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Oral history interview with Robert Morris, 2018 April 19-20

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Robert Morris, conducted by Svetlana Kitto for the Archives of American Art, at the artist's studio in Gardener, New York on April 19 and 20, 2018.

Svetlana Kitto has reviewed the transcript. The transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SVETLANA KITTO: This is Svetlana Kitto interviewing Robert Morris at his home in Gardener, New York, on April 19, 2018, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one. So if you could just start by telling me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your early life.

ROBERT MORRIS: I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, February 9, 1931. Lived there until I was about 17. Grade school, high school. Lived in a lower-middle-class neighborhood until I was 16. Then we moved into a more rural space. But my early memories really are about, I think, the Second World War.

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you tell me about that?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Tell me about your memories of the Second World War.

ROBERT MORRIS: Oh. [They laugh.] That's a long story, but—

SVETLANA KITTO: Start.

ROBERT MORRIS: It was the home front, and we were constantly reminded that this great conflagration was going on overseas. But—so we had to save our tinfoil and bacon grease and newspapers. We had frequent newspaper sales at the grade school, Graceland Grade School, when we were off for the day, with our wagons, trolling the neighborhood, and making stacks of newspapers on the bricks of Graceland Grade School. [00:02:08] That was kind of an occasion that I remember. It was—we built this labyrinth of newspapers. What else can I say? Grade school was, for the most part, quite boring, except in the sixth grade. I had a teacher by the name of Ms. Katz, who gave me a studio with an assistant. This was a small school, so it was quite surprising that I got this. I was excused from geography and music to paint murals for the school walls. So consequently, I never learned anything about music, but I got an early start making art.

SVETLANA KITTO: Was that your first exposure to making art?

ROBERT MORRIS: I think so. Although, when I was eight, I remember that I went to the Nelson Gallery on Saturday mornings to draw in the halls of the museum. So that was probably the earliest exposure I had to art. Yeah. So we were supervised by a young woman to keep us from marking on the walls, and I think we drew mostly—I remember mostly drawing from the Egyptian reliefs in the museum. [00:04:05] But I also—it was very early exposure to Cezanne. They had a wonderful late landscape there, and they also had a room of Goya's *Disasters of War*. Those two artists impressed me a lot as a child. And I think they had a lasting effect on me. What else? Maybe you can ask questions.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Well, I think I read that you were a Boy Scout.

ROBERT MORRIS: Pardon?

SVETLANA KITTO: You were a Boy Scout, right?

ROBERT MORRIS: I was a very bad Boy Scout.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes. We were all bad Boy Scouts. In fact, I never went beyond the second class, because there was a mutiny. We met at the—at Graceland, and Mr. Garrett, the Scout master was thrown down the stairs by a couple of the larger Scouts, and he went out the doors and never came back. So that was the end of Scouts.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. What were your parents—what did your parents do?

ROBERT MORRIS: My father worked in the livestock industry. There was big stockyards in Kansas City, and he worked there. My mother was a homemaker.

SVETLANA KITTO: And what was your relationship like with your father?

ROBERT MORRIS: Uh, my father was quiet, quite quiet. He worked very hard, and so when he came home at the end of the day, he was—he would often fall asleep in the big chair. [00:06:07] He was pretty exhausted. I would sometimes go down into the stockyards on a Saturday, if he worked a half-day, and that was an impressive place. It was full of animals, unhappy animals, in pens. Cattle everywhere. Men were rather colorful there. It was a completely new and strange environment there. My father seemed more at home there than at home, actually. He knew all the men. They all knew each other. This kind of camaraderie between the workers there. So, um—it was also a dangerous place. I remember once walking through the alleys, looking for my father, and I was going to take a shortcut through a pen, and a man I didn't know said, "Don't go in that pen. There's a bull in there and he's dangerous." So I went around, and about half an hour later, I came back, and there was a group of men standing outside the pen, discussing how they were going to get someone out of the pen who had been gored by the bull. So, there was—it was quite a dangerous place to be. Animals came in, at that time, by railroad, often from Texas and places. [00:08:00] I had seen whole entire carloads of longhorn steers, with great, expansive horns, that had never seen a man before they were loaded up onto a train in Texas somewhere, and sent to Kansas City. So, they were completely wild, and ran through the alleys, knocking down gates, stampeding, really. So there was a lot of craziness going on there.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you—did your father—did your parents talk about the war in the house?

ROBERT MORRIS: We listened to it on the radio. I was quite intrigued with the proceedings of the war. But I don't think it was discussed very much by my parents. My father had volunteered to go into the Army, but they said he—because he had a family and was a little bit older than the rest of the men, he was deferred, so he never went. But it was a constant presence, a sense that this was going on somewhere, and that every—there was a kind of—it affected the sense of—some kind of sense of community, I think, was enhanced by the fact that everybody had to support the war effort in various ways. [00:10:05] So it was a presence there that I knew about and affected me.

SVETLANA KITTO: What did you do with your friends when you were a kid?

ROBERT MORRIS: Pardon?

SVETLANA KITTO: What did you do with your friends? Did you play? Did you make things?

ROBERT MORRIS: Uh, yes. We did play games, and hide-and-seek and things like that, around the neighborhood. But I had a very good friend that I met in Graceland when I was 10. His name was Roger Harrison [ph]. He was, intellectually, far advanced of anyone in the—anyone else I knew. Was very interested in philosophy. By the time he was in high school, he had gone through Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. I hung out with him a lot. Often, on Friday evenings, we'd go take the trolley down to the main public library in Old Mozarts [ph] building, and spend time in the open stacks. And then sometimes, we'd go from there to the Y, which was a few blocks away, and work out there, and swim in the icy cold pool, and then spend time talking in some late cafe. So, Roger had a big influence on me. [00:12:00] I thought he was far superior to everybody else I knew at school. He was also tougher, and nobody provoked him, because he was very, very strong and fearless. I was fascinated by Hitler, and the Stuka dive bomber, and Roosevelt's patrician drawl, and Churchill's bon mots, but Roger was more interested in strategies, and knew all about hardware, and who had the most armaments. He had all these facts in his head, and actually, I think that he was a candidate for Asperger's, which was not diagnosed in those days. His life after school turned out quite badly. I think he was disappointed in a profession and in marriage, and became addicted, terribly addicted, to tobacco. I couldn't stop him from smoking. He died from emphysema, and I was there when it happened.

SVETLANA KITTO: When was that?

ROBERT MORRIS: That was in '93.

SVETLANA KITTO: So you stayed friends that whole time?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes, I was—we always stayed in touch. Yeah. He was my best friend growing up.

SVETLANA KITTO: And he stayed your—yeah.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. [00:14:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Just because I know that you've articulated a lot of anti-war feelings in your work, and then also you were involved in protests against the Vietnam War, then, even later, you've continued to articulate anti-war feelings, what was your sort of emotional sense of war as a child? Did you—do you think that that was that lasting impact of World War II?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, I think it had a big impact on me. Maybe more in the teens than early years. I think it was in the early '40s when I first saw images from the concentration camps. I remember thinking, these are images I cannot look at. They're the first images I'd ever seen that I couldn't look at. So that was—that was a big effect. Then I—yes, I protested. I was part of the protest of Vietnam, Vietnam War, called the Art Strike, protesting the bombing of Cambodia, for which my taxes were investigated two years in a row.

SVETLANA KITTO: During that time?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, right after. As soon as I—yeah. [00:16:00] And we did things like—I was in a group show at the Jewish Museum, and we voted to close the show as a protest. At that time, I also had a one-man show at the Whitney. So I went to the Whitney and had an audience with the director, and then said I—"We've closed the show, Jewish Museum, and I feel like it's only consistent if I close this show." The director—I think it was Jack Baur—said, "We have bylaws that forbid us to have galleries close when the museum is open. So I can't do that." So I said, "Then I will sit in front of the door." And he said, "All right, we'll close it."

SVETLANA KITTO: How was that received?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, I don't really know. I don't know. I don't think anything was written about that. I mean, shows are reviewed, but that particular thing—I don't remember reading anything about it anyway. Maybe there was articles about it.

SVETLANA KITTO: To my knowledge, I think—and we can talk about it more later, but at that point in time, there wouldn't have been a long history of directing the activism at the institution.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. Yeah, probably not. I think what got press was when we sat on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum and closed it for a day. [00:18:04]

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, you did? Okay.

ROBERT MORRIS: That was, that was reported, I think, in the *Times*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Who's "we"?

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: Who is "we"?

ROBERT MORRIS: Oh, all the people in the Art Strike.

SVETLANA KITTO: All the people in Art Strike, that organization?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, it was—yeah. It came out of another organization for artists. But it—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, sorry.

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm? Am I messing this up?

SVETLANA KITTO: It's okay now.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes, we sat on the steps, a whole bunch of us. Afterwards, when we left, there was a lot of papers and cigarette butts, a mess on the steps and so. I remember Carl Andre sweeping the steps with a broom, and I was still there, and he stopped, and I heard him say, "You know, you never know how good an artist you are, but you always know how good a sweeper you are." Carl had a lot of quotations. Everything he said, almost, was a quote—quotable. So yes, I was involved in the Art Strike. We also went down to Washington, busloads of us, and laid down on the Senate floor, and were dragged away by the police and put in jail. I rode in a paddy wagon with Chomsky and Dr. Spock. I am quite claustrophobic, and when they shut that door, and it's all black inside, I was near panic, but I knew if Dr. Spock could take it, I could, too. [00:20:09]

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow, I didn't know that. So Noam Chomsky was in the artists' strike?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. He came down. He was part of the protest. It wasn't just artists. I think—I don't remember the—all the connections.

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you just tell me some of the names that you remember?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well I remember—

SVETLANA KITTO: Doesn't have to be all, obviously.

ROBERT MORRIS: I can't remember all of them—

SVETLANA KITTO: Of course not.

ROBERT MORRIS: —all the people in the Art Strike. I remember Rosenquist and I were in the same cell.

SVETLANA KITTO: You actually were in jail?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: For how long?

ROBERT MORRIS: Oh, several hours, but then we were all bailed out. It was all planned. The lawyers were there to—

SVETLANA KITTO: Civil disobedience.

ROBERT MORRIS: —get us out. You don't see those protests today.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. You don't. That's true. Well, the nature of war is different, so I think it's hard for people to—

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, I suppose.

SVETLANA KITTO: So let's go back a little bit to when you were still in Kansas City.

ROBERT MORRIS: Missouri? Missouri.

SVETLANA KITTO: Kansas City, yeah. So your friend Roger—and so what were you intellectually drawn to at that time, and what were you thinking that you wanted to do in your life?

ROBERT MORRIS: I really didn't know. I was encouraged in my art endeavors. [00:22:00] After high school, I did go to the Art Institute of Kansas City [Kansas City Art Institute], and I was there for three years, but at the same time, I was going—taking classes at the university. So I was going to school day and night. I wasn't sure what kind of future—I didn't know what I wanted to do. Of course, I was not—well, I was encouraged, I suppose, in some way, to pursue the art. The whole idea of art as a career was not something that was encouraged. Everyone advised me that it was a bad profession, and you can't make any money at it. So I was uncertain, but —

SVETLANA KITTO: What did your parents want for you?

ROBERT MORRIS: They didn't have any—I never heard anything specific about what I should do. Neither one of them were very well-educated, so they didn't know about universities. Neither one of them had gone to university. So they couldn't advise me. I thought I might be an engineer. I took a lot of courses in engineering. I thought civil engineering might be something I would do. So I did study that, somewhat, at university. Roger and I went to some classes together at the university: history, literature, mathematics. [00:24:06] But the idea of a particular career in one field, I just—I didn't have any idea what it would be.

SVETLANA KITTO: So you were driven more just by your curiosity and what you were interested in, versus, like, high ambition?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes, I think so. Yeah. I didn't have any—I didn't have any examples, or mentors, in terms of career. My parents did not move in a circle of intellectuals, and I had no experience about that. So I think my main influence was Roger in terms of things I was interested—became interested in intellectually. Philosophy, which I pursued later.

SVETLANA KITTO: And so you were in Kansas City, and then your next move was to San Francisco?

ROBERT MORRIS: I went to—excuse me—I went to California, to San Francisco, in '53, and enrolled in the—I think it was called the California School of Fine Arts [San Francisco Institute of Art] then—it has a different name now [San Francisco Art Institute]—on Chestnut Street in San Francisco. So I began the semester there, and I realized I wasn't achieving anything. [00:26:00] That I didn't get anything from the teachers there, although there were some good people there. Bischoff—Elmer Bischoff was there, and David Park, and I had courses with them. Hassel Smith was there, and I attended a few of his seminars. I had missed Ad Reinhardt, who had been there before. But I came to the conclusion that nothing was happening, and I was about to be drafted. So I just volunteered and went into the Army in February, so I hardly completed the semester.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. So just, first, before we get to that, you went to San Francisco. How did you even decide to go to San Francisco? What was that—was Roger with you? Did you—

ROBERT MORRIS: No. It was probably someone at the Art Institute had given me some advice, that there was good—it was a good school to go to.

SVETLANA KITTO: And what was it like—

ROBERT MORRIS: I don't know why I didn't—

SVETLANA KITTO: —to go to California from where you were? I mean, it must have been quite different.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes. I don't know why I didn't go east, which would have been much more reasonable to pursue an art career. But I went west. Anyway. Didn't last long, and then I was in the Army for almost two years.

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you tell me about that?

ROBERT MORRIS: The Army?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. I haven't really been able to find anything about that. [00:28:00]

ROBERT MORRIS: It was—I don't think I've ever been so bored in my life as I was in the Army.

SVETLANA KITTO: Where were you?

ROBERT MORRIS: I was in Korea. I wasn't in the fighting. I was in the engineers, because of my engineering training. I was in the engineers attached to the Air Force, and our tasks were—our task was to build airfields, emergency airfields, but when I got there, they'd all been built, more or less. So there was nothing for this battalion really to do, so what they did was tunnel into a mountain half a mile. We made drawings of all of this, and engineering specifications. When they had got the tunnel made, then they packed it with dynamite, and they built a grandstand a mile away, I think it was, or half a mile, invited all of the engineering brass from Korea to this event, and blew up the mountain.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

ROBERT MORRIS: And served drinks and so on. So that was the event. The headquarters company planned it all. I think C-company ran these boulders through the rock crushers, and D-company guarded the piles of gravel. That was what was going on there. I was not a good soldier. [00:30:00] They actually were about to court-martial me for my misbehavior. There was some lieutenant who took pity on me, and they gave me a job as a courier. So I drove a Jeep from Seoul, where we—from below Seoul to Seoul almost every day. I could go anywhere. It said, "Courier, do not delay." So most of the time, I delivered some papers and then prowled around the ruins of Seoul, until I wrecked a Jeep, and then it was getting bad. I was in trouble. This lieutenant—I don't know why he took pity on me—got me a job as a policeman. They gave me a .45 and a pair of handcuffs, and orders that said I was to go to Incheon, which is at the southern tip of Korea—there was a prison there—and take a prisoner who had sold things on the black market and had been caught. I had to take them to Japan, to the prison there. I remember the first time I arrived, there was a riot in this prison in Incheon, and they were hosing down the inmates with firehoses. Usually, I would get a guy who was a big black man, who has done things like try to sell a Sherman tank—[laughs]—on the black market. [00:32:00] He was so happy—they were all so happy—to get out of there. I never used the handcuffs. We got on a plane and we went to Tokyo, and I delivered him. Then my orders were written in such a way that there was no return date. They didn't particularly want me to come back early, and they had paid me, so I just wandered around. I had—I could fly on any military flight. So I went to Hong Kong, and Philippines, and places like that. When my money ran out, I went back and got another prisoner and did the same thing.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow. That's interesting.

ROBERT MORRIS: But that was only toward the end. I mean, there was a lot of unpleasantness for me. So I was very pleased to get out.

SVETLANA KITTO: What was the misbehavior that you mentioned?

ROBERT MORRIS: I got in fights.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, you got in fights.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: You didn't like the other soldiers?

ROBERT MORRIS: No.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you make any friends?

ROBERT MORRIS: Pardon?

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you make any friends?

ROBERT MORRIS: Uh, there was a couple of guys I could relate to, yeah. Actually, one I got to know fairly well. He was from Portland, Oregon. Speaking to him, he said—he spoke highly of his university, Reed College. I ended up going there after I got out of the Army.

SVETLANA KITTO: Straight from the Army?

ROBERT MORRIS: Uh, not straight. I had to work—I went back to Kansas City, and I worked on the railroads at night to save a little bit of money so I could go west and go to Reed, which I did. [00:34:08] I worked there for, I don't know, several months, almost a year, and then went to Reed.

SVETLANA KITTO: So tell me about going to Reed. That's in Portland, right?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, that's in Portland. Well, it was interesting, the trip, because on the way there, I stopped in the Tetons area of Wyoming and got a job as a horse wrangler, because I had a little bit of experience with horses from the stockyards. But very little. I was hired by this ranch that had 95 horses, and they packed people up into the mountains, climbers, and tourists. We went up into the various lakes and things. I got to know more about horses than I ever wanted to know, because we had to take care of them. We had to break them. We had to treat them if they were sick, and shoot them when they had broken a leg by a car hitting them on the highway, because they all were pastured in the valley there, and there were no fences. So I learned a lot. It was very, very hard work. But interesting. I learned a lot about horses. That was the summer before I got to Reed—then I went to Reed. [00:36:03] Reed was an interesting place. It was extremely competitive between the students. They were all—I've never been in such a competitive environment. But I met Simone Forti there, and she became my wife.

SVETLANA KITTO: What were you studying?

ROBERT MORRIS: I was studying psychology and philosophy. But it was a very—the philosophy department consisted mostly of two guys, one who taught logic, and the other one who taught more general studies, but he was only interested in Pragmatism. I had already gone through that and thought Pragmatism was a very limited outlook, and I didn't think much of it. I didn't get anything from that course. I would say that it was an interesting school. There was a lot of competition with the students. It was very intense all the time. It was very limited with the faculty, and I think that was a severe limitation of the place. I didn't graduate from there. I think I was short of graduating, but Simone and I—

SVETLANA KITTO: How did you meet Simone?

ROBERT MORRIS: At Reed.

SVETLANA KITTO: How?

ROBERT MORRIS: I think in one of the classes there. I think a social psychology class. [00:37:56] She was incredibly intelligent, and so I was so impressed with her. Then there were these parties. Everybody drank too much on the weekends. Got to know her more there.

SVETLANA KITTO: She came from a different world.

ROBERT MORRIS: She came from a completely different world. She came from Los Angeles. She originally was a Florentine Jew, and had to get out. Her father got them out in '39 by—when he saw in the paper that the Jews were not going to be issued passports anymore in Florence. He put skis on top of the car, and they drove to

Switzerland, said, "We're going skiing." Well, from Switzerland, they left, and finally got to New York, I think by way of Cuba. She was seven, I think, at the time. Her father said, "We're going to get a car. We'll buy a car." He got some money out. He owned a factory there. They were quite wealthy. I think he was one of the richest men in Florence, and managed to get some money out. So they bought a car. He said, "We'll drive west, and when we find a place we like, we'll stop." They got to LA.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.] They had to go far to find a place—

ROBERT MORRIS: They got to LA. They couldn't go any further. He didn't like any of it. He refused to learn English. I mean, he learned a few words. [00:40:01] He spent his time making up chess problems, which were published in the *LA Times*, and he bought real estate and made a second fortune. So that was her. Her mother was—Milka was her name, which means "enough" in Turkish. She was the 13th child. Born in Turkey—

SVETLANA KITTO: She was Turkish?

ROBERT MORRIS: And I think she was Italian. She spoke five languages: Turkish, Italian, English, German—I don't know, it was just incredible. She spoke all the language. Mario, this very impressive man, spoke only Italian.

SVETLANA KITTO: Was she—what was—why did she speak so many languages? Just did she come from a sort of cultured family?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, she was born in Turkey, educated in Greece. She moved around a lot, or I guess her family did, I don't know. Anyway—

SVETLANA KITTO: Where did they live in Los Angeles?

ROBERT MORRIS: I don't know. I never knew LA very well. Fairfax or something. Do you know the place?

SVETLANA KITTO: I do. I'm from there.

ROBERT MORRIS: Oh, you're from there?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. That would have been a Jewish area then, so that makes sense.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, they were Sephardic Jews. Are you Jewish?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, I'm half-Jewish. My mom is Jewish.

ROBERT MORRIS: Sephardic or—

SVETLANA KITTO: Ashkenazi. But my grandparents are also—they're Latvian, they're Eastern European. They're not alive anymore, but they were also Holocaust survivors, but they didn't get out. They stayed there. They just did a lot of things to survive. [00:42:03]

ROBERT MORRIS: I know Simone's relatives—some of them perished. One of her uncles, I think, stayed voluntarily to help people get out, but he didn't get out. So that was a big experience for her.

SVETLANA KITTO: Coming here?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. I mean, it showed up later in her work. She became a dancer, and we moved to San Francisco from Reed. I began—I was painting, and she was studying with Anna Halprin. We were there for seven years before I came to New York.

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you tell me about those seven years in San Francisco? What were you painting?

ROBERT MORRIS: I was painting large Abstract Expressionist paintings, smeared all over the place.

SVETLANA KITTO: Were you taking classes?

ROBERT MORRIS: No. No. No, I was working nights on the railroad, as a railroad switchman. Very dangerous job. Worked at night and painted in the daytime. I remember one—I remember when I—I really didn't have any experience as a railroad switchman. I was a railroad clerk in Kansas City, but I said I was a railroad switchman, because it paid so much more. So they hired me. [00:44:00] I still remember the first night at work. I was to meet the foreman on track 39. In those days, they kept the yards very dark. They didn't have radios. You had little signal lanterns, so that you could see the lanterns. I was there at track 39 and heard this foreman crunch up on the gravel. It was so dark, I didn't see him. He said to me, he said, "You're the new man, right?" I said yes.

He said, "Well, you're going to follow the pot, and I want you to lace them up and put the breeze in them, and we'll go to Bay Shore," and he walked away. I thought, I'm going to be fired before I've even done any work, because I don't know what he's talking about. [They laugh.] There were a couple of guys inspecting a car. Car knockers, they were called. I asked them, "What is, what is—talking about, lacing them up?" He said, "Well, it means connecting all the air hoses on these string of cars, so that you'll have—they've just been switched into the track, so you have to have air in the brakes." It wasn't easy to do that, because they're very stiff rubber hoses. You have to bend one back and hold it one way, and then they snap together. He demonstrated it. By the time I got down to the end, I had pretty much mastered it. He said 'put the breeze in them' means, when you get to the last car, you go around to the valve, and you open it up a little bit, and then close it. The engineer who's connected to these cars has been pumping air into these hoses, into the brakes, and when he sees the drop on his meter, he knows he's got air in all the cars, and he gives you two blasts on the horn, on the—and that means he's got the breeze in them. [00:46:09] Then Bay Shore was the next yard. They were going to set out cars. It was a curious and interesting time, and—well, sometime during the first week, I remember we were in the switch engine and I had a lot of cars that were switching on a curving track. The foreman—I would get in the switch engine, and of course I didn't have much sleep, because I was working in the daytime as a painter. I would go to sleep immediately. That diesel would vibrate, and it was warm in there. He would shake me, and he said, "Hey, kid, get up and set out the first three cars." That meant go up and detach the cars there, and put 'em in a track. I'd stagger down. The next track was empty, so I just walked in the middle of that track. But after I had gone about 30 yards, I was around the curve and couldn't see the switch engine anymore. Then I hear him blasting on a horn, *toot, toot, toot*. So I think, maybe they've changed their mind about three. Maybe they want two or four cars. So I walk back in the track, step over and get up on the footboard of the switch engine, when the express goes by at 80 miles an hour in the track where I'd been walking. When I got out into the cab of the switch engine, he said—the only thing the foreman said was, "You dumb son of a bitch. [00:48:01] Don't you ever look at your timetable?" Two things you have to have in those days was a timetable showing when the express went through, and an inspected pocket watch, so you knew to stay off that track when the—they don't slow down. So he saved my life, and that's all he said.

SVETLANA KITTO: You were young.

ROBERT MORRIS: Lots of adventures.

SVETLANA KITTO: What—so Simone had joined Anna Halprin's group—class—school, right? She was—

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, she taught. She had classes. She lived in Marin County. Her husband was Larry Halprin, the landscape architect. They built a big deck. Their house was on a hillside, and he built a large deck that cantilevered down into the space with a tree or two going through it. That's where she had her classes. It was dance in nature in some way. Anna was exploring all kinds of things. Exploring language and different kinds of movement that had nothing to do with ballet. Simone became very involved in this. Some of it had to do with dredging up kind of unconscious or nonsense language, as well as verbal language. [00:50:00] Which I know she—it was just something that she latched onto and absorbed her completely. But the thing about Anna Halprin is that while her classes were very exploratory, when it came to giving a concert, which she did, to raise money, I guess, it was all sort of theatrical. Everybody put on costumes and became more conventional. For that reason, Simone and I wanted to go further with—I was not a—I might have taken one or two classes, but I wasn't enrolled in her courses. But I was still very interested in the theater aspect of things and what they were doing, and how they were changing, exploring, or really breaking the boundaries of dance. So Simone and I rented a place on Van Ness, I think it was, and we had Sunday night workshops. There were poets and musicians, dancers.

SVETLANA KITTO: Like who?

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: Who?

ROBERT MORRIS: Who were they?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

ROBERT MORRIS: They're not people you would know, and people who didn't become part of the discourse. I can hardly remember any of—

SVETLANA KITTO: That's fine.

ROBERT MORRIS: Sherry or Harry or—there was a musician. The way we ran it was that every Sunday, someone would lead the class, I guess, or improvisation. [00:52:04] We extended the improvisation that Anna was doing. Anna was certainly doing improvisation, but we wanted to extend it further in different ways, and different

people took it in different directions. Then we would have a discussion at the end. That was something we did before we left. Then I had come to a way of working which dispensed with the large gestures, and I was working over a canvas on the floor. I had a kind of bridge that went across, and I was working from that. I was painting with my fingers on newspapers. So there were a lot of fractured kind of surfaces. I'd usually start at one end of the canvas, and when I got to the other end, I was finished. Only then did I look at it, stand it up and look at it. So in a way, you could say this was a—preceded the *Blind Time*, because I couldn't really see what I was doing very well. I had an issue with the notion—the performative notion of painting, that had nothing to do with the end result. I couldn't make those two make sense. There was, on the one hand, the performance—not for anyone, but it was performative—and then there was the object. I couldn't resolve that, and I stopped painting. [00:54:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Because you wanted there to be a trace of—

ROBERT MORRIS: I wanted something. I didn't know. But I didn't—I just thought that was such a contradiction. I couldn't continue. So I stopped painting. Then—I had wanted to come to New York before Simone, who was stuck with Anna Halprin. But finally, she decided, okay, we'll go, and we went to New York at the end of 1960. Since I thought I was no longer an artist, I enrolled in the graduate Art History department at Hunter, because I thought I'd have to make a living and I would teach. So I started doing that, and I did get an MA, and I did teach. I started making objects then, without any kind of plan that I was a sculptor. I just started making objects now and then, and it accelerated.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you enroll in Hunter right away?

ROBERT MORRIS: No. No. Simone said the first year, all I did was read. Spent my time in the public library. But I don't think that's true. [They laugh.]

SVETLANA KITTO: You must have worked, too, right? Did you work?

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you work? Work, like, for money?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, I did work. I had to work. I got a job in the library, first a branch library, and then I worked in the art division at a public library, room 313. [00:56:00] Where—I did some research there. One of the tasks was to answer letters that people had wrote in about. I remember writing about Asher B. Durand. Then, from there, I went to—I enrolled at Hunter and went through that program. In those days, it was run by [Eugene] Gene Goossen, who had come down from—it was a women's college up north. Forgot—in Vermont.

SVETLANA KITTO: A women's college?

ROBERT MORRIS: Can't remember the name of it, but I will. Tony Smith was there, and he brought Tony Smith down. Goossen, I think, took a liking to me because, in his class, he was a Greenbergian, and I thought Greenberg was full of shit, and told him so, and so we had these arguments. I think he liked that, so he hired me. I remember him saying, "You should go speak with Tony Smith about teaching. I know you haven't taught, but he'll clue you in." So I went to see Tony, and I said, "Gene said to come here and ask you about what do you do—how do you teach?" Tony Smith said, "The only thing I go by is never be prepared." [Laughs.] That was it. So I guess there's something there about wanting to be responsive to the students. [00:58:04] I got to know Tony a little bit, but not very well. I was making these Minimal pieces, what came to be called Minimal. I remember I took a course with Steinberg, Leo Steinberg, and he was going on about Michelangelo, and contrapposto, and twisting his body around, and talking about the spiritual. I remember raising my hand, and I said, "I think, today, we don't need to have the spiritual in our vocabulary about art." He never forgave me. He gave me a C. [Laughs.] He didn't like being challenged. We never got along after that. I started a thesis on Brancusi. Form classes in the work of Constantin Brancusi. Sort of a Kublerian interpretation—George Kubler—because Kubler had written this book, *The Shape of Time*, and I thought it was very interesting, about his notion of primes and replicas. Although it—the more you thought about it, the more ambiguous whatever prime was. [00:59:49] But in any case, Kubler had—I think his theory grew from his dating of South American pottery, how it—it's kind of fulsian [ph] like, how it has an evolution and what it evolves to. I saw Brancusi going the opposite way, towards simplicity, toward a reduction. Of course, I was working in reduced ways, too, in some things. I was doing the plywood works, but I was also doing *Box with the Sound [of Its Own Making]*, which was the first thing I made, and *Card File* and things like that, that had nothing to do with the other. So I was in the beginning split, always. Anyway, I started this thesis, and Bill Rubin was my advisor. He had taught a few courses there. But then he left to go to the Modern, and I finished my courses at Hunter, so all I had left to do was the thesis, but I didn't do it. I got busy working in the studio. Every couple of weeks, Rubin would call me up and say, "Where's the thesis? Why don't you finish it?" He kept bugging me. I just wrote it one summer to get him off my back. [They laugh.] He had no particular reason to do that. I mean, he wasn't part of it anymore. But he pushed me to do it, which I thought was kind of interesting.

SVETLANA KITTO: What were some of the ideas that were emerging in the Brancusi thesis? [01:01:59]

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, I was tracing how—

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ROBERT MORRIS: —how things got—you know, one piece after the next became simpler all of the time. I really got into Brancusi, and I remember seeing something that I thought was misdated, and I had written to this—what was her name? A Brancusi scholar. I said, "I think this is wrong, this date." It turned out I was right, that it was wrong, wrongly dated. I don't remember what it was now, a bird maybe. He made something like 40 birds. Anyway, someone stole that thesis from Hunter. But somewhere, I have a copy of it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Someone stole it?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. I don't know why.

SVETLANA KITTO: Just to have it from—

ROBERT MORRIS: I guess.

SVETLANA KITTO: Like, to sell it on eBay one day or something?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, I don't know why. It's never been published. I don't think I'll publish it.

SVETLANA KITTO: I just went to Brancusi's studio in Paris.

ROBERT MORRIS: Did you?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

ROBERT MORRIS: I was there a couple years ago. I found it very disappointing. The works were just cast off.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wasn't that how he arranged it?

ROBERT MORRIS: That's what they say. But certainly not his best works there. I don't think. He was an extraordinarily compulsive character. [00:02:01] He would spend like a year on this much of the base of a bird.

SVETLANA KITTO: Around this time—so you—just going back a little bit, what was New York like when you moved there, and how was it different from San Francisco?

ROBERT MORRIS: Completely different. First of all—well, in those days, you could get a loft for $100 a month. Subway cost a nickel. So you didn't have to work full-time to pay your rent, like you do today, if anybody can even live in New York City. You had time to visit your friends, sit around and talk, or just think about things. You had leisure, to be lazy or to think about things. To write things down. Poets, dancers, musicians—I knew these in San Francisco, but there was more of a community in New York amongst these people. They all knew each other, all had these big parties on the weekends at somebody's loft. So you had this community. Maybe it was rather loose, but it was still a community, and you had time to work. [00:04:00] You didn't have to scratch for every penny to pay the rent. I had a loft for $85 a month, 25x100, and after two years, the guy raised it to $95, and I moved out. I was so irate, because there were lofts everywhere. So you had this freedom and camaraderie that I don't think exists—I think you get a different culture when you have that situation than one where everybody has to immediately make a living off it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Who were some of the people that you were getting to know in that first year? Did you know anyone when you moved there?

ROBERT MORRIS: In the beginning, the only person I knew was John Cage.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, you knew John Cage?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, I met him, because I had corresponded with him in—at Anna Halprin's, I met La Monte Young, the musician, and I got to know La Monte pretty well, and he moved to New York, too. So when I came to New York, I knew La Monte and I knew John Cage. Simone and I had a walk-up, a fifth-floor walk-up on Amsterdam Avenue. We had—we shared a studio with Simone, Yvonne Rainer, and myself, down on Bond Street, but we were living uptown. I called up John Cage and I said, "I have something I think you should—you might like." He came over, walked up these five flights, and I put the box with its sound on the table, turned it on for a couple of minutes, and said, "This is a box with a sound." [00:06:08] He said, "Don't turn it off." So I turned it back on, and he sat like this for three and a half hours—didn't move—listening to it. Then he got up and left.

Nobody's ever listened to it for three and a half hours, except Cage.

SVETLANA KITTO: Makes sense.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. In January of 1961, I made the *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, and at the same time, I made the *Column* out of plywood. I had a little room off to the side of the open space on Bond Street where Simone and Yvonne improvised and rehearsed, but my room had seven-foot ceilings, and I couldn't stand the column up, because it was eight feet tall. I made the two things at the same time: the box, the column. I think staring at that column on the floor gave me the idea of the two positions, of something that could permute, which I later did in a performance. Then I added the column that was on the floor. So in those cramped quarters, I think something happened. I knew Simone and Yvonne and some of the dancers. I knew a painter by the name of Robert Hewitt, who was at Hunter. [00:08:02] He was—I did this work called *War*, the performance, with Hewitt. He was the other guard, and we—maybe you've seen that picture, in a suit of armor. He was the other one. We were always taunting each other. I remember walking down Sixth Avenue with him one day when I said something he didn't like, and he picked me up and threw me on top of a car. I mean, the guy was so strong. [They laugh.] I don't know. So I knew him, and La Monte. Who else did I know?

SVETLANA KITTO: And were you working with Simone and Yvonne? Were you also—at this point, were you already starting to think about choreographing things? Were you working with Yvonne and—

ROBERT MORRIS: No, I wasn't. No, I wasn't.

SVETLANA KITTO: You were doing your own thing?

ROBERT MORRIS: I was—as I say, the first thing I choreographed was Hewitt and I were talking about war, and the problems of not having a war in this country, when we need an enemy. So we decided to do this confrontation. We both made our suits of armor. It only last a few minutes—[laughs]—in the basement of Judson. La Monte was playing a gong. I had made a big gong that Mark di Suvero had at his studio, under Mark di Suvero, down on the fish market. [00:10:00] Mark made me this gong: He cut it out with a welding torch, and it sort of popped up into this kind of beautiful curve. I made a frame. La Monte played that, just hit that, while we were doing *War*. Afterwards, I gave it to La Monte, and he put microphones around the edge and bowed it. He made music with the thing. So I knew Hewitt and La Monte and some of the people around La Monte, like Henry Flynt. Henry Flynt—there were these series of—well. I didn't have any money then. Simone and I broke up in '61, I guess it was, or '62—'62. I was quite impossible to live with, I know, and I don't blame her for leaving. It was a very depressing time for me. Anyway, La Monte knew Yoko Ono, and she had this loft on Chambers Street, and she let me stay there.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yoko did?

ROBERT MORRIS: Huh?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yoko Ono did?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, she let me work—live in there for a winter. There was no heat and no hot water, but I lived there and made works.

SVETLANA KITTO: In '61?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah—no, I think it was '62. [00:12:00] No, it must have been '61, because *Passageway* was made in '61. Yeah, it was '61, when the concerts—when the evenings of—were there. Yeah, it would have been '61. I was no longer with Simone then, and I was by myself there. There were these evenings. Jackson Mac Low gave a reading. Simone did her famous *Dance Constructions*. Henry Flynt gave a lecture. I'll never forget this. He said, "Before I give this lecture"—he stood up and he said, "Before I give this lecture, I have this Jew's harp." He put it on the table and he said, "We're going to have a contest, and whoever thinks of a game first gets to play this Jew's heart." Simone immediately said, "This is the contest, and I win." Henry said, "I've been out-reasoned." [They laugh.]

SVETLANA KITTO: So you and Simone could still be around one another even—

ROBERT MORRIS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. In fact, I made the props for her performance, some of them. The inclined passage, the inclined thing, and the box. There were two boxes. She claims I made two. I only remember one. I made one out of lumber I found on the street. One of the things she did was come out and get under this box and make sounds. It went on for a while, and after a while, you forgot there was a body there. [00:14:03] It was a strange transformation. So anyway, when my time came, I made the *Passageway* for my evening, which was just—you came up to the door of the loft, and there was just this passageway. The top—you couldn't see in the loft. You couldn't go in there. People wrote little messages on the wall, like "Fuck you, Bob Morris." Things like

that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did that thrill you? [They laugh.]

ROBERT MORRIS: So anyway, that was my contribution.

SVETLANA KITTO: What was Yoko Ono like?

ROBERT MORRIS: What was she like?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, she liked to be around famous people. She didn't do anything there, but she let us use the loft. John Cage didn't do anything. I think he might have gone to a couple of evenings. Anyway, after these were over, I had the props I made for Simone. They were there and getting in my way. I remember this box that was on the floor. I stood it upright and put a print under the bottom, and that became *Box for Standing*. I expropriated that from her. I made more—I made things down there. Continued with plywood pieces, mostly, in that loft, that one winter. [00:16:00] Then Arakawa arrived from Japan and became Yoko's boyfriend, so I had to move out. I had to get another loft. I think it was from there I went downtown to—I had a room under Mark di Suvero. I was making more Minimal pieces there in this little—it wasn't a very big space, about half of this. I would occasionally hear Mark—I'd hear him clamp down—I could hear his braces. He had braces on his legs. I remember once he clamped down and came to the door, and pushed the door open a little bit and said to me—I was working with a saw, cutting up plywood. He said, "Don't stop working. I just came to hate a little." [They laugh.] I had a—I was working at the library in those days, and only worked down there at night or on the weekends. I had a padlock on the door, and it was constantly being broken. Nothing was taken. There wasn't anything in there except plywood and a skill saw. I got tired of replacing these locks, and I wrote a little note, and I said, "To whom it may concern, if you tell me what you want this space for, maybe we can work out an arrangement." I came back the next time. The note was turned over, and written in a very nice, feminine backhand, it said, "We'd rather not say. Just leave the key above the door." [00:18:00] About then, I moved out. I moved through a number of lofts in New York.

SVETLANA KITTO: Where were they?

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: Where were they?

ROBERT MORRIS: Two on Greene Street, I remember. I had one below Canal Street, on Sixth Avenue. I had one down by the fish market, the one under Mark. That might have been all. I think that was it. Yeah, that was it.

SVETLANA KITTO: So '61—right. Did you go out? Were you going out and having fun?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, there was Max's Kansas City at a certain point. I remember Mickey Ruskin, who opened it. Before it was—became Max's Kansas City, I remember he invited me up to see the space. It was just like a greasy spoon or something. He said, "I know you're from Kansas City, and I'm going to call this Max's Kansas City. So what do you think I should do to make it look like Max's Kansas City?" I said, "Leave it as it is." [They laugh.] [00:20:00] But he didn't. He redid it. Artists could go there and get their steaks by trading art. I went there. We all drank too much. Smithson and—Smithson was there, and Carl was there. Oppenheim was there. Poons was there. Warhol was in the backroom with his crew.

SVETLANA KITTO: Those would have been the Edie Sedgwick days, right?

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: That would have been the Edie Sedgwick days or Baby Jane?

ROBERT MORRIS: It would have been what?

SVETLANA KITTO: It would have been the Edie Sedgwick days. Edie Sedgwick.

ROBERT MORRIS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I went there once in a while. I didn't hang out there every night, like a lot of people. I don't think I ever traded any art to Mickey. But it was a place. By then, I was at the Green Gallery.

SVETLANA KITTO: Before we get there, I wanted to talk a little bit more about the dance works. Can you tell me about the works that you choreographed, and Judson, and the people, and just everything about Judson?

ROBERT MORRIS: Judson?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

ROBERT MORRIS: Oh. Well, it was—Howard Moody was the pastor there, and he encouraged all these activities. They had plays, they had readings. And dancing. I mean, people could perform there, and did perform there. Simone never performed there. It was interesting. I asked Simone, I said, "Why don't you—why don't you continue here? These pieces you made are amazing." They had to do with completely revolutionizing what dance was, because dance in New York at that time was Merce Cunningham. I mean, for avant-garde, so-called. But what was he doing? He was doing ballet according to the *I Ching*. You know, he just mixed up the movements, but it's still ballet. It's still partnering. It's still all of the conventions of dance, which I detest and I think Simone did, too. But she said, "I thought of the dance evenings in one afternoon. Why should I go on?" And she didn't, for a long time. For a long time. And then she came back to it. She came back with her—and did some amazing things. [00:24:02] I mean, she's, even now—you know, she has Parkinson's—and even now she's doing incredible things, I think. Most of the people who performed at the Judson were studying with Cunningham. Trained bodies, again, pulled up. All that nonsense. But not entirely. Debbie Hay and—who was the other one? Well, Patricia—I guess Patricia Brown performed there. I'm not sure.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

ROBERT MORRIS: These are moving away from the balletic stuff and taking some moves from Halprin, like climbing on the walls and so on, which Halprin did. I'm trying to think of—Yvonne performed there, of course, and Debbie Hay, and Trisha Brown, and who was the other one? Who was a girlfriend of Larry Poons for a while. What's her name? I can't think of it. [00:26:00] I was approached by—well, I guess I participated a little bit. I was a performer in some of the pieces. Carolee [Schneemann] approached me and said, "We should—maybe we should improvise and do something." We met in the gym of Judson. She took off her clothes and started painting herself. I didn't think this was something I could deal with. It was too distracting. I think we met twice, and the same thing happened. Finally, I said, "Carolee, I don't think we can just do this as a kind of collaboration. One of us has to direct, and why don't we do this. I'll direct the first one, and then you direct the second thing, and we'll perform in each other's work." She agreed to that. So I did *Site*, where she could paint herself, but she couldn't move. [They laugh.] I worked out all the moves with plywood, because I was moving plywood every day. So it was kind of a natural partner to have plywood. She was a working girl, Olympia, but I was a working man, really, for her to observe. I think that was maybe the most interesting so-called choreography that I did. [00:28:07] The others, like *Arizona*, were very episodic. Then *Czech*—there was something I tried to do there, but I really did it in Sweden, which was—involved the entire—the whole space, and it couldn't very well be done there. So I don't know. From time to time, these things happened, in the mid-'60s, for me. Then I did *Waterman Switch* with Yvonne.

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you describe that one?

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you describe that one?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, it was two figures, nude, face to face, on two tracks that I made, that we sort of inched down these tracks to very lush music of Simone Boccanegra. That was—it was in movements. There was that movement. There was a second movement with—I was running in a circle, and who was the dancer dressed as—a girl dressed as a boy? I don't know, I can't remember her name.

SVETLANA KITTO: That's okay.

ROBERT MORRIS: Who were some of the other dancers at the Judson?

SVETLANA KITTO: Um. [00:30:00] Lucinda Childs.

ROBERT MORRIS: Lucinda Childs. She was—she performed her own works there, of course. She agreed to be in this piece where she dressed as a man, in a suit, and I ran around this way. There was another section where the two nudes stood on stones, I think, and balanced at the back, and I lifted a stone with—Muybridge [ph], doing the same thing. Then the last movement was Simone—was Yvonne and I going the other way. That was the last piece I choreographed. I got so much static about using nudity that I—sort of soured me on the whole thing. I didn't want to be—didn't want to present things anymore. I said, "I'm finished. I'm going to go back to my sculpture."

SVETLANA KITTO: Because of the nudity critiques or something?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: What was the content of that? What do you mean? Who—

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: You said you got so much—

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, people were saying, "Oh, this is just some kind of sensational spectacle." And maybe it was.

SVETLANA KITTO: People, like contemporaries?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. Yeah. I don't know any specific person who I can point to.

SVETLANA KITTO: I just meant, it's not like the press was talking about it yet?

ROBERT MORRIS: No, no, no. I think we did it first upstate. [00:32:01] I don't think—I don't know where—if it was premiered at the Judson. I don't think so. Anyway. I think there was something about the choreography, about the performances, that involved a kind of imagery that was not available in a sculpture. A kind of bodily imagery and movement that the sculpture suppressed. And so I felt a need for that, and I could find it in the dance. It was very satisfying for a while, and then I somehow passed out of it. I can't say why. I don't know why. It just ended.

SVETLANA KITTO: For you?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Do you remember any other—do you have any other memories of Judson performances that stick out to you in your mind?

ROBERT MORRIS: Lucinda's did, with her different kind of cloths that sort of harked back to Martha Graham. But it was very different. [00:34:00] What else? Yvonne's were very—I mean, Yvonne was a—something spectacular about just looking at her. She was such a presence that anything she did was totally riveting. She did a number of performances that were—they were all very riveting. I liked less *Trio A* or those things that were so dancey somehow. But before that, she did things that were—and then she did pieces which were interesting group pieces. She involved a lot of people, like the mattresses—all the mattresses, people moving them around. I was in those. I performed in those. Those were quite interesting. Rauschenberg did something with a great big parachute or whatever, on roller skates. Turtles. I don't remember.

SVETLANA KITTO: It almost seems like you're more impressed with dancers than—

ROBERT MORRIS: Pardon?

SVETLANA KITTO: It almost seems like you're more impressed with dancers than anyone else.

ROBERT MORRIS: Well.

SVETLANA KITTO: Or you like them a lot.

ROBERT MORRIS: I somehow was in that milieu, and I think they were around more than—I was with Carl, and Hewitt, and got to know Jasper [Johns]. [00:36:00] And of course, he was enormously impressive as a person, as was his work—as is his work. Rauschenberg was somebody I could not really do very well. He once told me, he said, "You know what your performance is like?" I think he was talking about *Site*. I said, "No, what?" He said, "It's like giving someone a saltine without salt and saying, 'How do you like that?'" [They laugh.]

SVETLANA KITTO: That's amazing.

ROBERT MORRIS: I like the *White Paintings*. I thought those were good.

SVETLANA KITTO: That's interesting, though, about the dance stuff, just because—how did you end up doing dance?

ROBERT MORRIS: How did I?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. It's just—there's no—you were interested in art from a sort of young age. Just—yeah. And how did Simone—I mean, did Simone have training in dance? I should know this, but I don't.

ROBERT MORRIS: She told me she once went to a Martha Graham class and couldn't do the second position with those feet out like that. Martha Graham said, "When you've accepted yourself as a woman, you'll be able to do

second position."

SVETLANA KITTO: Woah.

ROBERT MORRIS: Simone said, "That was enough for me." She never went back. She didn't have—she's physical. She had a lot of—and I was athletic. [00:38:00] When I was young, I played semiprofessional baseball, and I was a pole vaulter. So I was always physical. I was not nearly as good an athlete as I thought I was, but I nevertheless did it. I liked doing *Site*. That was very physical, and took a certain amount of strength.

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you describe the first performance of that?

ROBERT MORRIS: First performance?

SVETLANA KITTO: Of *Site*. Can you just describe it?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, it starts in the dark. It starts with a blackout, and I'm standing with my back to the audience. Upstage or downstage? Which is it, when you get close to the audience? I can't remember. Anyway—

SVETLANA KITTO: Up, I think. [Downstage]

ROBERT MORRIS: Huh?

SVETLANA KITTO: I think that's up. I don't know.

ROBERT MORRIS: Anyway, there. Then there are these white boards in the back. It starts on blackout, and originally there was a white box next to me, under which was an old Wollensak tape recorder I had made of a rock drill. I just took the microphone out the window of my loft on Sixth Avenue, where they were tearing up the street. I pushed that, and it starts the drill going. Then the light comes up, and I walk over, and on the right side of the board, I put my foot, left foot, against the bottom of the board, and reach to the top of it, and pull it, and so it pivots up like that. [00:40:00] Then I walk that board to the back, and lean it at the back. All this is rather slow. Then I walk back again. If I remember, I do the same thing to the second board. I think I walk offstage with that, and there's a pause. Then I come back, take up the third board, and there's Carolee. I put the board, I think, against the second one. I use that board—I move around with it. I put it on its point and spin it one way, and then the other way. I drop it on the floor, and I walk onto it and get the corner and pull it up. There's a move—then I back off of it. No, how do I—I think I'm off of it, then I reach down at the two edges, pull it up, and at one point I throw it up in the air and catch it. No. I don't remember now how these sequences go, but there's one point where I'm holding it like this, and it's this way in front of me, and then I throw it up and I have to catch it and balance it, which is not so easy. I don't remember the rest. But it's all—the board was my partner, in a way, in this piece, partnering—and I have a mask of my own face. [00:42:03] So there's hard parts and there's easy parts, where I stop, I do certain gestures with a mask, take off a glove, trace the edge of the plywood. All of it's slow, except there are these moments when physical exertion comes in and moves the board in some way that requires a little bit of balance and strength. I think there's—there's a film of it, you know. When I had the retrospective in '95—I don't know who suggested it—maybe Rosalind Krauss—that we film these. So we got Babette Mangolte to film them. I said to her—when we first met, I said, "I don't want anything fancy. Just turn the camera on and record the whole stage. Just witness it as a"—and she said, "You're not going to like it. It's very boring that way. But I'll do one. You can look at it." [00:44:00] I don't remember what it was we tried. Maybe *Site*, I don't know. She was right. It's so boring just to look at it like that. So it stopped being a record of the dance and became a film. It's her film. It's my choreography, but—for example, in *Waterman Switch*, she looks at the feet, she looks at different things. There are close-ups. Very few shots are of the entire stage. That's just that the camera sees things very differently, and you're looking at what the camera sees, and not what you see when there's a person in front of you doing this stuff. I think she did a good job, but it isn't my work, in a way. It's her work. That's what it's become. I would prefer that they stay as films rather than I would try to direct. There's a show coming up in France where they want to redo these, but I don't think I want to do it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Redo the performances?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, at least one. Direct somebody to do it. I've done that. I did it for the film. I directed an assistant I had, who was very physical and quite adept. He did a good job. It's not me in the film. [00:46:00] So for me, they're over with. They're finished. They don't exist anymore. A film exists which has some relationship to them. That's all I can say.

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SVETLANA KITTO: This is Svetlana Kitto interviewing Robert Morris at his home in Gardener, New York, on April 20, 2018 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and we're still on card number one. I thought that we could just start by you telling me about the first *Column* performance in 1962.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes. It was organized by La Monte Young at the Living Theater. He had a certain amount of time, and he divided that time by the number of his friends who were going to perform there. It turned out everyone got seven minutes. I had—I wanted to put the column on stage, in the center of the stage, for a three-and-a-half minute standing, and then have it horizontal for three and a half minutes. The curtain would open on the column standing, and then close with it flat. I didn't want any mechanical device to be seen, so I thought the only way to do that would be to get inside of the column and fall over. But I was rather uneasy about that, and I put off rehearsing that until the day of the performance. So I got up in the morning and got in the column and pushed it over. When you're inside a dark space like that, falling, you have no clue as to where you are in the space. So I hit the floor pretty hard, and I hit my head on one of the braces inside, and split open my brow. [00:02:07] I was really bleeding. I only knew one doctor, who was uptown somewhere. I've forgotten his name. But I got a cab and went up there with a towel pressed to my head, and waited for him like 20 minutes to see me, and then he took one look at me and he said, "I'm not a surgeon. I can't sew that up. You'll have to go to the hospital." So I went to the emergency room of—I've forgotten the hospital, on 77th and Lexington. What's the name of that? I don't remember.

SVETLANA KITTO: I don't know.

ROBERT MORRIS: Again, I had to wait for another hour. Finally, they did get to me and sewed up my brow. The doctor said, "If you had waited another 30 minutes, it wouldn't have mattered. It wouldn't have taken." By then, both my eyes were black and I had this bandage. It was afternoon by then, and I got to the theater just in time, pretty much, to do the performance. I fastened it with a very small piece of string to the top, and pulled it over after three and a half minutes, and no one noticed it. So all of my injury was in vain.

SVETLANA KITTO: As in no one noticed what?

ROBERT MORRIS: The mechanics of it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, the mechanics of it.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. [00:04:00] So I should have done that in the first place. That's about all I have to say about that.

SVETLANA KITTO: You had mentioned in our first session it was around, I think, 1963 that you started showing at Green?

ROBERT MORRIS: I think '62, but I showed before that, at a little gallery on Fifth Avenue, around Tenth Street, called Gordon's Fifth Avenue Gallery. I was in a group show there in '61 or '62. I don't remember the date, but it was very early. Somehow, the other participants were Japanese. Arakawa was one, and there were two or three others I can't remember. But it was something about boxes. The theme of the show was boxes. What I had in the show, I think, was *Box with the Sound*, maybe *Column*, and one of my slabs. I don't know if it was the floor slab or the hanging slab. I don't remember. We rented a truck, and everybody put their stuff in the truck, and we went up—everybody had a loft downtown, so we loaded up the stuff and went up to Gordon's Fifth Avenue Gallery. It turned out that my slab was just a few inches too large in one—in its dimension to go up the stairway. [00:06:07] But there was a kind of clerestory window right at the floor level of the gallery in front, and that would have been right above the bar, downstairs. So we decided that it would slip through that window, and we all got underneath it and started lifting it up and pushing it into this narrow opening. Then it started to slip, and everyone started screaming in Japanese, and I couldn't control what was going on. It slipped down and it broke their neon sign at the bar. But anyway, we got it in. I don't remember the reaction of the show. It was very crowded. Then when the show ended, the slab had to come out the same way, and the same thing happened after the sign had been repaired. It slipped again and broke the sign again. So the gallery was stuck for two bills for neon signs. That was the first time I showed in New York.

It was after that that I showed with Bellamy, in the gallery on 57th Street. Probably in a group show in the beginning, and then I had one-man shows after that. [00:08:00] In '64—I showed there in—I really should know these dates, but I don't. '62 or '63. I had gone to Germany to do a show in October of '64. I went there with Yvonne Rainer, and we performed at the Kunsthalle. Joseph Beuys arranged it. I had a show at the Schmela Gallery there. I made the work in a studio that was found for me. I fabricated small lead reliefs for the show, and we performed there. I got back in November, the beginning of November, and Bellamy said that he had a scheduling problem. Someone had pulled out of the show that was to open in December, and I said, "Well, I'll take that slot," not knowing what I was going to do there. Through November, I made all of the pieces that went into the plywood show of '64. I made them in my loft as—I put them together temporarily, then took them apart, and they were trucked up there as flat pieces of plywood, which I then reassembled. That was the plywood show of '64. I don't remember how many pieces. Let's see. There was a corner beam that spanned a doorway. There was the corner piece, the triangular piece that fit in a corner. [00:10:03] There was a slab that hung, I believe, from the ceiling, at eye level. And there was a piece that went against the wall, and there was a long bench, a

24-foot-long bench, and then a large piece that was nicknamed "the boiler." It was around four feet in diameter by eight feet, and then it had two square ends. That was the plywood show.

SVETLANA KITTO: Do you remember the reaction to that show?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, people noticed it. It was noticeable and got some press. In those days, Donald Judd was writing reviews for *Arts Magazine*, and the reviews usually consisted of about 10 or 15 lines of description, and then, at the end, there was a judgement, like, "That's third rate" or "That's fourth rate," something like that. That was typical of how he wrote them. I think he reviewed this show, but he said, "The problem with Morris's work is there's not enough to see." And I knew I was on the right track, because it's—I think those plywood pieces were more for the body than for vision. They were more haptic, had to do with a sense of the body's presence, and their presence against the body. [00:12:00] I was not—I mean, we were grouped together for some time, Judd and Morris and Flavin, and I don't think any of us really—well, I certainly didn't have anything in common with specific objects, which seemed to me to be really decorative objects. But Flavin, I have a lot more interest in, in the early pieces, because he used the space and the light, and they were ready-mades. I thought it was much more radical than what Judd was doing. But then, later, he got into neon—colored neon and got very pretty. I no longer had—I was only interested in the early pieces, the white pieces, like *Monument for Tatlin* and things like that. But anyway, in the beginning, because we were all at the Green Gallery, we got lumped together. So it took a while to live that down.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you hang out with them at all?

ROBERT MORRIS: I knew them, but I don't—I never became close to either one of them. Although I went out occasionally with Judd. We went to Max's, and we drove around Maine, I remember, one summer. No, I wouldn't say that I was close to either one.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. [00:14:00] Was Judd's—was the lumping and Judd's reviewing helping you to articulate what it was that you actually were doing?

ROBERT MORRIS: In terms—by disagreement?

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm.

ROBERT MORRIS: Probably. I didn't remark on it, but probably it did, yeah. Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did other people get that it was about the body right away, or did that take a minute to take?

ROBERT MORRIS: I think it took a while to sink in, and mostly it was how little there was there. There's nothing there. It's just these blank—again, I called John Cage, and I said, "I have this show. Maybe you'd be interested in seeing it." This was a group show I was telling him about, because I had a floor slab in it.

SVETLANA KITTO: At Green?

ROBERT MORRIS: At Green. I heard from Jasper, who I got to know then, that John had gone to see the show, but he said to Jasper, he said, "I went to see Morris's work, but I didn't see it. All I saw was this slab." So I thought that was wonderful, someone like Cage had that reaction. And Philip Johnson, I remember his remark. Bellamy said—when I went to the gallery, Bellamy said, "You know, Philip Johnson was here, and he went in there and he saw your slab, and he came into my office and he said, 'I'd like to have a broom to kill it.'"

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you like that? [Laughs.]

ROBERT MORRIS: I liked that. [00:16:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Did anyone come in and say, "I love this"?

ROBERT MORRIS: No, no one ever said that.

SVETLANA KITTO: What was—how did—did Bellamy nurture you at all, or what was your relationship to him?

ROBERT MORRIS: He was a very eccentric man that drank too much. Gallery wasn't always open at the advertised hours. I remember he came to my studio, the small place I had down in the fish market below Mark di Suvero, and he laid down on a slab and went to sleep. He took a nap on my slab, and then he got up and left.

SVETLANA KITTO: But isn't that kind of in keeping with the work?

ROBERT MORRIS: I guess so, yeah. I didn't wake him up. He did wake up. Then he showed the work. He also showed Mark di Suvero. He was kind of an eccentric guy. I think he had an affinity with the artists. We were

uptown, but we were really loft rats. What were we doing up there with all the money? Robert Scull kept the gallery going. It was his money. Of course, Scull was some kind of crook, but often crooks support art, so it wasn't unusual in that sense. [00:18:00] Then he withdrew his money and the gallery closed at a certain point. '66, I think it closed. But there were some interesting shows during that period with the Minimal types, and then there were some Pop-type artists. George Segal showed there. Lucas Samaras. Who else showed there? Larry Poons had some interesting shows there, the early paintings with dots. They were in contrasting—they vibrated when you looked at them, and that was shocking. Who else? Mark di Suvero, Poons, George Segal, Lucas Samaras.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did Carl Andre show there?

ROBERT MORRIS: No, Carl didn't. I don't know why. He didn't show there. He showed at Paula Cooper's.

SVETLANA KITTO: But—who were your influences at this time? You weren't that interested in a lot of your contemporaries, who you were being lumped together with. You met Duchamp at some point when you came to New York, right, and—

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, I did meet him, and he once came to visit my studio. [00:20:03] Because, from the very beginning, I was doing works like the *Box with the Sound*, *Card File*, *Metered Bulb*. Those works were small and had to do with language, some of them. Process. Time. I was also making the dances in those years, but also making the plywood pieces. So there wasn't any kind of unity in the work from the very beginning. It was kind of schizophrenic from the very beginning.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right. You would have a show, and it would have lots of different kinds of works in it?

ROBERT MORRIS: I had a show at the Green Gallery with the smaller works, like the *I-Box*. Dick Bellamy was always closing it. He didn't want it to be open.

SVETLANA KITTO: Can you describe that piece?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, it's a photograph of me nude, set into this little box, and there's an "I" cut out, and it has a door. The door, I think, had a—was it a door or the "I?" I can't remember. I think it was just the "I" that was pink. So you could open it and close it, and closing it obliterated the figure, the nude, and opening it had the full nudity of it. [00:22:00] It was the *I-Box*. Then there was the self-portrait, which was an electroencephalogram of my brain. I knew this—the man who lived above me in my studio on Sixth Avenue was a psychiatrist, and he got me this apartment at Columbia University, way uptown, and said, "You could go up there and get your brainwaves recorded. They're doing studies on epilepsy." I made my way up there, and there was this little lab, very small. A chair in the middle of it, with machines all around. You sit in the chair, and they proceeded to stick two-inch needles under my scalp, something like seven or eight. I got a little dizzy from that, but I wanted to go through with it, so I managed not to faint. And thought about myself for the length of time the needles went down the page, the distance of my height, and considered this a self-portrait. So I got the—they were not interested in my brainwaves. They said they're just too ordinary, normal. When you close your eyes, they change, and when you open them, but epileptics have big spikes, and mine didn't. But they were just what I wanted. I got to take the readouts home. [00:24:00] I met the psychiatrist a few weeks later in the hallway, and thanked him for getting me the appointment. I said, "I'm really glad you got me this appointment, but I didn't like the needles." He said, "Oh, well, they have two types of electrodes up there. One are the needles that you had, and the other type are round discs that they tape on your head." I said, "Why didn't you give me those?" He said, "Oh, I specified that you get the needles." I said, "Why?" He said, "I thought artists wanted to suffer." [They laugh.]

SVETLANA KITTO: That's good.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. What else did I show there? Lead reliefs. Some lead reliefs. I did a lot of lead reliefs at one point. I showed those with the works I'm talking about now, in a group show at the Green. That was very different than the plywood pieces. Those same years between '62, '63, to '66. Then the gallery closed, and then I went to Castelli.

SVETLANA KITTO: Before that, you wrote—oh, no, you hadn't written *Notes on Sculpture* at that point. You had not written *Notes on Sculpture* until '68, I think.

ROBERT MORRIS: '68, I wrote that, yeah. Well, I tended to write things after I had—I tended to write things to try and articulate what it was I was doing, and a way of being more conscious of what I had done. [00:26:15] Because when I was working, it was more intuitive. I just followed my intuitions, and then they became more conscious much later, and then I wrote them down. Mostly about sculpture, but I also wrote about the Nazca Lines. I took a trip there. I was interested in how one's perception was very different in that situation. Seeing at a distance is very different than seeing close up, like we are here.

SVETLANA KITTO: But at a certain point, even when you were still at Green, did you start focusing—did the work become less kind of heterogenous and more sort of these big, architectural pieces? Or did that not start until later?

ROBERT MORRIS: As I said, they went simultaneously in terms of—the column, the first column, and the *Box with the Sound*, were made at the same time, in the same space, and one had nothing to do with the other, and I just accepted that. It didn't bother me, but it bothered other people. [00:28:02] I think I continued to do these different—pursue these different avenues. That's just the way I am.

SVETLANA KITTO: So you were showing at Green, and then the gallery closed, and you went to Castelli.

ROBERT MORRIS: Right.

SVETLANA KITTO: And what happened then?

ROBERT MORRIS: I continued to show large, Minimal-type things. The work started—I had a show there in which the work permuted. They were these geometric wedges, either straight or curved. I changed them every two or three days so that the work had no final configuration, but it had a series of possibilities that any one of which was acceptable. That was one show I had. Then I started—when I was at Castelli, I began to make work in felt, and I had a felt show there. I don't know when.

SVETLANA KITTO: I think '67.

ROBERT MORRIS: '67, maybe, yeah. I started using heavy, industrial felt. Because the large works were completely a priori types of work. [00:30:02] I had the idea for the work, and knew exactly how it would be made, and could pretty much visualize what it was. I wanted to be able to engage with something that I couldn't predict its outcome. First I started using rags stuffed in boxes, or overflowing from boxes, and then moved to felt, light felt that's colored, like you buy at a craft store. Then I discovered heavier, industrial felt, which is used in—to dampen sound in automobiles or pad heavy machinery. There used to be a place called Continental Felt off of Fifth Avenue, around Sixteenth or Seventeenth Street. It was a whole warehouse of felt. I got their catalog, or their sample book, and ordered a roll of felt. I think I ordered one that looked rather pink or brown. They delivered this big roll of felt, 20 yards I think it was, and it was gray. I cut a little sample off and went up to the warehouse and said, "I think you sent me the wrong thing," and showed them the sample. [00:32:08] A man there looked at it and measured it, and sort of sniffed at it and pulled it a little bit, and he said, "No." He said, "What you've got is what's in the book here." I said, "Yes, but I—in the book, it's a kind of rust color, and you sent me a gray." He said, "Well, when they make this felt at the factory, they use a lot of wool rags, as well as new wool, and it mixes all together in this great vat, and the rags often bleed a color, and that's what it comes out as. But this felt is never seen, and color is not a criteria for us." If it has the right wool content, and the stiffness and so on, that's all they care about. That's how they measure it. And so color was not a criteria, but it was for me. I got to know the salesman, so finally I could pick out what I wanted there. Then the place closed. It's very hard now to find this felt. It's not made very—the way it used to be. But anyway, I started making felt, and I found that, at least in the beginning, I could have a structure as to how I would cut it, strips or whatever. [00:34:03] But depending on how I hung it, it was very different. I couldn't predict what it would look like. One piece of felt that had more than one position—it could be on the floor, it could be on the wall in different ways. And especially if there were pieces of felt, rather than one single item—if they were cut all kinds of scraps and pieces, then it was indeterminate. Each time you put it up, it was different. It couldn't be the same, because there might be 150 pieces. But what happened is that, once the felts began to have a little bit of a market, then whoever bought the felt wanted it to look exactly like the photograph. So that whole idea of the indeterminate passed away because of the market. I remember the first felt I made was in Aspen, Colorado, I think. I was out there for—they invited artists to be there one summer. I had this rather thin felt, and I got children to cut it for me, and they cut pieces of felt. That was the first felt I used. [00:36:00] But there was this discrepancy between—I mean, they cut it irregularly, and that was what I wanted, but—

SVETLANA KITTO: The children?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. But heavier felt, you can't cut that way easily. It's more—it's much easier to cut it in strips or pieces or squares or whatever. Or sometimes I would roll it and cut it in certain ways that would—once it was pulled out, it would be—do you know what expanded metal is? If you take a sheet of metal, thin metal, and make a series of cuts in it, in a brickwork type fashion, one above the other, so the cuts are not parallel as they move up, but they alternate, and then the sheet is stretched, you get a kind of pattern. It's stiffer, and it makes it stronger, but it's more open. So I cut some felt that way, and it stretched and became a kind of tangle. So there are different ways, different strategies, I had for cutting it and placing it. It's possible—it was possible for me, at a certain point, to have one piece of felt cut in some irregular way, and it could have—different positions of it would have made a whole show. [00:38:08] It might have 10 or 12 different possible, acceptable ways of its occurring. Gravity took over in some sense. I could explore all these things about indeterminacy and

gravity and chance. Felt allowed me to do that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Because it's soft.

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: The softness of it is different than what you were—

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. I said once that, for me, the felt was like the mother who was ample, soft, enclosing, and forgiving. A mother I never had. But it was—sometimes I'd wrap it around me and just get under it. It had this kind of anthropomorphic feeling. Feminine feeling. It was more informal.

SVETLANA KITTO: It seems like that—I mean, even before you were using something soft, the work that was hard—the slab and the plywood—it still had this feminine element, too, because it was about the body.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes, yes.

SVETLANA KITTO: That's a way that you really, I think, are—can be differentiated from the people that you got lumped in together with, is that there was this—I don't know whether or not you meant it to be this way, but it felt sort of like away from the masculinist. [00:40:16]

ROBERT MORRIS: Mm-hmm, yes. Yes, I think it was. For sure, yeah. Then I—I used other things that extended these ideas, like thread waste. When I worked on the railroad in those early years, a railroad—boxcar rode on axles, steel axles, that were—the bearings were brass, half-round bearings, the whole car set on these things. The weight was on these things. These brass bearings on the steel axles created a lot of friction. In order to lubricate them, they had these journal boxes, and they were full of shredded cloth, thread waste, basically, which was what probably was swept up off the floor of knitting mills. Sometimes red, sometimes—all different colors. I remembered that from the railroad, and so I used that, to some extent. A little later, though, later after the felt. I don't remember the date of when I did *Continuous Project*. [00:42:02]

SVETLANA KITTO: I think it was '69.

ROBERT MORRIS: '69? Yeah. So that pushed this to the furthest end, when I had this—Leo Castelli had a warehouse uptown where he showed work, and I took one of the floors and worked with all kinds of materials—thread waste, plywood, earth, grease, and so on—and changed it every day. So I just kept changing it. I had a photographer photograph what I did that day, and these photos would be put up the next day. It was a series of changes that never resolved themselves. It was an extension of permutation and chance and indeterminacy, and perishability, too, I suppose.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you—I mean, it seems sort of, from just looking at this short period of time, that you went from doing sort of spontaneous works, and you didn't know where they were going, to having, suddenly, a big audience and being part of a big conversation in the art world, and having just a lot of visibility in the late '60s. Just considering your background, I don't suppose that you expected any of that to happen. As in you've told me that you weren't, as a young person, like, "I want to be—this is what I'm going to be. I'm going to be a famous artist."

ROBERT MORRIS: No, no. No. I didn't have a clear idea of a career, for sure. I always had a job and made the work without—I couldn't live off of it in those early days at all. I had to do other things. In the beginning, it was laboring jobs, like the railroad. Then they became less laborious. Teaching, for example. Libraries. It was very, very gradual that I started to make any money at it—have a market. Then, even then, because I kept changing, I never had a signature style. I've forgotten the question you asked.

SVETLANA KITTO: The question was just what it was like to go from sort of moving to New York and not really knowing what was going to happen to now be—the money question is one thing, and then another question is just being—having an audience and being part of this very visible art world conversation and writing notes on sculpture. I guess I just wonder what that was like. [00:46:00]

ROBERT MORRIS: I think mostly, most of the time, you spend—or I spent—in the studio working. I was absorbed in what I was doing, and the idea of an audience—I wanted to—I had started writing fairly early. I had written this Brancusi text. Writing was something I liked doing. That was another activity. I had these different activities in the studio. Writing was another one. I just lived in these different spheres. I didn't feel part of any group, really. I never did. So I don't think I felt I was a part of a—I wanted to have a say and be able to articulate what I was doing, but I did that for myself, so I knew what I was doing. I was interested in art history and the concepts of art history. I had this early, early philosophical influence from my friend Roger, so concepts and structures were early concern. [00:48:09] That analytic part could be superimposed on what I was doing after I had done it for a while, but it wasn't part of how I made things. It only happened afterwards. So I think there were these separate

spheres I was exploring. I never knew who—I was not someone who hung out with collectors. I remember, I did go to a few collectors' places in the beginning, and I remember distinctly one New Year's going uptown to Park Avenue. I was invited to this party, and I think it was David Hayes who was kind of a collector and worked at the Modern. I think it was his mother's place, and she was a Firestone heir.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

ROBERT MORRIS: I remember walking into this big foyer off the elevator, and she was standing there by a big buffet, and on one side was a late Cezanne hung on the wall. [00:50:02] On the other side was Brancusi's *Endless Column*. She was talking about the party she had had works of art at. She said, "I called my liquor dealer and said I need so many cases of champagne"—or whatever it was—and he said, "Well, madam, it's the season now, and I'm not sure I can—I'm really overworked, and I'm not sure I can supply everything you want." She said, "Listen, you don't know what work is until you've tried to hold onto what you've got."

SVETLANA KITTO: Did that put you off?

ROBERT MORRIS: I think so. [They laugh.]

SVETLANA KITTO: You weren't interested in the hobnobbing and the—

ROBERT MORRIS: Not really, no. No. I mean, you know, there's interesting people, and—

SVETLANA KITTO: You went to Max's?

ROBERT MORRIS: I went to Max's, yeah, yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: When did you stop having—so, first of all, how was the work sold? When you were at Castelli and you got there, was it sold, or when did you stop having to have another job?

ROBERT MORRIS: I taught at Hunter for 30-some years, I think.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, you did? Okay.

ROBERT MORRIS: So I just kept teaching there, even then. When did I stop? I stopped in '92 or '93. [00:52:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: But you liked teaching, right?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, I didn't, no. Not much. I liked—

SVETLANA KITTO: Your students liked you?

ROBERT MORRIS: They said they did. [They laugh.] Some of them. I didn't like studio courses, but I liked theory and criticism. I got to teach that, and that was more interesting for me. But when I stopped teaching, I didn't miss one minute of it. It was a job, always a job. I tried to do it well, but it was a job, and I was greatly relieved when I stopped. I don't know. Shall we go on?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, I was going to—I was waiting to see if you were saying something else.

ROBERT MORRIS: No.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. So let's just sort of go through it in time. '68, '69. You just talked about *Continued Project Daily*. Was that—yeah. Then continuing to show felt works at Castelli. Then what was going on for you around then? How was the work changing in the '70s? [00:54:00]

ROBERT MORRIS: Can we take a break?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

ROBERT MORRIS: I have to go to the bathroom.

[Audio break.]

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay, go ahead.

ROBERT MORRIS: For many, many years, I have not given interviews. I've stopped being on panels or giving talks. I pretty much stay here in the country and work. I guess you could say I've become sort of a recluse. I had—was interviewed by the Archives a long time ago, in the '60s, I believe, and so I agreed to this because I wanted to complete it. I wanted to talk about now after all this time. But it's really an exception. I don't usually

do it. So let me read this. It's called "Unavailable," and I send it out when people ask me to come and talk. "I do not want to travel to distant places to give talks about art I made a half-century ago. Minimalism does not need to hear from me. I do not want to travel to distant places to give talks about art I made yesterday. Contemporary art is making enough noise without me. I do not want to be filmed in my studio, pretending to be working. I do not want to participate in staged conversations about art, either mine or others, past or present, which are labored and disguised performances. I do not want to be interviewed by curators, critics, art directors, theorists, aestheticians, aesthetes, professors, collectors, gallerists, culture mavens, journalists, or art historians about my influences, favorite artists, despised artists, past artists, current artists, future artists. [00:56:17] A long time ago, I got in the habit, never since broken, of writing down things instead of speaking. It is possible that I was led into art-making because talking and being in the presence of another person were not requirements. I do not want to be asked my reasons for not having worked in just one style, or reasons for any of the art that got made, the reason being there are no reasons in art. I do not want to answer questions about why I use plywood, felt, steam, dirt, grease, lead, wax, money, trees, photographs, electroencephalograms, hot and cold, lawyers, explosions, nudity, sound, language, or drew with my eyes closed. I do not want to tell anecdotes about my past, or stories about the people I have been close to. The people to whom I owe so much either knew it or never will, because it is too late now. I do not want to document my starting points, turning points, high points, low points, good points, bad points, stopping points, lucky breaks, bad breaks, breaking points, dead ends, breakthroughs, or breakdowns. I do not want to talk about my methods, processes, near-misses, flukes, mistakes, disappointments, setbacks, disasters, obsessions, lucky accidents, unlucky accidents, scars, insecurities, disabilities, phobias, fixations, or insomnias over posters I should never have made. [00:58:17] I do not want my portrait taken. Everybody uses everybody else for their own purposes, and I am happy to be just material for somebody else, so long as I can exercise my right to remain silent, immobile, possibly armed, and at a distance of several miles."

SVETLANA KITTO: Heard.

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: I said heard. [They laugh.] Okay, so having heard that elaborate and—

ROBERT MORRIS: Unavailable.

SVETLANA KITTO: —statement, let's keep doing all the things that you just said you won't do.

ROBERT MORRIS: Right.

SVETLANA KITTO: So thank you again.

ROBERT MORRIS: Mm-hmm.

SVETLANA KITTO: I was just ask—I was just trying to move us through talking about the work in the '70s. You had said at the beginning of the interview, actually, that you were involved in anti-war activism at this time.

ROBERT MORRIS: Right. Yes.

SVETLANA KITTO: And the New York Strike Against Racism and Repression, was what it was called, I think. War—Racism, War, and Repression. So—

ROBERT MORRIS: This movement grew out of Art Workers' Coalition, something called the Art Workers' Coalition, that I was not really—I maybe went to a few meetings, but I wasn't part of it. They were a group of artists, and they had different agendas: race, women, and so on. [01:00:02] So it went—it didn't have much unity. It somehow coalesced with the Art Strike, and it moved into that for a period of time. There may still be Art Workers' Coalition, but I don't know about it. It had a connection to this sort of social activity before the war protests.

SVETLANA KITTO: Were you—but you started getting involved in protests?

ROBERT MORRIS: As I said, I closed the shows, and it was about the war. I didn't then go back to the Art Workers' Coalition and deal with issues like race and women's issues. It kind of fractured at that point. Because people went in different directions. Different people had different priorities, and they couldn't really get together for a common cause, except for the war.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right, yeah. Were you continuing to do these sort of—were you still doing performative things at this time, like happenings?

ROBERT MORRIS: No.

SVETLANA KITTO: You weren't? You had stopped—

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes.

SVETLANA KITTO: —all that.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes.

SVETLANA KITTO: What about Earthworks?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes, I think—[01:02:01]

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ROBERT MORRIS: Well, working inside, we had pushed scale, and I was one of the people that pushed scale to the—to somewhat limits of an interior space, and so naturally, the next move is to go outside, where you get bigger. So I had—I was interested in that. I had gone to Nazca. That was another exterior art place. I was invited to be in a show in Holland. There was an issue—there was a show. I can't remember what it was called. I proposed, instead of bringing something there, to make an observatory. It was made. I put—they didn't have very much money, and I put some of my own money into it. It was outside of Amsterdam. Actually, it was the near the coast, near Muiden. It wasn't done very well there, and it sort of fell apart. Then I think some of the people there felt a little bit guilty about that. It was redone then, outside of—closer into Amsterdam, in the polders. The Dutch had been filling in. When you're in Holland, you're never sure if you're standing on what was once ocean, because it's been filled in so much. [00:02:03] It was filled in. These polders were filled in. They'd build dikes and put earth in there, and then this was devoted to agriculture. But the common market sort of ruined that, and so they made these things just nature preserves. The second effort to make the observatory was in one of these spaces. The Stedelijk [Museum] took over maintenance of it. I was interested—again, it has the issue of time involved, because it marks the solstice and equinox positions, and it harks back to prehistoric works. That was my sole effort, really, at Earthwork. Of course, I did this work *Dirt* in the one gallery, which involved a ton of earth and peat moss, and 200 pounds of cup grease, and various odds and ends. Virginia insisted that we put down plastic underneath it, because she had this fancy white rug, and so tried to do that and keep it from the rug. People would come in, and they saw that grease, and they would stick their finger in it and say, "What is that?" Then they got grease on their finger, and they'd wipe it on the rug. [00:04:01] So it ruined the rug. [They laugh.] But that was—that's the outside, but inside. So I didn't really have too much of a connection to the Earthworks beyond my observatory.

SVETLANA KITTO: I think you—was Bob Smithson a friend of yours?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes, yes. We were friendly. When I was doing the observatory, he made a piece also there. I think it was *Half Circle* or something like that. He was—had gone on. I think there was—I remember we went early with Virginia. We got a car and we drove out into New Jersey, looking for sites. He had—well, I did another earthwork. I did one in Seattle. It was a kind of strip mine, based on that. I didn't agree with Smithson. He thought that art could reclaim wasted sites, and I thought that was ridiculous. My earthwork in Seattle was, in a sense, a wasted site remade. We didn't agree about that, but otherwise he was always a very lively person, and we spoke, and we met and made proposals about this Dallas/Fort Worth Airport. [00:06:15] I proposed a ring of earth. I think this was Smithson's organization. He organized it. Nothing ever got done so far as I know. That was—so there were three things I did that had to do with earth, or proposed. Only one was realized. Yes, we hung out together a bit.

SVETLANA KITTO: So you went out with him and Virginia Dwan to—

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, we made a tour of New Jersey, down to the Pine Barrens. Nothing ever came of it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. I think you did—

ROBERT MORRIS: Although I think Smithson took a lot of photographs, and probably made works—what he called his non-sites—from that trip. It wasn't wasted for him. But nothing came of it for me.

SVETLANA KITTO: What about these? This was the *Blind Times*.

ROBERT MORRIS: *Blind Time Drawings*, yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. These were made in the early '70s, I think.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, right.

SVETLANA KITTO: They're on the wall.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. The one on the right—they began by making—there were several series made over the years. [00:08:05] I would come back to it, like the felt pieces. They were done in different phases, at different—I would make a series, and then leave them for a while, and then come back to them. Same way with the felts. The drawings—the first series were fairly mechanical, based on tasks, and different pressures, or count the strokes of touches, or whatever. That was the first series. The second series, I hired a woman who had been blind since birth to do them. She was kind of a lawyer or a legal person. That was her job. She had been blind since birth. So I went uptown to talk to her, and she said—well, here's what she said about my proposal. She said, "I don't see anything very artistic about it, but I'll do it." I paid her, of course. But when she—I don't have any of them here, but she got quite involved in it, and took it into a kind of psychological dimension, where she would rub the page, thinking about portraits of her friends, things like that. So she became quite wrapped up in it. We met several times and did a series. Sometimes I would work on one side of the page, and she would work on the other. So we did that series. [00:10:00] And then I did a third series. The one on the left is one of them, I think. Yeah. Called *Drawing with Davidson*. I was involved, interested, studied the work of Donald Davidson, who was a linguistic philosopher—language philosopher, and had made this series. Then I was a good friend of Ed Fry's. Do you know who he was? Ed Fry was an art historian who was a curator at the Met—not the Met, the—I'm sorry—the Guggenheim. Hans Haacke had proposed a show there that involved slumlords who were on the board of the Guggenheim, and this was going to embarrass them, and so it was refused. Ed Fry had curated it, and so he quit in protest, and he never got another curatorial job. He said he'd applied for almost—I don't know, many, many jobs, and they wouldn't hire him. He had gone to Princeton and wrote a book on Cubism, which is a fantastic book. [00:12:00] He was married to a woman, Sandra, who was teaching at this college in Pennsylvania, this small college. What's the name of it? I can't remember. And she put up a series—she showed—Ed would come here. He had a place in New Hampshire in the summer. He would drive here, and we would visit often. She knew about the *Blind Time Drawings*. They both did. So she proposed to do a show in this town, in this university, small university, and she wrote to Davidson, or called him—and he was in Berkeley, a professor in Berkeley—and told him about this show, and Davidson showed up for the opening. So I was quite astonished at that, and I got to know him then. We became pretty good friends. I was very interested in his thought. Less so now, but in those days, I was really into it. So we became pretty good buddies. He came to New York. When he came to New York, we always visited, and I went out there for his 85th birthday. [00:14:00] I remember he came here in '93, and we had lunch at the Oyster Bar in Grand Central, and he was on his way back to California. He said—Davidson was a real outdoor-man, and we were—and he was a pilot as well, and I flew planes, gliders, and also light planes, in the '70s and '80s. So we had a lot in common about that. What was the point I was going to make?

SVETLANA KITTO: You were saying what he said.

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: He said something. He came and visited you here. You went to the Oyster Bar at Grand Central.

ROBERT MORRIS: Oh, yes. Yes, we were—we had lunch there, and he was on his way back. He said, "I can no longer run very well." This was a guy, you know, 85. He said, "Something's wrong with my knee and they can't fix it, so I'm going to get it replaced when I go back to California." So he went back, had a knee replacement, and never woke up. They couldn't stop the pain. Very painful operation, apparently. But he had a bad reaction, and I think he had a heart failure from that. That was terrible. That was the last series—no, that wasn't the last series. I did another series afterwards. [00:15:59] I don't think it has a name, but it's about America as an imperialist, militaristic power. That's a sub-theme of it. So that's the last series.

SVETLANA KITTO: The last series?

ROBERT MORRIS: Of *Blind Times*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Of *Blind Times*, okay.

ROBERT MORRIS: So I guess there were four series. First one with A.A. Adrian Ash was her name, the blind woman, who's no longer alive. Then the one drawing with Davidson, and then the last one, about the wars—America's wars.

SVETLANA KITTO: How did you make that one?

ROBERT MORRIS: How?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. What was it?

ROBERT MORRIS: It was actually a little bit more imagistic than the others. There were attempts to touch out maybe a skull. Or metaphorical, anyway. The images—imagistic instead of just physical contact with the paper

in all the different ways the body could contact the paper with hands. I don't know if I have any complete photos of it, but it was the most different from all the others. [00:18:02] So that's the last series. They took place over a number of years, like the felts. I'd go back to it, continue. I don't think I'll make any more. It takes—I remember the first series. I think I lost 10 pounds doing them, because it's physical, very taxing.

SVETLANA KITTO: Just the experience of just being—is it scary?

ROBERT MORRIS: No, it's just laborious. You get exhausted with—some of the—I remember in the first one, there might be a limit of—a natural limit by how much friction I could stand with my hands, or fatigue of one sort or another. It was a lot of physical effort. That was the first one. After that, it was more nuanced.

SVETLANA KITTO: I just wanted to go back to one thing, which was the ad. The ad that you made in 1974.

ROBERT MORRIS: Oh, the poster?

SVETLANA KITTO: The poster, yeah. Did you expect people to have such a strong reaction to that?

ROBERT MORRIS: No. But they did. I remember walking down the West Side when I had a loft on Greene Street. I'd sometimes run around there. I was walking down by the West Side Highway, and there were these gay bars around there. [00:20:09] I looked into one of them, and there was my poster above the bar. I couldn't believe it. [They laugh.]

SVETLANA KITTO: So you're saying that you really didn't know that that was kind of—

ROBERT MORRIS: I made it for a show. [Phone rings.] Oh, excuse me. I had made it for a show called *Voice*, and this show was an eight-track sound-piece, so there were no images. I thought, I'll make the image the poster, because part of the soundtrack was about violence and war. So I wanted to make an image of Mars, and I thought I was linking the image of Mars, but I was just making a biker. It was complete error and a mistake.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wasn't it something to do with Lynda Benglis, too?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, Lynda was making—I knew Lynda then. She lived not far from my loft. We had lofts not—about a block apart. I got to know her pretty well. We did a tape. What was it called? She did—we did these—*Exchange* it was called. We would record and use each other's material to make this tape. She said she was going to do an ad, and I said okay. It was kind of a competition. [00:22:00] I was going to do a poster. She did her infamous ad for *Artforum* that caused people to quit. [They laugh.]

SVETLANA KITTO: That one got the really strong reaction.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: But that was also very homoerotic.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, right. Right. Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: And both of yours were—had that homoerotic—

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, they both did.

SVETLANA KITTO: They both did, yeah. Why don't we just keep moving forward in time? What was going on—so we've gotten through—talked about stuff in the '70s, and you were showing at Castelli, still then, and doing felt works into the '80s again. Can you talk a little bit about that time?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, I was also—'80s or '90s. I was also making these reliefs that used a lot of body parts and skeletons—bones, body parts. I did a series of works that referenced the Holocaust. Eighties. Then I changed into fiberglass reliefs. [00:24:00] So there was a series of reliefs about the body, body parts, in the '80s. I don't know if it went to the '90s. I think the '80s. I had a period where I did a series of mirror works. I got to know Tom [Thomas] Krens, who was at Williams College. I don't know how I got to know him. He was teaching there. Maybe I had gone up to give a talk. I don't remember. But I did get to know Tom, and he invited me to do something up there, an installation. They have a courtyard in between the library and some other building that's 50x50. I made this big mirror piece with—two, four, six, eight, 10—12 mirrors, something like 10x12 feet. Any position you take in this room, you're reflected back like 60 or 70 times. When people are in there, it's very difficult to know what's a reflection and what's a person. It's just total multiplication of images. So I was involved with that. [00:26:03] Then I began to use mirrors that would bend, curved mirrors. I did a show at Leo's of curved mirrors. I don't remember the exact date.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, I think that was still in the '70s.

ROBERT MORRIS: '70s?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, like '78 I think.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, sounds right. It was a matter of making these parabolic frames, and pushing the mirrors into them and seeing how much curvature I could get out of them before they shattered. That was the limit of the curve. We broke a few. Then I put things in front of them, structures that were distorted and reflected. That was a series. But it was rather a short involvement with those mirrors. I had done other—the first mirror piece I think I did was in Portland, Oregon, when I was asked to come out and do an installation in a gallery there. It was a pretty good—was it a gallery? I don't think it was just a gallery. It was like an art center. It was a big loft-type space. I put four 6x8 mirrors at the midpoint of all of the walls, and adjusted those so that if you stood in line with those mirrors, you would see the back of your head. [00:28:15] Actually, the first mirror piece I did—I'm sorry—I did in Rome, earlier than that, and I don't remember the date. It consisted—there was a space that was too—it was a strange, small gallery that had—exhibition space—it was basically two hallways at a right angle to each other. I mean, they were more than hallways, but they were rooms that ran together at a right angle. The first mirror piece I did was to put a mirror at the junction of the right angles, and then, in the hall—in the two, say, hallways, I had hung a series—I hung a series of steel plates that had been cut into rectangles, with big—like frames, basically, maybe six inches by three by three feet, and they were hung at eye level. When you moved into the space and got between two mirrors and looked forward into the—what you saw was the mirror straightened it out, straightened the space out. So you saw this long perspective of mirrors vanishing. That was the first mirror piece I did. It had to do with responding to the space of this kind of eccentric exhibition space. [00:30:00] Then I went on further with mirrors. I made the Portland mirrors, which, as I said, had mirrors on the floor, 6x8, around the room. Running between the mirrors were 12x12 timbers, so that you made a—they made a big diamond shape on the floor, butting into the mirror, into each mirror, in such a way that there was an infinite reflection of these timbers making these diamond shapes into infinity on each mirror. It required a very precise alignment of the mirrors and fitting of the timbers. That was done in—I don't know when—Portland. Then I did the mirrors at Williams. That was the biggest piece of mirrors. Then I did the curved mirrors. So there was involvement with mirrors and reflectivity, and the body again. I did something with steam. Steam piece. The Corcoran, I think in '69. Didn't work very well. Then there was a permanent installation in Washington—Bellingham, Washington—that worked better. [00:32:00] Again, a kind of indeterminate work. It doesn't have a fixed boundary. So there was *Steam*. Maybe that's it.

SVETLANA KITTO: And so then you had a retrospective at the Guggenheim, right?

ROBERT MORRIS: [19]95, yes. Yes.

SVETLANA KITTO: That was your first retrospective, right?

ROBERT MORRIS: First retrospect. First and only, yeah. Yes, that was curated by Rosalind Krauss, and Tom Krens was the director. And because I got to know him and he'd seen my work up there, he agreed to give me a retrospective when he came down and took over the Guggenheim. It was a difficult show to put into that space because of the—it's a difficult space. It's a great space, but it's best empty. It's very difficult to show work there. We did the best we could. But I wasn't very happy with it.

SVETLANA KITTO: You restaged the performances.

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: You restaged the performances.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yes, that's when we—by that Mangolte film, the dance pieces. Yeah. [00:34:00] We did them just for that. And I remade some things for the show.

SVETLANA KITTO: Anything stand out in that experience?

ROBERT MORRIS: The difficulty of the installation. It just seemed very problematic. There seemed to be all kinds of things going on. Getting the catalog done was another problem. Although I like some of the essays. David Antin wrote an essay that I liked very much. I got to know David Antin very early when I was in New York. I met him in Brooklyn. Dave Antin was then—I think he's a year younger than me. He was living in Brooklyn with his wife, Eleanor, who later became an artist with—she was an artist then, but she became known for work she did later, with boots and things. David was making his living then by writing thesis, math and physics thesis, for graduate students, but he was a poet. But he was brilliant, and developed his performances called *Talking*. [00:36:06] David wrote a very nice essay for the catalog, I thought. Very good. I didn't see him all that much, but—in New York—but he was an exceptional person. Really had a tremendous intellect.

SVETLANA KITTO: There was just a series of workshops and programs sort of celebrating him in New York.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, I know.

SVETLANA KITTO: I did one of the workshops, because it was called "While I Was Listening." And so I did an oral history workshop, because it's about story and—and then someone else did a workshop about dialogue and telling and talking. Then there was a night of performances, sort of—about the artist talk.

ROBERT MORRIS Yeah, they invited me to show up, but I lost the email and I couldn't get in touch with anybody. I felt bad about that. I don't know if I would have said anything, but I certainly would have gone, but I just lost it. I'm up here. You know, I didn't know. David told me that—he was a good swimmer, a great swimmer. Did you ever see David? He doesn't have a hair on his body. He's a striking-looking guy—he was. He said he was swimming, I think in Baja California. [00:38:05] Swimming at night, with a friend, and they went out, and it became cloudy. There were no lights on the shore. They were lost in the middle of this body of water. So they decided what they would do is that each one of them would take turns swimming in one direction, until they found the shore. He said they went two or three times before one of them found the shore. They'd call back, you know, and then they'd keep in touch that way. They were good swimmers, and so they did it—survived it. They got back.

SVETLANA KITTO: Was it—so you got this house—when did you get this house?

ROBERT MORRIS: This house?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

ROBERT MORRIS: I bought it in '71, but I didn't come up here for—I bought it together with the California artist, Craig Kauffman. He was in New York, and I think he thought he might be staying more. I knew Craig from San Francisco days, a long, long time ago. I liked Craig a lot. We got this house together, but then I bought him out, because he went back to California. [00:40:00] He's not alive anymore. We tried to do a project together at the Jewish Museum, a cooperative project. Didn't work very well. But—

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you do it?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, yeah. Craig was another guy who—he was somebody who I think never felt comfortable in his own skin, but was kind of a scientist. Also, those things he did in California with molded plexiglass and luscious colors, sort of like sensibility of Matisse via the vacuum form [ph]. I liked Craig. He died of pneumonia in the Philippines a few years ago. I don't know, I've lost the track.

SVETLANA KITTO: You bought this house—

ROBERT MORRIS: —together, and then I bought him out.

SVETLANA KITTO: When did you move—

ROBERT MORRIS: In '75, I built my first studio, and then would come up on the weekends, more or less. It wasn't until the '80s, I think, that I started working here a lot more. My daughter was going to school in New York, and so we would go down on the weekends—no, we'd come up here on the weekends, and I would stay longer, and they would go back, because she had to go to Grace Church School. [00:42:00] More—it was gradual, and I had to fix this place up. It was an old—it was a rooming house for hunters, and I tore walls apart. There was a big hallway there. It went out. Stairway. I took all that away. I got this lift with this dinky stairway. Then I built a greenhouse. I mean, I just kept tearing it apart for years and years. I'm not going to do any more. [Laughs.] It's very inefficient. Lucy wants to get out of here.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, really?

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah. Well, I mean, I have my studio. She's got a studio now. I built her a studio, but it's too isolated, I think, for her.

SVETLANA KITTO: During this period we're talking about, '80s, '90s, and then you're also moving piecemeal more and more up here, how had New York changed for you?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, I got this loft at 12 Greene Street with Rosalind Krauss and Alan Buchsbaum, two friends of mine. We bought it together. I was on the top floor. I had big 16-foot ceilings in the front. Huge. But tiny, dinky elevator that was always breaking down, so I couldn't work there much. [00:44:01] I did felts there. That's all I could do. Then my daughter was going to school, and—but New York, you know, it became more and more expensive. The real estate became expensive, and artists had to move out. It was no longer—Canal Street used to be a place where I could go shopping for things I used in my art. There were actual stores there, hardware stores, metal stores, plastic stores. Then it all changed. So I couldn't work there anymore. It's so much easier up here. You drive a truck right into my studio. I couldn't work down there. It was unpleasant. I didn't—I don't know.

I guess I'd used it up. So we got rid of the loft, I don't know, '92—no, I don't remember. No, later. I don't remember. We got rid of the loft in the '90s and moved up here permanently. I continued to work there in the studio. I had a studio up there I built around '84—'83—and it's very bright and light, and I do drawings and things there. [00:46:07] I did—I made the last couple series of *Blind Time Drawings* up there, and I could put work up there and see it very well. It's all skylight on the north. The studio down the road is full of tools, and it's a mess. Dirty. A mess. So I had these two spaces, and they suited me very well up here. I guess I'm just wandering around and not addressing what you want me to address.

SVETLANA KITTO: No, it's—no, you are. We're just going through it. You got rid of the loft and you were living here permanently and making all your work here.

ROBERT MORRIS: Right. Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: We're sort of, I think, in the '90s now. What were you making—what do you want to talk about in terms of the last few years of making?

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, now I started having an assistant when I was moving up here. I worked together with an assistant, and I didn't have that in New York. I worked by myself. That allowed me to do other things. I've had three assistants. [00:48:00] The first one had a problem with drugs, and I didn't know it. He became addicted to heroin. It just got harder and harder to work with him, and I had no idea he was addicted. We made the curved mirrors together. Then I had to just get rid of him, because it was impossible. Then, after him, there was my second assistant, Ryan Roa. He was—he went through the art program at SUNY New Paltz, and he was a sculptor, so he was very adept and very strong. We worked together for many years. He recently left and moved to Florida and got married. Ryan was very—he hardly said a word when he first started working for me. Then he went to Iraq for a year or two, and when he came back, he couldn't stop talking. He was very good. [00:49:59] Now I have—Nick Jacobs is my current assistant, who is really quite good, quite adept at all kinds of things. He's worked in museums. He's worked at Museum of Natural History and the Met, and so he knows about all kinds of installation issues and museum issues, and how to restore work. He's very meticulous. We've worked on felt pieces together, and we're working on these current works now that involve Photo—he knows Photoshop, and he's doing that for me. We're working on pieces that require Photoshopping.

SVETLANA KITTO: Of your photographs?

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: Of photographs?

ROBERT MORRIS: The images are taken from Goya and rearranged in different ways, and enlarged onto—printed—inkjet printing on very large canvases, which are hung in the space. That will be my next show. It opens in the fall.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. That's exciting.

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: That's exciting. It sounds very different for you.

ROBERT MORRIS: It is very different. There will be two aspects of it. There will be what I call the banners, those works. Then there are eight fiberglass pieces made with translucent epoxy, so that they're about 3x5, 4x6 feet. They're all text pieces that say things like, "Racist motherfucker" or "Assassin asshole assassin seals." [00:52:20] "American big dick military." They're all these—I call them curses. The second line is written backwards, boustrophedon style. That's an early way—it appears in early Greek inscriptions. They wrote left to right, and the next line, right to left. It's called boustrophedon, which means "how the ox plows." Early Greek inscriptions take that form, and I've adapted it so that the swear word goes backward. These are rather difficult to read. There's a lot of reflections, and it's—the material is put on over a text very loosely, so it's all in relief. That comes after—this is the last series, but before this, there were the series of shows I had of figurative works, made with—using a mannequin in different positions. I don't know if you saw any of those shows. The first one was made with linen and epoxy over a mannequin that we then—it hardens, and we strip it off. [00:54:12] You have these shells of figures in different positions. The last show I had at Castelli's downtown was made with carbon fiber and epoxy and figures based on—one's based on Goya drawings, late Goya drawings, and one is based on Rodin's *Burghers of Calais*. Then there were two others that were just figures on the floor or on the wall. So that is the more recent work that I've done. That's gone from implied relationship to the figure to actual image of the figure. So the banners they involve are the *Caprichos*, mostly, from Goya's etchings. That brings us up to date.

SVETLANA KITTO: I'm just wondering about—in terms of the new work you're making, what our current political

situation—how that's playing into your—

ROBERT MORRIS: Well, yes.

SVETLANA KITTO: The curses sound familiar.

ROBERT MORRIS: Yeah, curses, for sure. Yeah. [00:56:00] It's there, I guess. Yeah. No, it's literally cursing the government. The military. You know, just swearing at it. [They laugh.] It has no political bite at all. It's just flaring up and yelling, basically. And the Goyas, these things are manipulated by Photoshop, and there are some allusions to current political figures, but it's very vague. I mean, you can do anything with Photoshop. So that's where I am now.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Is there anything else you want to say?

ROBERT MORRIS: Hmm?

SVETLANA KITTO: Is there anything else you want to say?

ROBERT MORRIS: No, I don't think so.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay, thank you.

ROBERT MORRIS: Okay.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]