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Oral history interview with Glen Michaels, 1981 July 1

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Glen Michaels on July 1, 1981. The interview took place in Troy, Michigan, and was conducted by Mary Chris Rospond for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[Tape 1]

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Let's talk a little bit about your family background. Where and what kind of setting did you grow up in.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, I was born in Spokane, Washington, and left home when I was drafted in 1945—eighteen. Apart from a short visit later, I have usually been in the east and in Michigan.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What type of. . . . Did you come from an artistic family, or did you have any type of early art training?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, I had many cousins who were encouraged to be in the field of art and music. I have a brother who is a full-time teacher. He taught art in a college in Tacoma, Washington, for years. And I would say that art has been an important part of the entire family, with just a few of us inclined professionally _____.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: At what point did you become interested in art? Was it as a child, or later?

GLEN MICHAELS: I was always drawing, _____. There were always drawing materials around from my earliest years. My brother and I used them. Anything that would occur to us, like watercolors or oils, whatever, those things were provided for us. But I would say the most important training began when I was about eleven, and that was the WPA art project [Spokane Art Center—Ed.]. I studied with Guy Anderson, who really started me early on murals. That's when I did my first mural, when I was eleven or twelve. And the WPA art project didn't provide materials, but they allowed you to talk to these many artists who were, you know. . . . Otherwise, we would not have met them. They were really active artists. I think Mark Tobey taught [there, them]. He didn't teach me, but I understand he taught. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: In Spokane?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, in Seattle, I think.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Oh, I see.

GLEN MICHAELS: But see I was studying in Spokane. Guy Anderson was one of the most important people in the early years, I think.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay, let's talk a little bit about your education. You attended the Yale School of Music during 1950 to '52, before receiving a B. A. in Art Education from Eastern Washington University [then Eastern Washington College of Education—Ed.] in 1957. What prompted this switch from music to art?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, I'd always wanted to become a cartoonist some day. And that was sort of an important facet of drawing. In the early years it was just accepted my brother and I would take piano lessons, so piano was just sort of a thing we had to go through. And I became interested, I think when I was about sixteen in seriously practicing the piano. But I didn't look upon it as a future. When I went into the army they had, there were many places, you know, service clubs, and it was just for recreation I played the piano. And eventually the army sponsored me a radio program in Seattle, and it was sort of exciting to. . . . I forgot to mention I was very interested in current, the current favorite was Chopin. So I memorized a lot of popular things that. . . . I don't mean popular music, [I mean—Ed.] classical music that was popular at that time. The army, and later a booking agent, made a lot over my abilities which were unfinished at the time, but I was, I had a good memory and I sit down at the piano and play for a couple or three hours from memory, and then more or less accurately and I suppose my youth had a lot to do with making this sort of thing commercially acceptable, so then I found myself playing in nightclubs and that sort of thing.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Hmm!

GLEN MICHAELS: The booking agent arranged a tour when I left the army. But I knew I wanted to study seriously —and I was drawing all of this time, but that became the hobby and music became my main interest. And so I

studied with a teacher in Seattle. I'd earned enough money in the army from piano playing and later from playing commercially in. . . . Vaudeville had not yet died and I was involved in that at that time. So at the age of nineteen, when I was out of the army—I was only in the army a year and a half—then I started studying seriously in Seattle with a teacher who was very well known in the Northwest, McNeeley was his name. Anyway, I studied with him for several years, practicing eight and nine hours a day. And it was valuable later, in that I never have worked so hard since as I did as a musician, no matter how hard the murals are, how many hours I worked. I think that tells you something, though; if you have too work hard at a thing, you're not intended to be in that kind of field. I think there were certain. . . . A certain bullheadedness, or something, made me go on and on. But I did decide when I was, when I did win a sort of scholarship to Yale Music School in 1949 and '50, I decided I would give myself two years or three years after graduation to see if I really wanted to be in that field. Because it. . . . When I got to Yale and heard so many fine musicians. . . . It was an exciting time. Hindemith was there and Ralph Kirkpatrick, and something about all the personalities surrounding these people brought out the urge for caricature, so I kept drawing pictures all the time I was in school. And we published a cartoon book called, Oh, You're a Musician, which was sold nationally, and I. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Was that while you were at Yale?

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Publication of that _____?

GLEN MICHAELS: And during that time, friends introduced me to Mary [Petty] and Alan [Dunn], and so Alan Dunn was really the one who encouraged me to go into the field, not of art, but into illustration.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Now, who was Alan Dunn?

GLEN MICHAELS: Alan Dunn is. . . . Well, Mary Petty and Alan Dunn were cartoonists for the New Yorker. They go back to the early days of the New Yorker.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Huh!

GLEN MICHAELS: And I think Alan Dunn's work appeared until recently in the New Yorker, if I'm not mistaken. But he was a fine line man. His skill in drawing, his ability to add in certain humor. He certainly had a creative skill that was far beyond [what—Ed.] you think when you think of a cartoonist. You know, when you think of [Daumier, Dobier], you think of a fine draftsman.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: And then you. . . . You know, as a cartoonist. And I always felt Alan Dunn had his own personality in his drawing.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: How did you come to meet Alan Dunn?

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh, just at Yale. Some friends, a friend who. . . . Some of the writers with the New Yorker and with Harper's Magazine had seen my work and suggested that I meet some of the people in New York. And I think behing the scenes there may have been strong misgivings in my spending my time in the field of music. I don't know. For one thing, I don't have what is called a piano hand, I mean, you know, the stretch is not what it should be. And secondly, I didn't start early enough with the best teachers. And I think those two things are very important to a pianist. I could have been happy as a musician, though, I think, and I didn't have a preconceived notion that I wanted to be a performer. I mean, I didn't feel that being a performer was any more important than being a teacher. I mean, I could. . . . I just felt that whatever I wanted to do, I wanted to be the best in it. If I wanted to be a piano teacher, I would want to carve out a certain kind of piano teaching that had never been done before or something. But the urge to draw, the visual thing, was such a strong urge that I decided not to go back to Yale when I was in New York the second year after I'd been in Yale. I did well as a student, I suppose. It was a struggle but I worked hard when I was at Yale. But in New York I began. . . . The summer of '52 I remember being so interested in art exhibits and everything, and so I decided not to go back to school. And my G.I. Bill had run out anyway, and also the. . . . You know, it was difficult to think of. . . . Well, I was washing dishes and I was doing portraits. That's when I learned to do portraits so fast. Because it was to help with the work, to help with my money at school. You know, even the G.I. Bill, if a great help, is not enough to really get along on in school. It wasn't that kind of _____.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm. Were you taking classes in New York at that time?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, no.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: And working and doing odd jobs?

GLEN MICHAELS: No. I just quit the school and friends introduced me to Russell [Lyons] with Harvey's Magazine. No, it was Mr. Allen; he was the editor then, and had seen my work and so he suggested I submit some drawings. He gave me a story by Jessamyn West, so I illustrated, did some illustrations. My eyesight was very good then, and I did the illustrations and they were published for the exact size that I'd drawn them.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Huh!

GLEN MICHAELS: I just took it granted that everybody could see that well. I'm so envious now of people who could see things, little things. I need glasses all the time when I work. But the work was published in, right away. It wasn't a financial success. I was working at Schraft's as a waiter at that time, when it was published. So it was just, at 26 I was beginning a career in the field of art, I thought. But I realized that the field of art needed an education, so I must go back to school. So at twenty-six I started all over again. I went back home and to a small college in Eastern Washington, College of Education. It just happened to be near my home, so I went to school there.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Is this in Spokane now? [Really in Cheney, just outside of Spokane—Ed.]

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah. There again was a very important teacher, Opal Fleckenstein, who was a student of Mark Tobey. And so I studied with her. She was a watercolorist, a very fine one. It's more that, you can't really learn art. Julia Schmidt used to say you can't teach art. You can't learn from teachers; you can only pick up the sort of state of mind in which you can absorb things around you and put it to your use. For instance, from the music field I absorbed the kind of sort of state of mind in which you can practice one project or one sonata for nine and ten hours a day, every day for weeks. You know, that kind of concentration applied to watercolor or whatever I was studying later in the visual field. But I didn't regret the years as a musician, but a more direct route would have been to go directly from the army to an art school and to have been done with my education.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: My transcript goes from 1945, when I took my first harmony course at College of Puget Sound in Tacoma, to I think 1958. That's a long time to be studying, you know. I mean, with alternate times to earn enough money to pay for the study. I was not big on the scholarship; I was always to old to win any scholarships, or whatever. (laughter) Just _____ but not _____.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Were there any other individuals at Eastern Washington University that influenced you?

GLEN MICHAELS: You're thinking of Eastern Washington College?

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Yes. Students, teachers.

GLEN MICHAELS: Nan Wiley was the head of the department. And she was a sculptress. I remember. . . . It's hard to separate what really influences you. [Not that] I took courses with her. The thing that really was the fact that she was working on a piece of sculpture in obsidian, which is the hardest, it's as hard as flint. And she did this beautiful piece of sculpture out of obsidian. That impressed me very much. I mean, you learn an art by example; you're impressed by something that somebody has accomplished. I don't think there was ever any newspaper article about her obsidian sculpture, but it was hard material to work in and she succeeded, and the finished product was as finished and as satisfying as a piece of pre-Columbian jade or something. It had that kind of satisfaction for me. So by. . . . I feel that just by osmosis I sort of picked up a love of material from Nan Wiley, a love of material that later transferred itself to tile.
I did a few mosaic-like things in design classes or something that. . . . I was twenty-six, not nineteen when I studied with these people, so I think I got more out of them being older, and less scholastic aid, _____ financial aid, but I mean there was no bitterness, and when I say this I just. . . . I guess I was a slow starter in the field of art, so I started at twenty-six and. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What type of work were you doing then? Were you experimenting in a lot of different media and just getting your feelers out?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, at the. . . . I still had a basic love of cartooning. I was on the staff of the Yale Record—you know, when I was at Yale—and at Yale Daily News and all that sort of thing. Incidentally, that did help me, you know, when I was in New York, to say that I was on the staff of. . . . You know, when I wanted to get a recommendation for my book from Peter Arnow or whoever, they would gladly write a little something and I always felt it was because I was on the staff of a magazine that they had been on, you know, or something. But when I went into the field, to a sculpture class, I couldn't help doing sort of whimsical things. You know, wire sculpture that. . . . It was all new to me. I wasn't that familiar with Calder's early works or anyone's. I remember there was a wire, a lot of wire and a lot of scrap metal, so without realizing it I was reviving the Dada period of sculpture. (both chuckle) So I was, you know, sometimes ignorance of a field is a great advantage.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Yes.

GLEN MICHAELS: You know, it was all fresh and new to me, and it was only later when I studied that I realized it had already been done, you know. Then it was by accident that I realized that even in painting my main enjoyment in work was putting things together, as opposed to the idea of taking a piece of granite or obsidian or something and chiseling away and finding the living creature inside. Mine is putting all those chips together and trying to glue the world back together, I think. And I've still been doing it. You can see in this house we're trying to put things back together. So I suppose schooling is mainly a search to find your own vocabulary and your—for lack of a better word—your materials, you palette, whatever you're going to use.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm. So at this initial art training in Spokane, did you feel that you were coming into art study very naive from. . . . ?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, no, I. . . . Hmm, I came to the Eastern Washington College of Education because I wanted to be, then, a fine art teacher, not a music teacher. So it was as simple as that. I never had any burning desire to be famous, to be well-known, or notorious, or anything of that sort. I only wanted to be the best I could possibly be in whatever field I chose. And I wanted to be the best possible teacher of art, maybe. . . . And I was thinking of specializing, maybe teaching the deaf or something, using it—art—maybe combined with my musical skills, whatever they were, to show that there could be a combination of the visual with music as a therapy, that sort of thing. And that was in, I think, in the years before it was, before there was much exploration in that field. I did get a chance when I taught at Cranbrook to combine the, you know, music and [visual-Ed.], and see some results with children when you would work with Debussy as opposed to Mozart and then Chopin, different, and Stravinsky, whatever, without actually putting a record, you know, the boring thing: listening to a little bit of a record and then having them splash the watercolors around to the rhythm of whatever that record is. There's a great advantage of being able to play a snatch of music, play it on the piano, and play it again, and play just that part. And then still retain the children's attention. And I say children because I think music is a very valuable thing, especially in the early years to combine with the painting and that. So I just wanted, in answer to your question, I wanted to be a good teacher, a good art teacher, and that was a good school.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Had you taught any type of classes before, or why did you decide. . . . ?

GLEN MICHAELS: I've always taught. I've always taught. When I left New York, I decided, when was I most happy, and I was most happy when I was teaching in Seattle. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: I see.

GLEN MICHAELS: . . . not most happy when I was practicing eight and nine hours a day and struggling, and I only taught in order to pay the rent, in order to pay the room and board, because my money in Seattle ran out after the second year. By money, I mean the money I'd earned in the army and in vaudeville and. . . . I didn't play in a burlesque house; it's just vaudeville used to be in Northwest; right after World War II it was still going, and most of you don't remember it—or even think about it—but there used to be a vaudeville act between each of the films. There was always a double feature.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: I see.

GLEN MICHAELS: And so there would be. . . . I remember getting ready to go out and play. You had to wear makeup, and I'd hear the knife-throwing act (laughter), and I'd know it was time for me to go out and play Rhapsody in Blue. And then I remember the. . . . Let's see, there was one, well, there were so many different interesting people I met. Mickey Rooney's dad was Joel [Yule], was in the, at the Palomar Theater in Seattle. And Chill Wills, who I still see on television. I remember—and I see him in movies; he was in, oh, I remember that thing with Elizabeth Taylor, was it called Giant, or what was it, it had Texas, movie? [based on the Edna Ferber novel—Ed.] Anyway, Chill Wills was a Western character actor. And I remember the piano in this particular theater was on wheels and I was playing the piano, it started moving away from me, so Chill Wills came out and pushed the piano so I could finish the polonaise or whatever I was playing.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: It was, anyway, the money earned from these days was enough to live on for a few years, you know, because I just saved it. I mean, I didn't have many expenses, and just, it really, your expenses are very small when all you're looking for is a piano to practice on many hours a day and a room and board. And that was relatively easy to find a couple who worked who wanted to rent one room and you'd raid their refrigerator, so that's the way I lived for four years, I guess, until I went to Yale.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: After Eastern Washington University, what did you do? Did you come right to Cranbrook after that?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, I got a job teaching. I was asked to teach in a small town. It was a high school job, and it just sort of, somebody asked me to teach, you know, the superintendent had heard of my painting or whatever, I don't know. But anyway, there was an opening and they gave it to me. So I taught there for two years. I always have a strong feeling that any job—and I don't mean part-time jobs—but any teaching job or working with a corporation or something, you should give it at least two years, because, to find out if you do like it, or just in your records it's very bad to have a two-month job and then a three-month job and that sort of thing. And so I taught for two years. The reason I quit was because I wanted then to work on my master's. I felt if you're going to be a teacher you should at least get a master's, and, you know, you should continue studying anyway; all teachers know that, no matter what the field. You're aware of current events. Just like doctors, they're always aware; they have to be aware of the latest thing. And just like people in the art field, that's an obligation; you should be aware of the things going on, whether you object to them or not. I feel it's a little _____ for the creative people now because the machinery of publicity and such that you have to memorize so many names every year, it would like memorizing the Chicago phone book. But I mean, every place I go somebody asks me if I've heard of this artist or that, and even if I've met them I can't remember their names. But you should be aware. So that's why I went on to my master's.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Now, you were living in Seattle at this time?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, this was that short interval when I did live at home, those two years in. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Oh, I see, in Spokane.

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah. And then I, the reason I came to Cranbrook: I was taking a summer course at the University of Washington, in Seattle, and. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Was this in painting?

GLEN MICHAELS: Painting, design, just a summer course, anatomy, everything. But again, one personality: Glen Alps. He was the one who opened my eyes to Op Art. His whole design concept was optical illusion, taking a flat surface and turning it into a sculptural thing. Experiments that he was doing that were so fertile and so exciting I've never seen anything like since. Well, in a way, when I came to Cranbrook and Wally Mitchell, he. . . . I always felt that Glen Alps and Wally Mitchell were the ones who provided all of the ground work for Op Art, and yet you don't hear of either of them—I mean, in New York in _____. But of course it's understandable: galleries need a product before they can get a percentage, so they. . . . But I have always maintained that the pioneers in the Op field were really the most exciting ones. And some day there will be a research into their products, and there won't be so much mystery as to how the great people in the Op field, you know—or the well-known ones— had their beginning.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Right.

GLEN MICHAELS: But Glen Alps really helped me in the, helped me be objective. It's difficult to. . . . It's not difficult to do one person's portrait, for example, but to conceive of the entire family in the scene it's different; you have to be objective. Well, the same thing with a forty-foot wall; you have to conceive the entire surface, and not only, as if you were able to, like the camera lens, focus closely and step away, and go back and forth. And this is the kind of advantage that a course in design should be. It should allow you to think like an architect. Architects do it all the time. They think nothing of it; their mind can move inside a building. I'm not speaking of every architect, but I'm. . . . This is the ideal of a good architect that he can imagine himself inside the building and outside the building. And it's only now and then that an architect gets a real turkey where they try to design all the furniture or something. But they really have to think like a, sort of like a composer has to think of music in the round, all of the entire orchestra, the whole thing.
Then while I was there—I didn't get my master's; I was just in summer school at the University of Washington—and several people mentioned Cranbrook as one of the leading schools. So finally I made a study of it; I went around and asked every person in the Northwest who had any prestige—I forget some of the names, you know—but every leading artist in the area.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Can you remember some of their names?

GLEN MICHAELS: I asked Opal Fleckenstein, was one. She was a student of Mark Tobey. And I didn't ask Mark Tobey, but I met him a couple of times. I asked—oh, I can't remember his name—one of, a teacher in Spokane, had a very name—anyway, he was a fine painter and had had good training. He wasn't a graduate of Cranbrook. But I just asked them all to name, give me five schools to go to for my master's, and every one of them mentioned Cranbrook.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Hmm!

GLEN MICHAELS: And there were some repeats, but every one of them mentioned the Cranbrook Academy of

Art. Then Frank Okada, who was a graduate of the school, was at the University of Washington, and he told me I should come to Cranbrook. So he wrote several letters to Fred Mitchell, and so I applied and I came; you know, with my earnings from teaching I came to Cranbrook for my master's.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Why did you, what were the reasons that you continued studying painting at Cranbrook? You know, versus sculpture or any other medium.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, I wasn't at, I was always a painter. As a matter of fact, drawing was the thing that was my strong point, and it was my greatest interest. It was just to reinforce drawing that I used color. In fact, when I was painting, in one whole year before I came to Cranbrook I was trying to reduce things to no color, just almost a minimal palette, almost black and white. But I was achieving the grays by using the complements: you know, purple and yellow killing each other, or red and green killing each other. But they formed interesting grays, and so I tried to see how close I could make the, I could make a drawing—it was really a drawing with paint— without turning it into a marshmallow painting. You know, so many people paint with insipid colors, you know, but the painting. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm, the [blahs]. (chuckles)

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, yes. But painting was the most immediate. When I first to Cranbrook I wanted to minor in sculpture and major in painting, but I felt I was a painter, because I'd made my way through Yale by painting portraits. It had become sort of a fad that people would have me do a portrait on the weekend for $25.00 a painting. A lot of them have a lot of cheap paintings of mine, and that was sort of a fad.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Who did you paint? Do you remember?

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh, usually Smith girls, you know, and the guys would bring their girlfriends over and I'd do their portrait, and they carried them home wet, on the train, I guess. (laughter) And so I did a lot of paintings. But that's when I learned to paint fast. And I've always loved doing portraits, and I still do two or three a year now. But the sculpture was something that grew out of painting, later on. I shouldn't say sculpture, I should say bas relief, that kind of thinking, grew out of thick paint. My paintings became thicker and thicker and I realized that I was hoping to cast a shadow. I wasn't so interested in color as. . . . Color is the strongest, most damaging of all the elements. It can destroy the composition, or it can make it, but color is everything. Because it can cover, you know, you can do a white marble relief and paint it and you don't even know that it's white marble; you don't even know that it has a shadow-casting quality, because color can destroy. I mean, I'm not saying anything against color; I'm just saying that it's a constant battle to balance your, the color when you start using shadow-casting possibilities of pigment. But then when you get into the point where you're squeezing one tube of paint out just for one little square, six inches of your canvas—and plus that fact that there's a risk that the whole thing will fall off when it's hung on the wall—that's when I started using tile. This is after I graduated from Cranbrook, that it occurred to me to use tile, because I'd always used tile and different things on the floor, as a still life. By the time I got to Cranbrook, I had sort of gotten beyond the idea of just traditional still lifes. My studio was always sort of a mess. You'll see downstairs, I think they would kick me out of Cranbrook because I had so much junk around my studio.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What was it like studying under Zoltan Sepeshy?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, I studied with Zoltan the second year, the second semester. You see, I got my master's in one year at Cranbrook.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: I see.

GLEN MICHAELS: And maybe they felt I was such a frantic painter they had to get rid of me, I don't know. But I remember the first encouragement from Zoltan was very quiet encouragement, when I told him I wanted to do a frescoe in the real sense of the word: that is, painting wet in wet. And, in fact, the sculpture assistant helped me in this twelve-hour session, when we wouldn't leave this area. I'd done the cartoon for it. And Zoltan very quietly brought the proper pigments to me. He saw that I had ground the marble dust with the plaster—I have forgotten the whole process—but I did some research, and he provided with the material, as long as I was interested in it. He didn't teach it, but he provided me with the necessary thing which, materials and that sort of thing, which is. . . . I don't mean the marble dust, but he did the proper thing a teacher should do: provide materials and provide a sort of backing. And he didn't really teach frescoe painting; I wanted to do it, so he encouraged me. I'd say his encouragement during that time was a great memory for me. But I really learned more from Zoltan when he became my neighbor and friend, after he retired and lived just a block away. We would have a drink together, whatever, and he and Dorothy became very good friends of ours. One time he. . . . At the Art Institute, we were, the four of us were having dinner together with some people, and he made some sort of complimentary remark about my portrait-painting, which was rare—a compliment from Zoltan was rare. But I asked him if he would be willing to give me the secrets of egg tempera. He was one of the great authorities on egg tempera painting. He was a pioneer in that field. And I said I wanted to know about, because I just wanted to know about egg

tempera; it was a different mood than oil painting. After you paint with egg tempera, the brush seems to ooze and slide across the surface in oils, you know; it's a totally different quality. So I said, "I'll do your portrait and then you'll teach me the method. " So he agreed, and so this is, I did a portrait of him that Dorothy has. And he, step by step, he went through the things, some of the things that were not in his book on egg tempera, and it was a wonderful experience. In many of the paintings I did in the next two or three years, they were egg tempera under oils. You know, it was a technique, because he combined varnishes with his egg medium, you know.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm. What other individuals influenced you while a student at Cranbrook?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, without question, Maija Grotell was the greatest influence. I didn't succeed in studying sculpture at Cranbrook. It wasn't open. It was a filled class. They said, "You'll have to study with Maija Grotell. " And, you know, having been a music student, I didn't know any name anyway, and I said, "Well, that's fine. " I didn't know she was the Beethoven of the ceramic field. The major thing about Maija was that she gave me as much attention—and all of us who were minors—just the same intense interest that she gave to her fine major students, the people who were majoring in ceramics. And there were some great students studying with her at that time. Marie Woo and so many different people. But. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Do you remember any other names that were there?

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh, well, let's see, I'm trying. . . . Oh, John Stephen.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: John Stephenson?

GLEN MICHAELS: Stephenson. In fact, I have a beautiful pot that I traded to drawing to John for, this beautiful pot; I'll show you in the other room. And then Laert and Son [Alusiannaninada]. I think I've pronounced it correctly. The husband and wife were, and they were both fine ceramists. And Al Pine was there. Do you know _____?

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: I just don't remember some of the names that come to mind. There was Bob Seeburger was there; he was a fine ceramist. Then he switched, went into the field of design. But again, it was, I think my admiration for Maija was not only that she was one of the world's great ceramists, but she was a great teacher. I have great admiration for people who have the ability to get an idea across to somebody else. It's part of the living thing. This is why I work in materials that—maybe it won't last forever—but I want to make sure I'm using material that will be the best I can possibly use. That's why I had to borrow money sometimes before I can finish a mural. It's bad business, but it's. . . . I'm no businessman; I've got to tell you that. It's satisfying to look back and see a work I did twenty years ago and if there's any damage it was vandalized; it wasn't, you know. . . . Or just wear and tear, even marble can be damaged.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: How did she teach? Was she. . . .

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, by demonstration, and that's why I've always questioned the teachers who say they should never demonstrate for the student for fear they'll copy. I've always demonstrated. I've never drawn on a student's work, or picked up the clay when I was teaching ceramics and exhibit "you do it this way," but you demonstrate on another piece of paper, or with other clay. And that's her. . . . In learning to center, you know, make a big bowl—I have a few around here that I did—she actually demonstrated, as difficult as it was; she was in great pain all the time. I think she suffered from [silicosis] from the glazes and that sort of thing.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: But she was. . . . It was a kindness and everything about her, wonderful. She was Cranbrook to me, as far as I was. . . . I didn't, I don't hero worship. I never have been able to do that, but she was a wonderful person.

[Tape 2]

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: We were talking about Maija Grotell and Cranbrook. Were you in general agreement with the Cranbrook philosophy, or did you have other ideas?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, to me it wasn't a philosophy; it was just an ideal place to feel isolated if you wanted to feel isolated, or to be with people of many different interests if you want conversation. It was a wonderful time because it was exactly right for me at that time, because I needed a certain isolation. And I couldn't stop painting; I painted all the time. And I think within two weeks I had thirty paintings either nearly finished or. . . . Whether they were good or bad didn't, isn't the question. It's just I was like perpetual motion; I couldn't stop

painting. I was so excited about the fact that I would be left alone without responsibilities for that length of time, the whole year. It was a wonderful time for me. And the setting is so perfect. If you want to leave your studio and go walk alone in the woods or whatever. If you. . . . The most important thing to me though was the fact that I would have lunch with a table full of weavers, dinner with a group of architects, and go to a movie with a bunch of painters or something. It was a totally different conversation with each group. And of course, the one thing all students share, I think in any field, is self-centeredness. So their naturally talking about themselves, their own work, everything. It's a wonderful school to listen at, I think, to listen to other people's goals and. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Who else influenced you while you were at Cranbrook? Other students or. . . .

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh, without question. . . . Well, in the first place, influence is a difficult word, because in creative work uniqueness is . . . is just that. I mean, the people who are influenced I think are people who flip through Art in America and. . . . Former students of mine I remember would, they'd come up with the latest thing that's popular in New York and try to paint it and turn it in as a class project. That isn't influence. I think that every painter was certainly aware of the fact that Jack [Madsen, Madson] was painting there. He was a student when I was there, and he later taught at the school. And. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What type of work did he do?

GLEN MICHAELS: He had a tremendous sense of color. One of his gods was Whistler, I think. You know, he had, he was salvaging some of the things that had been done in the nineteenth century, and especially a love of the Japanese culture [that seem to; that seen through] Western eyes. And he had a great love for pigment, for paint, and a strong sense of composition. He was named as one of the top ten young painters of, I'd say 1956 or '57. At least I saw that published someplace in a national magazine. And then he became a student at Cranbrook. Whether it was good or bad for him, I don't know, but he eventually taught at Cranbrook. And I know I talked to the man who showed his work in New York, his gallery—I forget the name of the man. He was complaining because Jack was not producing enough painting to sell, you know. His work was selling, and it was very exciting. It was going up in value. But he was one of the strong influences, if that is the right word. As I say, everyone was aware of his painting. Everyone who had any strength of character would hope to avoid painting like him, in other words, you know.
But I'd say the weavers, not any individuals, but their concept of having to start with a product and rolling it up and not being able to see the thing until it's finished really, that influenced me a great deal at Cranbrook. And the same I experience over and over. With the mural I'm working on now, I won't be able to see the entire thing together until it's all up on the wall. So I have to hold the whole composition in my mind, the same as a weaver has to hold the whole complicated concept—even though they have a design, preliminary design, no doubt, they still have to think of the balance of the whole thing. And they won't see it until it's off the loom.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm. What did you do after Cranbrook?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, the Junior League in Birmingham had wanted to start a project for the community called the Young People's Art Program, which would be taught at Cranbrook, and they were looking for a teacher. And I didn't learn until several years later that they were considering several other students to teach the course, and, anyway, they asked me to teach it and I was glad to have a job as soon as I graduated, so I taught at Cranbrook. And I taught there for [several, seven] years. And it was an ideal situation mainly because of the Junior League. In the first place, anybody involved in that program would have to be, would have to volunteer their time because they had a sincere interest in helping children learn about art. Simply because it was such hard work for them that it was certainly no place to just sort of casually say you were "doing good" in the Junior League. So I was lucky enough to be with very strong women—strong in their ideals and interest, to the extent that some, many of them I still know today as very good friends. Jackie and I kept in touch with so many of them.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Who were some of them that helped you during those years?

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh! Grace Campbell, and Nancy Halstead, Nancy Hintermeister, and Phoebe Matthews. Let's see, there are so many names that are in this community. . . . Lou [Craig, Prague] and Anne Wardrop. . . . Anne Wardrop was the head of the art center that year, I mean, the head of the Junior League part of it. So it's, she was used to success in any project she started, and it was a very difficult thing to arrange, to teach that many—you know, hundreds of children—and also have an art tour program. Her talent for organization was incredible. And it went along for [seven, several] years, largely due to the fact that they started the program in a very businesslike way. First they sent me to Minneapolis to study their program. There was an art program, I mean, they had their program right in the middle of the city in a. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Was that affiliated with the Minneapolis Junior League?

GLEN MICHAELS: That was a Junior. . . . I'm sure it was, yes. That was a Junior League helping. . . . They helped as volunteers and they helped, I think they started a project by financing it the first two years or three years. And I feel here in Birmingham they sponsored it even longer than that. And it was the first step towards bringing

Cranbrook into the community, which now they do as a matter of course. But if anyone could bring a criticism to Cranbrook before that time, it would be that its isolation was sort of heavy. I mean, it was, its exclusiveness was not very good—for the school itself.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: So this was the first time that Cranbrook had reached out into the community.

GLEN MICHAELS: The first time I know of. I know Wally Mitchell taught a children's course years ago. But it wasn't handled in this way. People came from many places just to see the classes and, you know, watch the classes and there was a lot of publicity. And a lot of the students, who are now in their twenties and thirties, have told me that they gained a tremendous amount from that course. And again, I think it was largely due to the setting. The fact that we could take thirty kids out and they could sketch the [village, Villas] fountains, or they go out and study the terrain with snow and everything, you know, whatever. . . . Once a friend of mine had a ram with a, you know, the horns that are so. . . . In fact, it started chasing me during the class. I asked her to bring it out—and a goat, and those were our models. Somebody rode horseback. I never asked permission. I asked afterwards if it was all right to have animals on the grounds, and of course they told me no. But I said I already did it.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Yeah.

GLEN MICHAELS: But it was a wonderful place to have a drawing and painting class, and the kids would come after school and on Saturdays. And then during the week we would have museum tours. The Junior League volunteers would tour the gallery, whatever was showing, and give talks, much as they do at the museum in Detroit. And once the Art Institute loaned us a whole group of puppets, you know, and came out and spent the entire day demonstrating them for the class, and so that was the subject matter. It was also a great advantage to have Junior League helpers. If we wanted to do silkscreen, which we did one time, I had thirty students, so we made nearly thirty silkscreens. I think we made all thirty silkscreens, and so they all had one. And several Junior League members learned the technique so they could assist during all these classes, so it would be a two-hour class, or two hours and a half, and they'd have full help during that time.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Now during that time, did you have any personal time to work on your own art?

GLEN MICHAELS: Yes, it allowed enough time to start the thing I'm doing today. I started. . . . In my studio as usual was a gathering place for a lot of still life stuff, or some things I picked up at the city dump all over the place, just gathered around. And it would be subject matter for my paintings, and eventually it occurred to me to glue some of the tiles and found objects together, and those were my first works. The interest in, again, the sort of interests that architectural students showed in my work. One, Jack Friatt, who was a former student of, disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright, visited my studio one time and I'd gone to school with him, and he said that the little works I was doing would be ideal to cover a whole wall. Now he was, this was way before I showed in New York, about a year before. And a year later I had about sixty of these works. And then I started showing them in New York, carrying them around in New York. They were pretty heavy to lug around.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay, well, let's talk about your artistic development from painting to assemblage to mosaic sculpture, how this all came about.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, I painted because I had a love of pigment, and love of what pigments could do in certain vehicles. I still love painting and return to it every year, some time every year. When I'm asked to do a presentation piece, or prototype, of a mural I intend to make, I usually paint it, because I want them, I think they can see it in vivid color—or lack of color, whatever it is. But the still life is still one of the most valuable instruments, valuable setups, for a painter. Portrait painting is good, or figures, or figures in action, or whatever, but still, for the quiet times of learning still life is still the beginning. Just like a drawing student should learn how to draw a square or a cube and a sphere and a cone and whatever. But my still lifes became more and more complicated. I would put them on the floor. In order to sort of give the feeling of brush strokes in between one object and another, I'd try to make that transition with ordinary humble bathroom tiles that a friend of ours did, or a friend of mine did, mosaics. And so I borrowed some tiles; she gave me a lot of boxes of tiles. Her name is Betty Kahn, very talented student of Carl Milles. And so actually it was Betty's willingness to help me—and to help any student—she had a big studio, and she would allow many students to use her materials or her torches or whatever. She was a sculptress, or is a sculptress.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Did she teach at Cranbrook?

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh, no, she studied there.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Oh.

GLEN MICHAELS: But she, and she had taught in the community at, the Birmingham [Bloomfield] Art Association, I think, and different places. But I asked for some tiles, and she gave me, and I laid them out on the floor and

that made the transition between two objects, say, because it sort of, they reminded me of brushstrokes. And it wasn't until later that it occurred to me to glue them together and actually put them on a panel. My first panels were very heavy because I had, oh, no way of, no understanding of how to lighten the load, you know. The board itself would be pretty heavy. But that was the start; it was the subject matter, the still life.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: How has your music background affected your work?

GLEN MICHAELS: In two ways, I suppose. One is the, to have focused my attention on a given project no matter how mountainous the project seems. Then the second is the, is sort of a vague value, and I think that is. . . . For instance, if I'm playing a Beethoven sonata, I see the entire structure of the sonata—you have to, in order to save your energy through the entire thing—or whatever, whether it's a sonata or whatever. But you, the musician thinks of the whole picture in a sense in the way that an architect has to think of the entire building, be sure you. . . . I know one architect who built a library and forgot to put in the elevators. You know, they had to start all over the next year. But this kind of overall look I use again and again when I work on my murals. And when you see the mural in the basement now, you'll see that if you're not careful it might give you a nightmare just thinking of the, you know, getting all of those pieces together. But it's the overall view, that helps.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Have you done any traveling that has influenced your work? I know you were in Japan in the summer of 1960 and also in Italy in the spring of '65.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, I think that before I went to Japan, the strongest ethnic influence on my design, the fertility, or the fertile sort of interest of taking the few elements and turning them into a design, came from my love of Japanese products and Japanese gardens. In Spokane there used to be Japanese families who were gardening—I remember, the most unfavorable place; right below the bridge. It was my favorite, most beautiful place, before World War II, and you'd look down and you'd see these beautiful patches of farmland and it was like a patchwork quilt: a very small space beautifully tended, and no doubt getting a lot of produce from the small area. As soon as the war started—I remember thinking how stupid; everybody was put—I didn't know where they were sent; I learned later they were put in prison camps, which is immoral in the first place, but in the second place, they put what we call in the west stump farmers—that is, they're too lazy, they don't cut a tree down, they just plow around it, the stumps. So these stump farmers were taking over the Japanese land, which they naturally gave to the people, just took it away from the people, for fear that they would be against the war effort. It destroyed the whole thing, and that made an impression on me at the time: how what was beautiful once suddenly became an ugly mess, you know. They had, they couldn't even put potatoes on, I think. It was quite a large little section, several sections in my home town. I remember the first toys, during the Depression, the cheapest toys and that sort of thing, were Japanese. They would fall apart because—and that really became sort of a cliche, that if it was made in Japan, it would fall apart. Now we, here, if anything we've achieved that much more successfully. When I would buy toys for my children—in any store—I always asked, "Is it a ten-minute toy, or a fifteen-minute toy?" They're designed to fall apart.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: The Japanese packaging, the wrapping paper, everything was beautifully invented. You know, the color, surprising color combinations, all those things influence me, so I was. . . . Seattle, Vancouver, British Columbia, full of Japanese influence, there are stores and everything. So I would say that Eastern vision influenced me very much. It was, it influenced me in a different way I think than it influence Mark Tobey. His was a mature study of it and all that. Mine was just early memories of things that interested me, because. . . . Oh, things like my dad worked on Coulee Dam, for example. It's the biggest dam in the world. It really bored me to death. I would just see thousands of people, by _____ like flies, like fireflies at night. It must have been beautiful, when I remember it all, but it didn't influence me any in my visual handling of anything. It would have made wonderful subject matter for sketches and everything. It never occurred to me to sketch that. I was always sketching some sort of thing based on another world or another culture. But when I did go to Japan, I went with the sole purpose of studying their gardens. And I took hundreds of photograph slides of gardens. I would, I stayed in a Zen temple in Kyoto, [Daikoka Ji Shin Juan], and that was for three weeks of the two months I was in Japan. And every day I would set out and do a photograph, do one, at least one Zen temple and their gardens, and sometimes two in one day. It was, you know, Kyoto has so many places you could spend months there and every day would be filled with beautiful things to see. And I went to Nara and. . . . I stayed with Japanese families when I went there, most of the time, in Tokyo and in Kyoto. And then was lucky enough to be invited to stay at the Zen temple. And I didn't study Zen; I just. . . . It was a wonderful primitive place to live, you know. And very primitive. It seems to me there were no. . . . You had a kerosene lamp to get, you know. . . . I was the only guest, and there was one priest, there was an Obasan, an Oshosan. I forget. One is a maid and one was the priest; I forget which is which. And I never, it was a place where students might come just for, they'd have their own area just to, maybe they were having difficulty in school or something, and they would sort of—it was a retreat for them. And was certainly great for me, because at that, when I wasn't photographing I was doing silverpoint drawings. So it was a quiet place to sit and sketch and look out at a garden, beautiful place.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Oh, is there any other travel you'd like to mention or talk about _____.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, when I went to Italy the first time, it was because I had done a. . . . I hate to, it's difficult to get me out of my studio; I hate to interrupt my work. And once I'm there I enjoy being there, but the first big trip, when Jackie and I went to Italy, was because the airline paid me, part of the payment was in airline travel anyplace we wanted to go, so the two of us went to Italy. And I think we stayed three. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Was this in connection with one of your commissions?

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh yes. I had done a mural for Rockefeller Center, for [El Al Israel] Airlines, and part of the payment was the airfare. So I agreed to it; I mean, that's, they wanted it, my larger work.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm. You've taught in the Detroit area since 1958. You know, first at the Young People's Art Center at Cranbrook during '58 to '65, then at Wayne [State University?—Ed.] for two years, '66 to '68, the University of Windsor from '70 to '71, as well as a lot of community art centers throughout the metropolitan area. How has your work been affected by teaching? What sacrifices have you had to make?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, the sacrifice would be that I would just work later into the night if I felt I had not done my quotas on my own work, you know. This particular area of Michigan is—and I'd say Windsor, certainly many talented students I've still kept in touch with—for some reason, Michigan has been a wonderful ground for creative people. I mean, there's something about the blend of a pioneer quality, you know, the new frontier—I can't describe it—that reminds me a little bit of Seattle and, you know, the west, in the sort of young thinking, and businesspeople and everyone. They're genuinely enthusiastic about a new project, in the city or whatever. And the fact that there are so many architects here, I can't understand it. You know, it's Cranbrook, I think, that has drawn so many people here, and made the whole public aware of the creative people who have been here through the years. I think this has encouraged parents to make it quite a natural thing for students to be interested in art or music. When I was at Yale Music School a lot of fine musicians came from this area. You know, we studied with Ralph—not Ralph Kirkpatrick but [Bruce, Ruth] Simons and, you know, some of the fine piano teachers there. And I think that made my teaching really important. I wouldn't want to teach just to teach, just to. . . . I think that sounds snobbish, but it's just that people genuinely interested in creating something themselves are so self-centered that it takes a, you know, it's good for us to realize how many talents are around—younger talents and it keeps you aware that you'd better work yourself. You know, it's, if you're going to. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: It gives you the push.

GLEN MICHAELS: Yes, yes. It isn't the love of doing good for other people that sends, that is the main advantage in teaching. One of the by- products is you realize there are others pushing ahead and they're doing very exciting things, and with lots of energy and. . . . It keeps you on your toes. I don't feel that teaching is a positive thing in any creative person. I say it carefully. I don't say, as many have, if you teach, then you sacrifice your, the product, because that has to do with your energy or whatever. I would say that the most damaging thing to art teacher is the paperwork and the extracurricular things demanded of you, democratically demanded of you. Other teachers have to do lunchroom duty, then you should. I say that if a school in any place in the United States would want a good art teacher, they should automatically say, "You don't have to do anything—never chaperone a dance, you never have to fill out forms, you never have to do anything other than a written grade of the student." I mean there's so many things that the academic world foists on the creative world that should be thrown off, because it's damaging the students. I'd say the really bedraggled, pathetic arm of teaching is in the creative field—and it has been for years. It's amazing that anything creative ever comes out of this United States with our system being what it is. We have fine, fine teachers, fine talents, and then they just accept the burden of. . . . Can you imagine having to teach a class, and having a mimeographed form handed around to the students after you've taught and they say they're to fill that form out telling you what thought of the teacher and send it into the administration. In the first place, if you're teaching art or music, you're giving them secrets you have learned from your teacher. I studied with a piano teacher, who studied with a student of Liszt. He was giving me secrets that for all I know came down from Liszt. Now, you would be giving this information to a group of thirty students and they fill out this mimeographed form saying what they think of your teaching. You're giving them secrets they don't deserve if that's their attitude. It's the attitude of the creative teacher, should be made lighter, the load of the creative teacher should be made lighter in order to get the most out of the talents that are available. As a result, students are smart, they're young, they come to people who know. They hear that somebody knows about working in, oh, batik or something, you know, some strange. . . . Or working in [incaustic] or something, so they find somebody and maybe they'll have the nerve enough to call and the person will give them some of the secrets, and that's the way they learn. But certainly, in a class, in the first place that's too crowded, you know, in a university, it's amazing that any learning occurs. You know, I don't look on the teaching as a positive thing. It was, I had more energy then, and so I could actually produce, still produce the amount of work that I demand of myself, but I couldn't teach now and produce.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Were the classes too structured? Did you have to adhere to a curriculum structure?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, I couldn't say that. I'd say that if anything they just bent over backwards—at Wayne State University and then University of Windsor—to make it a pleasant teaching situation. And then the fact of changing schedules or doing something for me, no, I couldn't complain about anything of that. So it's just the paperwork work demanded, you know, and the extra things. I'm thinking more of public schools, when I taught in public schools. And of course it's the young students that are being lost. I mean, I know many students I had who I'll bet now are, oh, in the logging business or something. And they should have, they could have been drawing circles around some of the people who are, you know, we go to their shows, because they had encouragement at that very critical early age. The greatest loss in this country is not the raw material—you know, the trees, the everything, all the. . . . The greatest loss is stupid loss of talent as it, as it's crippled in the school system. And I'm careful to mention it is not the fault of the people teaching it, it's their, they need a crusader who would tell the administration what is necessary to provide the proper atmosphere to develop a fine musician, or to develop a fine musician [probably meant to say artist—Ed.]. In the first place, it has nothing to do with democracy: Talent is never handed out democratically. And the training should be appropriately geared to that.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Can you recall any of your promising students that have since gone on?

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh yes. The first. . . . Well, there are so many. I'm thinking of Patty Hewlett, who is working with a film company in Chicago. She's won many, many awards. Of course, I can't take credit for Patty because she was all. . . . I think she won more scholastic awards than anybody I'd ever heard of. I don't know if it's a national record. But in all fields: weaving. . . . Of course, her mother, Fritzi Hewlett, was the head of an art program under the Fords, years ago in Detroit; it was a children's program that she taught. And so Patty had the advantage of the mother who understood creative things. But. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Was she out of Wayne, or. . . .

GLEN MICHAELS: No she was, this was at Cranbrook Academy of Art, in the children's program.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: And, let's see, Gordon Reeves is a fine sculptor in Canada. He was my student at Wayne University. And Scott Gregory is doing some tremendously exciting things, and his. . . . Well, he was my student at the University of Windsor. You know, I don't know what. . . . I'm just thinking of people who had very exciting ideas and were developing them in a logical way. [Kagen Toss-i-on] was a student of mine, and he's developed in a powerful way, because he's made use of his own background, I mean, in culture. I feel that, I hope I had encouraged him in that direction. I mean, I hope that was the thing he looks back at as the thing responsible for his developing, that facet. Because, you know, creative people can go in many different ways and fritter their energies too many directions.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What was his name again?

GLEN MICHAELS: Kagen Tossion.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay.

GLEN MICHAELS: And I could mention so many, you know, it's difficult, you know, to. . . . The most, one talented photographer was Nancy Linn, who worked with on a Tiffany grant. The only thing I ever—I suppose I've had awards, but anyway this is something that just sort of was a gift. It was a most wonderful thing for me, because she given an apprenticeship grant to work with me. And she was just like another pair of hands with the, you know, just totally working with me on the Bell Telephone, you know—I'll show you a little photograph of it. It was a very complex, rich-looking surface, and she worked with me on that and also on another. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Was this in Michigan?

GLEN MICHAELS: Um hmm. And I was given the scholarship, her apprenticeship money and then asked to find somebody who could work with me that whole year.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: And what year was this?

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh, I don't remember. I think five or six years ago, maybe longer. Of course, they, she, her sister Judy had been a student of mine, and she was very talented, or is very talented. And Nancy is continuing her work in photography. I think both girls are working in photography. And they've shown in galleries around here and in New York too. I don't know, that's as far as I could go on names of people. It's difficult. I think of so many I don't know who to leave out.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay. How were your classes set up? Did you assign certain projects. . . ?

GLEN MICHAELS: Which? I taught in so many schools, I don't know. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Uh huh. Well, in general, what is your approach to teaching?

GLEN MICHAELS: It would depend entirely, you see, it would depend entirely on the limitations of the site, in the first place, and the number of students and the age. My favorite classes in college were the drawing classes, beginning drawing. Because I didn't have any wise- guys who came in with a, they'd studied drawing for years, and one came, one did come to me and all these, this typewriter paper with a circle, a different place on the paper. He was working with a circle. It was a put-on, as far as I was concerned, and I just suggested he try counseling or something. I've seen so much of the, you know, the sort of, I suppose they'd be called smart-alecks in the art field, but it just bored me by then, you know, and I probably should have been more understanding, but I just kicked him out. But in beginning drawing you usually have people who really want to learn to draw, they have a love of form, and they don't know whether to go towards the Walt Disney way of drawing or what, and you can sort of help them avoid that mess, you know. I don't mean commercial art is bad; it's so good now, that it's blended, it's hard to tell what is what. There is no such thing as commercial art anymore. It's either good or bad. But see, they're putting me on or they're drawing sincerely or doing their product, making a product that is sincere.
So, it would always start with materials. They had the silver-point drawing or working with earth colors, or working with. . . . Sometimes in a drawing class, I'd cover the entire floor with a huge roll of paper, photographer's paper, two big rolls. Have the paint already mixed up. I know it was a drawing class, but inks, paints, everything, they'd splash around, make this huge group drawing and with a scissors cut out any part they wanted, and that was the beginning of a composition they would then develop into an abstract project, you know. I mean, there were many setups possible in a university that weren't possible with children, because they wouldn't take an idea and develop it. You know, you'd have to do everything. It takes as much energy to teach any group, any age group.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay, let's talk about your commission work. Since 1960, you've had steady offers of commission work, both public and private. Let's talk about, you know, how these come about. Do you approach people? Are you approached? And then your working habits and the way you prepare for. . . .

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, let's go back to the first commission, which was in New York. [In, For] the first two commissions, I was at the Bertha Shafer Gallery; I'd been showing there for several years. And I was, on one of my many trips to New York, delivering some work that I'd just finished and. . . . She didn't sell many; she just was interested in showing them to architects.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm, and what type of works were you doing _____ _____?

GLEN MICHAELS: They were always assemble, just like fragments of my, the works that you're familiar with: tiles and. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Assemblage, um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: Yes. And I remember waiting to go to dinner with Bertha. I'd just arrived in New York, and I couldn't believe she was telling an architect that "Glen could do twenty feet of this," and she was holding up a little thing that had taken me three months to make, and I thought, "Well, if Bertha says I can, I guess I can do it. " And she was a wonderful, wonderfully optimistic person, you know. Well, anyway, she arranged for two big projects at this time.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: We're at the end already.

[Tape 3]

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay. We were talking about your affiliation with the Bertha Shafer Gallery in New York and your first commission.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, the first commission was for the Continental Can Company, and another one was for the Bulova Watch Company in New York. And it was the second one which appeared in Rockefeller Center, which was twenty feet by eight feet. And that was its own advertising, so therefore people would see that mural and ask me to do another one, so that the first works were large enough that they led to other works. There was a considerable amount of groundwork that Bertha was able to do, you know. She did not present my work as individual complete pieces, which they were, but were to be sold to collectors. There was only, they did buy them for that reason. But she had a greater vision than most people would have in those days, and that was to combine my work with architecture. So Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb bought one of the largest works I'd done at that time, and all the other people showing at Bertha Shafer's Gallery were grateful because it was so heavy, it was

right, it was a part of every show; they couldn't cover something over it. (chuckles) And Mrs. Webb bought it and, you know, it was something that she had a certain appreciation of the kind craftsmanship and technique that I was developing. I think she saw what might come. She had a vision too of seeing what might develop out of those early works. Because the early works were uneven in their, in my, I was uneven in my skills, and even. . . . As I look back, I question that I was ready to show the work anyplace. It was just people kept urging me to get the work to New York. The problem of doing works that are designed for architecture almost. . . . Well, the largest problem is that it sort of cuts you out of any serious criticism, because, as one very famous art critic told me, when he had already asked me to let him know if I did any, you know, the large work. He'd already written about my work in a national—or in one of the papers.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Who was this?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, it's not very complimentary, so I'm not going to mention who it is. But I called him and told him that I was now, I'd just finished a large mural, and he said, "Well, Mr. Michaels, we are, as critics, we can only be interested in things if they're in galleries, or if they're in museums. " I said, "Well, you would have missed The Last Supper, wouldn't you?" I mean, you know, I don't quite understand this kind of thinking, but it still exists today. When I, I know of many. . . . Of the steps that I've made, if anyone is interested in my particular corner of work, of pasting, or whatever I'm doing, there were certain developments made that were earthshaking, to me, in the next step. When I did this forty-foot mural in St. Louis, in which I cut a wedge of black into the upper left hand corner, architecturally it seemed to support this huge lobby roof that was an addition to the hotel. It was a. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Was this the Chase Plaza Hotel?

GLEN MICHAELS: Yes, Chase Park Plaza Hotel. But there was no mention of these things, no. . . . In other words, if my work had been obedient enough to the laws of gravity, and if it would have been rolled up and put in a gallery show, then it would have had its normal, damning criticism, or praise or whatever. But as it was, it was not in the realm of that which was to be criticized. I did have regular articles in Progressive Architecture and that sort of thing, on little fragments, these pieces I would bring into Bertha Shafer's Gallery. But when, what I'm saying is when I actually landed the commissions, and after I left the New York Gallery for various reasons, I found that the serious world of criticism was absent, neither negative or positive.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: How did you come to meet Bertha Shafer?

GLEN MICHAELS: I was told by so many people who kept visit. . . . Tex [Shewas] visited my studio, and Yamasaki and several different people, when I, it was just a total mess, when I. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: At [Aye-an-dro]?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, this was in Birmingham.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: In Birmingham.

GLEN MICHAELS: On Park Street. I had the entire top floor of an old house there. And when I'd make so much of a scrambled mess in one room of the tiles and everything, I'd move on to the next room. It was just, it was a wonderful studio. And several people told me I should go to New York, so I made two wooden suitcases that would hold two of the works, I suppose. And I had met Balthazar [Korop] by then, and he photographed some of the works and sent them off.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Is this the late fifties?

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah. Let's see. . . . Yeah. So I had photographs and these two heavy cartons, and went to several galleries, and I think there were, two or three showed a mild interest, and one of them was Bertha Shafer. And I say mild because it's very hard to think of these things that are so heavy—you couldn't hang them on the wall, and they were too rough to use as a coffee table top, so. . . . But anyway, I. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Were these mosaics mounted on plywood, or what type of materials?

GLEN MICHAELS: Yes, it was just tiles laid next to each other, making use of a glue that would allow them to sort of appear to come away from the wall. So this was its, the first, the thing that had been tried by architects in the past, but they didn't have the material. You know, there's an illusion to coming away from the wall, but a bas relief is limited by gravity. And these were, because of the wonderful glues and epoxies and _____, you could sort of come away from the wall. Then evidently, I was the first to make use of the most mundane material—like bathroom tiles and kitchen tiles, and clipping them and finding some beauty inside the tiles, and making use of that, and putting so many thousands of them together. Perhaps I was the first to do that.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Were you using found materials or did you purchase a lot from ceramic supply places?

GLEN MICHAELS: No. Most of them were found objects and one of the things about collecting found objects is that everybody believes every day—and I'm grateful for it—but except one person brought over an old plow and put it in my studio. I thought that was too large a found object.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: (chuckles)

GLEN MICHAELS: But no, many. . . . When I was in Japan. . . . I went to Japan before I showed in New York. It was one summer after I'd taught a couple of years at Cranbrook. I went to Japan one summer, went into a department store and asked for "all of the little black parts, they're made of glass, that are used in a game called Go. " And they're, the look like M&M's, and they were held up in customs about three months because the customs people kept breaking them open wondering what, why I'd want boxes of these things. And I used those things in my, you know, in addition to tile. Everybody who looks at them wonders what they are, unless they are Japanese or unless they know the game.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm. What are they made of?

GLEN MICHAELS: It's glass. It is a deep purple glass, but on the exterior it looks just as black as ebony, you know, but it's an interesting glass shape. The white ones looked too much like plastic or something, even though they too were glass. In my choice of material, it's always a question of doing, is it. . . . If it's too commercial, or you know, [swatzy] looking. . . . I mean, you know, can you imagine doing a mural out of plastic forks, for example? Really disgusting looking thing. I mean, this is the sort of thing. I require many pieces of the same size and shape, to show the innate possibility in turning them into something that ______ curves or. . . . In other words, it's making use of mass production, but trying to avoid the boredom, you know, try to erase the monotony.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Let's get back to your early Bulova commission in New York City. Did you colloborate with an architect, or were you given full freedom, you know, in chosen space or area in the _____.

GLEN MICHAELS: Not really. That was a very difficult commission, because in the first place it was not the practice of corporations at that time to be even vaguely interested in any art products. And in order to make it interesting to the board members, it naturally had to have some purpose. Any great outlay of expense always had a purpose. For instance, fire escapes have a good function, when the blaze in on fire you can get down the ladder. But art, at that time, was not in that category. It had no purpose. So they had five requirements. This mural had to show that Bulova was involved in the space age and Bulova was involved in not just clocks and everything, but, you know. . . . So the result was that. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What year was this?

GLEN MICHAELS: 1959, I think. The great danger for anybody showing in a gallery to do something for a lobby or for a reception desk or something is that they risk somebody labeling them as a lobby muralist, which they certainly, they didn't bother calling me that until after I did a few lobby—or was quite successful in getting some of the jobs. But my feeling is that—it was then, it is today—if somebody has a vision that requires a big space and a lot of weight, I'm not going to expect to build the thing in my backyard and hope some, you know. . . . It has to be a part of architecture. And it has to be in a place that is where they want, where they require that sort of shape, like lobbies. I mean, the architects have created huge—or at that time—had created what we thought were huge areas, and with no solution to them. But now, the architects with the malls and all this sort of thing, they've created even larger, gigantic spaces, and they're not being approached in a mature way by the design committees, nor by the artists themselves. And I have a whole way of thinking about that that only leads down a negative alley.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Right.

GLEN MICHAELS: I'd rather think positively. And I still feel that I must have been right, because some of the people who were criticizing me at the time eventually became my competitors, for the same lobby space. So I think the works, the gallery can be a place to show things, but it is not necessarily the end product; it doesn't have to go from gallery wall to living room wall, and if it doesn't do that, would it be art? I mean, does that have to be the criteria? It's. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: When you do your commissions, are the pieces assembled directly on- site or onto the wall, in the case of the Bulova commission, or are they assembled, you know, on plywood and then put up?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, again. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: How do you work? What's your technique?

GLEN MICHAELS: Again, everything, whether it's play-writing or music, everything is blocked out, in some way. There's always some way of blocking things out. And again I return to Cranbrook: I learned to block out my murals, or to do the initial sketch, from Marianne Stringell, because she was this wonderful weaving instructor when I was there. And I saw her showing some students how she would armfuls of wool on the floor, you know, thread and different things, twist some of them, and give you the whole idea of what a rug would look like. No weaving was involved; it was just thrown on the floor. Gravity held it together.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: So I learned from that that you throw tiles all over the floor, all of this materials that I might use: wooden pieces, ebony, or whatever, but pieces that I've collected. It would all be laid out on the floor first so I could look at it. And that would be my sketch. And it wouldn't be for anybody's eyes but mine. So that's the initial sketch. Now I use that as a device sometimes for somebody who might be interested in a work for their walls. But it isn't essential now. Usually people who want my work know that the finish product will be sensitive to the environment. For instance, the one I did for Detroit General, or Detroit Receiving Hospital, Bill [Kessler] has a tremendous skill in color, and in color sense. So I did the opposite. I became a foil for this. . . . I wasn't going to add. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Compete with that surrounding.

GLEN MICHAELS: . . . compete or try to jungle it up, because it's too large of space right over the reception area. So I just borrowed from his other reflecting qualities, chrome and whites and grays. The whole thing is done in that. So it erupts from the wall, and it doesn't depend on color.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What do you feel has been your most successful commission, and why?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, it sounds like a pat answer, but it's the most recent one I'm doing, and never more strongly than right now. Because of the—I don't know how many murals I've done in the last twenty years. It doesn't matter; it's just I have pasting constantly for twenty years, and it has led up to an awareness of what I want to see on a wall or on a surface, and it's coming about in this work I'm doing for Oakwood Hospital right now. In the first place, I always. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Oakwood hospital was where?

GLEN MICHAELS: In Dearborn.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: In Dearborn.

GLEN MICHAELS: It's the guild in Dearborn, Lola Smith and Muriem . . . Let's see, Saks? We'll have to do this over if I can't. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Well, we can correct it.

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah. Anyway, just a moment. I'm [going to check] her name.
[Interruption in taping]

GLEN MICHAELS: Murium Saksa.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay.

GLEN MICHAELS: Anyway, the reason I think of the two of them, it's—and all people on that committee—this is not just an exception; it's the rule today, in most of the things—it takes a few people—the Detroit General Hospital, with Irene Wall and Olga Dworcka and a few others—to get the necessary funds to put up a wall. Especially it's necessary today because the public thinks its tax dollars, its tax money is being used for. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Public space.

GLEN MICHAELS: . . . public spaces, and something like that. So these people who are able to raise the money are very, it's very important, and I'm pleased that this very important work is occurring at this time. It's important to me because at last I'm achieving a work that when it's finished will look like the wall was covered with one sort of undulating wheat-colored surface and that I've sort of chiseled into it and found areas that are bronze. Bronze seems to grow out of it. It's. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What materials are you using to achieve this?

GLEN MICHAELS: Tiles and bronze and brass.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: But it's sort of something you dream about and hope you will achieve in each work, but this is sort of a plateau right now that I've reached in. . . . And could satisfy that sort of awareness that I've reached this goal by a few little pieces, but here's a wonderful opportunity to do a work ten feet, six inches tall by thirty feet wide. And working with an architect that I've worked with before, Tom Harris. And that is, as long as we're talking about architects, it is rare to find architects like Tom Harris and George Zonars, and a few others, who really understand that a little area underneath the, you know, where the—the molding around the floor—is every bit as important to the work on the wall. As light switches that somebody might want to put in. In other words, helping me avoid the thing that I always compare to a plastic plant put in front of your work, or an exit sign, or something. I mean, it's way beyond this. These two architects, when I've worked with them, have made sure that the way the work fits the wall is every bit as architecturally sound as. . . . Oh, in the stairway, or anything else in the building. And you'd be surprised the number of architects I've worked with who totally ignore anything; it's all up to me. In one instance I had to have a wall built to put my work on. I mean, there wasn't any support in the thing. And it isn't that it's the architect's fault; it's just they somehow are not amenable to [need] them, and then very rare. When you work with art, you're totally dependent on an architect's sort of vision and his cooperation.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: From the outset of this new building, was there a space in mind for, you know, for you to execute a piece?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, this is an addition to an old building.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay.

GLEN MICHAELS: But, and I think that some of them might have had me in mind for the simple reason that I've done a mural at Wyandotte Hospital, and at Scott Memorial Hall Medical Center at Wayne, and also at Detroit Receiving Hospital. I refer to it as just Detroit Receiving because it changed its name from Detroit General Hospital, you know. [A dog has joined the conversation—Ed.] A few people have mentioned the fact that there's a positive sort of favorable therapeutic quality in an interesting work in the lobby or in the waiting area. It's questionable whether a realistic thing that tells a lot of the story about the medical field is very cheerful when you're waiting to find, you know, or waiting, the patients are waiting to see somebody in the hospital. And I don't mean that you have to always use cheerful colors, I'm just saying that it should be something that can arrest your interest for a while. So there's that; that might be one of the reasons: that it would fulfill a real function in a hospital. I understand there have been some studies on the therapeutic value of color, and that sort of thing, in reference to uniforms and the rooms and everything else. It should extend to the lobby too, because the people waiting downstairs are sometimes the most neglected, and the most, you know, most ignored of people visiting, coming to a hospital.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Do you just work on one project at a time exclusively?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, I have at least four small, or five smaller works, always in process. And I do some _____ drawing and paintings in, you know, that I might do during the week. And I usually have, like right now I have, let's see, four major projects plus two. . . . I've got about twenty works I work on at once. I'm trying to add them all up, and I really, during a year's time, as I look back, I have twenty works in process at all times, but when I'm preparing for a show I need to have many more. Because when you're preparing for a show, it's wise to prepare about sixty boards, then you can choose some. Some of them never see the light of day because they're turkeys. But you have to do it to finish the thing. And you throw them out when they're finished. But you have to have the. . . . Some of the ideas are so experimental that you have to do them, just to see if it's palatable. The older I get, there are fewer and fewer things that I take that far. There's one I'll show you in the basement that I was in question about, because it was coming away from the wall too far, and it was a wonderful twist, and it is, it will work. It's a white and bronze work, white tile and bronze. And that will be in the gallery.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What other key pieces have there been in your career?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, it is a good question, because you know my work well enough by now to know that one is always limited by the site, by the space, and you have to. . . . You don't have to do the work for the building, but if it will enhance the building, it's to your advantage, or in your development. But some had a happy situation. One I did for Richard Roger's home. Dorothy Rogers, who is also very sensitive to visual things, and one of the leading designer. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Is this in New York?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, it's in Connecticut, in their. . . . It's not a home—I guess they live there year around, I'm not sure. I think they went back and forth to New York. But that work was in a sort of problem area, a little sun porch, and so it wasn't a. . . . It was a surprise to see a work up there, so it had to be important. You look out at

the swimming pool and you'd see a _____ bronze hanging near the swimming pool, so the water, all of the colors influenced what I did. It was tailormade for the side, and it appeared in Look magazine two years ago. But it was, that was a favorite of mine. Another was the World Bank, which is now. . . . It used to be called the International Monetary Fund Building, and they moved across the street and I guess it's now called the World Bank. But there is a forty-foot mural I did for that. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Was that Chicago?

GLEN MICHAELS: In Washington, D. C.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: In Washington, D. C.

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah. That was, you know, as I look back, it was the surprise of seeing it as you go up the stairs and then look back and there it is. You know, it's sort of the unexpected place in discovering it. And I think both of those works share that same pleasant surprise of a site. It's sort of within the rules of an important place, but it has the element of a surprise. Some of the. . . . Well, the happiest two works are, to me, are here in Michigan, the Manufacturer's National Bank mural.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: In the Renaissance Center?

GLEN MICHAELS: Yes. And because there are so many, not only good memories of working with the archiect, but the people involved at the bank were genuinely interested, as it progressed, and then I have the feeling that the people who worked in the bank are, you know, from what they tell me and what they told [friends], really enjoy and it takes away, it gives something to their day, because, after all, it is a wall that's a reverse lobby. They're looking at a wall, you know, from the teller's cages [at many times] and it's, well, it's a big airy building that still could be a confining feeling if your desk is facing a wall. So I have many good feelings about that as I look back at it. And Detroit General Hospital, or Detroit Receiving Hospital mural, over the reception desk, that too is a favorite, because of many other reasons. The skylight, the light, the setting is. . . . [Interruption by a third party, whose voice continues in the background—Ed.] The setting is ideal, you know, and I had worked with the architect before and we knew the sort of. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Who was the architect?

GLEN MICHAELS: Bill Kessler.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Bill Kessler.

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah, and he's one of the reasons I feel that, you know, we do live in a very important architectural center. Because the people around here, [Hoona Burfords] and Bill Kessler, so many are becoming not just nationally known, but internationally known. And I mean there's so many there's no point in mentioning them; they are. . . . To remain in the field of architecture in Michigan, it's a major area, just as New York is. Dallas. I do think that. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Why do you think. . . .

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, I think that Saarinen and, you know, that sort of wonderful period, sponsorship by the Booth family here, gave its major thrust in the field of architecture, but perhaps it's because this was always an industrial town and whenever anything was done in an architectural way, they know this isn't the city that's been planned like Paris, or planned, you know, beautiful avenues and everything. It was necessarily sort of a hodge-podge, so when somebody did a building it had to be important. I mean, maybe they too far in cleaning house, I mean, just starting from scratch, but it. . . . I'll tell you one thing; it's a beautiful city from Windsor. They have a treat of one of the most beautiful skylines around, and that is. . . . You know, I'm very optimistic about Detroit. It's a, it has many of the problems of the big cities, but it has greater possibilities because of the [graft, crap], because of the destruction, to start over, areas to start over with. And it had some good strong architects to do things. And of course there have been many mistakes. I think that the automobile people are used to thinking big and so the solutions are big. Certainly, the Renaissance Center might be an example of what the architecture will be in the future, that whole city in one unit. And then maybe nearby would be another unit, and then the. . . . This might be the future; I don't, to say, to conserve energy, might be one of the by-products, you know.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay. Getting back to your commissions, your commission at Renaissance Center mural. That's 160 feet long. How long would that take? And do you do sketches on the wall first and then apply each mosaic tile?

GLEN MICHAELS: No.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: How is something in the round, such as that, done?

GLEN MICHAELS: When there was nothing but concrete, cement dust, and everything down, there wasn't even—I remember a lot of rubble around there— George Zonars went with me when I [graphed, wrapped] the entire area with white paper. And then I took buckets of dust, you know, like paint, powdered paint, and a few big brooms and huge brushes. And I already had pencil sketches of what I, how I, the way I wanted to treat the walls. Incidentally, the two walls interrupted by two doors. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Yes.

GLEN MICHAELS: So that had to come into consideration. But in order to get a sweep that would normal, that would be natural, if it were a watercolor brush and you were painting on a table, it would be due to the sweep of your wrist, or your whole arm. Well, for some of these brush strokes they had to have the natural sweep and energy starting at one point, and so I'd take this huge broom and sweep it the full length, to get the right direction, on this paper. The paper was lined off with the cartoon line and then returned, I returned with it to my studio and then had them cut the boards to conform to these sweeping brush strokes, or broom strokes. And then because it is a very serviceable area, and because I think one of the miracles of the modern age is the fidelity with which a mold will capture any surface, even fingerprints. But that's a, it isn't the fact that that's covered with Naugahyde; it's a pigskin, true pigskin surface. Anybody would know no pigskin in the world could cover 160 feet. But that's what we chose as the paper to work on, the environment.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: So the pieces were then covered with the pigskin Naugahyde, and then my designs were cut out and each of, I don't know how many pieces, many pieces, were brought out to my studio. And then when I finished doing the assemblages in my studio—and they were all laid out occassionally five or six of them at once so I could get the idea of what they would look like—then the boards were put on the walls, on the circular wall, and then the pieces were pressed into their space, you know, into the holes that were left. In other words, it was really putting a puzzle together. And it had to be very well planned, because no matter how carefully a building is designed, the floor is slightly uneven, or something you know, so it had to be installed with great care.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Let's see, how important was the influence of color and light in your mosaics? Do you, you know, for each space. You usually use grays and, you know, maybe some mauves and bronze colors.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, one, the Bell Telephone mural is alive with color, many bright colors, because it had a particular sort of function. When you get off the elevator, I wanted you to automatically head towards the reception area, which was, you know, it was right on the executive floor. And so it had to be sort of a thing that would draw you to it, so it has more the look of a tapestry, fourteenth century tapestry or something, than a mosaic. So color was very important. Lighting would enhance that particular one. They've never put the proper lighting on that one, so it's really. . . . I've only seen it when it's been photographed with photographic lights on it. Again, anything larger than three feet by four feet, you're a slave to the electrical trade. So all I can say about lighting is that I shudder when somebody says they're going to wash my wall with light, because that means bleach it out. And you know how boring it is to look through family photographs and see everything bleached out, you know, too much light.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, that's the. . . . The painter doesn't suffer from that too much, because you can build your own painting, you know, your own mood in pigment. But anything that is a bas relief—and especially where you want certain strong shadows to give a mystery to it—can be bleached out.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Do you usually, can you usually control, you know, the_____?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, nothing can be controlled permanently. The next people in charge might decide to put coatracks in front of your building, your work, or move the light fixtures.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Sure.

GLEN MICHAELS: But at the World Bank and at the Renaissance Center, many places, they've allowed us to, or we've been consulted on the lighting. But the function of the room is also, is most important. You can't make it beautiful, get beautiful moods that look like a bar or something, you know, if the person has to work at a desk nearby.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Do you feel you have more freedom in executing private work rather than corporate work?

GLEN MICHAELS: No. No, because as soon as people are interested in my work, they naturally want the best I can do, and they don't, you know, make a runner run in anything but running shoes. I mean, they don't, I've been very lucky that way. There have been a few commissions I didn't do, because I could see—I would tell them I was too busy or something—because I knew that I couldn't do, well, I would have to quit half way through and take my tiles and run, because there is no greater obligation than the obligation to the people behind, you know, who have already helped pay for your work.
[Interruption in taping]

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: . . . talk a little bit about what you think you're trying to achieve in your work. . . .

GLEN MICHAELS: Umm.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: . . . which is a real difficult question.

GLEN MICHAELS: It's like, What is art?

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, it isn't a matter of what to achieve; it's a matter of, an awareness that you want to awaken again and again. And that is. . . . I'm sure if you've written a particularly good letter to somebody, they have a feeling after writing that letter, that's certainly totally different from the time when you pay your telephone bill. That letter you just send a check, and the letter, sorry I'm late in paying it, or something. I mean, there's a different feeling in the feeling of accomplishment. So I guess it's that awareness that I see in every work I do, no matter how small. And. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: An awareness for yourself, [awareness for, of the people that are]. . . .

GLEN MICHAELS: Awareness, of. No. I can only speak of my own awareness. I don't know what other people are [dealing]. There's no greater compliment than when people buy it, though. I just feel that when I finish a work, and I have that feeling, then it's eligible to go on somebody's wall or in a gallery. If if doesn't have that feeling, only once did I finish the work and I sold it and hung it up on the wall, and I called the—it was Sig Blum, an architect—and he was good enough to honor what I said. I said, "I've just put this work up,"—it was a major commission years ago—and I didn't have the feeling. And I know as I looked back what was wrong with it: it was pretentious. It was full-blown, it was, something was wrong with it, so I asked him if I could remove it, and forget it and start again. And then I did a beautiful white-on-white work—at least it was beautiful. . . . I left with a good feeling, that it was right. I think only cooks really know what I'm talking about when I talk this way, because that's why I use the word palatable. I mean, taste, good taste, _____, it means nothing. I mean, ugliness means nothing, beautiful, but palatable. You know when you've eaten dinner and you get too much red pepper and it's not palatable. So there's something about a fine chef and that is the quality, feeling of achievement, I hope, in every work, whether it's a portrait, a silver-point drawing, a piece of jewelry, whatever. So that I'll look at it ten years from now and still like it. What was your question? I forgot. (chuckles)

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Just, what were you trying to achieve?

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah, that's what I'm, I'm aiming for that feeling, I suppose with. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay.

[Tape 4]

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: This is a very general question: Are there are any artists working now with whom you feel strong affinity?

GLEN MICHAELS: Umm, I don't feel any affinity individuals, in my work. I feel an awareness of the history; you know, I'm constantly aware of things that are influenced by, oh, maybe Moorish columns or Celtic interweaving of materials, whatever. But it's more culture, influencing. But if you'd want to reword the question. You mean, are there any artists that I enjoy right now?

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: That you admire, yes.

GLEN MICHAELS: I'm thinking of three: [Nagari] is one. You know of his handling of stone? Well, maybe he isn't. . . . I never know what an artist's Hooper rating is, or how famous he is; I just know what appeals to me. And I remember a few years ago seeing several of his works. He would take a stone and just with very little change to the stones, he would create a beautiful piece of sculpture, beautiful abstract. It had all of the qualities of that stone that would be in, have a prominent place in a Japanese garden. And yet it had a timeless quality.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Is he American, or. . . ?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, he's Japanese. Japanese.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: From Japan? Nagari?

GLEN MICHAELS: Nagari, yeah. [Hawkin's Ferry] had one of his pieces near the terrace I designed. And it was very effective [out, right] there, a stone piece. Another person who, because he was the first to use a material in a way—he was copied later—but he's in the Hirschorn Collection and everything, is Peter Stern, Jan Peter Stern. And he works with aluminum—or steel—you know, metal forms. And the one who is most compelling, I think of it as most power in realism, is Elizabeth [Frink]. She's English. In fact, she's showing now in this country, but I first saw her work in 1956, no, '59 and '60. She showed at Bertha Shafer's Gallery. And at that time she was doing these strange birds that would be screeching, or something. They had a lot of vitality and it was strange that anybody could take just this dumb bird and it would. . . . But it's in bronze and it seemed so full of energy. Now, we saw a show of hers when we went to London, and we took the children to London a few Christmases ago, just for the Christmas season. And for the first time I met Elizabeth Frink. We have friends, mutual friends. And I told her that I had admired her work for years before, you know. And then, she and her husband showed us some recent works. She'd had a show with Barbara Hepworth, I think, a two-man show. So those three people share one thing, and I think it's an unmistakable sincerity, just. . . . I think they will be landmarks. I don't know what their publicity, therefore their rating is now, but. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: I say rating because I know it's so confused by people with certain publicity advantages and sort of, you know. . . . It's hard to tell what the art scene is nowadays. Even when you know that they can buy a full page in a magazine or something, become. . . . (chuckles) You know, the publicity is no longer a barometer.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm. Okay. Let's talk a little bit about Michigan and the midwest environment. For most of your career, you've worked in Michigan in the Detroit metropolitan area, and have you found this climate conducive, and how has this surrounding industrial environment affected your work, if any?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, certainly it affected it, because it couldn't have existed without one major thing. And that is, that all of my experiments have been with the most contemporary materials. Even though I've been combining things with bronze and ebony and ivory, things that are salvaged from the past. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Is this as far as adhesives?

GLEN MICHAELS: Adhesives, and I've even done structures of plastics that [eventually, represents]. . . . Two year's work, all of it thrown out, because it eventually came to. . . . Their value to me is the value as an armature or an adhesive, or rubber molds or silicon. I mean, the things that are available here in Michigan that are used in the automobile industry would be just out of sight in New York. I mean, it would be, they'd probably send to the manufacturer here. I mean, when I wanted to use a rubber mold called Black Tuffy, for example—it's a wonderful mold that they use in industry—the owner of the company, Jim [Renger], made a trip out to my studio and gave me a demonstration! And you couldn't get that sort of thing [anywhere else—Ed.] As a [result—Ed.], when it happened. . . . Another time, I asked students from Cranbrook if they'd want to come to my studio and watch this demonstration, in case they wanted to use it. See, a mold to a sculptor is not something to mass produce his work; it's to get greater fidelity than you might get if it were a plaster, breakaway mold. All of the things of industry have been of interest to me. When I worked in glass, Thermopane, I've done things. . . . I would go down to a glass factory, or place that made Thermopane windows, and they would. . . . I think the place was called Twin Panes industry, and they allowed me to work right there with the epoxy, do the. . . . Then they put the window together and, you know, between two panes of glass, would be this whole stained-glass window without the aid of lead to interrupt it, you know.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Hmm!

GLEN MICHAELS: And those were experiments that could only have occurred here. But as far as an environment that. . . . When you use many, many materials, its logical place is basement. So I've always been in a basement. And so I would be productive no matter where I lived. So I think that it's more the people and the interest in architecture and materials that are so favorable here. Plus the fact I happen to love Michigan. I think it's a beautiful state. If I only had time to explore it more.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm. What do you feel are the most influential institutions and organizations, artistically speaking, in the area, regardless of if you've had contact with them or not?

GLEN MICHAELS: You mean, for artists or for. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Yes.

GLEN MICHAELS: I think yours—the Archives of American Art is. . . . We were discussing that a little before; it was born here. And the Art Institute, I think, is probably the most continuing influence for me, because I. . . . You know, if I've missed a show or two, I feel very bad about it, because, you know, there really have been some very important shows at the Art Institute. The music here is very alive here. It's [Poplar, Pomford], and English, and David [DeKaris]. [David] had also the high level of musicianship in the symphony, the things at Cranbrook, the Joan Schwaders, the things that she has worked on at Cranbrook. So it's just an interest that's shared by so many here. It isn't an institution; I mean, I've already mentioned Cranbrook. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Sure.

GLEN MICHAELS: . . . as being one of the state gems here, you know. I was so pleased recently that Roy Slade has been efforts to restore it to what it was in the, you know, when Saarinen was there. At least they've succeeded in his own home. And that's a very healthy thing. So actually those institutions, you know, Art Institute and the. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Do you feel the Detroit Institute of Arts has been responsive to artists in the community, both artists and craftspeople?

GLEN MICHAELS: Of course, I'm sort of negative about that sort of thing, because I've always questioned just the idea that because a person was a Utah artist, or an Idaho artist, or something, that he should have, that we should. . . . I mean, if a tremendous fountain specialist, living in Ohio, and [just-Ed.] because we have the Michigan money to build a fountain, I don't see that we should take somebody from Michigan just because he happens to have been born here or paying taxes here. I'm not that democratic. I feel that too often the regional, or this provincial feeling can be a negative thing for future generations, because you end up with this thing that is of questionable value, when we could easily have had one for the same price by somebody from the next state. I mean, that's why I never can understand that sort of thing. It's beyond me.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Sure.

GLEN MICHAELS: I think New York started it. I think New York is the most provincial oasis in the world. I mean, they can only see this part. I don't mean that it isn't a creative place, but some of the thinking has been very negative and not to its own good, in the fact that they see nothing beyond New York. It's sent a lot of talents away from there, the centers.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay. Locally, here, your work has been handled by Peggy [DeSalles], the Little Gallery in Birmingham. How did you meet her and how was she as a dealer?

GLEN MICHAELS: Peggy DeSalles had an immediate understanding—and Albert—Peggy and Albert DeSalles had an immediate understanding of what I was doing years ago—before I showed in New York. In fact, when Bertha Shafer—I had already negotiated to show my work in New York, when I met the DeSalles. And. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: When was this? The late fifties again?

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah, right, '59, I think it was in '59, yeah. And I remember writing from Japan, writing to Bertha, that I just had one request. She had asked that she have an exclusive on my work. And I said, "I just have one request. I'd like to be able to show at the Little Gallery in Birmingham; that's the only way that I could have an exclusive, and then you can have anything else, but I just always would like to show there if I want to. " And she agreed to that. So I've been with them up until the time that my work became more and more commissioned work, and there just wasn't time to put shows together, my drawing. I think that the combination of Albert DeSalles, who is always a step ahead of everyone else in his understanding of things in the art world. . . . He was, not only did he have the intuition that you hope a dealer has, but he was so articulate. He would express things in a few words that people would think—at least, I have [thought] I wish I had said that in that way, you know. And combined with Peggy's energy, and she always referred to it as her "nose for" I think. . . . Well, she has a certain awareness of what is right. I mean, she would go to Japan and come back with the most beautiful things. And yet everything was available at that time, but she would, her choice, her eye was very special. Her eye's always been special in jewelry and things. But his was a more intellectual kind of eye. It was a wonderful combination for me, at that particular time. Because it allowed a showplace for my drawings, and paintings, and things that never would have come out at a gallery, because in New York they only wanted to see things done in the assemblage technique. And I showed those too at _____. But there came a time, just as in New York, when it more logical to be sort of a solo person, and then it was years later that—I mean, after I left the gallery in New York and I left all galleries— Then a little later on I showed at Bob Kidd's Gallery, and that was a totally different environment, and a totally different. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Was this just recently, in the late seventies?

GLEN MICHAELS: I guess so. Whenever the last show was; it's been two years since I've had a show there, I

think, maybe longer.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: In 1977 you had a one-person show at Kidd's.

GLEN MICHAELS: Was it? Yeah. Well, it's time I prepared for another one, soon I guess. But it's, if a person were given a choice of galleries in this area, it would be hard, because I used to show at the Lester Arbin's Gallery, years ago. So it's, each gallery has its own sort of environment. One of the great favorable things at the Kidd Gallery is that both Bob Kidd and Ray Fleming and the people involved are also actively involved in the field itself.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm.

GLEN MICHAELS: It's not that wasn't; Peggy was a weaver. It wasn't just a person who would, isn't just going to sell other people's works. She was a fine photographer. And some of her, I understand some of her best negatives and everything were lost in a flood, which is very sad. She was one of the early photographers in this area.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: What type of things did she do?

GLEN MICHAELS: Oh, I know she did a portrait of Leonard Bernstein that he used in his publicity, and she was connected with the Art Institute for a number of years, photographing the Rembrandts, doing special studies where the light would reveal things about Rembrandt's painting techniques that only the camera could pick up. To know Peggy, when you know Peggy, it's hard to think that she's this kind of. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Exacting.

GLEN MICHAELS: Yeah, she has that kind of thinking combined with all of her vitality and everything. But she's, you know, always been a very vital, sort of magnet, in every, in anything connected with the arts community.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: I know years back you were appointed to a special art commission by Governor [Romney]. Are you still serving.

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, that was a group. . . . [Eileen, Aileen] Saarinen was in the group and Marshall Frederick. That was just one afternoon. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: I see.

GLEN MICHAELS: In which we were invited to look at the models presented by [Smith, Hensen and Grilles] for the state capitol. We were presented with these five different projects and. . . . My feeling about that sort of thing is that there should always be a margin for change in any presentation. That meeting seemed to be one in which we all looked at these five projects and there was no feeling of let's take this idea and extend it, or anything. It was also a time when I lacked the tact that I now have. I was, you know, I didn't really feel that they were appropriate for the site. I wonder if they do this in the medical field, if they ask a group of doctors to discuss another doctor's work, you know, in front of a whole crowd, and say, "Now, how do you think of this appendectomy?" It was not quite the way to go about, you know, assuring that ones of the designs might be, or something might be revamped from one of the designs. They all had an integrity or they wouldn't have been there, you know; they wouldn't have been in front of our eyes. I don't know; I have strong misgivings about the committee meeting to discuss something that is going to be set up in front of the public, because it assumes that everybody has a vision, and most people can't even tell the carpenter where to put the window in the kitchen when they're remodeling their kitchen. They say afterwards, "I didn't mean it was that wall; I meant it was the wall over there. "

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm, sure.

GLEN MICHAELS: So it would have to assume that everybody understood blueprints and everything else, when these committees meet.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay. What are your views on fine art versus craft? Do you think there's a difference, or are there any kind of dividing lines?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, you know, when you listen to a musician, are there any dividing lines between the right notes and the wrong notes? I mean, one is called a sloppy musician and one is called a musician. There is no separation between accuracy and sublime quality. You cannot think of Myra Hess playing the piano and think of craftsmanship or accuracy; you don't even think of anything. She just reaches your heart. This is what happens in the visual arts. You don't think of Durer as having very nicely sharpened instruments to do his etching or, you know, "isn't he to be congratulated for so many strokes in one square inch?" I mean, that isn't, there is no separation. There is. . . . I will say that skill should be so much a part of the creativity that you're not aware of

any effort.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Okay. Do you have anything else to add? Or would you like to discuss anything we might have missed or you think pertinent to your career?

GLEN MICHAELS: Well, we didn’t discuss something that is sort of in the beginning stages for me right now, and that is the treatment of a design element that is. . . . The repeat design. That has not really been approached by creative people. Whether it’s a building material, or whether it’s a fabric, or a wallpaper, or a module to be used in highways, or whatever, even if it isn’t designed to have any [unity] at all, so it isn’t a decorative thing; it’s just an accidental repeat design that occurs over and over. I recently have been involved in two projects, one in Mount Clemmons and one in Mocomb County College Auditorium. In both of them I’m using a module, several modules that I’ve designed, that fit one into each other, in such a way that it breaks the [onus] of the repeat design. And if this could be then transferred to fabrics or transferred to wallpaper, or whatever. . . . I see nothing wrong with the creative people designing anything that is needed, that is looked at. I don’t that wallpaper is down here and a mural is up there. I mean, I think. . . .

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Everything should be given its due. . . .

GLEN MICHAELS: Everything. Well, every field could be a subject to approach in a design way, you know. And the auditorium, the people—[tear apart with me; Terra Potter with me] and architects, Maury Allen was the architect who called me. And I didn’t realize that they’d always had an interest in the acoustics, and in music, that they had already built a reputation for helping to solve the problems involved in acoustics. And the fact that they would choose my work for the many facets would help to enrich the sound pleased me because of my interest in music. And then it gave me a chance to work out this five-year experiment I have been making with squares that fit, that each edge would fit itself, and each edge would fit several other squares. So that I would be able to solve both the sound problems and not bore the people with a repeat design.

MARY CHRIS ROSPOND: Um hmm. Have you been working with acoustical engineers and. . . . ?

GLEN MICHAELS: No, it’s, the basic thing. . . . I’ve been interested in their work. For instance, the manufacturer of this module has found that with different mixtures of plaster, he gets a harder surface, not only from the lasting quality of it—it is a wall that’s with built-in damage. So that if it’s damaged through the years, it isn’t a big deal. This is the nature of the design itself. It has a repeat motif within each little module, but they’re not, the craftsmanship is not so precise that it’s boring. You know, it’s not so, it has a certain rough quality. Excuse me.

[Interruption in taping; some conversation ensues with others and the decision was apparently made off tape to end the taping session.]

END OF INTERVIEW

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