AK.

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

MR. OLIVER: Seventy-six years old, won and we had our meeting in Anchorage that year and I happened to sit next to him. I said, "Now what'd you do with your money?" He said, "Well," he said, "you know," he said "I know this will piss Sarah Palin off. I live down the street from her." So he said, "I thought I'd move." I said, "No." He said, "That's a good reason to stay there," he said. So he said, "I took \$24,000 and paid off my mortgage on my house. I took the other \$26,000, I put in the bank." And he said, "I stopped working as a greeter at Wal-Mart and I went back to my studio." That following year he was a finalist for the Booker Prize.

So what do you do—do you transform him at age 76? You sure as hell do. Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. I was talking with Richard Notkin quite a few years ago and he's a ceramic artist and he was in Helena at the time in Montana. And he said, "You know, the job of an artist really is to make art." He said, "but you just get so bogged down trying to survive and make a living that until that's addressed, it's very hard to get to the real work at hand."

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's exactly right.

MR. OLIVER: Fifty thousand dollars, that could be two years or two and a half of years of supplement to somebody, so—

MS. RIEDEL: What's the poet's name in Wasilla?

MR. OLIVER: Oh, I'll find out. I'll find out. Yeah, great.

MS. RIEDEL: So U.S. Artists is now back on track?

MR. OLIVER: Back on track, fabulous team. I fly to Chicago on Sunday. We meet Sunday, Monday, Tuesday of next week. We'll select the 2014 award winners, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: [Exciting. –MR]

MR. OLIVER: It won't be posted for another six weeks or so. And then a lot of discussion's going to be about this next stage of fundraising, which has been great. Actually, this new gal, a gal based in Chicago who's just a fireball, really great. We got a \$1.3 million grant from Cargill yesterday. And so, just the, you know, just, it's been completely reenergized—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —and so it's really great. And I think that—and some new board members; it's been as good as I've seen. Yeah. So, but we're looking for good geographic diversity—so we need somebody from the northwest, so if you think of a name, give me a call.

MS. RIEDEL: For what position?

MR. OLIVER: Well, a board member of USA.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And think they could stand four more board members and we're pretty well, I think the northeast and the northwest is where we could stand representation.

MS. RIEDEL: Northeast and northwest? Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. And it's also the right time for a lot of people too, you know? It's very funny; my wife had the best synopsis. I was saying I was going to take this job on, and she says, "Okay," she says, "I think that's great. It gives you a good excuse, a good exit strategy for SFMOMA." I mean it's much tougher getting off the SFMOMA board than getting on. And she says, "But here's the deal I want to make with you." She said, "You get an envelope in the mail and it has any of these seven words on the outside of it, you disagree. Don't even open it;

you just put it right in the garbage can. Don't open the envelope, you just put it right in the garbage can." I said, "Okay, give me the seven words." They were, gala, golden, jubilee, silver, oh my god, what are the other three? I've suppressed them. She said, "We've done that in our life. We don't have to go to any more of those things."

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. OLIVER: And it was true.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Because the social aspect of it was never what really intrigued us.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And it was the support base that intrigued us. And so we went to them because we had to.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Particularly if you were in a leadership position you had to go.

MS. RIEDEL: What about the support base intrigued you?

MR. OLIVER: Well, because in that you found some real magical personalities. That's the whole USA Artists board is like that, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: They're all people who had a real passion for it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And the change for me was '97 when I chaired the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts]. I chaired the Creation Presentation Division in the NEA in '97. I got that job because I'd been on several panels in the '90s and Jennifer Dowley, do you remember that name?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I do.

MR. OLIVER: She was great, she was the head of that division and so she asked me, she had been on several panels, "Would you come back and just chair this one?" Which, she said, "It's a couple more meetings," but she said, "You have to take the results," and they had, Creation Presentation has like, two-thirds of the budget for the NEA.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: The other one is Preservation and Historical Recognition I think. The other ones are more archival where the Creation was a new style. But that was, '97 was a Newt Gingrich Congress and I just had a war.

MS. RIEDEL: [I imagine. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: He and I did not get along very well and Clinton's office, they took their recommendation, they appointed me this, but we just had shouting matches with Gingrich and his idiots. And they finally came back to me. Clinton's office said, "Listen, we're going to lose the NEA if you don't give up on the artist's stipends." Because I mean, NEA used to give grants, direct grants to artists.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely, yes.

MR. OLIVER: Ten, 15, and 20,000 I think it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. OLIVER: And that was, made a huge difference.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: That let people stop waiting tables or driving a cab and they went back to the studio with those

little grants. In '97 that was a lot of money.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: And it was Susan Beresford, who was head of Ford Foundation, fabulous gal—and I've spoken publicly about this a lot—in '97 I said, "Okay." I said, "I'm not happy about this. I'll resign." "I don't want you to resign. Take these things to the national council and get them approved, but it says you have to agree to give up the artist's stipends." There was another name, artist's—they weren't residencies, they had another word for it.

MS. RIEDEL: Scholarships?

MR. OLIVER: Scholarships, yeah. [They were fellowships, not scholarships. -ALF]

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. OLIVER: So he convinced me that if he didn't do that we'd lose the NEA in total. And this was after the *Piss Christ* and some of those other things. So, we had a lot of arguments in the White House and out with his executive staff, and I finally said, "Okay, I'll do it." And I've been mad about it ever since, ticked off about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Spoken vehemently about it. And one day Susan Beresford came to me and said, "Do you want to do something about it? Stop whining about it and join the United States Artists board." And it was great and she was right.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes perfect sense.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: So it was sort of the completion—and I get the fellowship back in spades and they're better than they were.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: Completely unrestricted.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: The way it works, the artists have to get nominated then they apply but they don't have to necessarily apply about anything other than they'd like the support, or they can go and do an elaborate layout of some program they want to do, but I mean.

MS. RIEDEL: So if somebody nominates them and they're accepted as nominees then they're allowed to apply?

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. OLIVER: And then they have about 400 and it gets reduced eventually to 50.

MS. RIEDEL: Fantastic.

MR. OLIVER: 350-400 every year.

MS. RIEDEL: And just to clarify, you chaired that NEA, '94?

MR. OLIVER: '97.

MS. RIEDEL: '97. For one year?

MR. OLIVER: You can only do it once in your life—for one year.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: It's not a paid position, you get a stipend salary which is you get a per diem when you're in

Washington, D.C.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: I think it was \$100 a day or something, for food and housing.

MS. RIEDEL: [Okay. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Which you could choose to either to eat and sleep in a bus station.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I know.

MR. OLIVER: Or you can sleep in a hotel and not eat.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] And it was the creation and presentation program? Was that it?

MR. OLIVER: I think it was called creation and presentation. It was one of the three divisions.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: NEA was always in three divisions.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: I think that's what they called it.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll double check.

MR. OLIVER: It's been 20 years, but—

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

MR. OLIVER: Because the other two, one was historic and one was preservation and—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: —I don't know if it's still—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: —that way or not. Essentially it was new works.

MS. RIEDEL: So, going back to this support base and being part of this group, I think it's actually a nice transition back to the ranch because it seems that that process of making the art—of being involved in the making—has really been an important part of your engagement in the field all [along. ... -MR] There's something about the process of the art making that seems to have been of interest to you from the start. From the very first pieces that you commissioned.

MR. OLIVER: It's certainly from that, but in reality, that's a very actually stimulating question, because if I was to say what led me to do the various leadership positions in the volunteer world—

MS. RIEDEL: [Please go on. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: —it was because I had some management capability. I'm not bragging about it, but I had management capability and problem solving. You do this or somebody calls because this building is sinking over in the corner, "What do I do?" So I tell them how to raise up the corner of the building. But those leadership positions were all administrative.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: The change at the ranch came about because of spending so much time in the art world as a volunteer and on the social side of it, particularly with the landed-gentry, the moneyed people who never worked for a living, or made a payroll, or hired employees, or worried about their employees, you know? The saddest thing around this office is I knew every employee, their spouse's name, their kid's name, and their dog's name. Now half of them I'm not sure. I said, "Who's that person on the third floor?" So we've gotten bigger than I'd like to be, but this is a family. The average tenure of an employee for this company is 17 years. That's average.

MS. RIEDEL: The average tenure is 17 years?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And you founded this company in?

MR. OLIVER: '69.

MS. RIEDEL: '69. And how many people do you have now?

MR. OLIVER: Well, it's probably 100.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: A little over 100.

MS. RIEDEL: And what did you start with?

MR. OLIVER: Two.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Right.

MR. OLIVER: Me and my partner.

MS. RIEDEL: Is most of the construction in the Bay Area? I read someplace—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, mostly—

MS. RIEDEL: —a thousand buildings.

MR. OLIVER: No, no, yeah, we have a couple thousand buildings, but sort of Fresno north to the Oregon border.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But I'd say 90 percent of it is in the nine Bay counties

MS. RIEDEL: And a couple thousand buildings at this point?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary. We'll get to that too, but—

MR. OLIVER: But so, I got into that because of administrative skills that I had.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Whether good or bad, that's what I could do best or wasn't shy about pushing some things.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But when you get in the art world then see you got to get administrative skill and be the president of the Oakland Museum, like I was, or CCA, or SFMOMA and then you saw the good and bad. I mean people who were just genuinely generous. I mean you'd say here, take the landed gentry, like the Haas family. Where egos like this, and just—

MS. RIEDEL: Tiny—

MR. OLIVER: The best.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: The Bay Area would be a different place if it wasn't for something like that family.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Evie Haas was my mentor in many ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Abby?

MR. OLIVER: Evie.

MS. RIEDEL: Evie.

MR. OLIVER: Evelyn Haas. And—

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MR. OLIVER: Pardon?

MS. RIEDEL: How was she your mentor?

MR. OLIVER: Well, because she was, she was well into her 70s when I came on the board and I saw her—

MS. RIEDEL: This was the SFMOMA board?

MR. OLIVER: —and, but, I just saw she had sort of a—the SFMOMA board. She was just sort of a major personality. Just got it done and was very positive, you know, and if you disagreed with her she'd pat you on the back and then she'd say, "Let's talk about this." Then she'd take you in the hallway or whatever or buy you lunch or a cup of coffee. But she had a direction and she was driven. She was driven.

MS. RIEDEL: But it sounds like she also had—

MR. OLIVER: But she had such a pleasant way of getting there.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: And all the people I worked for, I never harassed anybody. I mean, some staff that didn't do their job right—but even I was polite if I was terminating them. I mean, it wasn't—it was done, you know, with a severance or whatever it was—I wasn't throwing them to the street.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: I just said, "This isn't working." And she had a very nice way of doing that, really nice way of doing that. But then you also had the people that were—art was money or the stature of the board was money. I remember because I'd been on the board—SFMOMA board—like I said, most of these people are gone so I can tell this story, for one year when Brooks Walker came to me who was then chairman of the board and said, "Steve," he said, "I want you to chair the committee on trustees." That's what this was called. I don't know what they do now. I said, "Brooks," I said, "That's in theory the most—" I was always taught that's the most powerful committee. I wasn't even on the committee. It was the gateway to the board. If you wanted to get in the board that, we had to do the research on you, recommend you to the board or you didn't get anywhere. You didn't get past that committee you didn't get anywhere. And I said, "Gee, Brooks, you know, I just won't seem capable of doing this when I haven't been on the board long enough." He said, "I'm not worried about that." He said, I said, "Why would you even think about it?" He says, "Because you're socially incorruptible."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs]

MR. OLIVER: And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well," he said, "you were invited to 32 of the most important parties in northern California last year and you went to two of them." I said, "Don't you think you can figure out why I went to the two I went to rather than the other ones that I never remember counting that I didn't?" He said, "I don't care." He said, "I just mean you're socially incorruptible. Nobody can invite you to dinner or a party or whatever and get on the board and that's what I need. I need somebody to block there."

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MR. OLIVER: And he said, "Besides that," he said, "I have a woman that needs to be terminated from the board and I don't think anybody can do it but you." I said, "Okay, well who is it and why?" And he told me who it was and why. She's just badmouthing the museum all the time when she was off. And so, I said, "Okay." And he announced it and everybody just kind of looked around, just, "Why is he doing this?"

And I took over chairmanship and then I went and talked to her, we had a little cup of coffee and I said, "I'm going to tell you," I said, "this is not going to be the happiest coffee you ever had." But I said, "Your term's coming up in June and it's not going to be renewed. And I wanted to let you know because I thought it would be better to have you resign, saying you're busy and it was time you were going to get off the board, thank you, rather than be terminated". And she said, "You can't do that." And I said, "Well, yes, I can because I am going to do that." I said, "You can talk to Brooks if you want to, but I'm telling you that's the way the committee voted". And she said, "Yes, but you just can't do that to me." And I said, "Now, why?" She said, "Well, my husband will

cut my clothes allowance," I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, I get \$7,000 a month for clothes for SFMOMA. I get \$3,000 for the symphony, I get \$2,000—"

And she went on this litany that was \$23,000 a month she got for clothes. Now this is in the '90s I guess. That's a lot of money. And she said, "I can't—" well, I said, "I don't understand that." I said, "You might have to try Wal-Mart or Target or something, because this is the deal." And I said, "You do whatever you want." And I said, "You've got two months." And in seven weeks she submitted her letter of resignation. But I mean I can't even deal with somebody like that. I mean, I couldn't deal with that.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you find a lot of that?

MR. OLIVER: Some. I mean, not a lot. I mean, SFMOMA would be maybe half the board is there for some other ulterior reason.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And I understand—business connections or something. I mean, I've joined a board because there was somebody I liked.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: I joined—I'm on the board of a bank—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —because someone was on the board that I wanted to hear his thinking. Those are the most boring meetings I've ever gone to in my life. I said, "Can I just put my head down on the table here and when you're finished just wake me and I'll leave"? I mean it's just so horrible.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: But, you know, so I'm guilty of it, but—although I am leaving that board—but what you realize is that there's reasons you do things and every once in a while you run into somebody like that that says, "God, this is why I don't want to do this anymore."

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like the antithesis of U.S. Artists.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, exactly. It's exactly the antithesis of U.S. Artists.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: So this whole thing got started because you asked me the question about do I get in them because of the process of artists?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: What happened, I realized, is when I invited one artist to come to the ranch and do something, the very first one—

MS. RIEDEL: Judith Shea—

MR. OLIVER: —Judith Shea, which is just because of the anathema, and being tired of hearing people talk about money and art—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: —my wife said, "Let's get somebody to be here who had no value to this thing, you'd destroy it if you move it, we'll invite somebody." It was just this magical experience because I realized half way through it, the same skills that I brought to make a board better—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —or a museum better, I could help an artist. "Well, yeah, you can't make the column that big, but if you did it this big you could do it. Or you could do it this way or that way." So I just became a studio assistant. I became a studio assistant with some skill set.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Not only I provide the money and the resources, but I could tell them how to build it so they didn't have to give up what they wanted it to look like.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: This is what I want, but I can't do this because somebody says it'll fall over or it'll peel, or whatever. I said, "Let me think about, we'll find some way to do it."

MS. RIEDEL: I think this is a really important part of your story and this [interview. It's a point I want to dwell on. This -MR] frustration with the commercialization of—

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —art and the art world is something that you're well known for. It's not something we hear very much [about -MR] at all—

MR. OLIVER: No.

MS. RIEDEL: —anywhere—

MR. OLIVER: No.

MS. RIEDEL: —these days—

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —and I think it's worth dwelling on.

MR. OLIVER: I know a number of collectors, serious guys—I won't give you their names—who are well known who never want to meet the artist. Don't want to ever have he or she touch or see them— they're not afraid of them, they're just not anti-social, they're just not interested in that confusing the discussion about their choice and what is now their possession. It's not the artist's anymore. You know, it's a different—

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. OLIVER: That's not even negative. I don't mean it that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: They have no desire to see that and what I thought was just the opposite, seeing the artist problem solve. But I work every day with architects. And architects and artists problem solve differently.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Completely.

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MR. OLIVER: And they both are aesthetic. It's both driven by aesthetics because the architect, it always has to be programmatic. It always has to—this room or this building structure has a mission that is part of the commission given to them by their client.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: It has to function, it has to have a purpose. It has to house something.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Support something. Shelter something, whatever it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Whereas the artist doesn't have to do any of that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: The artist has to find a way to articulate what's in their mind—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —about this, in our case, sight, or it could be what's in their mind when they're painting on a canvas. But they problem solve so differently.

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe that'll come out a little [more -MR] in the story. Let's talk about the evolution of the Judith Shea piece [*Shepherd's Muse*]. [It was the -MR] mid-80s, '85—

MR. OLIVER: Well, if you've been on a tour—yeah, it was '85—

MS. RIEDEL: Right outside house, this piece.

MR. OLIVER: And, I've told this story a lot of times, it was just very frustrating for us because she came and started doing sketches, and then showed us the sketches, and I had—tell her—for the first year we just whined about everything she did.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you decide on her in the first place?

MR. OLIVER: We saw a show.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: We saw a show and loved it, loved the work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Never met her. Didn't meet her until she got off the plane.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did you come up with the idea even of an outdoor installation? How did you come up with the idea for a sculpture?

MR. OLIVER: Well, because we were having dinner with some dear friends of ours—

[Audio break.]

—his wife has now passed away, but her husband is still around, and I see him occasionally now, and this is a guy who is a business person and—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —primarily in finance and does investment stuff, that sort of stuff, and we were having dinner at the house one night, and I was complaining about a transit insurance policy for a Wayne Thiebaud painting that I had bought to go someplace, and nobody would do that anymore, I mean now it is insured all the time, but I had to buy it, the museum had it, and I had it here, but I did not have it in the process, and his answer —so making a judgment about our taste in art, as well, "You mean this crap is worth something?"

MS. RIEDEL: [laughter]

MR. OLIVER: I answered, "Well, not all of it, but some of it has some value, which is why I have to insure it." I mean he was really making a judgment about our taste.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And then also saying because this was the '80s. It was really a go-go decade in the art world—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Right.

MR. OLIVER: —it was one auction record after another, and people were buying prints in '85 and '87 and '88 for \$1,000 and selling them for \$5,000. It was all the same names, you know, and he said, "That's it. This is an investment for you. You're making money at this. I thought you were just buying real estate. You are treating this like real estate. You're—" I said, "No, no, no." I said, "I have never sold any or—we've given them away, but no, no." And then when he left, we started talking and said, "Let's just invite somebody to come here. We got all this land let's just do something that ceases to be of value. Let's just do something site—specific."

MS. RIEDEL: Had you seen—

MR. OLIVER: And site-specific was a new word that was coming into the vocabulary then too.

MS. RIEDEL: Had you been to Storm King? [... -MR]

MR. OLIVER: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: I had heard about it, but I hadn't gone. I did after that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Storm King—you know, Storm King had objects purchased and placed in landscape. They'll deny this, but they had their board retreat at the ranch—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —and their first [site-specific piece -MR] was Richard Serra's, which was done because of their visit to the ranch.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: They've now had two board retreats there.

MS. RIEDEL: Was Runnymede up and going yet?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Runnymede was objects placed in the landscape, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Now —nothing was ever site-specific there, and that was mostly family because three families owned it. It wasn't owned by one.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So—no, but it wasn't like I had a grand plan. We just did one and said it was going to be it, but it was such a feeling. I mean, at the end of it, we were so lost when she left because—so, we whined for the first year. And if she hadn't just told us to just shove it and get out of there—and then finally she said to us one day, she said, "Okay, you've told me now for the third time this wasn't what were you expecting. What were you expecting?" And we told her exactly the last show we saw of hers in a museum and just described everything, and we thought we would get another one of those, you know. And she said, "You know what?" she says, "You just have to trust me. I'm not doing that work anymore." And I thought, "Oh, God that's the last thing I want, some artist telling me to trust them."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: And so we had dinner that night and after she left, I said, "Listen, we are just being terrible to this poor lady and she is so sweet. Let's just do it and if it is all wrong take it out, and get a bulldozer and take it out." And I didn't tell her that until five years ago, and we just missed it. You know, we just missed the whole thing because the pieces on Washington Mall outside the Hirshhorn, the pieces to the entrance to the Walker Museum, the sculpture garden, all came out of the piece at the ranch.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: The first time the male figure ever showed up in her work was that male overcoat that you've seen on the rock.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: The first time these architectural elements, the columns, the fragments, sculpture fragments, showed up were in that work. All those works came out of there. And we just caught her at transition, and she has transitioned three times since then—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —doing other things—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —and it went to wood and now—it never had the figures, now they are very figurative, and she has a show in New York right now. And so, just seeing this was really transformative.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And we always say, I tell the groups that come there, we went out and found the first three dimensional work that was in that show, belonged to a collector in Cleveland, OH, and we bought it, and we keep that on a special table in the living room at the ranch to remind us of we thought we were going to get and we got. This is what we always thought we were going to get and out there is what we got, and it is just a little lesson in humility to us every day. We don't prejudge it. We make a decision about the artist's work and then just be supportive.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Do whatever you want.

MS. RIEDEL: And as far as I have read, you have very few parameters that [artists have to adhere to -MR]—there is no time limit, no size or mass limit, within reason.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: The Serra might stretch even the reason [limit -MR] [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: Or the last eight story building that Ann Hamilton built.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. It seems like an extraordinary way to handle a commission.

MR. OLIVER: And no real dollar limit—we hate to say it that way, but we changed after the first four or five—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: —because at the end of the Jones-Ginzel piece. I don't know if you saw that?

MS. RIEDEL: No, that one I didn't.

MR. OLIVER: Did you go through the guest house when you were there?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: Okay. That changed everything because we used to go around the lake the other way, so you run all around the lake, and you saw Dennis Leon, Ellen Driscoll, and Kristen Jones and Andrew Ginzel, but the guest house has gotten so much press that it's hard to do that, and that heads us in a different direction, so you miss those three, but the Jones-Ginzel one is called *Pananemone*. It is all these things, 40 things that hang in the trees and spin and all this other stuff, and each artist had a budget, which was this little fantasy we lived with until they went over the budget.

MS. RIEDEL: [Ah. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And they—[Laughs] they made aesthetic decisions—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —without regard to the longevity of the project.

MS. RIEDEL: [Ah-ha. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: So we rebuilt that project twice.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And if we done it right the first time, we would have been over budget, but we'd have been so far ahead.

MS. RIEDEL: [Hindsight. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: So everything changed. From then on, we said, "Let us agree on what your services are going to be —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —the fee for your services and then we will pay for everything else: Housing, transportation,

fabrication, engineering. All we want to do is be at the table to talk about the materials.

MS. RIEDEL: [Okay. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: We don't care about—nothing aesthetic, but we want it to be here 50 years from now, and the way for us to do that—we have the skill set, or I can find the skill set to know that what you are doing is going to last.

MS. RIEDEL: Now there was a Goldsworthy there that's no longer there. Correct?

MR. OLIVER: He did half a dozen pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But this is before he did any permanent work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: The first permanent work I ever knew he did was at Storm King.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And after they had come to me and said, "What happened to yours?" I said, "They are all gone."

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And so *The Wall that Went for a Walk* [*Storm King Wall*] was his first permanent work that I was aware of.

MS. RIEDEL: When you say you want [... -MR] to talk about materials, you want these pieces to be there 50 years from now, is that partially a response to—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah—but when we commissioned Andy, he said, "You have to know these are going to go away—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: "—but you're left with a photograph." We have a large scale photograph that is like half the size of that, of the works.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But the longest one lasted four months, the shortest one like two minutes.

MS. RIEDEL: [Interesting. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And what's interesting, we got these big images, but he has other images now that he has talked to the people that are writing the book

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Which is great, and it is things that I didn't even know that he had from his time at the ranch.

MS. RIEDEL: [Nice. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Which was relatively short like off and on for six months or so.

MS. RIEDEL: [... -MR] Was your decision to have pieces that were permanent [a reaction to that Goldsworthy experience -MR] or do you just—

MR. OLIVER: No, no. It was just—it was an artist that interested us.

MS. RIEDEL: So in his case—

MR. OLIVER: And so if it's not permanent, it's not permanent. It's all right. It just disappeared. The others are going to disappear. Maybe the Serra there, they're going to be making up religions about it in 2,000 years.

MS. RIEDEL: They might.

MR. OLIVER: But the others are—

MS. RIEDEL: Or the Terry Allens [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: —they have some ephemeral nature to them, you know, in some ways they're not forever. Some have greater potential than others, but—that is all.

MS. RIEDEL: [It's fascinating ... -MR] that these commissions often become either the catalyst for new bodies of work for the artist—

MR. OLIVER: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —or they become seminal pieces—

MR. OLIVER: They often become—

MS. RIEDEL: Transitional pieces?

MR. OLIVER: —transitory times for the artist because something has happened. They have been freed to do something or think about something.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And all have brought different reactions. One of the funniest reactions—I was telling someone the other day, we were talking about something—and it was Ellen Driscoll—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —who came and never done outdoor work before.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: A lot of them—or Judith had not either, but—and she complained about the California skies. She said, "In my studio, I've got walls I can push. Here there is nothing to push. You don't even have clouds in the sky here in California."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: "I can't push back against anything." She said, "It's just too big."

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: I had never thought about that, but here she was so spatially oriented.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: So, the best thing that happened there around the dinner table—

MS. RIEDEL: Would you talk about—

MR. OLIVER: —and often not about art—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: —I mean just these amazing conversations. Just like Joan Simon put off Richard Serra's conversation about the ranch until the very end. She was a little frightened of him, and Joan is no shrinking violet, but—I said, "Here's the way to talk to him, I will talk to his assistant, Katrina." Serra has a very small group of people he gets along with and trusts, and hopefully, we are in that group, or we've been told we are. But his assistant Katrina says, "Here's what you do: Richard and Clara are going to their place in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia on Friday. By Monday morning, he will be incredibly bored." So she said, "Tell Joan to call him on Monday morning, like about 11:00 a.m."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: She said they talked three hours. She said, "I've been doing this for 50 years. It's the most amazing three hours I've ever spent in my life."

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. OLIVER: And she said the second most was Jim Melchert.

MS. RIEDEL: I believe that.

MR. OLIVER: And here's two guys at the same vintage and yet incredibly enlightened.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And a lot of them knew each other, I mean, Melchert in particular, from all the different hats he's worn, knew all—or most of the artists he knew or had some connection with previously.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, he was head of the NEA for [four years -MR].

MR. OLIVER: Head of art and public places there, but he was also the head of the American Academy in Rome—

MS. RIEDEL: That's right.

MR. OLIVER: —for seven years.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.] Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: That's where I first met him.

MS. RIEDEL: [Ah. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And then—was just a charming guy.

MS. RIEDEL: He is.

MR. OLIVER: And a great communicator. So, I mean, many of the artists who worked at the ranch had known him from some other life.

MS. RIEDEL: I imagine. And from teaching at Cal for all those years, too.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Yeah. And even Nauman did. Nauman did, from his period here in San Francisco, Melchert was a collaborator.

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

MR. OLIVER: So all of these crossover spots were really great.

MS. RIEDEL: At some point it would be wonderful to talk with your kids.

MR. OLIVER: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: [About the -MR] experience of sitting around the dinner table and—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —talking with the—what is it, 18 different artists that have passed through the ranch?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, 18. Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems that as much as the product, the whole process, the process of being part of the—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —evolution of the piece has become incredibly important to you.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, it is, and I think, you know, some of it—like here, Ann Hamilton was given the commission, signed the contract, took her—what do they call it, not the—commission's another word, the retainer—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —and it was 14 years before she could figure out what she wanted to build and then three and a half years to build it. I am sure my grandchildren think she is a relative.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: I mean, she was there so much.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And so you have this extended family—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —that she has grown up with them.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And have you ever seen these pictures she takes with her mouth, where she uses her lips as a shutter?

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think so.

MR. OLIVER: She puts film—oh, they are quite amazing. She puts this film in her mouth and then stands in front of you and does this, and takes it. It's—and then she knows how long to—and she counts and closes her mouth.

MS. RIEDEL: [Amazing. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: She takes it out and then she puts it in this bag. She carries the bag with her all the time, so she has her bag. The collection of photographs she has of my children and grandchildren is just amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: That is extraordinary. When did you decide to build the artist residency house?

MR. OLIVER: Oh, funny story, we realized we needed some guest facility, because the main house only has one bedroom and a little tiny guestroom, and had so many friends and family and—much more mature staying there, but the problem is the house is such an iconic piece of architecture, they either had to build a littler version of it next door, so, kind of its sister or cousin—or you had to do something completely different.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And so we asked Jim Jennings, who was a very strict Modernist to design that house.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And the way he did it was just to turn its back to the main house.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: So all you see is wall up there. You do not see anything else.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And so it was a perfect solution. We did that in 1989, I think it was, and it won what's called a P.A. award, Progressive Architecture, this sort of world famous design magazine, they select great awards every year, and this won that award for that year.

MS. RIEDEL: [I remember someone mentioning that. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: But at the same time, it didn't have an artist involved in it, so I asked Jim to put it off. Let it sit down for a while, and we held off five, six, seven years, I think, before—I had an eye on Rabinowitz's work, but he is a handful, and I had to kind of get to a spot where he could get stable enough that I could get him signed up to do this. And so I finally told Jim—I said, "I think I found the artist." I said, "He can be a handful." I said, "You go to New York and meet with him, and if you two get along, we'll do it." They went together—and they got along famously. It worked out great because one could control the outside—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —and one to control the inside of the walls and they collaborated on the furniture, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Is the process for the commission—is it similar for each artist? It seems like some come many times, some stay longer.

MR. OLIVER: We—

MS. RIEDEL: Is there any similarity or—

MR. OLIVER: We've institutionalized it a little bit more. We ask them to come four times before they make a proposal.

MS. RIEDEL: [Okay. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: I'm sorry, three times, the fourth is the proposal. Once winter and once summer, so they can see the terrain of the land—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —at different seasonal, and they can pick spring or fall.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Selfishly, that just gives them—forces them to look at—because it seasonally is different, and a lot of the trees lose their leaves, et cetera.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: So they see that, but really, selfishly, it just says, "Is this somebody you are going to want to spend a lot of time with," you know, because it means out of that you are going to have five or six, seven meals together. You are going to have lots of conversation.

MS. RIEDEL: [Clearly. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And you are going to find out—because Serra was great. When Serra first came, he said, "I think I can work with you." This was the time he was suing the GSA [General Services Administration] over the *Tilted Arc*, I mean, he was living in Nova Scotia.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: He said, "I think I can work with you," but he said, "but I don't think I can convince my wife to come here." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, she really hates California." And I said, "Okay. Well, why don't you bring her out one time and let's just see how it is?" And she came in. If you have ever met her, she is just a delight, and this tall, beautiful, blond lady, but really the funniest woman in the world. She has the art world nailed, I mean, she can tell stories about people that I know that are just hysterical, and I usually add to it—very funny stuff. She came back and we just hit it off like this from day one. She had never been—the only place she had been in California was Los Angeles. She had never been out of the city limits of Los Angeles. And she just fell in love with the ranch, so it was great. It was really great.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look back at these 18 commissions, is there one or two or a few in particular that you are especially proud of, or that were—

MR. OLIVER: No, because they are a little like children, so I mean, it's hard to do that. Clearly Ann was great to work with and Serra was great, but then Nauman, I tried for 17 years to try to get Nauman to come, and he wouldn't come.

MS. RIEDEL: But he came.

MR. OLIVER: Yes, because—

MS. RIEDEL: Seventeen years.

MR. OLIVER: —17 years—and Serra both had the same dealer in Frankfurt, I think, and he died, and they were on the same plane going to Frankfurt for his memorial service, and he said, "Hey, do you know this guy Oliver? He's called me and called me for 17 years," and he said, "What do you know about it?" And Serra said, "If he is asking you ought to do it." And Serra said a bunch of nice things, which were really great, and so Nauman came back and he called me. He said, "I'll come up. I'll stay two hours one afternoon. We can talk two hours, one afternoon." He stayed three days.

MS. RIEDEL: Really.

MR. OLIVER: But he did because he came and we had an outbreak of what is called blue tongue in the ranch for the sheep, which is an infection in the mouth. He is really a serious cattle—he has a huge cattle ranch on the New Mexico/Texas border, and he raises horses, he does a lot of stuff. He only talks about art one day a week, just Wednesday. And he came, and we had this disease, and he said, "Well, let me look at it." And so he got into inoculating them, and we were there giving them injections, and he was working down at the barn, and the way up to the ranch was up the road and he said, "We ought to build a staircase up here." So—

MS. RIEDEL: That's a great story.

MR. OLIVER: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] You know, sometimes it is just—I said, "There is no pressure," you know, "take as much time as you want."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: So sometimes it was just the relaxation of it, you know. Let's get the economics out of the way here. Send me the bills for everything else. Let's just talk about what we are going to do.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that is another interesting part of the processes—the degree [to which you would -MR] facilitate things. You get the permits, I've heard the Serra story [...,—we might -MR] put that in here, and the Ann Hamilton story—

MR. OLIVER: The Ann Hamilton is 59 feet over the height limit for Sonoma County in that area.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: I've got an argument in San Francisco. I'm building a building that is two inches over the height limit.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. OLIVER: It is 59 feet. But, you know the funny thing is this woman, who was the head of planning for my section of the county, and I just had a war for 15 years—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —and now we are great friends.

MS. RIEDEL: What happened?

MR. OLIVER: Well, I think she came in one day and she said, "Okay." Yeah, I can come to the planning department counter and they would say, "Oh, God, he is back again."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: "You go talk to him, I just can't deal with him again." And so she kind of got into it. I said, "Well, let us do something. Let us see if the neighbors object and whatever it is."

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And then finally, I think I came down to giving—when we were going to give the ranch away. I was talking to her about something. I said, "You know the Smithsonian wants it, and SFMOMA wants it, and I am talking to the California Arts Council and stuff like that, and she said, "This should be in Sonoma County. This should be an asset for Sonoma County." I said, "Okay, you got a deal. You got a deal." In some ways, I think the problem was I wanted to carve 15 acres out for the main house, the guest house, and this lake—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —that I was going to give to the kids and I said, "Then you can give it to the foundation, but I said eventually it has to belong to the foundation." So, I went to the County in this whole process and they said "But this is a 70 acre minimum area of the county. You have to have at least 70 acres and you cannot have any parcels smaller than that."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And I said, "Well," I said, "You know what, I'm talking to the Smithsonian, that's the federal government, and I'm talking to the state and they don't give a damn about your rules. They will do whatever

they want." Because he said, "You can do it and we would support it, but it takes three years to do a general plan amendment that would allow this thing. And I said, "Well, you've got 90 days, so figure out what you want to do or I will just give it to the federal government." And that was a bit of a bluff, but they did a general plan amendment in 28 days.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: I mean, this is unheard of.

MS. RIEDEL: [And it -MR] was an extraordinary opportunity for them.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, because —and they were smart enough to lose, and the planning department came and said, "You can't lose this."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And to their credit, then they did it. So- justice can still be purchased in America.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Don't let anyone tell you that isn't true.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: So, you know, and so ever since then I've just realized, you know, that's where it should have been. That is where it always should have been, so we weren't disappointed.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there plans for new sculptures, still?

MR. OLIVER: Yes. I've got four in the works. This has been a big sidetracked year because of the book and the Lawyer Full Employment Act. There is a couple of guys—this probably shouldn't be in the book, but I will—or in your report, but there's a couple of people in Sonoma County that make their living off of suing individuals and organizations for ADA accessibility.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: They came to me, and I said, "Okay. I'll do something." But they said, "We want you to hire our people." But I'm in the business, I mean—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —so I hire architects and designers all the time.

MS. RIEDEL: [Right. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: So I went out and searched out the best there is, and the best I found in California happened to be based in Sebastopol and I hired him, so when I didn't hire their people, then they threatened the county and—it is a big battle going on now, so we got lawyers.

MS. RIEDEL: To make this sculpture park accessible?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: I said, "I'm not going to—I said, "You know Yosemite Falls isn't ADA accessible. There are parts that are not going to be and I'm not going to destroy the Ann Hamilton tower in order to make it wheelchair accessible," so I said, "I'm—you have to figure out what you want to do." So we are working through it all, but it is just the Lawyer Full Employment Act.

MS. RIEDEL: Time consuming.

MR. OLIVER: So that's been put off, but I'm waiting for three proposals from three people. I've got one and I'm waiting for the next one.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you usually average one a year, one every two years?

MR. OLIVER: We did. There was a time when we were doing two at a time, which was a nightmare because I

realized that I got too focused on supporting one person—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —too focused on supporting one person to the exclusion of somebody else.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And so now, we just do one until it is complete and one until it is complete. Now in the case of Ann because we took so long, we did some of those in the meantime.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: So right now we would only have one working at the ranch at a time.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: So our goal is to get something started this year—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —until this other legal thing came up. And I have no problem with saying going forward everything needs to be ADA accessible, no problem at all.

MS. RIEDEL: [Right. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: But that wasn't a requirement before, as long as it's private. It is only when it becomes public that it—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —that that is a problem.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: So—I mean, we are working—well, the County knows it. This guy makes his living doing it.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: The County knows it, so they are working with me.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you describe—[...-MR] either the evolution of the Ann Hamilton piece or the Serra piece, so people have an understanding of what exactly has been involved in the installation of the pieces?

MR. OLIVER: For Ann it was simple. The biggest problem for her in this long time, first was to decide what she wanted to do, and then solve all the problems structurally, because—

MS. RIEDEL: And this has to be drilled way down into the—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. It goes as far in the ground as it goes in the air.

MS. RIEDEL: So what is that, 85 feet?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, 65, 70 feet, below grade, but then we actually sunk the tower a foot and a half, I mean, a story and a half into the ground, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: The tower is 86 feet high, but it does not go quite that deep in the ground, because it somewhat goes in the ground now, the tower does.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it—

MR. OLIVER: So that was the big structural problem, and we did a whole bunch of tests, trenches across the ranch, just to locate where the nearest earthquake fault was, if there was one. There was a small fracture about 300 yards away and that changes how you do it structurally, but what she wanted it to look like did not work at all structurally, so we had to go out and solve that problem.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And then build it just took a long time—it took us a year and three months from when we started digging the hole until we were back at grade and another year to do the cylinder, and then another eight, nine months to do the staircase inside.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it always intended to be a performance space?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. What she always talked about from the beginning was to create a vocal cord for the ranch, is what she wanted to do.

MS. RIEDEL: Before or after the Fontana piece?

MR. OLIVER: It is interesting that it is after the Fontana piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But the Fontana piece only plays once a day—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And it's always the same in some ways in that it is a similar sound, where this is quite a variety of things.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: You know, really a great one coming up on December 21st and 22nd—

MS. RIEDEL: What is it?

MR. OLIVER: —which is Sympho, a group of contemporary symphonic musicians out of the BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music]—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: —that are three different new symphonies. Total run is about an hour and 15 minutes for all three, so it is like 20 minutes, 25 minutes apiece, and they performed once before about two years ago. Were just really brilliant.

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds great. I've always wanted to get up there to see Joe Goode—

MR. OLIVER: Oh, Joe Goode was really great, really great.

MS. RIEDEL: I've loved him for years.

MR. OLIVER: The [other -SO] one that was really great was in June of this year, which was Zaccho Dance Theater. Do you know them?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. OLIVER: Joanna Haigood?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, of course.

MR. OLIVER: Unbelievable.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll bet that was.

MR. OLIVER: All of them danced on the outside of the tower—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: Up and went over the top into it—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: And then the whole dance inside, so the audience was outside for half

MS. RIEDEL: [Great. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Inside for half, but inside was a six story high ladder out of the water, up to the top, and all of the

dance was on the ladder.

MS. RIEDEL: The space itself is extraordinary. It is a charged space to begin with.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I can only imagine [Laughs.] what it's like in action.

MR. OLIVER: What she did to it. She and I have known each other for 25 years or so.

MS. RIEDEL: I would imagine.

MR. OLIVER: She is great. So it's been a lot of fun. The last three or four years when we haven't done anything, the salvation has been that because we've done a lot of those things.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: We are probably at a—are you at a good stopping spot?

MS. RIEDEL: Let me take a quick look.

[Audio break.]

MR. OLIVER: —plus years at SFMOMA Board, I got time off for good behavior, but I went to their publication department, because Neil and I have known each other for a long time. I knew him years ago because I have good friends in Omaha, I mean, Des Moines, where he was at the Des Moines Art Center.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And then I joined the Smithsonian Board because he was the Chief Curator at the Hirshhorn.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, exactly.

MR. OLIVER: And I wanted to work with him and—oh, God—his—the director there.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. OLIVER: Jim—and then after—I was on the Board two years and then when he retired. He was formerly at the Des Moines Art Center and then went there. I can't think of his name. Jim Demetron.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: Who in the art world is sort of iconic guy, another one —

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —and then he went to Chicago, and then I had to convince him to come out here and take the SFMOMA job, and we go back a long way. I went up to the publication department and said, "Tell him—I had Yale the University, UC press, all of these people had made proposals about a book on the ranch." And I said, "I really don't want somebody just to, kind of, focus on the eccentric collector or something like that, I wanted to focus on the artists." And I got this proposal from this guy, Greg Miller, who is a wealthy guy who made his money someplace else, who just does art books. And he said,—he gave me this list. He says, "This is the dream team. I'm going to get the dream team for you." And the head of publication at SFMOMA said—Neal said, "Well, get him in here and let's see." He gave him the list, I said, "What do you think of these people?" "Oh," he says, "it is the best in the world. That is the best design and writing team in the world." He said, "You are never going to get them." I said, "I got the contracts for all of them right here." He said, "Where did you get that?" "Greg Miller," I said. "I've never heard of him." "I don't know what he is doing, but he said he has all five of them signed up." The book design will be in L.A., Joan Simon is writing, Greg Miller is producing it, Green Dragon is the design firm in Los Angeles that is designing it and it is amazing what they have done.

MS. RIEDEL: I can't wait to see it.

MR. OLIVER: And Joan has just spent—I have like a paragraph after each artist. It is all talking about the artist, which is just great, and Neal wrote the foreword, and it is all the right focus, you know, it's on the artists, and that sort of stuff, and the artists responding to the environment, and stuff like that, so it's great.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the inspiration for the book?

MR. OLIVER: Well, I mean, I think someone was saying, you know, a lot of things are just things you know about, and so they are trying to film and record the tours now. We are doing a lot of them. They started a docent program.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MR. OLIVER: I think the Sonoma County Community Foundation, which is in theory the technical body that owns the ranch, I gave it to them—

MS. RIEDEL: 2009, right?

MR. OLIVER: Yes—says that they want to develop a docent program, which they have started—

MS. RIEDEL: Makes sense.

MR. OLIVER: —and we are funding it. The person who trains the docents SFMOMA is taking that on.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: So and her—and it was so funny because she has been so great. She brought her husband to one of these things, and he signed up as a docent.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: I said, "Well, good thing I'm not a rock climber or something, it would have been much tougher on you than this."

MS. RIEDEL: [laughter] Quite.

MR. OLIVER: So, it has been a fun group, so it is a nice way to start it and—

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Fantastic. Well, let's stop here for the day

MR. OLIVER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: —and pick it up tomorrow.

MR. OLIVER: All right, great.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Steven Oliver at his office in Richmond, CA on September 3rd, 2014 for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, card number two. And we're starting [today -MR] with the magical moment between [inaudible].

MR. OLIVER: Well, it was really—we talked about other things. I just wanted to end this cycle that I thought about last night for the first time in 20 years. So we had this big blow up at CCA, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Which year was this, '81? '82?

MR. OLIVER: '81 or shortly after a year after I was there, probably. Nine or 10 months after I was there. I wasn't there very long before I blew the place up—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —and it's really funny because, in some ways, it comes full circle to Viola Frey—

MS. RIEDEL: Perfect.

MR. OLIVER: —a funny story of over there. So probably, you've probably heard if you were at the ranch on tour. So after CCA sort of settled down, I could see there was a good path moving forward, and I had been there five years. I sat four or five years as chairman. I said, "You know what I should do? I should step aside," and one of the big problems I had at SFMOMA was actually, there was very little turnover. When I realized I became chairman of the board, I was like the fifth chairman. That was a museum founded in 1933—

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. OLIVER: —then that's crazy.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: I've got to tell you that's crazy, and I tried to change it, but that's another story. Anyway, so I said I should step aside, and we also grew the board, fabulous people of the board. The board has been better that day than every day after I got there just because you get one good person on, they'll get somebody else on, and some people—when they had the other group before were giving \$200 a year, and we had so many people that gave, you know, Barclay Simpson, if you know that name—iconic guy. I recruited him for the board. And you start adding people like that, it changes the whole chemistry of the board. It's all about peer comfort. So if somebody asks me on a board, "Who else was on the board?" the very first question I ask.

It's no reflection, it's just that well that person's interesting. Sometimes you do because that, even as much as the mission. So anyway, five years later things were looking so great. It was time for me to step aside and make some changes, and a great person followed me.

So then, I had a little time off, but I had developed this sort of pain in the neck reputation, and so I got a call from somebody at the Oakland Museum saying, "Would you join the Oakland Museum Board?" And that was a building we finished, helped me get in business, and I knew a lot a people there, and liked it, and my wife had stepped down as a docent, I think, by then. I said, "Yeah, okay. That's good. I can do that. That's great. I just got this time off." They knew I'd stepped down, and so—

MS. RIEDEL: From CCA?

MR. OLIVER: From CCA.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: They said, "Oh, and by the way, would you be president of the board?" And I said, "What?" First day on the Oakland Museum Board, I was president of the board. My wife said, "There's got to be something else." I said, "Well, we have a chairman." They had a model where they had a president and had a chairman. SFMOMA had the same thing; I was both president and chairman. At SFMOMA, the president just carries the chairman's bags, but at Oakland Museum, they had two different tasks. The chairman was a guy like Jim Vohs, who was head of Kaiser, V-O-H-S. Really a wonderful guy, and very pleasant. So I said, "Okay."

So we joined the board, and then I realized it was just in complete chaos, too. The museum was run, sort of, by the Women's Board, which raised all the money, and did great things, white elephant sales and all the things that they did, which was great. And the board didn't give much money. It didn't help very much, and there was bickering, and the City of Oakland was going through a very, sort of, power struggle between the then—mayor, an African-American by the name of Lionel Wilson—very nice guy—and the city manager by the name—oh, my God, this is one I suppressed. I can see his face, too. Anyway, I'll think of it.

MS. RIEDEL: We can add it.

MR. OLIVER: Anyway, yeah—and we got together and decided we're going to do something as dramatic as we did at CCA, and so we went out and got resignations from the 44 women on the Oakland Museum Women's Board. When the museum originally started, the Women's Board actually started the museum, and they were the most active volunteers, raised money, doing all kinds of things, immigrate, and it was really the blue-haired—if there was a society in the East Bay, it was that board.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Piedmont—based and that sort of thing. And then all of the other museum board, we had resignations because what we—our game plan in talking to—Henry Gardner was the city manager's name. Henry said, "You guys don't pay anything for the operation. We do that." And he said, "I select the executive director." And I said, "No, no, no, no. We want to. We want to select the executive director. We'll get all this resignation. The city can appoint some board members. We'll appoint some board members. We'll start all over again from scratch." And Jim agreed. Everyone agreed with it, and that's what we did. We collected the 60 resignation letters. We developed a new board with spectacular representatives on it. Donor checks of a big chunk of change. I won't say how many hundreds of thousands of dollars or millions, and took them all in to Henry Gardner and said, "Okay. We did everything we said. Here are 80 resignations, board and the Women's Board. I brought a check for the first bit of money donated by the new board that we're recommending. We have room for you to appoint a board. Now what we want to do is start a search committee for the next director."

And that was it. The director resigned, and the board was in disarray, and we just needed a change. It needed a revitalization. And Henry Gardner said, "Ah, you know, I changed my mind. I just appointed Kay Weiner, who was the chief of recreation to be the executive director. So I'm not interested in that deal we made anymore." And I said, "Well, you know what, here's what I'm going to do though. I want to leave you the resignation letters. Oh,

and I'll leave you the check, too." I tore the check in half, and put it on top of that. And that was it. We all walked out.

So I was on that board for like a year and a half or whatever to do this. And that got another big press because here's this other crazy person like me was there doing this, and a month later, I got a call from Francis Bowes to ask if I would join the SFMOMA Board because she said, "You not big enough shit to stir, you better come over here and do it." I mean, that was kind of—she didn't quite say it that way, but you know that's what she meant.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And that's when it all happened. And so my tenure at the Oakland Museum Board—even though I was the president—if I was president of that board for 342 days—that's how long I was on the board, too. I mean, whatever it was—it was quite amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And eventually, I think now they do that, but it's taken them 20 years to get there. And the new director they have is fabulous. If you know Lori Fogarty, she's fabulous because she was the deputy director of SFMOMA, and SFMOMA always worked when she was there, and the day she resigned, David Ross, who was the director, lasted about 90 days. Because his meetings were fabulous, but nothing happened after them if she wasn't there. If she was there, she did everything.

MS. RIEDEL: [Essential. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, so the whole museum fell apart. He was gone in a short period of time.

MS. RIEDEL: One thing you mentioned too, before we turned on the card here, was how you got started in art volunteerism.

MR. OLIVER: Well, it probably came because this gentlemen—the story I told you yesterday—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. OLIVER: —at the hospital—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —asked if I would just go and help him, promise to be one year on this college board I never knew. But my sister went there for a year, so I knew that, after she had graduated from Berkeley—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: —she went over. She was interested in painting, and went over there, and took classes for a year.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was the beginning of it.

MR. OLIVER: So I knew—I'd heard about it, but it was because I owed a favor to this guy—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —who asked me, "Just go there. Promise me you'll stay there one year."

MS. RIEDEL: What was his name again?

MR. OLIVER: I think it was—you know, if somebody asked me this morning. I was telling them I had told that story, and I had not had—probably had not been repeated in 30 years. John Perkins, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: That's what you said. John or Jim [... . -MR]

MR. OLIVER: John Perkins, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's been 30 years?

[Cross talk.]

MR. OLIVER: I've been 34 years on the board of CCA, the longest—serving board member. And I stick around just because the board gets better every year with the new people that come on the board. It's an interesting group of people and incredibly dynamic. And so before, when you consider the centric of that board was 300 yards

from the college, you know, up Broadway Terrace in Oakland, and today they're all over the Bay Area. We probably have—every bay county has a representative.

MS. RIEDEL: That's terrific.

MR. OLIVER: So diverse, and you know, and pretty small egos, I mean it's—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —it's not like SFMOMA, where, but, I mean, it's probably better suited for me than that big thing like SFMOMA. That was never—I was there 20 years, and I had no difficulty doing anything there, but I didn't yearn to do it. Some people do.

MS. RIEDEL: What's the difference for you?

MR. OLIVER: The size of the egos of the people on the board. And the size of the checks they write. It's somewhat commensurate with the size of the egos.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: I always talked about all the big groups that come into the ranch. I said, "If you're going to do it as—selling tickets is one thing. If you're going to do it at an auction item, let me tell you this. The success of the auction is directly proportional to the length of the cocktail hour and the size of the egos in the room."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: I mean, because some people had to pay \$25,000 for a tour of the ranch for just he and his wife. They want to do it alone. That's crazy, but okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: If they want to do it. As long as it's [a non-profit that -MR] benefits.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But I mean, I think it's just never—that side of the thing never really appealed to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: So. It would probably be in the construction—I think about afterwards, is being in the construction business is a much more,—some days I used to have to wear a tie. The Gap let me talk myself out of that. But that's another funny story, how I stopped wearing a tie. I wore a tie for 35 years, and we were hired by an architecture firm in San Francisco to do some tenant improvements for a law firm—big San Francisco law firm, I won't say their name—in Palo Alto. I went down there, and they spent over three and a half million dollars taking out two floors of this office building, fancy up offices, but I never understood that. I said, "I looked at the drawings," and I finally asked the architect. One day, I said, "What? This looks like a gym rather than—" "Oh, no, this is a changing room." I said, "What do you mean?" "The guys come down in suits from San Francisco—three—piece suits. They go there to put their jeans and T-shirt on, because they are representing Silicon Valley companies, and they didn't trust them when they came dressed as suits, and coats, and ties.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: So they went down there to dumb down their wardrobe, so they could go to Silicon Valley to their clients—

MS. RIEDEL: That's funny.

MR. OLIVER: —and I said, "Then I don't have to wear a tie anymore."

MS. RIEDEL: There you go.

MR. OLIVER: And I haven't worn—you know, a couple funerals and weddings I've done it, but other than that.

MS. RIEDEL: That's one of the beauties of the area.

MR. OLIVER: Exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: And owning your own company.

MR. OLIVER: That was the Gapification. Yeah, exactly. Your name is on the outside of the building.

MS. RIEDEL: You can wear what you want.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: You had mentioned that the CCA story might circle around to Viola Frey.

MR. OLIVER: Well, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Or we can just formally dive in.

MR. OLIVER: No, no, no, no, it's easy. It's very easy. If you were at the ranch when, my show where it all started, I talked about two pieces—yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: *Mean Man*.

MR. OLIVER: And *Mean Man*. Because originally, when I bought that, my purchase document from the dealer says, "Mr. Chairman." But when I got it, and was officially registered—there's an art registry— that an artist when they register it. I don't know what it is. I don't know enough about it. Then the official name becomes what they call it. So regardless of what it says on your invoice, that's what its name is forever, and you can't change the name. You can call it that, but if it was ever sold, or transferred, or whatever it is, and somebody looked at it, it would be part of that. And she changed to *Mean Man*.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you get this from Rena Bransten?

MR. OLIVER: Who did I get it from? Somebody from her studio, I think. It wasn't from Rena. It was somebody else.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you first meet Viola?

MR. OLIVER: Well, when I had this big blow up at CCA—

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.] okay.

MR. OLIVER: One of the first things I did was—the one vice president I didn't fire was a wonderful guy, oh God. I see the face again, but I can't think of his name. But I can get it. And so I kept one of the vice presidents who was the provost, which meant he had all the interaction with the faculty. That's their job. And I said, "You"—I said, "I want to start this—I want to tell people what I did last night. So I want a faculty meeting. Faculty head—faculty department heads." And he brought in—Viola was head of the Ceramics Department.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And we never had a mean word to each other, ever in life, but she just decided that somebody mean had to do this. I don't know if it was mean, but that would be a fair—from somebody that's an outsider—that would be a fair description, as opposed to focused, or decisive, whatever. You know there's—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: But—and this guy, this big figure, this nine-foot—tall figure with his hands—you know. So looks like. He looks—I mean, he fits it.

MS. RIEDEL: He didn't look that mean.

MR. OLIVER: But he's not smiling.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. OLIVER: He's stern.

MS. RIEDEL: Most of them are. Right?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. None of them are, you know, happy faced.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.] smiles [Laughs].

MR. OLIVER: Right, right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you buy that to install outside?

MR. OLIVER: No, I actually bought it for our yard at our yard in Orinda because, originally, we had a lot of outdoor sculpture stuff, and we took it to the ranch, and then gradually we've given it all away, except two pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: And why is that?

MR. OLIVER: Well, because it wasn't site-specific. As that sort of evolved, then the object placed in the landscape was sort of antithetical to what I was doing there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So—and sometimes you get asked. Some went to the City of San Jose. Some went to different museums and that sort of stuff. But I kept two that I have a real personal connection with the artist. Vi's and Jun Kaneko.

MS. RIEDEL: I saw [Jun's -MR] piece by the pool.

MR. OLIVER: And he and I go back a long ways. And so all the other outdoor pieces were given away. But all those started in the house in Orinda.

MS. RIEDEL: What drew you to [Viola's -MR] work in the first place?

MR. OLIVER: Well again, it was just -I was never much of a craft purchaser, so it wasn't craft, but I didn't see this craft, and then this figurative work. It was that figurative work, and the quirkiness of it, and then knowing her because she was very quiet. None of that quirkiness showed in her personality at all. It all was demonstrated in her work.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And so then you realize that—probably the first time I ever worked with an artist because, in some ways, it maybe even the beginning of the site-specific stuff because I used to go to her studio, occasionally, or I'd see something on campus.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And then, I'd go to her studio and—because we would talk about something.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: I'd go there, ostensibly, for a CCA business thing, but I really just wanted to see the studio. And then, we get through that, and they'd say "Look around." So you saw all these crazy things. I mean, if you've ever seen her work, there's this wide variety of stuff, from just assemblage of found objects mixed in with her ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Some of us thought, "This is just nuts," but then that's like, back to Kienholz. I mean, after you started looking at it again, you started—and you started to learn about her background, and how this modest upbringing in the central valley here, and you begin to see how it came into her life. In some ways, these big men, and she would stand next to them, it's just like they were the protectors again, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Now you must have met her right about the time [of the Crocker Art Museum retrospective, '81, -MR] and then the Whitney was '84. Was—

MR. OLIVER: Crocker probably happened even maybe before I knew her well—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —because that's about what time I joined the board.

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds about right.

MR. OLIVER: And the Whitney had one?

MS. RIEDEL: In '84.

MR. OLIVER: I saw the show there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But we were not—you know, we really didn't get close, in some ways, until I stepped down.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But I had bought a number of Squeak [Carnwath]'s early paintings, and so when Vi passed away, she asked the two of us to sort of manage her estate, and to manage the estate was to manage it for the benefit of other artists.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's what started the Artists' Legacy Foundation.

MR. OLIVER: The Artists' Legacy started up. And I had done enough work in foundations, so I sort of took the business side of that management, whereas Squeak took sort of the more day-to-day management side of it, and storage of facilities, and what to do with—because the other thing that was a huge cache of Viola's drawings, too, which are really great as well. Really great.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't think anybody has spoken about the Artists' Legacy Foundation yet for the Smithsonian, for the Archives, would you describe it, what the mission is and what you're hoping to accomplish?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. I think the mission, again, was to protect her legacy. In some ways it started two-fold, which was to say you—what happens to an artist when they pass away, and in her case has no heirs—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: I mean, one thing—most artists, it goes to their children or family, and then, in some cases, you begin to see like—I think it was Rauschenberg or one of them, where somebody who wasn't a family member sort of mistreated, or sold stuff off, or did something else for his or her own benefit. So what you're looking for is somebody you can trust to manage your estate afterwards. And so that's what we did. Her will gave her warehouse space to her long-term studio assistant, very nice guy.

MS. RIEDEL: Sam Perry.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, Sam. The studio building we sold. Her house we sold. And that money created cash in the endowment.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Which funded storage, conservation, all those other things, and the beginning of promotion of her work, which is what we've done. And then what you realize is, after doing this for 10 years, it's not an easy task.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. OLIVER: It's one thing if it's Rauschenberg or Stella, let's say, as opposed to someone who had a sort of modest reputation. A good reputation, but more modest in scale and subject.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: So we had to have this one national show that traveled a little bit. That was at the Museum of Art and Design in New York.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: There in Columbus Circle, and it had—oh, she had a great show that was in the Oakland Museum—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —that was great. But trying to find—just the effort that we put in to get two other venues or three other venues for that. One, it's not an inexpensive show to travel and move.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: They're heavy, and fragile, and have to be assembled and disassembled to move. So it's not inexpensive. That's complicated, and so what is the long-term future? I don't know. We'd like to have—and I—because I stepped off that board when I became chair at USA, but only because one, the board has gotten a lot stronger in recent years. It had good people on it with a variety of experience, which is really great. And so I felt

more comfortable—Sandy Shannonhouse [who is trustee of her late husband Robert Arneson's estate and director of his archive -ALF]—I already—you've already met her. Tim Rub [director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art -ALF].

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And so they had good diversity on the board, which was great.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And so it was a good time for me to get off. In some ways, it needed just some new voices.

MS. RIEDEL: [It was time. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Viola's legacy had been protected for that 10 years I was there, and it was time to kind of get off for me. But I had good people there, you know, in a wider variety. And it's not an easy situation because the question is, do we keep a core collection.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And sometimes, even that core collection should be dispersed to the right, appropriate museum or institution.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And then, if you begin to sell the core collection—so what you have left is the more, let's say, the less important parts of her collection, then it's harder to organize a show.

MS. RIEDEL: [It is. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: We tried to organize a couple shows last—the last one that we struggled with, and were unsuccessful, was a drawing show, which would be much easier to transport, hang, and everything else, and still struggled with it because—some of it was she had a checkered gallery relationship in the Bay Area, which was not good. And may be some reasons around it that were more personal that I'd rather not go into. But I think that her salvation for the foundation in some ways was the gallery she had in New York. Nancy Hoffman, I think, is her New York Gallery. And the majority of the work sold in the last 20 years, even during her lifetime, were in New York, out of that gallery. Where you'd think where most of her fame and recognition was here locally, but the crafts community was very big in New York, and that was Nancy Hoffman's strength, and so people came there, and still sell stuff there, and she still has a show there every year or every other year at the latest.

MS. RIEDEL: Viola does?

MR. OLIVER: Viola does, at Nancy Hoffman. And the shows, they're great shows.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: The dilemma, she's not producing more work. So then the question is, when do you stop doing that?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So sometimes you put—and they did it—the warden, those who knew her work better, could make the decision, what should be the core works that should be protected long-term. So sometimes they'll be in the show because people will come to Nancy Hoffman just because it's a little like a museum show.

MS. RIEDEL: [Beautiful. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And then she'll sell things, some things that are less famous, let's say.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: So, I mean, you realize it's not an easy solution. It's not an easy thing. And Squeak and Gary's are set up to be—to add it, but the biggest, the most vexing problem in totality is—and Squeak and Gary have no heirs, either. The idea was to grow this Artist Legacy Foundation—was to grow another artist. But how do you bring another artist in? Because it's very difficult. That's not a criticism of the idea, but I would be very surprised if the Artists' Legacy Foundation, 20 or 30 years from now, is doing just Viola, and Squeak, and Gary, assuming they have passed on.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Because to get somebody else to join, you have to say one, we like your work. Two, you're bring some assets to support. And three, you're not going to control the foundation because we control the foundation. And that may be the ultimate nix on it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: Squeak and Gary were joined at hip with Viola, so they took care of each other.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Now, you bring in another third party in. It has to be somebody they love and trust, and then, if you add them to board making decisions, they're going to be making decisions about Squeak's work and Viola's work.

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

MR. OLIVER: So politically, it's a flawed concept. So here the Rauschenbergs, and those people of the world, they have their own foundation. Like Adolph Gottlieb, who the head of that was the guy on our board—he resigned, too. But he was very good. But you realize that you have to have an artist of substantial reputation, with substantial asset base in their work, to even afford this concept.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And the dilemma is, how do you get over the flaw of converting the concept where it is now or letting it grow. And I think it's too flawed to grow.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. OLIVER: That's not why I left.

MS. RIEDEL: [Oh? -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Because I was very happy—it could be just take care of Squeak and Viola, and that's all there is.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And Squeak and Gary have a good asset base. So there's money there to support it, but it's a real dilemma.

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

MR. OLIVER: And most middle-level, or mid-career, or middle-level recognized artists, that's the problem they're going to all face.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. What do you think Viola's contributions were to the art world? How do you see her in the larger context?

MR. OLIVER: I think adding to the school of ceramists that came out of the Bay Area with Voulkos and that gang, and Arneson, and all those wonderful artists that added uniqueness to the California school.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Took a little bit—because you realize, that was really Davis, and Berkeley, and CCA—were those big things because the Art Institute didn't have that, and didn't have a ceramics—probably did, but it wasn't as renowned as CCA.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Because it was the craft side of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: Well, what's really fascinating was the debate when that name was dropped. The argument.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd imagine. You know, that's—

MR. OLIVER: Now, a lot of the more mature people were very offended by that.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you say a little about that?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Because I was in that debate from the beginning—that debate—that probably came to the board for a vote five times while I was in my tenure out there, so far. And the last guy was just more articulate than the first four guys. And it was really about the issue is—do you really segment craft from art, or is it art? And so you take the highbrow view of it. Intellectually, Viola's no different as art than the painter here. But at the same time, they're just a different medium.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] One paint—

[Cross talk.]

MR. OLIVER: But this could be a paper—

MS. RIEDEL: —one clay.

MR. OLIVER: —on charcoal, versus clay. So it was hard for me to say. But some people just—there are people, purists, who really prefer the word craft.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think of her work as craft? Do you think of it as clay? Do you think of it as—

MR. OLIVER: No, I think of it as art, sculpture.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: We just finished building the Museum of Craft and Design on 3rd Street. I don't know if you've been in it or not.

MS. RIEDEL: Not the new one, no.

MR. OLIVER: It's nice, and it's interesting because it's a fine line where they are because it's really interesting. And it's a good spot. They'll be there for a while. But it's hard, and again, it's a little confusing, so. You know, you think of design as either furniture, or graphic design, or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But those lines blur in some ways, in my opinion.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. OLIVER: And the closer you get to the art world, the more blurred those lines are, to the point you just ignore them.

MS. RIEDEL: [Agreed. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: So I was actually—I thought, finally, after many years—it's probably the first three times it came to a vote, I voted no because I was really supporting the other people in the room who were passionate about that. But the last couple times, it was overwhelmingly passed. So it's been an interesting discussion. I know that the more mature grads are still a little upset by it.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: But I think it's tongue-in-cheek when they argue about it because, in some ways, they just raise—they didn't differentiate that you're a craft maker as opposed to an artist.

MS. RIEDEL: It was a different era, too.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. I think so too. I think so too. And I think it was just coming—it was changing mediums, from what was classically art, into discerning this is art.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

[Cross talk.]

MR. OLIVER: And took a lot of people—

MS. RIEDEL: A number of different disciplines have been added.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Oh, no question.

MS. RIEDEL: [Over the years. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Certainly in the digital and electronic side.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Film, video, all that sort of stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But even, can you imagine, I bet there was some debate early on that Fred Sandback's work, whether it was art or not.

MS. RIEDEL: [I can imagine. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: The guy's doing a thing out of string, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: I love his work.

MR. OLIVER: When we gave his work—because he was a commissioned artist at the ranch.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh really?

MR. OLIVER: But you didn't see it because—I'd say there's 18 pieces that are visible.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Eighteen artists, but only 15 are visible because Andy Goldsworthy has disappeared. Fred Sandback was there two and a half years, and finally decided the only place he wanted to build it was at a house we were building in San Francisco.

MS. RIEDEL: [Ah. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And he built it in that house, in this tower, that's sort of the center of the house. And I spent seven years building this dream house, and my wife hated it from the day she moved in to it. Just hated it. It was too notorious. It was the cover of "Architectural Digest." It had all this stuff, and everybody promised this anonymity. It wasn't that. Grey Line made it a stop on the tour of San Francisco, and she said, "Get me out of this place."

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: So my salvation was I found somebody dumber than me that came along to buy it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: Just, I mean, I spent—

MS. RIEDEL: Where is it?

MR. OLIVER: —I spent way too much—340 Lombard in San Francisco.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: If you can imagine San Francisco, it's 1/3 of an acre.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MR. OLIVER: Five lots.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. OLIVER: Underground parking garage for 12 cars with a turntable that you kind of drive in, and you spin around. It was crazy. And this guy—I won't say a name—who owns this—owned it ever since they bought it from us.

MS. RIEDEL: Well it sounds like it could be terrific—

[Cross talk.]

MR. OLIVER: He had—oh, it was a fabulous house. It was just way too ostentatious for us. And SFMOMA wanted to party there three nights a week, and we'd had enough.

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MR. OLIVER: Get me out of here. But it was so funny because this guy had an attorney who called me and said, after I got my 19th lecture from my wife about, do you know the people that rang the doorbell today. It was a group of French architects from Paris that wanted—I said, "Did you let them in?" She said, "Oh, yeah, I let them in. They came all the way from Paris to see this house." So she said, "You've got to get me out of here." And that guy—I said, "Well, this guy called me today. This attorney called me and said, 'I have a client who will pay you anything you want for that house if he could have it.'" And I was like, well wait a second. I spent way too much on this house. And I said, "Okay. I want this." And I put my cost and added a couple million dollars to it. He said, "Okay, okay. Let me think about it. Let me talk to him." So he talked to him, and he called me back a couple days later and said, "He'd like to come see it." I said, "That's fine." He'd never seen the inside, just pictures of it in magazines, something like that. I said, "That's okay." But I said, "But I have to tell you something," and he said, "There's a guy that I've hired. This guy's made a lot of money. Young guy. He was 29-years-old or something like that. He says, "This guy that I've hired, ever since I've represented him for the past couple years, who just is his economic wet blanket. All he does is, every time he goes to buy something, this guy goes with him, and he just craps on it." And he said, "So I want to tell you they're coming, but he's bringing this guy who's just going to say bad things about your house." And he said, "I don't want you to be offended by it, but it's going to happen." And I thought, okay, okay.

So about four o'clock in the afternoon the next day they came, and maybe it was later, about five o'clock in October on one of those fabulous San Francisco days. There's only like three a year. It was 75 degrees. It was five or six o'clock at night. The sun was setting between the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge. This is on Telegraph Hill. You could see all the bridges. He brought his Ferrari into the garage. I turned him around in the turn table. They got out. We went over and got into this glass elevator that went up five floors to the roof, wrapped in glass—half in glass and half in red suede, was the other side—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs]

MR. OLIVER: —just obscene, even telling the story. Got up off to the roof, which was a cast glass floor. Got off, walked around the elevator to the hot tub that was bubbling on the roof, and the guy went up next to this guy who was buying, and the guy—this attorney, just a junior attorney—he said, "Pay him whatever he wants."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs]

MR. OLIVER: That's all he said. He said, "We can go now." He said, "I'll come back after you own it." And they went out, and got the owner, went back down in the Ferrari, and out the drive. And it was the most expensive house that ever sold in San Francisco then. I mean, it's chump change now by standards, but I mean, this 20 years ago, 15, 18 years ago.

MS. RIEDEL: What inspired you to build that house?

MR. OLIVER: I had actually bought an apartment house that was on that lot as an investment, and I had sold the house in Orinda and bought the ranch and was going to move to San Francisco. And I must have had some good years and too much money in the bank. So I think I'll build this thing. But in San Francisco, on Telegraph Hill particularly, dealing with Telegraph Hill—dwellers, which is a very politically—it's a very tough organization.

MS. RIEDEL: [I'm sure. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: So I converted this five-unit apartment house, five-unit apartment house into a single-family residence by not changing the footprint at all. And in order to get around all that, and dealing with all the plumbing stuff, I had to call it a remodel. I was just remodeling it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: And I finally ended up remodeling one brick. We got down, and we just tore down one part after another, and finally the inspector said, "You're just tearing this thing down." He said, "Tear the whole thing down. Save one brick. Call me back when you pour the foundation." Because we were building this whole parking garage under the house, under this apartment house. I saved the brick, called him up. Said "Just throw it in that concrete." I put it in there, and we poured concrete on it. So we remodeled that one brick, eventually. That's why it took seven years. But I went around the whole planning process and built this house, just by—because I knew the system, that's what we did.

MS. RIEDEL: And the joy of challenging it down to the brick [Laugh.]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right. Exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: Any particularly insightful stories about Viola? Visits to her studio, things she might have said, conversations you had?

MR. OLIVER: I think one of the things I took away from her, I think Viola enjoyed the process as much as I did at the Ranch. And I think I really got the joy she had just working in the studio.

MS. RIEDEL: [Interesting. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And often, being alone, or sometimes with an assistant, but just doing something with her hands.

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

MR. OLIVER: And I think, as much as anything, probably the first time I really saw an artist do that, because a lot of this was well before the stuff at the ranch started. And so seeing somebody—and the first time I ever spent much time in somebody's studio because, prior to that, it was—either you'd see it in a gallery, or in a much more formalized or presenting situation, as opposed to sort of dusty and dirty.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And she wasn't a real talker. She wasn't real talkative or a big communicator.

MS. RIEDEL: [I've heard that repeatedly. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Whereas Squeak is very much that, very vocal, and so they were a perfect partnership in that way. Because—and then she was a teacher. In many ways, Vi was her mentor in college, even though they were different disciplines.

MS. RIEDEL: [Absolutely. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: That's where Squeak graduated.

MS. RIEDEL: [CCAC, then. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: But they didn't teach at all because—Squeak taught at Berkeley and Davis, so.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So she wasn't—in fact, I probably might not have even been involved in it if Squeak had said, "Get Steve into it." So I knew Squeak because of the Oakland Museum, and then I advised them on construction when they bought some buildings and—because we knew each other, because I was a patron in some ways, and I had bought several of her works.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And so. And every time something good happened to me, she would send me these little letters, which were little works of art in themselves, and so—

MS. RIEDEL: Squeak would?

MR. OLIVER: Squeak would.

MS. RIEDEL: [Nice. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: So we had this sort of long connection. But because Squeak and Viola—I was sort of brought into the formula because of—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —of Squeak, but then Viola said, "Yeah, I know that guy, and—"

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And I think, one time, months later, she said, "You know, most of all those changes you made, those were the right thing there." But it took probably five, 10 years before she said that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. But she wasn't a really gregarious communicator. Pleasant all the time, but slightly reserved, and quiet, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: But to see her work in the studio was probably the happiest I'd ever see her.

MS. RIEDEL: [... -MR] I've heard that from a few different people. There [seemed -MR] to be a joy in the working process.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Yeah. And some of that—I also just saw in classes, but I never came and monitored her class so prolifically so I was there and saw a lot of it, I mean, so a lot of what I did was come through a class or just walk through with somebody. If I was taking a donor through, I'd go through her class because her class—there's more physicality to it because there was kilns going and people throwing lumps of clay around. So there was a little more drama in those—that and the glass studios were the best.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: Painters were a little more reserved.

MS. RIEDEL: All that—

MR. OLIVER: So physically, it was a little more active, physically active.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: But I think—and yeah, I wouldn't have thought of if you hadn't asked the question. It was really Squeak who introduced me, say, "I know somebody who can come and help us, advise us on what to do."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And I got him the right attorney and those sort of things. People to get it put together right.

MS. RIEDEL: Circling back around [to -MR] some of the summary questions from our discussion yesterday about the ranch, and your larger collection, which we really haven't discussed at all—

MR. OLIVER: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: [... -MR] Perhaps we should mention [... -MR] what else is going on there. How do you see the evolution of the collection over the past 30 years? How would you describe—

MR. OLIVER: The collection of the ranch or the broader collection?

MS. RIEDEL: Both.

MR. OLIVER: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: And how you see the ranch fitting into the broader collection.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. That's a good question. Probably I've never thought of the ranch as fitting into the broader collection other than—even though we've given away the ranch, the physical land and the land it sits on—or 80 percent of it. There's still 20 percent we own that has a few art pieces that will eventually go to them, but that's just set up so the kids can make that donation. What I plan currently is that the art works bought—that I own that are done by any of the artists around the ranch go—will eventually go with the ranch to the foundation, so the foundation can have a broader way to talk about the artists who have been there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Other than that, the rest of the collection—that's a good question. Probably, some may be sold—but, you know, I haven't thought about that yet. But some will go to the kids. We've asked children and grandchildren to pick their 10 favorite, and I said, without regard to value, and then we'll equal it out financially. And it's very funny because some of them picked stuff that they've had in their house for 20 years, and they just don't want—I said, "Do you want to rotate?" "No, no, I don't want to." So they—and they knew nothing and know more now, but knew nothing about their values, so it's totally about their emotional attachment to the works. And the grandchildren, too, have now picked out things.

MS. RIEDEL: That's terrific.

MR. OLIVER: So there's that part of it. And then the rest will probably be given away, sold, or whatever it is, because the foundation not only has the land, but it is being endowed with a lot of money, a lot of zeros, to do two things: Continue to support work that's on the ranch, to maintain it, start a program, a manager program, so there's professional management when we're gone.

MS. RIEDEL: [Great. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And so that endowment will have to be funded in some ways. Some it—I've bought a life insurance policy on myself that goes to the—and given to the foundation that I fund every year that gets \$5 or \$7 million, I think. But then, there's other millions we're giving them, and the idea is to be sure that it doesn't ever worry about money.

MS. RIEDEL: [Perfect. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And it has the chance to maintain things properly.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: But then I think there's another mission. That is, none of these works will last forever. And the only thing we haven't filled out in the final part of foundation document is, at some point in time, some of these works will be just considered not significant. I'm not worried about that. Or physically, they'll deteriorate and fall apart.

MS. RIEDEL: It's hard to imagine that happening.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Some of them—

MS. RIEDEL: Some of them—

MR. OLIVER: —some of them, but some of them are a little more fragile and—we'll see that. And I want the organization to have the ability to remove them, if that's the case. But what I haven't filled in in how many years has to go by because artists' reputations get rehabilitated in a lot of ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And so somebody who you didn't think much of 20 years ago, you think a lot of now. So we didn't put in 20 years. We don't want to put in 200 years. You've got to say, "Okay, what is the right number?"

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And it's probably 50, 75 years, something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: So, and then, to fund a curatorial body to make a decision, you know, this can to be removed.

MS. RIEDEL: No—no plans to preserve—

[Cross talk.]

MR. OLIVER: Well, we have—everyone has a conservation program.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: But some of the things made out of wood—

MS. RIEDEL: [Will decompose. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: —and are outdoors are not going to last forever.

MS. RIEDEL: That's what I'm thinking about.

MR. OLIVER: So bronze and steel. And so I tend to now say I've selected things that have more lifespan than the early ones, but early ones all—remember, it wasn't about value, it was if it didn't exist, it didn't exist.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So those have been sort of awkward things, as opposed to a museum where they're indoors all the time, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: The real question is, I've said this two or three hundred works—should I also give other works that are part of the collection part of it to Oliver Ranch Foundation? It doesn't seem that it belongs there. Maybe it should—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —but—and frankly, if Sonoma County had a viable contemporary arts presenting place, I'd probably give it to them.

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

MR. OLIVER: But I'm not happy with what the Sonoma County Museum is doing. The only viable one in Sonoma County is actually the Sonoma Valley Museum over in the town of Sonoma that is run by a very bright gal, and is well-run, and well-organized, which I wish I could say about Sonoma County Museum in Santa Rosa, which is logical. It's right there in the center of the county, and if I was happier with them, I would do it there, but I think, you know, it really hasn't been decided.

MS. RIEDEL: And [... -MR] the additional artworks in your collection that are made by the artists who are part of the Oliver Ranch Foundation—

MR. OLIVER: They will definitely go with the foundation.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, and will there be a structure to hold them, or—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, because then, in the long run—you've been to the ranch—so the guest house.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Probably, what I see—this is a very exciting commentary on life—that the guest house—both of those apartments will go away as apartments.

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

MR. OLIVER: They were originally designed as studios for artists, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: One will be an exhibiting space—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: —for the artwork of other artists there at the ranch.

MS. RIEDEL: [Perfect. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: The other will probably be, God forbid, the gift shop or the office.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: You know, we got T-shirts and hats now- or the library, or books—I mean, doesn't every tour end up in the gift shop?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: I hate to say it, but I mean—I have to be realistic, or have been to enough of these things to know that, somewhere along the way—if all of a sudden tomorrow there was going to be a different team managing it, maybe the main house will be—or they'll go in the main house, too. Will be the offices, or board room, or whatever it is.

MS. RIEDEL: It would be pretty wonderful to have books about the artists that are there—

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —and related artists.

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: It could be wonderful resource.

MR. OLIVER: And artists that come on, and then one of the things we're thinking about is, one of the works that is the most fragile, the Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel, likely will go away in 10 or 15 years. And then our thought was, we would take all that across the lake. There's about 10 acres across the lake that you see across there, and just turn it into a rotating gallery, maybe—have ways to borrow artwork from other major museums—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —that could show work of a different theme. It could be California artists. It could be, you know, that sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And have money to fund that, and make a donation to the museum, plus borrow the work for six months, or whatever it was. Or maybe it would be there April to November, or whatever it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: So there's lots of things we've talked about.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But the next generation of leadership can deal with that.

MS. RIEDEL: Makes me—

MR. OLIVER: What you want to do is have it be an asset for Sonoma County.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. OLIVER: And the wineries—they all love it.

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MR. OLIVER: Because, I mean, here you are bringing in all these people in there, so it's great for us.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think of the New York Botanical Gardens—[they have rotating art exhibitions. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And they're pretty wonderful.

MR. OLIVER: Oh, they are.

MS. RIEDEL: They're only [installed for six months or so. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: No, and I've been out there to see things.

MS. RIEDEL: Gorgeous.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Yeah. Really great.

MS. RIEDEL: [Great setting. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: It's wonderful to see the garden transformed, and the work transformed by how it's sited.

MR. OLIVER: The other funny thing, if you've ever been there, it's out on like 180—164th and Arthur Avenue. It's out—way out there. North of—

MS. RIEDEL: In the Bronx.

MR. OLIVER: Big X, yeah. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: We're talking about the Bronx.

MR. OLIVER: But someone said, "Oh, you're going out there. You should go up to see Little Italy." I said, "Oh, no, Little Italy's down—"

MS. RIEDEL: Oh yeah. Arthur Avenue.

MR. OLIVER: Arthur Avenue. Have you ever been there?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh yeah.

MR. OLIVER: So this was like 15 years ago. I said, "Okay, I want to go out there. I want to see the Botanical Gardens," and I had a car and driver because I want you to wait because I want you to take me to this place and then bring me back. And Nancy had done some shopping in the morning, and she had stuff in a gift bag, and I pulled up in Arthur Avenue and I said, "You better put this stuff in the trunk." And the driver said, "Are you kidding? Put it on the hood here, it will be just as safe."

MS. RIEDEL: That's right.

MR. OLIVER: He said—I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "This is—the mafia runs this street."

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

MR. OLIVER: And we start walking up and down that street. It was hysterical, from the private clubs with these goons out front that, I mean, you wouldn't wrestle with if you had two guns, and it was hysterical. And someone said, "That's just—the mafia runs that neighborhood."

MS. RIEDEL: I often [visit -MR] with a friend. I was going to [feed -MR] the meter, and she said, "Oh, you don't need to. Nobody gets tickets here." [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: That's right. That's right. And I went and had lunch there one day—but the best part, it was very cold. It was a fairly cold day, and I went into a bakery that was around the corner.

MS. RIEDEL: [Great bakeries. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And I was like a foot and a half taller than everyone in the bakery, and the only male, and the only person not completely dressed in black. And the lady at the counter—I was way in the back—she said, "Well, wait a minute. Let the man through. Let the man through. Let the man through." And I came out the front. It was like I just entered a room with 15 of my mothers. They say, "You know, it's very cold out today, and your jacket's very light. Here, let's see." They went and got me a warm loaf of bread, said "Here. Put one of these under each of your jacket," and then button my jacket up. "Now, what did you want to buy?" I said, "Well, I'll just buy these loaves of bread. That's what I wanted." "Oh, no, I'm giving those to you to stay warm." Well, I said, "No, I'll pay for them." And that's how I was treated.

MS. RIEDEL: Cannolis.

MR. OLIVER: Right on that block [Laughs].

MS. RIEDEL: It's like nothing [else in the world. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: I've never talked to anybody else who ever knew about this.

MS. RIEDEL: I love that place.

MR. OLIVER: It's amazing.

MS. RIEDEL: [... -MR] Every time I have a chance to go, we go.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. I had a fabulous lunch.

MS. RIEDEL: [And the cannolis. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Everything about that place is [hard to describe—from another world. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: But you'd be surprised the people that don't know about it, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: Well not anymore, now [Laughs].

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Right. Right. Right.

MS. RIEDEL: [... -MR] Do you associate your collection with any particular movement, style?

MR. OLIVER: No, I mean, it was funny. People talk about where your tastes are. They've evolved a lot, and it's funny because my wife and I tastes sometimes went this way—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —and then they come back.

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

MR. OLIVER: And it's very funny because we started out in the Bay Area figurative school, you know, that sort of area.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And then I got very intrigued with minimalism and that. I went off in that direction.

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

MR. OLIVER: I remember a Robert Mangold painting I bought years and years ago, and she said, "God, it's just canvas with these lines on it," and then, many years later, I said, "Well, maybe this is one we should sell." We got worried about its fragility.

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

MR. OLIVER: And she said, "You're not selling that one." I said, "Well, you used to hate it." "Yeah, well, I like it now." So it's very funny how your tastes change.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: I would say now, if we had to focus on what we bought the last five or 10 years, it's probably been works on paper more than anything. It's almost because it's the antithesis of what goes on at the ranch, you know—

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

MR. OLIVER: —concrete and steel.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes sense.

MR. OLIVER: I don't think it's culturally that, but I guess I see the hand of the artist more there than, you know.

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

MR. OLIVER: Something about drawings, and sketches, and that sort of seem so personal, and—I'm attracted to, I guess, just sort of the intimate nature of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you collect anyone in depth? [...-MR]

MR. OLIVER: No, not particularly.

MS. RIEDEL: [There are -MR] 350, 400 pieces in the general collection [Inaudible.]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. There's some that we have, you know, five, or six, or seven of—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —probably the most. Thiebaud early on, and Oliveira.

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

MR. OLIVER: We have multiple pieces of theirs.

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

MR. OLIVER: And then Balko, later on. Again, and sometimes it depends on whether they've done drawings. Like here, Sol LeWitt, you don't think about that, but I have probably 10 of his drawings. David Ireland, same thing.

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

MR. OLIVER: So it certainly isn't by just name artists. I mean, even Thiebaud—what we paid for him was absurd, when you bought in the '70s, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Which is why I was so offended. The '80s were the big boom and the go-go decade was prints.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Because I have some Diebenkorn prints, that there an edition of like 15—

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

MR. OLIVER: —and they were '70s and early '80s. By the end of the '80s, those editions were 200 to 250. And I'm not blaming the artist. This was just the business world.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Those dealers says, or that person said, "I'm going to make this print. We better do 200 of these."

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

MR. OLIVER: And the things that I bought for \$700 were going for \$7,000. And that all ended in 1990 or '91, and I thought, hallelujah. Because what had happened was those people who paid \$7,000 thinking they were going to sell them for 10 for 15, they were back worth two because the whole bottom fell out of that market.

MS. RIEDEL: That actually leads into another question—

MR. OLIVER: Because they were just selling autographs.

MS. RIEDEL: —we'll segue there for a minute. What sort of changes have you seen in the market for American art over the past 30 years, locally, regionally, nationally, internationally?

MR. OLIVER: The Bay Area has become more diverse. It's not quite so focused on the figurative stuff, and a much broader range.

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

MR. OLIVER: The addition of electronic film, video, and that sort of stuff has been good, even though I'm not a huge fan of it, and have some, but very little of it, but some.

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

MR. OLIVER: So diversity, and it's less generic. It used to be much more regional.

MS. RIEDEL: [True. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: So you could say, "This is a New York artist." If they were a minimalist, they were a New York. There was a Chicago school, and there was even a difference between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

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

MR. OLIVER: That's blurred a lot, I think. A lot more international artists are brought in, and the more you traveled, the more you went and looked at that sort of stuff. The art world has changed from how it's marketed. If you talked to an art dealer, a gallery owner who is honest, he or she would tell you that 75 to 90 percent of their sales are done at the fairs.

MS. RIEDEL: I have heard that.

MR. OLIVER: And so what happens is those of us who go to the galleries—those are just free museums for us.

MS. RIEDEL: [Okay. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: That's what they've become. A lot of big collectors ought to realize that—they're not making any money there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: They're making their money in these fairs.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: That's how the market has changed rapidly.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there fairs that you go to regularly?

MR. OLIVER: I used to, but we've really burned out on them.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Really burned out on them, and Miami used to do it. We used to—God, the Chicago art fair was in the '80s, was the place if you didn't go there. And that changed. Then it went to LA, and then it's all been moved around in different spots. And then, Miami is the one that probably burned us out on them because we went, and it is just—I mean, it's the world leader right now, and that spun out of Basel, that fair.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But when the dealers start to complain about it, you know, because it is so big now that they don't even get to see their customers. They thought the customers come and see these 50 galleries that had this best building and these great works, but now, there's probably eight or 10 sub-fairs that go on. The ones, everything from hotel renter, where they have it in their hotel room. I'm not objecting to it. If I was going to go, you'd go do that. But then, there's another whole social world that goes. I must get invited to 20 to 30 dinners, events, cocktail events, exclusive VIP things where you can't get in the door unless you get there about an hour before it starts. I mean, it's like going to the—like, I don't go to any openings of fairs,—like Venice Biennale. For the first 10 years, we were so excited about being collectors. You go to the opening of the Venice fair. And then you realize this is a joke because what you have is 150 meaningless encounters with people that always end with, "Let's do lunch." And you talk for 35 seconds with each one of them. And you couldn't see any work because there are 15 people standing in front of you.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: So, and you go to Venice Biennale, 80 to 90 percent of the work isn't even finished being installed because they're Italians doing the work.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: So when we go to Venice right now, we go in September or October—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —because it's finally finished. It's kind of calmed down.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And so I think for the really passionate collector who knows the game, nobody ever goes to the opening anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Because that's going back to see and be seen, and that sort of stuff, which—

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: —which is exactly what I'm not interested in. So it's changed how we do it. If there was a fair, I'd go to the last day, but then sometimes you don't—then, what you do truthfully is you miss some of the jewels.

MS. RIEDEL: Because they're gone.

MR. OLIVER: Because they're gone.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: So, depending on your stature in the art world, you get invited two hours before the opening, three hours, you know, that kind of nonsense.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And I've done that, but then you've got to sort of feel obligated to stick around for some of the social events, and you know somebody, somebody you like, and then you realize—you all come to your party, and of course you get to the party, you never see them or get within 30 feet of them.

MS. RIEDEL: [No. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: So it's a push-pull. And I think we're always torn about going for that VIP reception before the doors open because you just see some things you might not otherwise.

MS. RIEDEL: [True. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: So it's—

MS. RIEDEL: How do you think American artists are perceived in the rest of the world?

MR. OLIVER: That's very funny because I think that line's blurred. I don't think—

MS. RIEDEL: Pardon?

MR. OLIVER: I think that's really blurred. I mean, I don't think anybody did advise them as—just to make a—

MS. RIEDEL: [No one -MR] thinks about it that way. Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —particularly at the top of the pile. If you talk about—I don't know if you saw the *Vanity Fair* article recently about that they had invited 400 people, major players in the art world, mostly curators and museum directors, and talked about the five most important living artists. *Vanity Fair* did this; four hundred nominations. Check it out, it happened maybe within the last six months.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Somebody gave me the article. And the top five—two of them worked at the ranch, which was nice. Serra was two, and Nauman was number four.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: I think Richter was number one. It was usual suspects.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: I mean, you'd recognize the names. And so there was no particular all foreign, all American. I see that art world as really being blurred because, in many ways, the world—certainly Western society is blurred. If you say Western Europe and North America—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: That's blurred.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you seen that become increasingly blurred over the past 30 years?

MR. OLIVER: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. But—of course. Yeah, much more so now than it was before.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And some of that's just the international nature of the people. The landed gentry of the world have homes in multiple spots, and so, I mean, it is really blurred.

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

[Cross talk.]

MR. OLIVER: And New York used to be the center, and while New York probably is the center, but I'm sure London competes with it, and other cities are rising to that. I don't know that any one quite has the consistency, high-end, and stature that New York does, but I mean, Berlin gets close. And if you talk to serious collectors, if

they've talked about a nationality that like—Belgium probably has the greatest collection of serious collectors. I mean, it's a funny mix.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Or you look at the top 100 of one of those magazines, *Art News*, or one of those does the top 100 collectors in the world. They used to do 50; I think they've changed it to 100. It's interesting, but that's very North American and Eurocentric for the Western world, for sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But you see some on Asia.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And here Serra just finished a big project in Qatar.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: In fact he sent me some pictures. The Emirate of Qatar sent me something. Serra's inner circle sent me this package. I don't have any pictures of it. It's a lot like—it's actually just a gigantic, I mean like two or three kilometers, and twice the scale of the Serra that we bought for UCSF [University of California, San Francisco] in their campus. Have you seen that, the UCSF?

MS. RIEDEL: No, and I do want to talk about that.

MR. OLIVER: You should go there because—

MS. RIEDEL: The Mission Bay campus.

MR. OLIVER: That was an interesting thing because UCSF interviewed 50, 40 people around the world and then selected four of us.

MS. RIEDEL: [Interesting. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And—

MS. RIEDEL: This is the art program for the new campus of UCSF—

MR. OLIVER: New campus at Mission Bay.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: And that's what she gave us, \$20 million, and it was all the chancellor, because Chancellor Mike Bishop is a wonderful guy.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Nobel laureate. A modest art collector, but—a passionate art collector, but modest stuff. And he told the chancellors, he said, "I want one percent for art on this new campus." And they said, "Oh, no, we can't do that. It's a public process. It's public money." He said, "Well, then I'll resign. I don't want to be your chancellor." And they said, "Well, you can't do that. We can't have him do that. You're a Nobel laureate, you know, the UCSF are trying to build our image," and he said, "Let's think about it." So they came back to him about six months later and said, "Here's what we'll do: You're raising a lot of money. If you buy all the art, we'll give you the one percent, but all of it has to come from the philanthropic side and no public money." And he said, "Okay, I can do that." And then he hired the four of us, he hired Mary Beebe, he hired first, who's great. Have you ever met—do you know who that is?

MS. RIEDEL: I know the name.

MR. OLIVER: Head of the Stuart Collection in San Diego. One of the great public art collections. Really worth a trip to San Diego alone just to see it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: And she helped him. She said, "Here's the other 35 people you should interview," and I was one of them. And Neal Benezra was one. He got selected. And then they were struggling. I said, "You know, we need a European influence," and I said, "Hire Sandy Percival," somebody I know who's head of the London Public Art

Program for the City of London. And they hired her, and they paid us \$1,000 a day to do this when we worked.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: Which is, you know, four or five days a year.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And they didn't want to bring her in from London. I said, "I'll give up my salary. I'll work for a dollar a day, and you use my money to fly her in." I said, "If you're going to do this well, you want to have a broader influence than just those of us in the United States." And so it was an interesting mix.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you talk about how the selection process worked, and—

[Cross talk.]

MR. OLIVER: Selection process was really fabulous.

MS. RIEDEL: —what you were looking for.

MR. OLIVER: Really great. The four of us would argue like hell—

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: —and then select somebody, and that was the end of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Because Serra—mostly though Serra would never come back after the project he had in the city that got knocked—

MS. RIEDEL: [Cancelled. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And this is his hometown.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And I said, "Richard, don't worry about it. You give something that makes me happy, it's done." And Neal said the same thing, and I said, "These are the people you got working. No public process. The public doesn't weigh in at all. It's all of our purchase. This contract's signed and paid for. Fabrication—the first time the public's even going to know it even exists is when it's installed." And otherwise, we wouldn't have got it. And we got down to the end. We had like \$3 or \$4 million left, and we had a fabulous, incredible piece by Martin Puryear, designed, ready to go. And then the recession hit, and the chancellor changed, and the new chancellor said, "I can't really lay off teachers and buy your art. So I need your endowment to come back to me." It was hard to argue. I mean, we understood. I mean all the schools were cutting back.

MS. RIEDEL: [Sad, but true. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: UC system was in trouble, and here we're out there spending, buying art, but we lost a fabulous Puryear—

MS RIEDEL: [That's a real loss. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: —and he does so little work.

MS. RIEDEL: How many pieces were eventually installed? Do you remember?

MR. OLIVER: Oh—hundreds, in a way. But the big ones that were on the campus, we did that. But all the hallways are filled with this very diverse, of age, ethnicity, gender, everything you could think of, of California artists. We probably bought 300 of their drawings, paintings, photographs, other things that are in all the hallways in all the buildings.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]. And how was this project different from all the other ones you've worked on? I'm sure it was different in many ways, but it would be interesting to hear some of those points.

[Cross talk.]

MR. OLIVER: The four of us had enormous freedom, and all Mike Bishop asked was, "When you select what you

want, we'll have a committee of faculty and students called the Art Committee. You'll be the Art Board. They'll be the Art Committee, and take it to them to get them to approve it, and they'll bring it to me for approval. If they don't approve anything, I'll approve it, but I want to go through this process."

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: "And I didn't just want to give them lip service, so I want you to sell it when you go to see them." And we did. There was never a battle over it. It was great.

MS. RIEDEL: And—

MR. OLIVER: For them, they just took it as a class. I mean, they went there to learn. Here, Neal, and Sandy, and Mary Beebe giving lectures about these works.

MS. RIEDEL: How did the fact that it was going to be part of this large, new hospital complex affect the choice of the work?

MR. OLIVER: I don't think the fact that it was a hospital complex ever was part of it. It was just that it was a beautiful set of open space. There was a lot of grounds, a lot of open space—

MS. RIEDEL: [Interesting. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: —in the city of San Francisco, in a very highly public, with people walking around all the time, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So the fact that it was a hospital made no difference? It could have been a museum. A sculpture garden.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: [Hmm. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Because actually, that isn't really the hospital. The hospital's actually a block away.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. OLIVER: That's all teaching classes. But it's all graduate students, so it's all laboratories, and teaching classes, and stuff like that, so it really is a college.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, I see. I thought it was the actual hospital.

MR. OLIVER: The UCSF is University of California in San Francisco—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —but the hospital actually has just been finished now.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MR. OLIVER: In fact, its dedication is in September. But we did all of this work for just the educational campus.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. OLIVER: Which is the one up on Parnassus in—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: That had just outgrown its space, and they needed something—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: So this was to grow.

MS. RIEDEL: And there's an art program for the hospital as well, isn't there?

MR. OLIVER: They had an art program there.

MS. RIEDEL: And you're—

MR. OLIVER: And drawings, and—

MS. RIEDEL: But the new campus.

MR. OLIVER: But there was in the old campus too, but now the hospital has its own program.

MS. RIEDEL: And you're not engaged with that?

MR. OLIVER: No. They asked if we did, but we thought it was better to take time off. This was actually a real awkward time for Neal because he was hired to do this, would come out to San Francisco three different times a year or so for these two-day meetings, and everybody said, "Are you going out to interview for that job?" He said, "No, no. No I'm not." Did you ever hear—I don't know if this story should be taped. I will tell this, but you be careful with how it's used.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, you decide. I can either turn it off, or you can tell me later, or we can—

MR. OLIVER: No, I'll tell you. Then, just use it circumspectly because this was a very awkward time. People kept asking every time because we would see him socially, or he'd be here for three days, and we'd go out, and we'd go to the museum, or we'd do something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right—let me pause this for one second.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Are there any writers in particular that have been significant to your thinking?

MR. OLIVER: Writers?

MS. RIEDEL: Writers or critics [affecting -MR] your thoughts on art, collecting?

MR. OLIVER: Good question. In some ways, probably the ones that maybe I disagree with, or are strong-opinioned writers. I actually loved Robert Hughes's work. And did I relate the time that Hughes was at the ranch?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. OLIVER: Hughes was doing this thing called the *Art of the 20th Century*. It was a PBS special.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: No—the art world, which started with pre-Columbian art, and it went through—quite a wonderful thing. I have the tape of it that I bought. But then it ends with the contemporary world. And like each hour, like nine hours—each hour was a different century or several centuries. Quite a wonderful thing. It ended with the contemporary art at the ranch. So he called and said, "I've heard about the ranch. I'd like to come there." He said, "I'd like to come sometime when Serra's working there." Said, "He's there now and won't be finished for a little—" I said, "Yeah, fine." So I gave him some dates and calendars. He came to the ranch when Richard and Clara were there, and I said, "He's out in the valley," and I said, "Some of the staff, they'll take you out there, and I'm going to do some work here, so I'll catch up with you." So—

[Audio Break.]

MR. OLIVER: —I went out about an hour-and-a-half later, and they had been in the same valley for an hour-and-a-half and not introduced themselves to each other. If Serra went here, he went here. And they went here, then he'd go here. If Serra would come up, he'd go down or—however it was. I mean these were two strong personalities. Have you ever know Hughes or ever heard of—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Of course.

MR. OLIVER: So—and that's what I kind of liked about the reading was the bombastness of H.R.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: It wasn't necessarily the critic. And so the critics that I—probably often more I disagreed with what I read than as not. So, I went out and said, "Have you had a chance to talk?" He said, "No, we haven't met yet." I said, "Well come on, let's do that. I'll come down and get them introduced and that." So they started chatting. And then I went off to do something else in the valley and came back and they said, "You know, we're getting along, we're talking here, why don't you get a bottle of wine out here and we'll sit and we'll talk to him." I said,

"Okay." So I went back to the house and got somebody to take a bottle of wine out there. And then the guy took it out there came back and said, "Can you get another bottle of wine?"

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: So I said, "Well take two this time so you only [inaudible]. So, then they didn't come back so I went back out there. And these two guys were so drunk, the two of them. I said, "This is hysterical."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: And, so, they decided they wanted—you know how you come down to Serra, then you kind of wind down this trail into the bottom of the valley. They were going to go down that trail. And they had the film crew—there filming them, so this whole time, same time. So they were going to say, "Okay, you walk on the path, and I'll walk just on the upper side of the path, and we'll walk like we're walking together." Now the because the path is only this wide.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: Well, they tried that three or four times, and they both fell down, because they were so drunk.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: And so they said, "Well, this isn't going to work. This isn't going to work." So I said, "Okay, well"—this is like the middle of the afternoon. I said, "No more booze. You need to get sober up out here, you'll both have a headache, we'll come back to the house, so we can talk later." So they were going to do that. And so three or four hours later, they came back to the house. And they sat by the pool. Richard, Clara on his left, and Hughes, and they argued for two-and-a-half hours about paintings in [inaudible.] And they'd be arguing about whether the hand was palm up or palm down. "No, no, no, that's all wrong, the hand was palm up." And this is why. And they both were these accomplished historians about art, not necessarily pre-Colombian, but it was in, it was certainly mid-Renaissance work.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Famous paintings in the world.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: That were inspirations to their work, and they argued about every one of them. And Clara was right in there, because—I mean she's got like a double Ph.D. I mean she might have been the smartest of the three of them. And several times I said, "I got to record this." And I kept thinking, I'm going to leave. This was the most magical two hours I have ever heard of conversation in my life.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet.

MR. OLIVER: And—but then I said, "Well, I can't go tape because I'll miss something."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So I never did it. And then that whole sequence. Very little of that was filmed—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's too bad.

MR. OLIVER:—other than just seeing them sit there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: But the whole sequence didn't make the cut in the tape.

MS. RIEDEL: That's too bad, that wasn't filmed.

MR. OLIVER: The whole thing with Serra. Everything was—it was just those two days they spent together, and then the magic of just being an observer to this. And that's why I say, the best things that go on at the ranch were not necessarily the work, but this other byproduct of conversation and interchange. And several times when Serra was there, Puryear showed up—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER:—for the years before, because he was the artist who followed Serra.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: And so these incredible dialogues at lunch—

MS. RIEDEL: I imagine.

MR. OLIVER: —about their roots and history and where their interests were. Where their inspirations were, and where something sent them down a different path.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And listen to two people like that and, it was magical.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. OLIVER: And hard to recreate. That's the stuff that's hard to recreate.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you take notes? Did you write anything down afterwards?

MR. OLIVER: No, I didn't. I mean I—you know—

MS. RIEDEL: Even a journal?

MR. OLIVER: —I didn't feel capable that I could ever do it justice, you know, really. Other than verbalizing what I saw.

MS. RIEDEL: It would be a wonderful part of the book to have your notes—

MR. OLIVER: Oh God, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —and to go over some of those dinner conversations.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. And one of the things that there is in the book is there is—I said, "You don't want me to write anything because it will all be about buses and bus drivers." I said, "So, what you should do is just"—so what they did is they just had—I would have one page of just recollections about working with this artist after the interviews, and the photo, but well, the great thing there's a lot of photographs. And a lot of things that were in the artist's collective: "Well, here's some sketches I did for it," that I'd never seen.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, great.

MR. OLIVER: Or other notes, or a letter I wrote Steve about something. And so, it's an interesting mix of stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I can't wait to see it.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, it should be very fun. It should be great.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds unusual.

MR. OLIVER: It should be great.

MS. RIEDEL: Not your traditional—

MR. OLIVER: No, it's not traditional in that our—and all the photographs of are, a lot of them are just stuff that we had of a handheld camera we took a picture of. And they're digitally reproducing them all so that they can be quality, high quality for the book.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: It should be fun.

MS. RIEDEL: That sounds fantastic.

[...-MR] What do you see as the most powerful influences on your collection?

MR. OLIVER: Terrible to say, it's probably the construction business is the influence on the collection because I realized how much fun it was to be to the studio system.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: There's a great thing, there's been a number of films and PBS specials about the ranch, and stuff. And there's this one time when they're doing something about Ann Hamilton's tower, and they interview one of my project managers. Sadly, a guy who passed away of a heart attack—actually, carpenter superintendent. He was a carpenter superintendent. Started as a carpenter and risen to being superintendent for us. Which means he's in charge of the project.

MS. RIEDEL: [That's great. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: We have project managers in these offices, the white collar guys are the ones who do all the paper shuffling. But the one in charge of the project is the superintendent on site. And they were interviewing him—and this is a guy that I always saw as quiet and a little bit slow. And he wasn't—he'd never come inside. He would solve the problem, but it might be an hour later or something. And they asked him, —the interviewer, the television interviewer on PBS. "How was it working with these things?" And he went on this one paragraph. It was one of the most eloquent things I ever saw. He said, "The difference in our life of building something that is made for an economic purpose, or something made for just its sheer beauty is all the difference in the world for somebody like us." I mean this guy just came across as this genius statement. Then you realize, the other thing that I probably—I don't know if I said this in your tour or not, because it depends on whether somebody asks me a question, when I started the project at the ranch, with Judith Shea, I said, "Okay, I want volunteers."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Did I tell you I'd say this? I said, I said, "Who wants to go to the ranch? And you're going to be away from home three nights a week, but I'll put you up in a motel and you might be there six months or so—three months or six months," I said, "I don't know what it is." Everybody just—I said, "Come on, just raise your hand if you want to do it." And everybody just sat on their hands.

MS. RIEDEL: All the volunteers?

MR. OLIVER: No, no. They sat on their hands. Nobody raised their hands. This was a staff meeting. All the carpenters and superintendents—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. OLIVER: —saying, "Who wants to work there at the ranch?" Nobody wants to. I said, "Okay, I'm just going to get, pick volunteers, like the Army does. You're going, you're going, and you're going." I said, "Come on, it's two or three months. No big deal." There's 34 people in this office signed up to work on that project because it was such an incredibly positive experience.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And I think you changed—

MR. OLIVER: And they came back to us and changed because what these guys realized—who are blue collar workers—many of them are college graduates, but they want to work with their hands—that they are doing the same thing the artist was doing. Their reason was something for some commercial enterprise or some functional purpose. The artist wasn't. But they had the same skill set.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. And you—

MR. OLIVER: Serra has called two or three times to talk to somebody who worked on our crew—"I want to talk to Steve Chambers because I have a question about this for him." I mean those kinds of things—and a number of artists have done that. It wasn't just Serra. But it's to realize how close these two industries are in some ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: One's just creative, and one is functional.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary craftsmanship.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. But some of these artists—like, Serra's contract is about that thick. Some law firm in New York did the whole thing, we negotiated. "Just give me something—where do you want me to sign?" "No drawings. You just get to work." Okay, okay. So at the end of the project, Serra gave me a book filled with, like,

25 drawings about the work. And then he gave a drawing to every man who worked on the job. And they kind of threw it in their pickup trucks. I said, "You know, if I were you, I would save—I'd protect that—save it, because some day—it has some value." And somebody came to me a couple of years ago and said, "Do you think Richard would care if I sold this?" He said, "I have three kids in college right now." And I said, "I don't think so." I asked him. He said, "No, it's all right." And they got a lot of money for it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yup.

MR. OLIVER: And I think he was pleased that they kept it that long, over 15 years, 18 years. But then, it did such good for that family. It probably changed that family from kids coming out of college in debt—or no debt.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And that isn't why these people signed up for it, the reason other people signed up because those guys just thought it was the best time of their lives.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And how do you request that in a business like this? We're in the construction business. How do you give that rich a relationship to your employees?

This company is at—I gave 50 percent of this company to the employees 28 years ago. None of the debt, none of the liability, but 50 percent of all the rewards the company makes each year.

MS. RIEDEL: So like an ESOP [Employee Stock Ownership Plan]?

MR. OLIVER: No, no. Actually—I still own the stock because it has a liability, but we do the accounting at the end of the year and the reward goes to them—the income. Fifty percent of the income each year is divided amongst its employees. And it half depends on what your stature is. If you're a vice president, you do better than if you're a secretary. But it also depends—50 percent is that, and 50 percent is what kind of volunteer work you do in the community. In exchange for the fact that we guarantee that 50 percent of our construction work every year is reserved for non-profit organizations at a reduced fee. That's the trade-off. I'm giving this to you if you agree to that. And there was a lot of whining about that. But —that was just two years or so. Because they thought we're giving up the money—yeah, we're going to give up a little bit up. We're giving up all the fact that this company could make more money.

But I said, "You know, in ups and down years, the last five years, what kept you busy for the last five years was non-profits. Because why would anyone build an office building that we built when you could buy it for half the cost?"

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. OLIVER: So in a good year, an employee's bonus could equal his or her salary. So that's why the average tenure here is 17 years. So it's a different—this is family. This is family. I have clients who say, "Listen, I want you to build my building, but I'll wait three months if I can get this guy, and this guy to work on it." And that's what you want. You can't have anything better than that.

MS. RIEDEL: No, you can't.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. Because they realize how important it is to that client. We're in the construction business. And we, you know, be a low bidder—competitively bidding jobs. We haven't bid a job in 30 years. All of our clients come by referral. They come and hire us to do their work.

MS. RIEDEL: You haven't bid a job in 30 years?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary. The cross-pollination between, I think, the art—

MR. OLIVER: We made this decision—

MS. RIEDEL: Yup.

MR. OLIVER: —we made the decision to stop doing that. We were only going to negotiate work. We just about starved to death for the first couple of years. It took us five years before I made as much as a common laborer here. But then, I said, "How you do this—leave your client happier at the end of a job than at the beginning, they'll come back."

MS. RIEDEL: [Yes, clearly. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: We've built 50 buildings for some people.

MS. RIEDEL: [It worked. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And the dilemma we have now is not having enough capacity to build it for everybody. But—I mean, a lot of these people who work here have never worked for a company that didn't have to bid something. We're the low bidder, we get the job. We don't do that. Crazy.

MS. RIEDEL: It's extraordinary. The overlaps between—

MR. OLIVER: But what we give back to clients someday—every contract is a fixed-price, guaranteed-maximum contract. If we have savings at all, they go back to the client. Two years ago, in 2012, We had a—client was a decent size, project was \$25 million project. At the end of the job, I took, and gave the client—we paid his last payment, we did our final accounting, and I gave him a check for a \$1,200,000. Now I might be in his will today

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: —but I mean, he just couldn't believe it. He just couldn't believe it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: And I said, "Well, we took some chances, because the market was so slow, we held off buying some things and we bought things at a great buy, and here's the accounting." We gave \$3.5 million back to clients that year. This is crazy. Most people would say, "This is absolutely crazy business," but it isn't. What you realize, if you just bust your hump for that client, and they understand it, and they get great work, and if the roof leaks 10 years later, we go back to fix it—that the rewards are there

MS. RIEDEL: Well it seems that what you're talking about with your clients is exactly what you're talking about with the artists at the ranch, which is it's all about the process and it's about the relationship.

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And the product's part of that.

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: But it's only part of it.

MR. OLIVER: And your responsibility to all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: That you maintain a high standard. You hire the best people. Some people—there's a guy back here, it took me 10 years to convince him to work for me. Now he's been here 23 years or something like that. But he said, "Yeah," he said, "I just couldn't believe it—I didn't believe that—I've been in the business for a long time, and I didn't believe—I've never seen someone as crazy as that." But what you realize is, how good it is when you work out a balanced relationship like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. OLIVER: I mean, people still think you're nuts, and the best recruiting animal we're going—we've hired a couple people recently—I said, "Just walk down the hall, point at anybody, and go in their office, and close the door, and say you want to talk about how it is to work here." And we've never lost anybody because of that.

MS. RIEDEL: [I've talked to a few entrepreneurs and I think it's interesting to hear about -MR] this different way of doing business, and how incredibly successful it is.

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems to be slow to catch on, but the people I've spoken to all say [it works. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: And take—and it does take patience. It does take patience. Does take patience.

MS. RIEDEL: You have to work hard, and be clear.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. And you have to make some difficult decisions sometimes, you know? We're in one right now where we did a temple down on the Peninsula. And the architect specified this very fancy plaster wall—these sink recesses for expansion joints. And they're all failing because they don't stand up in the heat—they're not strong enough like the steel. And so, we're having to replace them.

And I talked to him today, and said, "Have you ever done this before?" "No, I never specified this before, but they assured me it was going to be all right. Because I'm trying to get the guy who put them in." And I said, "You've got to replace these." So now I'm in an awkward situation. We'll fix it. I'll do it. But I mean it—it's going to cost \$50 to \$75,000. And I like the architect when I had this conversation—he'll think about it for next week. I'd like to come and say, "Listen, I'll pay for part, if you'll take care of this, and get this up." And that's usually it. Seventy years—next year will be 70 years in business, and we've never been in court. Never had a dispute with a client in the construction business. Our insurance company says, we're the only company that they know of in California more than 50 years in the construction business, never had a dispute. Never been to court, never been sued, never had a dispute with a client. It's probably because sometimes I've said, "Okay, if the money is that important, you keep it. Just don't call me again."

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So we walked away from some money.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: But that's just philosophically,—if I get it, I'm just going to give it to lawyers or, you know. And—so—my sisters both married them, so I get to abuse them regularly, anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. OLIVER: So you know, it's just, it's a flawed process.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: Now someday we may have to, but I'm trying not to.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: But you realize, though, if that's your reputation that —and you're consistent with it. It's not one time—you've got to do this for a long time. But the calls we get now are mostly that—"Gee, I hear about you everywhere I turn—somebody said, this is who you should call." That's good.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it makes [me think about how you've -MR] referred to yourself as a glorified studio assistant at the ranch. And it sounds as if you're doing something very similar [for the artist, the way you were talking earlier about the carpenter fellow. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —the difference [is -MR]—

MR. OLIVER: Dave Marshall [ph].

MS. RIEDEL: [... Facilitating the construction of an exquisite piece, for artistic and aesthetic purposes. That's what you're doing here and what you're doing there. -MR] Do you see what I'm saying?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, I think it's just—you know, I don't have really the answer, but I realize that both [Nancy -SO] and I are so lucky. Coming from such modest means. And then, I tell my kids—you know, we got lucky because we were born at the right time. We started investing real estate at the right time. I mean, we're people who bought real estate in the '60s—I did my first real estate deal when I was 27 years old. I bought a building in Walnut Creek, if you can imagine. And I would tell my father, "Do you want a partner on this," and he said, "Oh, no, it's crazy. You're crazy to do this stuff." But, we've just gone through the best [50 -SO] years of economic history, from the '60s to now, you know? It's been a little bit of this, but it hasn't been, like, 1929.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So I said, "We just got lucky. We were born at the right time." I said, "You're probably not going to get to have that same style of luck, so"—we're not smarter than everybody else, we're probably less greedy and so—

MS. RIEDEL: There also seems [to be -MR] a love of the process.

MR. OLIVER: Really, yeah, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: I mean, I don't need the money. I don't come to work because I need the money.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So—in fact last year was a tough year so I didn't take a salary for the year. But —and I come to work because I still enjoy it. And working with these people that I hired. This guy right here with all the white hair, he had a black head of hair when I hired him, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. OLIVER: So—if you didn't enjoy working with those people, you wouldn't—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —do it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: It's a different challenge. And the real advantage—what's really intriguing about the construction business is everything, every day is different.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. OLIVER: And working with the artists is the same way.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. OLIVER: And we built the Oakland Zoo. And then we started doing a lot of veterinary hospitals. But then we do a new museum. And so, you're sticking your nose into somebody's business all the time, and trying to find a better way to do it.

MS. RIEDEL: You've [mentioned that you're really good at problem-solving, and that -MR] the artists that you enjoy working with, are really good at creating problems.

MR. OLIVER: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: Can you say a little more about that?

MR. OLIVER: Well, it's, not the problem in the negative sense—

MS. RIEDEL: No, of course.

MR. OLIVER: —but the tough choices. "This is what I want, but I don't know quite how to get that." And so, in some ways, if I can find them how to get what they want, in some measurable, effective way—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. OLIVER: —that gives it stability and lets it stay—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: —then that's good. I had to have a number of failures before I found out that that was the expertise I brought to the table was, this has got to last longer than, for them—time for your to take the picture.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's a good point that not everything works out. There have—

MR. OLIVER: No.

MS. RIEDEL: —been pieces that haven't worked.

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: There have been—

MR. OLIVER: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —things that were envisioned and never happened.

MR. OLIVER: But if I were to do it again—

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: —and we knew it wanted to last for a long time, we probably would have done something different, and I would have gone to the artist and said, "That's not going to work. And if you want that look, here are the three things you could do to get there. Pick which one of these you want to do."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And they might have said, that, "I don't want to do the project." Okay. "Okay, let's do that one." And I'd say, "Yeah, but that's gold-plated as opposed to this," and I'd have said, "Let me think about it and let me think of some other alternatives. See if this would work." And I might come back and say, "Okay, gold-plated is what we've got to do. We've got to do it."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Or, by that time—and I've got this thought where I'm frustrated by what it's going to cost to get exactly what they want. And by the time I got back to him, they're thinking about something else. "Oh no, I've forgot about that."

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

MR. OLIVER: You know. Because they either saw it before I did, or saw they asked for the impossible or whatever it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I—

MR. OLIVER: I asked for an artist who wanted to do an entire project out of ice, and wanted it to be kept at 28 degrees year—round. I said, "No."

MS. RIEDEL: [Okay. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: This gets to be 105 degrees here in the summertime. I can't keep it at 28 degrees year—round.

MS. RIEDEL: This Serra piece is [interesting, too, because you mentioned -MR] there was only one foundry in the U.S. that could build that piece.

MR. OLIVER: There might have been others, but that was the only one we found. I mean—

MS. RIEDEL: Walla Walla, up in Washington, right?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, the one in—not Walla Walla, but in Jorgensen Forge in Tukwila, WA.

MS. RIEDEL: [Ah, right. -MR]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. That was a tough one.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: Yeah. And I knew—Serra's original model—the original made was 36 inches rectangles—there were 36—inch columns.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And he said when he got them out and we built them out of masonite boards so they could replicate what they looked like. When we got them out there, he said, "No, they look too feminine." He thought they were too feminine. Too slender. He wanted them huskier. So we rebuilt them at—36, 38, 40. And he said, "God, we're getting close but it's still not right. Let's go 42." And I knew somewhere around 41 inches, I couldn't get him there."

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: I said, "Well let's try 41. Right? You think you're close. You know, like this. Okay, okay, do 41." He said, "Okay, that's right." I said, "Phew."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs]

MR. OLIVER: Because I didn't want to eventually say, you know, then we can't build it. That's where I was at 42.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. OLIVER: So—sometimes just having knowledge, the technical side of it was able to guide—I didn't talk him into the decision. He still said, "Okay, now- 40's real close." I said, "Well, let's try, instead of 2—inch increments, let's just try one.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MR. OLIVER: And we got lucky. So sometimes you get lucky.

MS. RIEDEL: I think we've done a very good job of covering what we needed to cover.

MR. OLIVER: Okay, that's great. That's great.

MS. RIEDEL: Any final thoughts?

MR. OLIVER: No, no, no, it's been fun. And some things I haven't talked about in 20 years. It's very funny.

MS. RIEDEL: I was hoping for that.

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Excellent. Well, thank you so much.

MR. OLIVER: Well, that's great.

MS. RIEDEL: I appreciate it.

MR. OLIVER: That's great.

[END OF INTERVIEW]