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Oral history interview with George
Tsutakawa, 1983 September 8-19

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with George Tsutakawa on September 8, 12, 14 & 19, 1983. The interview took place in Seattle, WA, and was conducted by Martha Kingsbury for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

DATE: SEPTEMBER 8, 1983

[Tape 1; Side A]

[GEORGE TSUTAKAWA reviewed the transcript and added clarification, particularly about the World War II years. His added comments with his initials are in brackets--Ed.]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: George, why don't we start by talking about a lot of biographical matters. I'd like to know about your personal background, your family, your growing up in Seattle and Japan also, education.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Uh huh. Well, let's see now. My father was a merchant who came to Seattle in 1905, and he started a small business and eventually he gets involved in fairly large company exporting and importing American goods and Japanese goods. He, as I recall, had business in Japanese food, clothing, art goods, and all sorts of things from Japan, and then in turn he was sending lumber from the Northwest to Japan. He also dealt in scrap metal and just anything.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That he sent to Japan?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, he sent to Japan. Well, I was born in Seattle in 1910 as a second boy and fourth child. My family was, my father had a very large family: nine children and I was a fourth child. In other words I was about in the middle of this large household of brothers and sisters.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were your parents married in Japan?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did they come to the United States together?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. Well, my father before coming to the United States was already married to my mother, and I had a sister (older sister), who was born in Japan.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: However, the rest of the family, all the rest of the eight children, were born right here in Seattle. And, well it's a long, long history you know, I mean story, because this goes back 73 years. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's okay; I want to hear it all.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I was told later that when I was a year and a half, my parents took me to Japan for a visit -- with the other children, my older brothers and sisters. But for some reason they brought me back to Seattle after a short visit to Japan, and again when I was seven years old my father took me to Japan with another brother and left me there for ten years. And I was raised by my grandmother on my mother's side, in a small town called Fukuyama, which [is-Ed.] in Hiroshima prefecture. A small town, about 30,000 people, with a beautiful castle in the city; it's a feudal town surrounded by mountains and a beautiful river that flowed through the city out to the inland sea, a very beautiful place. And I lived there and went to grade school and high school in Japan for ten years before returning to Seattle in 1927.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you lived with your maternal grandmother, did your brothers gradually come over and join you?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, they all lived together. My father was so busy with his business and my mother was so busy having children, and fortunately he was financially able to send all the kids to Japan.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The girls too?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. Boys and girls both.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did the girls live with the same grandmother?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, you lived together?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Same grandmother, yes. The reason for this was that the village where my father came from was way up in the mountains in a farm community, and they had no facilities for educating children. That is, my father felt that it was too backwards.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So he wanted us to have good education. That's why he chose this town of Fukuyama, which is, as I already mentioned, an old feudal city, but highly cultured ancient city, oh about, at least a thousand years old.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So it was, for him, it was an ideal place to raise his children. That was the reason for it. Besides, my grandmother comes from an old Japanese warrior, Samurai family, and she was well educated, but also very strict. So she really took charge and gave us a very good education. Now. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But you went to the village school with all the other Japanese children.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes, oh yes. That's right, oh yes. Many interesting experiences. When I was seven years in 1917, my father took me to Japan and immediately put me in the Japanese grade school, second grade. And I couldn't speak a word of Japanese.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Not a word?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And I had already gone to Lowell School grade school here on Federal Avenue, just right by Volunteer Park where I was born. So I spoke fluent English just like all the neighborhood kids. So when I went to Japan, I had to just forget my English and learn Japanese in a great hurry. Although it was kind of interesting because all the kids in the neighborhood in Japan called me a foreign pig because I was well fed, had a lot of milk and butter, I had a light complexion, I guess, and [was--Ed.] real plump. And so they all teased me and they really gave me a bad time for a while. Until I, I just learned to speak Japanese and forget English. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: All your brothers and sisters were the same; they spoke no Japanese in Seattle.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. They all went through the same experience. But it was interesting, then in 1927 when I came back to Seattle at the age of 17, I couldn't speak any English.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So I had to go to grade school -- the old Pacific School, on Jefferson -- to learn English.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: For how long? A year?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, actually, you see, I was already 17 years old, but I was put in first or second grade to learn from ABC.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: With the small children?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. But that didn't work very well.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So they created special class for grownups, for foreign students, which was a little better. Although the problem was all the Japanese and all the Chinese and all the Philipinos always got together, they spoke their own language, didn't make very good progress in learning English. (chuckles) But anyway, my teacher, Miss Thomas, was a very fine teacher, very understanding. She decided that I shouldn't be wasting any more time there, and she sent me to Broadway High School after one year.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So when I was 18 years [old], when I became a freshman at Broadway High School, sitting with the, you know, freshmen. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Thirteen-year-olds.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But you had already had high-school subjects, mathematics and science, in Japan?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. Yes, I did. I had four years of high school in Japan. So all the subjects except English and civics and history or something like that I had no problem.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Because I had all the science, math, and botany, zoology and all that. So anyway, that's all right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So now I'll turn it off? It's on!

[Break in taping]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I just wondered. I suppose we could go back and talk more about my childhood in Japan, though, later, maybe; I don't know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, I would like to, sooner or later, hear more about your childhood in Japan. One thing I was going to ask in relation to the high-school education we're just talking about: Do I understand that the curriculum in Japan included no English instruction then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. This is very true. It's very strange, though, because the English instruction then, all the Japanese children, even today, more so today, consists mostly of reading and writing and grammar and memorizing words, but when it comes to conversation they're just absolutely helpless in many cases. And that's why I think today there's more effort on their part to invite American teachers to come and teach English and other subjects in English.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But when you were a child in Japan, you did not learn English reading, even?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: None at all.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: See, in this little town, Fukuyama, there was one English missionary.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, and that's all!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Only foreigner in the whole city.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So you can imagine. But English was taught in high schools by Japanese teachers who learned from Japanese teachers, you see. And so, it was interesting. And maybe that's the reason why after I returned to the United States the English language came to me very easily, quickly, because I already had the basics in English grammar, and not so much in diction and word usage and expression and all that, which I had to learn.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you want to go back and talk more about your life as a child in Japan?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, maybe I should, you know, because. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How about your grandparents? What were they like?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All right. Eventually, the reason why I became interested in art will come up in our conversation, and therefore in order to explain some of that I'd like to say something that is my experience in Japan. First of all, I already mentioned that my grandmother, who raised us, was a very well-educated, cultured woman. And she was well versed in Japanese poetry and calligraphy and music and Noh drama and Kabuki and all those subjects. In fact she was one of the patrons of the local cultural groups which studied and performed on the stage. And when we were children, my grandmother used to take us to these performances.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And I was only about seven, eight years old, ten years old, when she took us. And made us sit there -- in fact the Noh performance in the old days lasted all day. You start by eight o'clock in the

morning, take a box lunch with you, and you sit there all day.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you don't leave during parts of it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no, you're not supposed to. You just stay. Of course, we kids used to run around a lot, and then be scolded and told to sit down and watch.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, we had that experience. And then my grandmother used to send us to a Zen master, in the same town, who told us stories, usually religious, and also stories about way of life. And this Zen master was a potter, calligrapher, and painter, and tea master. And so we were told to sit and first listen to his lecture, stories, and then he would make green tea, or go through tea ceremony, and make all of us kids --small class, maybe eight or ten -- drink this bitter tea, have a small piece of candy, and then we'll all go to his small kiln, and make things with clay, and this was a small pottery class.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you go see him every week?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Once a week. It was a regular thing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you go to a house, or did he live in a temple, or temple compound?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, he had just a private house, which was a combination small temple and residence.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And with a teagarden, or teahouse?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, a teahouse.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. And he was a Zen master, and that's how [he] made a living. I can't, I don't understand -- I still don't know -- how, whether he was hired by anybody. I think he was an independent tea master and Zen master. And he took students, and I think the parents gave him something [for taking] care of the kids. But that was a very unique experience, you know. Later, of course, as we grew older. . .

[Break in taping to answer phone]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So we were talking about the tea master.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well, as we grew older, and go past teenage, or when we're teenage, of course we revolted against all this, you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Even while you were still in Japan?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. So we said that's nonsense, you know. We'd rather play baseball or fencing or some other sport. And go to the Hollywood movies. Now there're not a lot of little things about Japan at that time. In this small town, of 30,000 people, there were three movie theaters. And two of them were showing Hollywood movies! You know, Buster Keaton and Charles Chaplin and Harold Lloyd.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: With subtitles?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: With Japanese subtitles?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Now can you imagine? Now this was 1920s. All right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What did the third one show?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: The Japanese movies. Japanese, so-called Chambara. Chambara is the sword-fight stories [and melodrama--George Tsutakawa], or Japanese Westerns.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. Even in the twenties, already?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yeah. And Japanese people were very fond of Hollywood movies, and we knew all about Hollywood. This is 50 years ago, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's the world-wide image of America.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. And all right, now, let me tell you a few other things. In this little town, there were a small group of artists who either studied in Tokyo or in Paris, oil painting! And there was one young artist, had long hair, and sort of a beat (chuckles), beatnik type, who had just returned from Tokyo. And he had a big one-man show - it seemed big in those days -- of oil paintings! Now in this little town, we were already looking at, and reading, art magazines. And the art magazines --I still have some around here somewhere; I'll show it to you sometimes -- carried reports from the art scene in Paris.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, it was European oriented?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, European paintings.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were they published in Tokyo?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, published in Tokyo, circulated all over Japan. All right, now, I have a little interesting episode or thing that I want to tell you. In 1927 I came back to Seattle and went to Pacific School for a year. In 1928, I entered Broadway High School, and enrolled in art class, and my art teacher never heard of Picasso, Matisse, and Leger, and in this little town, way out in the sticks in Japan, we were already talking about Picasso and Matisse.

Now, this probably has nothing to do with this biography -- but you know I think the Americans, especially and the Westerners all so surprised to see Japan make such a quick and complete recovery from devastating war and. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, we appear perpetually astonished.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All right, now. The thing is a lot of people still believe that American occupation of Japan for a few years after the war completely reeducated the Japanese people. But there's something that they fail to understand, and that is, 50 years ago my contemporaries, people in their sixties and seventies now, were all watching Hollywood movies, and listening to Beethoven and reading Tolstoy and the great European philosophers' and writers' works, and painting.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, I guess by the 1880s, Japan made itself very oriented toward Europe, very diligently knowledgeable about Europe.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, yeah. So you know, the leading Japanese people, scholars and statesmen and businessmen in their seventies, had a very good background, even before the Americans came, you know. So they understood the whole thing, what was going on in the world. They were ready.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. I think it may be that Japanese people, early in this century had a much stronger interest in European culture than Americans did.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, in a way.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And that Americans were very ambivalent, very equivocal.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Because we had concerts in this little town, again, which featured Schubert or Beethoven or Wagner, you know. In a very crude way, but they were doing it, in a little town.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And did your grandmother go to that as well as to Kabuki and the Noh?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, my grandmother didn't go to all those; she still wanted us to go to the Kabuki and the Noh plays and go to the flower arrangement shows, you know, exhibitions, things like that. Okay, now there's one more aspect that. . . I'm saying all this because I think it has a lot to do in my later choice to become an artist. And that is my grandfather, on my father's side, was a very interesting man. I was told that the Tsutakawa family was very wealthy landlord, way up in the farm community inland. And when my father grew up, or about that time, my grandfather owned a whole village. And they said, they told me that you stand on his property and look in every direction and he owned every forest and every mountain as far as you could see from his house. Okay, now. The reason why my father came to the United States was because of my grandfather, who was a playboy. And he went to Kyoto, the capital city of Japan, when he was a young man, to study art, and to. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He was a playboy in the sense of culture, not just social activities.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, so he wanted to be a tea master, and Zen master, painter, poet, and all those things, and he went to Kyoto. And he lived like a young prince there, and he squandered the Tsutakawa fortune, used it all up.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What did he squander it on?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, if you go to Kyoto, the capital city, in those days, sure you can buy a house and go to these masters, and pay tuition, and then go to the geisha house, and eat good food. And then after so many years, he came back to the village and brought with him, well, half a dozen masters with him, and he built a small palatial house to house these masters, to give lessons, you know, and do their thing. And so by the time my father was about twelve years old, the whole fortune was gone.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, so you never saw any of this?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No. So, my father had to go to work as a young man, about 14 years old, went to Osaka. And went to a very large import-export house, and learned business. So. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So that's how he learned the trades that he carried on in the United States.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right, so he came to the United States when my grandfather had nothing. But, the important thing is, when I was growing up, my grandfather was still living, and he was still doing flower arrangement, tea ceremony, and paintings and all that stuff.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Where did he live and where did you see him?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, eventually my father buys back -- he was a pretty shrewd businessman; he made good money -- so he buys back a lot of this old property, and then he puts grandfather back in his old house and he lived very comfortably.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you would go to see him there?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It was in the same prefecture. . .?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, it was a different prefecture. Okayama. Next prefecture, not very far. But anyway, he was a very strange kind of eccentric man, and he didn't like most of the grandchildren. Now you imagine, my grandfather was one of nine children, my father was one of nine children, and I'm one of nine children. So you can imagine how big this family is, how many grandchildren grandpa had. But he didn't like any of them except me, for some reason. And he would call me and tell me to come and stay with him. And every day he would make tea for me. (chuckles) And make me sit down and go through this very formal. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Ceremonial tea.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .ceremonial tea! Well anyway, somehow he liked me. Well I liked him too, in spite of the fact that he squandered all this, his fortune. So anyway, that was a great experience, so I always remember him.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Would you go and stay with him for a week or two at a time?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes I did.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Very much apart from the others, yeah.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Course he died a long time ago, but I still remember him very well. So those all, my grandmother on my mother's side and grandfather on other side were the, I think, the influence on my thinking and later actions and attitudes.

[Tape 1; Side B]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think I told Gervais Reed some of this.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I was going to ask one more question that came to mind when you were talking about your life in Japan there. You mentioned those painters who had studied in Tokyo and Paris and painted in oil.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you yourself ever paint in oil or Western watercolors then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Uh, no. No I didn't, although I became interested in doing sketches. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You did?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Dessin [French], charcoal drawings and things like that, very simple things, about that

time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And did you do them in an essentially European manner, with perspective and shading and all those things.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think so. Yeah, I used to watch these professional -- well, they were sort of a professional artist -- work. And also look at these art magazines, and I was very fascinated by it. So about that time I think I became interested in drawing. In other words, what I'm saying is that I really didn't have any basic art training in Japanese painting, sumi painting, I never did.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But much exposure, even in Japan, to Western art operation.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. Yes. This is the interesting thing, you know, in a little town out in the sticks.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can you recall whether any of those artists made their living from their art or whether they all had other jobs.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I don't know. I can't tell.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can you recall whether they themselves argued at all about whether they should conform to their Japanese heritage, whether they should conform to European criteria?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, all I can say is that these Japanese so-called intellectuals were just all-out for European culture. And every day they were talking about Schopenhauer and Tolstoy and Shakespeare and paintings by the European painters -- Rubens and Corot, Cezanne, Van Gogh just dead serious. And they didn't pay any attention to Japanese art.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So among themselves there was a very strong, clear focus and the pull in the opposite direction was from completely different people like your grandmother, who didn't want to read Schopenhauer at all (chuckles) and wanted you to go to the traditional.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, I think it's interesting that somehow the traditional art concept stood, and survived, shall we say, in spite of the strong European influence.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think it did even with them, you mean?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Did what?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think the traditional Japanese concept stood even among those artists who occupied their minds with. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I think so. Of course, the Japanese art, the traditional Japanese art in the last hundred years, has changed a lot. And it had its ups and downs, too. And so they were very much in competition with the Western art, but I could probably say that in the last 20 or 30 years there was a very strong revival of the traditional Japanese art tradition, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. But when you were young there was nothing like that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, we didn't. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That you were aware of?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, it's interesting, though, because of thanks to my mother and grandfather, I was probably exposed to a lot of traditional Japanese art because in our house, like my grandmother's house or my grandfather's house, they always had very fine collection of paintings, which they had hanging in the alcove, you know tokonoma, in which they change seasonally or hang pictures appropriate for the event or the season. And we were all exposed to that, very much so. So in my own case, I think it was always going side by side, Western idea and the traditional Japanese thinking.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you feel that you've had very strong exposure to both.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well I would say, more than average children. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, sounds very much like it.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, yeah, I think so.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Certainly more than average American children.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. That's why when I came back to Seattle. . . Well, there's another thing. In Japan when I went to. . . Well, it starts from the very day I went to Japan and went to this village and found myself unable to communicate with the children in the neighborhood and I was dressed differently; I was so frustrated, you know. And somehow, that feeling stayed with me all through ten years in Japan. And as a result I hated school. I didn't like Japanese school at all. And of course my father was very frustrated with me because he expected all [his] children to be the best student in the class, you see. And my father was a hard-working, self-made business man, and he expected all the children to follow him. And then here I was, I was a terrible student. I was always failing, and the reason was I just didn't like school. And I think it goes back to the time when I had a hard time learning Japanese language.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you came back to the United States, as it turns out, you went to a great deal more schooling. Did you like what you did in the United States much better?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. Much better. Somehow it came more naturally to me. And of course one of the things was that I had the strong desire to want to become Americanized. I wanted to be, well, forget about Japan, and learn the English ways, American ways as fast as I could.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you were a student in Japan, as you became older, ten, twelve, fourteen, did you look forward to returning to your family in the United States?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Not really. Maybe I did subconsciously, but I didn't realize it until much later.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you leave behind close friends in Japan your age?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, yes. And also my brothers and sisters, they all, you know, stayed. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Many of them were younger and stayed?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .stayed, except one sister, who was a founder of Uwajimaya, you know, the Japanese store in Seattle?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. Sure.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, the madam of that store is my sister, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But the others stayed in Japan permanently?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: They all stayed in Japan. My sister and I are the only ones in my family that came back to Seattle.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I see. Now is this a sister who is close to you in age?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: She's two years older than I am.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Two years older. Did she come back and work in your father's import business then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. She came back about two years after I came back. I think she came [in] 1929; I came back [in] 1927.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did Uwajimaya grow directly out of your father's business, or indirectly?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, it sort of, in a way. Because my father already had a big import-export house right here in Seattle and also a large market, which I managed for several years. But my sister married another Japanese who had a grocery business in Tacoma.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But when the war came, Tsutakawa Company was confiscated by the American Government Alien Property Custodian, because my father who happened to be the owner of the store, was in Japan at the time the war broke out.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So it was confiscated. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .rather than sold at a tremendous loss, which it might have been anyway?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, we never got it back. We lost everything. That was a big company, warehouse full

of merchandise and half a dozen trucks, big company in those days.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So then Uwajimaya grows out of your sister's husband's business in Tacoma.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, right. So he moves to Seattle and starts over again, the same type of business.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: One more question. Your parents then stayed in the United States? Or did they go back to Japan and join all those children?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, they went back to Japan and stayed on; that's one of the reasons that the Alien Property Custodian always regarded Tsutakawa Company as an alien company, and didn't want to return it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Because so many of the family had returned to Japan?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you raise -- this is an aside from your own biography, but the question comes to mind - when you raised your children here, did they have a strong sense of having cousins in Japan and see their cousins?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes they do. In fact, three of our four children have visited Japan, and they have met many of my cousins, and their second cousins.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: As you said, there must be many, many relatives, the nine and nine.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yeah. For instance, a lot of my cousins and sisters and brother live in Tokyo area now. And so, when we go to Japan, my wife and I, my older brother would immediately call a so-called cousins party, and there'll be 50 people, right there. Overnight!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. (laughter) I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah! Thirty-five, fifty, always! And that's only part of it, you see. It's crazy. And then we go around to Osaka area, Kyoto area, there'll be another 20 cousins.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh really?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: (chuckles) So it's really getting to be too much, but it's fun and we know them all.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you first returned to Japan in the 1950s, was it 1956?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: '56, I guess, it was, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Then it was at that point, a long, long time since you had seen a lot of these people.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, that was after 29 years. And it was a long time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you reestablished many contacts.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, well fortunately we kept correspondence. Of course, my father had already died, and my mother had died, too. Oh no, wait a minute. When I went back to Japan in 1956, my mother, who was a second mother, stepmother, although she really raised all of us kids, because my real mother died in Seattle, she died in that influenza in 19. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .18, probably?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: '18. Right. So, then my father married another. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: She died, then, right after you had gone as a youngster to Japan?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, that's right. I left for Japan 1917; next year she died in Seattle. So we were all raised by our stepmother, who was a marvelous woman, just did a tremendous job, just like a real mother.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But she was here in Seattle, and you were in Japan?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, she was here for a while and then she went back to Japan.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh she did. So she was with the children along with your maternal grandmother.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes, yes, right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I didn't understand that either.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you want to leave Japan as a topic for a moment and go to Broadway High School, which you started to talk about a few minutes ago?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All right, we could do that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Or was there something else you were going to say.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: (chuckles) No, I can't think of anything right now about Japan, except that the ten years in Japan actually was very dear and in many ways sentimental reasons. I often think about it, because that's where I grew up. There was another little thing that maybe I should say at this time, and that is when I was going to high school in Japan, when I was about 16 years old I guess, maybe a junior or senior in high school, all the men, all the students were enlisted as a part of the Japanese army. And when I was 16 years old, I was given a rifle! An old-fashioned rifle.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: This would have been in the mid-twenties.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All the students were given a rifle. And we were to guard that and clean it and polish it like our own. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: To keep it with you? As your own property?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It wasn't just one-hour a week drill.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no, no. We kept it all the time. We had a barracks where we kept all our guns, you know, and we had a uniform. And then once or twice a year, we were taken out with the regular army to maneuver, up in the mountains.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: This was in the 1920s?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was this part of the rising militarism of Japan that I've read about?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, oh yes, very, very much so. And that's about the time of Shanghai incident and the Manchurian. . . Oh God, Japan was very aggressive, in invading China and doing all kinds of bad things in. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How did this feel among the students? Were they excited about it? Were they very. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, it was something that we just accepted, had to do, as a Japanese. We had no choice. It was pretty rough days. . . And then later I come back to the United States and I was in the U.S. Army, you know! So I served in both armies. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In different, different circumstances.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Very, very funny, now. I can say it's funny now, but it was real serious.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Not at the time. Have you any insight or suggestion of why you among the children -- well, you and your sister -- wanted to come back to the United States and become American?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, all right, okay. I guess I have to talk about that a little bit. As I mentioned before, because I was such a bad, poor student in Japanese high school my father was thoroughly disgusted with me. And he thought I was a real shame to whole Tsutakawa family. And about that time -- I think I was probably 15 or 16 years old -- I was interested in becoming an artist. I started to do little sketches and things like that. And at some point, maybe I was 17 or about the same year I came back to the United States, I told my father that, that I wanted to become an artist. And boy, he was really shocked and he just couldn't believe it. And he was real mad at me, and so I think he was really frustrated. He thought about this for a long time, and he finally said to me, after so many months, he said, "George, you go back to Seattle. We don't want you here."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh. Did he say you go back to Seattle and be in the family business? Or just go back to Seattle?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, I knew he wanted me to become a businessman. You see, I had two uncles here in Seattle, who were taking care of this end of the Tsutakawa export business.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you were sent to be with them?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, so he said, "Well, you go back to Seattle. Right now." So he gets a ticket on boat and puts me on the boat, he said, "Goodby." This is very interesting, very touchy, because actually he, the way he said it, and the way it all happened, he was really disinheriting me. He said, "I've got nothing with you anymore."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Like an exile from the family?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, yeah, that's how it happened.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did it please you at all? Or did it deeply distress you?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no. It really didn't hurt me that much. I was very lonely, lonesome, and when I got on that, the steamship, which took about 18 days crossing from Yokohama to Seattle you know, I did a lot of soul-searching and thinking, in my young mind -- 17 years old, you know. But I guess I was determined to become an artist. So I said, "Well, I'll just stick it out, my own conviction, and see if I can make it. That was my attitude.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So, by the time you arrived in the United States, you felt there had been a real break and the determination to become an American, to Americanize, was part then of a determination to make your own way.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, yes, I think that all sort of came about the same time on that trip.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you then live with one of your uncles?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes. I did. Like I said, I had two uncles and their families, and I was like a houseboy in the beginning. My uncles were all having small children, and so I used to housesit or babysit, live here, live there for ten years, a long time. Although. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But they also gave you time to go to school.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. They allowed me to go to university [of Washington--Ed.], and pursue my thing. So I was, well, I was happy.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So first you went to a year of grade school to learn English. Then you went back to Broadway High School. . . Then you went to the university?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Then you mentioned earlier, maybe it was off the tape, that when you went to Broadway High School you began taking art classes there.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can you tell me more about them?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But you know, another thing that a lot of people don't understand, and in a way I don't understand it myself, that is I was already 18 when I entered Broadway High School, and I spent four years going through high school, going through the whole courses, like any other kid did. Well, maybe I was not in a hurry or rush to get to art school or go beyond, so I just took my time, and thought this is the best way to learn English and become a good American. People would ask my age, or they try to figure out how old I am by asking me, "When did you graduate high school? When did you go to University of Washington, enter art school?" Well, I say, "1932." Then they realize that my contemporaries, who went to high school and university art school with me, were all about four years younger than I am. Most of the people still don't realize that. I have to explain the reason how it happened. Because I spent four extra years going to school. (chuckles) Which, I thought, afterwards, the time was not wasted. Yeah, it was good for me. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What did you do during those four years in high school?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, it was just like any other high school student.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But you began once to tell me about the art courses you had there.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yeah, okay.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Who were they from and who did you meet there?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, the interesting thing is, like I already said, I had no problem with math and physics, and you know, all those academic subjects, just English. So I took more art and I started to do my independent work, like printmaking. And I was accepted in Northwest Printmakers [Annual Show--Ed.] when I was in high school, you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Ah hah! That explains that _____ doesn't it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And when I was a freshman in the university, I was already exhibiting in the Northwest Annual [at the Seattle Art Museum-Ed.]. All those things happened. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Slightly skewed from the usual relationship.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right, right. Because I was actually four years older than the average students of my time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did they have the facilities for printmaking at the high school?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes. Well, we had woodblock, woodblock prints. That's all we did, but. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you didn't need presses.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But I did a lot of those, and I enjoyed doing that. In fact, I won a national award in the Scholastic Art Board, you know, the Scholastic Magazine, which ran a big high-school art contest?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I got a first prize in that once, which gave me \$50. Now, in 1928, '29, \$50, imagine how much money that was! (laughs) It's like a \$1,000 today! (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Remarkably big prize.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So little things like that was happening to me.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was that for a print?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, block print. One block print of some smelt, fish.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you have any of your old block prints?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Uh, I still have a few copies of these old prints that I exhibited and won a prize by, somewhere. Someday, when I have my retrospective, I'll show them. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You'll have to find them. When I asked you about things from the thirties, I don't think you showed me any prints.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Before that? No, I guess not, maybe not.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I didn't think so.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I'll have to find them, sometime.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, now a minute ago you mentioned that when people try to figure out you in relation to contemporaries -- there was this age difference and so forth -- who were some of the contemporaries, the people that you began to meet?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All right, now. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You mentioned Morris Graves, once, even back then.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, yeah, I already mentioned that in this art classroom, which is Miss Jones, Miss Hannah Jones, was my art teacher. I had two art teachers. One was Miss Piper and the other was Miss Jones. But Miss Jones was the one we all liked very much and who really taught us a lot and took good care of us. When I say "us" I mean some of these foreigners, the Chinese and Japanese students who could hardly speak English you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And there were many of them at Broadway High School?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Quite a few of them.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That was the area of the city?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, so we used to spend more time down in that art classroom. And that's when we got to know Malcolm Roberts and Jim Hastings and then Morris Graves used to drop in at lunchtime. And he, well, he hasn't changed very much. He was tall, lean, always hungry-looking, and wore shoes or no shoes sometime. (chuckles) And he would come in, half a French bread wrapped in newspaper and small hunk of cheese, and wander in.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Why did he come to the high school? Did he live near there, at that point.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, we still don't know how this all happened.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He was done with high school himself and had come down to Seattle?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I just don't know, because I found out he was not really registered there, as a regular high-school student.

[Tape 2; side A]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you're saying Morris Graves was not registered, he was not a high-school student.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, you know what? I think it was probably because Malcolm Roberts used to come around, and they already knew each other.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, was Malcolm Roberts a high-school student?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that's another point that I'm not quite so sure about. But he used to come and visit us. And he was already doing surrealistic paintings, very beautiful things.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now this was between 1928 and 1932, you were at Broadway?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and see this was before Leo Kenney's time. And I think as far as I can remember, Morris Graves used to get into surrealism a little bit, when he was doing the chalice things, and Chinese urns and containers, and tripod things, you know. Morris Graves was doing things slightly surrealistic. And then Mark Tobey was doing something like that, too, for a while, with a lot of big spatial painting, somewhat surrealistic. I guess they were sort of fascinated by the French school, the Dada and surrealism just gradually coming into the Northwest about that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Where did they get their information? From art magazines?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think so. Must be. As far as I'm concerned, I don't think any of them went back East, New York or anywhere.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Tobey traveled to England, of course, but I . . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, Tobey did, yeah. . . But I'm talking about our little group. I had not met Tobey yet. I met Tobey later on about 1934, '5, I guess, about time I graduated from the university.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You met him after he returned to Seattle?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, about that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: After he'd been gone for a while.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right. Because, well, about that time, I became manager of this large grocery store called Pacific Market, which is a part of the Tsutakawa Company. And when I was a -- kind of jumping a little bit, but --

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's okay.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . . manager there, Kenneth Callahan was already curator for Seattle Art Museum, and also writing art news or art criticism in the Seattle Times, in those days. . . And Margaret, his first wife, was also a writer. They used to come to my store to buy groceries. This was a regular thing. And about that same time, Morris Graves came, and [William--Ed.] Cumming came, and all these people. And Morris Graves, I think, brought

Mark Tobey to my house, to my grocery.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yes? That's how you met him, you mean?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and it's interesting, you know, because being a manager of this market, I was the one to extend credit to all these poor artists who were drawing about \$23 a week.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now you're talking about the late thirties, when they were on the WPA?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, WPA, you know, checks. And I used to cash them.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. (chuckles)

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And of course that was never enough money, you know, to live on, so I used to give them credit. (laughs) So my grocery store became sort of a little meeting place for Seattle artists for a while. Oh, it lasted several years. And that's how I met all these people.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Where was it on Broadway?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh no, this store was on Jackson Street between 12th and 14th. There's a Chinese grocery store there now.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay, so. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, but when we had it, it was a very large [store]; we employed over ten people, we had a grocery store, fresh flowers, vegetables, fruits, and fish market, Japanese and American food, and quite a busy place.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I see. Did the Callahans still live downtown then, so that this was very convenient for them?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I think they lived somewhere near the Volunteer Park, yeah, the museum [Seattle Art Museum-Ed.].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Nobody had moved out north of the University District by that time.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, I don't think so, as far as I can remember. And Callahan, let's see now, was the other one. Yeah, I was just thinking about the time Callahan and Margaret -- I remember the time when they were married! And their first boy came, Tobey. Now this is 40-some years ago, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you finished Broadway High School, did you go straight on to the university or. . .?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And managed the store that you're talking about at the same time?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, no, I hadn't started managing the store until, when I was almost through university.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So it about '34, '35. Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You were at the university until about 1936, is that right?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah, I mean about that time then you began managing the store.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right. Well, there was a reason for that. You see, my two uncles operated the wholesale and the retail and all this Tsutakawa Company business in Seattle. And one of the uncles, the older one, was, had a stroke, and he became very ill. And therefore, my other uncle asked me to help the company, take his place.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I believe I remember your mentioning once that when you finished at the university you had planned to go to Paris.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And this is what prevented your going?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. Yes, that's right. I had already picked a freight line which I was going to take out of Seattle through the Panama Canal up to Paris, you know, and had a lot of planning for this trip, which I had to give up, because of the illness of my uncle.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That must have been a great disappointment, wasn't it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, it was. Well, you know, when you look back, that was the way things turned out, and I don't regret these things.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, you stayed and became very involved in the art circles here instead.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well I did, yes. And I always enjoyed my association with my fellow artists.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Before we leave some of the things we were talking about a minute ago, can I ask you to backtrack and describe in a little more detail what Malcolm Roberts did? I think many of the people we've mentioned did works that are fairly well-known and accessible, but Malcolm Roberts, although I've seen a few things by him, is less well known. Was he painting those weird seascapes with beached boats, when you met him in the early thirties, or can you remember?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I really don't remember all the details, but I remember vaguely that his paintings were a little more like a Chirico, but much more refined. I think Chirico and Magritte. . . Who was the painter who did this beautiful wall with the round window? Was that Dali? Kind of a stone or stucco wall with a round window, beautiful painting, I still remember that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I don't know.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: It was something of that order. It was not too intricate. He had some human figures, kind of a distorted, dissected human figures, or fragments of human figures, set in a kind of a very open or sometimes enclosed space with walls, and kind of a blue sky like Dali.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You're talking about what Malcolm Roberts did?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I've never seen any of those.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But that's about all I can say, because I just saw them several times, two or three of them, which he would bring in to this little room and we sat and talked about it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was there a Northwest Annual or anything equivalent after the museum [Seattle Art Museum--Ed.] opened in the early thirties? The museum opened in '33. Did it provide a way for artists to exhibit, in the thirties?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Let's see now, the museum. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I know there was a Printmakers' Annual.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, that was. . . Printmaker's Annual, first ones were held at the Henry Gallery, and then they later moved to Seattle Art Museum. Now, the Seattle Art Museum celebrated its 50th anniversary this spring, right?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Which means that it opened in 1933. Now, by that time, Seattle, they already had about seven, six or seven, or maybe more Annuals, Northwest Annuals. And I remember while the Seattle Art Museum was under construction, they [had] the Northwest Annual in the downtown Chamber of Commerce building two, three years. I remember going down there to see it. And before that, it was held in the old [Horace C.-Ed.] Henry residence. And it was called the Seattle Art Institute.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You mentioned exhibiting in it yourself, quite early.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well you see, I was going to Broadway High School at that time, 1928 to '32, and in those days I remember after school a bunch of us used to walk up Tenth North [now Tenth Ave. E.--Ed.] and to Henry residence where the Institute was and view the Northwest Annual. And I remember those days there were probably about 30 or 40 artists, and each artist had about four or five paintings. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: In the Annual. I remember that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now did people you've mentioned like Malcolm Roberts exhibit in the Annual, so you could see their works there?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that is something I can't quite remember, although I remember [Walter--Ed.] Isaacs, and [Ambrose--Ed.] Patterson, [Edgar--Ed.] Forkner, and then there were quite a few Japanese painters, like [Kenjiro--Ed.] Nomura, and [Kamekichi--Ed.] Tokita.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, they were in the Annual?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yeah, they were all in the Annual, and they were in fact winning quite a few prizes in those days. And then naturally all the art critics and downtown newspapers were making fun of the modern art -- very funny, yeah, in those days.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Which of these artists seemed very modern to the papers? All of these artists painted representational works, did they not?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, they were representational, but sort of expressionistic, you know. For instance, I remember one time one of the Japanese painters -- can't remember, it was Tokita or somebody -- made a painting of a black cat, just a cat with big eyes, and it was a strangest, ghost-like cat, and he won a prize. And the paper just picked it up and they raised heck about that painting. (laughs) But you see I was already exposed to modern art in Japan before I came, so this thing was all no surprise to me.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, absolutely. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What made you decide to go to the university for further study?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that's because of Miss Jones. Miss Jones insisted that I go over to the university, and continue to study art.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Had she gone to the university or had she come from elsewhere?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think she came from Middle West somewhere. And I don't think she studied there, or well maybe she took some courses while she was teaching, but that I don't know. But when I was doing prints, you know, Miss Jones introduced me to the Henry Gallery and there was a Mrs. Savery, Halley Savery, who was the wife of an old professor.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah, after whom they named Savery Hall, I believe.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well, Mrs. Savery was a curator of the Henry Gallery.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I didn't know that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And now this is around the thirties. And I think for some reason Miss Jones knew Mrs. Savery. So she told me to take my prints to Mrs. Savery and enter them in the Northwest Printmakers' show, which I did, and I was accepted, you see. I was so excited because this was a professional printmaker's annual. And then the judges were Ambrose Patterson, Helen Rhodes, and Kenneth Callahan.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you know any of them personally?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No I did not.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, you had not met them then.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no. I got to know them after that, but at that time, I was so, even scared to go to the university, you know. I'd never been there before and I had to take the streetcar and get off somewhere on 15th Northeast and look for this gallery without any windows. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right. Still very distinctive.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, very much so.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Then when you studied there, what were the most exciting or beneficial or instructive

aspects of it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, as you can well imagine, in the early thirties, the instruction and the courses in art were very academic. And we had one or two years of charcoal drawing from plaster casts, and then composition, and then by that time, after one or two years, I started to go to sculpture studio and do clay modeling of nude for two years, and sometimes casting them in plaster of Paris and the usual, very, rather uninteresting courses. Although I took it very, very seriously, and I worked awfully hard at it. And of course my teachers were usually pretty pleased, and encouraged me to, you know, keep going.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were you ever impatient with the academic tedium that you've described?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, I don't think so. Of course, I had a very strict and rigid educational training in Japan, and everything, anything that's given to you, you don't argue about it; you take it, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: You become very stoic or determined to follow instructions.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Without that set of mind it seems to me that knowing early about Picasso and Matisse, you might think some of this education irrelevant, as recent students say.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I don't, no I didn't really think of that. Some reason I just accepted as a way to become a professional artist, you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. And how did you view the work of your teachers?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, of course, I had preference for some teachers, and less for other teachers.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Which were your preferences?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I liked Patterson's work very much, although I always felt that Patterson's work was not very consistent. He was doing all sorts of things, but he did it well, I thought. Isaacs didn't really strike me as a real great painter, although it's another case where we knew he studied in Paris and he was in Salon d'Automne or something, and so we all respected him as a great master.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Actually I think it was Patterson who was in the Salon d'Automne.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, was it? Was it Patterson?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. It was Patterson.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Maybe it's the other way around. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But you're right that Isaacs was well-credentialed, in other ways, yes. You studied a great deal of painting and sculpture both, and also design, ceramics. . .?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All right. . . Now, in the third, fourth year I was actually, definitely majoring in sculpture.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh you were?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Under Dudley Pratt.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And that's where my real heart and interest was. And so I spent more time in the sculpture studio under Pratt, whom I had great respect for. And he really took me in, and gave me special attention and a lot of instruction. And there's a little thing that I haven't told anybody, but. . . Oh-oh, there it goes. [referring to phone ringing-Ed.]

[Break in taping to answer phone]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Go ahead.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All right. Now, I think I told you that about the time when I was ready to graduate from the university, one of my uncles became very ill and I had to help my company, my uncles' store. And about that time, when I was ready to graduate, Dudley Pratt, my sculpture professor, was going to retire. And he asked me if I would take over his class.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, this was a great shock to me, or pleasant, rather pleasant surprise, but it was impossible and I didn't think I was ready anyway to take over his class. But he did call me and mention that to me, and I couldn't do it anyway, because I was all tied up with the company business.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And had wanted to go to Paris instead, anyway.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that's right, yeah, so. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: There were three alternatives.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, I was very confused at that time, and so I declined his offer, not to take his place. Well, I'm glad I didn't because I'm sure I wasn't ready for that, at that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It was like a full ten years before you actually came back to teaching then, wasn't it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you worked with Pratt, so closely, what materials did you work in. I associate his work with wood, but. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yes, and we did some stone carving, and terra cotta, we fired clay. In fact I did some metal casting too. In those days, we didn't have very good facilities, but we did have, we did do one or two lead castings. And in order to do that, we had to go through the making of the, of course, modeling first, and then mold and then the core, and all that, shrink heads and sprues and all that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you learned the technique.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, yeah, so we learned the technique in doing this.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was there a foundry at the school?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, we went to the engineering school, School of Mining and Engineering, you know. They have a large casting department, so we were allowed to use their facilities, a certain time of the year, which we did.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was Dudley Pratt the only sculptor teaching then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, yes, that's right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What year did Archipenko come to visit? Do you remember?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All right. Archipenko came twice to our university, and the first time was, gee I don't know the exact year, because I was a senior. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay, you were still a student.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I was still a student, and, yeah, he came as a Walker-Ames Professor, and for, I think one quarter [1935-Ed.]. But anyway it was for graduate students and advanced students only. But Dudley Pratt gave me special permission to be in this class which was a great experience for me, and I learned a lot from Archipenko. And then he came back -- I don't know when, about fifty-something?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, after the war? When he came back for a summer I think, didn't he?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: After the war, he came back [1949--Ed.]. Because we were married already then. But somehow, Archipenko became very good friend of ours, and we invited him here and in fact he did that sumi painting on that wall. [Gestures to wall-Ed.].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He did?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: He said, "What is this?" You know, he never did a sumi painting in his whole life. So we told him what to do, and he started; he got so excited he did about half a dozen of those things.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And then you mounted it for him?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, I had it mounted in Japan by an expert mounter. I bet that's the only Archipenko sumi in existence. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I'll bet. Did he keep any of the others? Did he have them mounted?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no, he didn't show any interest; he just left them and went. Although he came back several times. And then he was a great cook, and he would go down to the Pike Place Market and come back with two shopping bags full of all kinds fish, and salmon egg, and goodies, cheese, vegetables, and cook all day, and give a big party.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yes?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: He used to invite us, you know, to his house. And, oh, we got to know him very well. When we went to New York, we used to visit him, before he died. And his first wife came the first time, and she died, and then he married a young woman later who was with him for several years I guess. I don't know what happened to her.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: She was with him the second time he came to Seattle?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I think so; I'm not so sure about this now, but we definitely saw her in New York.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you feel that you learned different things from Dudley Pratt and from Archipenko, that either of them changed your sense of sculpture?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think so; I think so. Dudley was still very academic, and he was a very sensitive modeler. But he didn't experiment very much, except he did some interesting stone, that is, soapstone carvings. And he was experimenting in firing soapstone, which. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Firing soapstone?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. He would carve a soapstone and then fire it. And it did very strange things; it kind of crackled, and chipped, and these little crevices, you know, appeared, and it turned brownish, metallic brownish color.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were these figurative things he'd carved?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, yeah, but his things were usually pretty solid, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. The few things I know I associate with great massiveness.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, massive.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And very chunky quality. Did they exhibit any of these soapstone experiments?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, yes he did. He exhibited them at the Seattle Art Museum; he had some in the [Northwest-George Tsutakawa] Annual there.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It sounds like a kind of contrived archaic quality.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, you see, he was interested in local product, such as soapstone, which we found in abundance up the Skagit River. In fact, when I was a student of his, he used to organize trips to. . .

[Tape 2; side B]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: We were talking about Dudley Pratt.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. He used to take the whole class up to Skagit River past Marblemount, and he knew where the old talc mines were. And he used to take us, and we'd make a whole day out of it. In fact it was very interesting because this was early 1930s, you know, '33, '34, and he had just come from back East to teach at the university and he didn't have much money. But he had a old Model T Ford, and he made a homemade trailer, about the size of this table, a little bigger maybe. [about 4 feet by 6 feet--George Tsutakawa.]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs) Yes?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and he would take that up to the mountain and we'd follow him and we would go into the mountains and carry these boulders -- soapstone, some pretty heavy stuff --down the hill and load them on the truck or the trailer-truck, and come home. In those days the road was very bad and very bumpy and full of holes, and we had to start Seattle about five o'clock in the morning and barely get there by ten o'clock in the morning. Took five hours to get there. And then we'd climb up the hills into the mines and carry the rocks down, down to the highway, and load them, and then we'd start coming home, and we get home past midnight. But

every time we made those trips, we had three or four blowouts, flat tires.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I thought you were saying the soapstone was so fragile that it broke.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No, just flat tires.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Tires. So what happened is he didn't have a decent, what do you call it, pump.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Pump.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So we had to unload the stone. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh George! (laughs)

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .by the highway.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, that's terrible.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh there's tons of stuff! And then. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, you don't mean a pump; you mean a jack. You didn't have a good enough jack.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, jack.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you had to unload the whole truck.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, we raised the trailer, you know, and changed the tire, and then patch the tube, and all that, and take off again. Here goes another one, you know. And we had three or four blowouts on the way. I will never forget that experience. And when I started to teach sculpture myself, I used to take my students out there, and we had the greatest time. Of course, it was a little better; we had a little better cars and better highway, paved.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) You didn't have to start at 5:00 a.m.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: You know, in the fifties, or sixties, we didn't take all that time, then we had enough time for a picnic along the [Skagit--Ed.] river, and just beautiful days. And I used to take my children, my wife, and maybe ten students. That was great. But I learned all this from Dudley, you see. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He was interested in local materials. Was he interested in local wood? Did he try cedar and shaggy things like that?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. He was using a local wood too.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And then was he interested in the art of local people, the Indians?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, quite a bit of that, and then of course he started to do these public art commissions, you know. Like, well, on the facade of the first medical, what do you call, university's medical school? Their, these reliefs hanging on the walls. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yes, low relief?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Well, that was the first building. Now there's so many buildings you can't find them, hardly. But in those days they were very prominent piece of sculptures. And then he did quite a few sculptures in public buildings, and especially institution of higher learning, like university here and university at Pullman [Washington State University--Ed.], and also police department [at Fourth and James--Ed.]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I don't know that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, the one called the War Mother, a very tall lean mother.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: On a police building in Seattle?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, it's right on the east side of the police department building. It's a stone, it's quite a beautiful thing, very -- what do you call? -- sort of a European 1920, 1930ish, what we used to call World's Fair sculpture.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs) I know what you mean.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But it was very competent and good craftsmanship.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Maybe this is an appropriate place to ask you, although there are so many places to ask. I've heard you mention, both in relationship to the thirties that we're talking about now and in relationship to your recent art, having an interest in public art, and then you mentioned this now about Dudley Pratt. Is this something that in the thirties, which you're talking about now, people talked about, debated, had strong opinions about?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, very much so. Yeah, in fact when Dudley had big commissions, he used to ask or hire some of the advanced students to go to his studio and help with the preparation or. . .oh, there's a lot of, you know, work to be done. And that was a very good experience for me, because I learned a lot of tricks, so to speak, of how to handle these big jobs.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Had to work on a large scale.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, that's right, and also, you have to work with the architects; you have to work with building engineers; you have to work with the construction crew.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And the fabrication problems are also much complicated.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, all those problems, and you kind of learned that by watching them or doing parts in the preparation and the actual working.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did he feel that commissions for public works were much more rewarding to him than works uncommissioned, or done on a small scale?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I didn't quite understand the question, now. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did Dudley Pratt prefer to work for large public situations, over working on a small scale for individual purchasers?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Uh huh. Well, I would say most of the sculptors love to do big things, whether it's for public or not, you know. And of course, in many cases --in most cases -- a sculptor can't afford to do a huge, massive, or heroic piece unless somebody finances or you have a commission to pay for it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But some sculptors feel that the tradeoff in freedom that one has working for private sales, in exchange for the ability to work for large scale, but have to work with all these people that you mentioned, is a very difficult tradeoff.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. [reflective, rather than confirming response--Ed.]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Other people don't feel that way, I gather. They feel that they'd much rather have their work in a public situation.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, you know I think there's something about your physical and physiological makeup, and your attitude. I think some people simply cannot work with people. And even if it, he's well-paid, he'd rather not do it; he wants to do his own thing. He doesn't care. Very few people. But most the people, I think -- most the sculptors I mean -- welcome the opportunity to do something large where he can really show his skill or ability or vision, and leave it for posterity.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and I think that's probably a highly personal thing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But do you think that more sculptors are like that than painters?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Probably so. Very few painters do murals, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I know. And many would not care to, I think; it's not just that they don't have the opportunity ____.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, in the past, though, in Europe and Mexico and other countries, mural painting was always quite an engaging activity for painters. I don't know how this all came about when this so-called easel painting started. Not many people do murals. I have done a few myself, but not many.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How large?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, you know this is kind of, again, to me an interesting experience. When I was in the U.S. Army, because I had my credential, or the degree from art department in art training -- the army finds all of these out, you know -- so they tell you to go decorate the officer's club, paint nudes or something, or go downtown, the USO, and the USO said, "Oh hey, come on, and paint us a mural!" (laughs) A big mural!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh really! Did the army put you to work doing things like this?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, this was the USO, or the army. When you're in the army you don't care, and you'd rather paint a mural than run around with a rifle anyway. So, I used to do a lot of these murals. I enjoyed it; I was having fun. Although. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Where were you stationed, so where were these?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I was stationed four and a half years in the U.S. Army, starting from Camp Robinson, Arkansas, out of Little Rock. And then I went to Camp Fannin in Texas. And then from there I went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and then Fort Snelling, Minnesota. But my murals were all done in Arkansas and Texas. And I'm sure they're all gone by now, because they were not very permanent. And they were always tearing these barracks down, you know; they didn't care. It was just kind of a fun thing anyway.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did they give you any assistants, so you could cover large spaces?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, sometimes.

Sometime I'll have to talk about my experience of being inducted in the U.S. Army right following Pearl Harbor. It was a great mental and -- what do you call? -- physical as well, difficulty for all the Japanese people, especially Niseis like myself. And there's a whole story in itself. I'll have to talk about that sometime. But anyway, I was shipped to Little Rock, Arkansas, January of 1942, and sent to this infantry training camp in the hills of Ozarks, not far from Little Rock -- place called Camp Robinson. And naturally I started basic training like anybody else, running around with a rifle and doing the calisthenics and target practice and all that. But anyway, after about a month of this training, I was called by the camp commander. So I had to change to a clean uniform and report to the camp headquarters.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You had no idea what it was about?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: (laughs) No, I didn't. But then the camp commander -- he was a colonel or something -- said, "Come on in, come on in," you know. And says, "I hear you're an artist." (laughs) "Yessir!" So he says, "Well, how would you like to paint my portrait?" (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You're kidding! (laughs) What vanity!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I had to kind of brush up and try to remember what Isaacs told me in his portrait painting class. (laughs) So the commander says, "Well, we'll provide you with all the material you need. You just make a list of materials, and we'll get it for you. And report back tomorrow morning." Just like that!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Which I did. So all my training colleagues were very jealous because every morning I went in a clean uniform and polished shoes, and reported to headquarters.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you painted his portrait?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yeah, I did; and then there'd be other officers. "Hey, George, you make my portrait, too." (continues laughing) So, then they treated me so well, just like officer, and I'd go to the officer's mess hall and eat the best steaks and made friends.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No kidding?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and then they say, "Well, how about decorating the officer's club?" Now this time they're talking about big mural. I had never painted a mural in my life, actually, but I said, "Sure, yes sir."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Of course. What did give them? Do you remember?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, there were several. They always suggested a certain subject matter and usually people, and sometime it had to do with weapons -- oh anything, all crazy things, nothing serious.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: They didn't try particularly to make it appropriate to the army, or to make it escapist, or. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, this was for the officers in, you know, officer's club, where they [relaxed, partied or -George Tsutakawa] got drunk. (laughter) So anyway, it was quite an experience.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you feel that working large like that was ultimately of any benefit?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, I don't know. However, I have a little thing I have to tell here, and without hurting anybody. And that is when I started to teach, art school. . . I started to teach in '47, I think. Oh, around '50, at one of the faculty meetings, I spoke up and said, "Well, why don't we teach mural painting?" And I had already, well, like most of the art students, studied Mexican murals, you know, like Rivera and Orozco and fascinated by it, and in fact Orozco had come to the United States, San Francisco and other cities, during the 1940 World's Fair, and he did some big murals, which I saw. And so I was kind of fascinated, and also I had done some myself in the army; nothing serious, but. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In the army I assume that you painted in oil or some other paint on a prepared surface.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, yeah, oil.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Nothing on plaster.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So I brought this up, you know. And then, God, I was really shouted down, saying, "Who in the hell wants to paint murals, nowadays?" (chuckles) So that was it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was it regarded as something very passe ', associated with government programs and post offices?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I don't know, it was just [of--Ed.] no interest whatsoever. But I did say, "We should train our students to do large things, and sculpture and painting both." I did say that. But no one was interested.

. .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In the late forties and early fifties, art had become a very private, romantic expressionist. . .

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GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, right, so that was interesting.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you brought that up do you remember whether Patterson was there? Patterson had tried the mural and gone to Mexico.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I can't remember whether he was still teaching. In '50, maybe he wasn't by then. I guess Isaacs was still director.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I don't know.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's before [Boyer--Ed.] Gonzales came.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you know Pablo O'Higgins, when he was in this area?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I can't remember whether I met him or not, because I did study mural painting, the true buon fresco from Patterson. And I have a fresco back there, in my back yard. I'll show it to you before you leave.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. And that was a true fresco I did, the only one I did. But I was much interested in this subject, you know, at that time. Let's see, I can't remember the other question you had about mural painting.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I just asked if you knew Pablo O'Higgins, and you didn't know him personally.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh. That name is very familiar to me; in fact Patterson was always talking about O'Higgins, and I know he came to Seattle and did that mural in the Union Hall.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Wasn't that O'Higgins?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. That was O'Higgins, and he did that about 1940.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Just right before the war began he did that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All right. Then I didn't meet him; that was before my time. I remember about that time, I went to San Francisco World's Fair, 1941, or '40. And I saw a lot of these murals. There's a tower in San Francisco. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The Coit Tower.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And you kind of go winding around and there are walls all. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Dense with murals, just dense.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that impressed me very much in those days, you know, and so I wanted to do one too, myself.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It's still impressive and it's in good condition. It's all locked now.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, is it locked up now?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You can get in certain hours.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, I see. I guess people were. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: They're protecting it.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, vandalizing and all that.

[Tape 2; side A]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You were starting to say something about the Frank McCaffrey publication, the Group of Twelve, I think it was 1936 or '7?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: It was in the early thirties, something like that. I still remember that little pamphlet pretty well. And Nomura, Tokita, and there was one more. I can't remember his name.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: There was a third, and I remember Nomura and Tokita.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, I think there's another in that. Tomita. Tomita is the third one. I think he was in that. Maybe I'm mistaken. You know, when I returned to Seattle in 1927, and I was just trying to get my bearing on the new situation, first of all learning English and becoming accustomed to American way of living, naturally I was drawn to the Japanese community, which was around Main Street and Jackson Street, anywhere from the waterfront up to about Twelfth Avenue, in the south part of Seattle. And there was a concentration of the Chinese and Japanese merchants -- small businesses, groceries stores, beer parlors, little hotels, fish markets and things like that. And there were quite a few Japanese people, very active in those day. In about the center of this so-called Japanese town, on the hillside, there was a -- well, let's see, that was Sixth Avenue South and between Washington and Main Street on a steep hillside, there was a small sign shop, the name was Noto, N-O-T-O, Sign Shop. And this little shop was owned and operated by Kenjiro Nomura and Kamekichi Tokita, who painted signs for all these Japanese and Chinese businesses around that part of the town. And they did beautiful work, these gold-leafed names of little banks, you know, and exchange and, well, all kinds of businesses. That was their main business.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Large signs, for outside use on the street?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, yes, and also on the windows, glass windows. They did beautiful job. Well, these people were very busy, and in much demand by the Japanese merchants, but they both had great hobbies; in fact, they were professional painters. And they joined the -- oh, I guess you could call the Ashcan School or the early American painting school of the thirties. And indeed became quite well known. And every year since the Northwest Annual was inaugurated, first at the Seattle Art Institute on Harvard North in the old Henry residence and then later, 1933, when the Volunteer Park Seattle Art Museum was opened, all those years, in every Northwest Annual Nomura and Tokita -- and then there were others like Tomita, quite a few, about five or six Japanese painters -- always entered. And they were accepted. And they often won prizes, first, second, third prize or something like that, and the local newspapers always took it up and publicized it. And so as a young student, myself, 17 years old, just starting to study art at the Broadway High School, this is a very fascinating and wonderful experience to go to the Northwest Annual, see Nomura and Tokita's paintings as well as getting to know these artists in their own shop. So I used to drop by after school or weekends, and those guys were always

working, seven days a week. So we'd just drop in, and I say we, because there were several Japanese young art students, as well as Chinese art students, like Fay Chong, Andrew Chinn. And my other very close friend, painter friend, or student, was Shiro Miyazaki. Well, I have many of his paintings, and we'll talk about that later. Miyazaki and I used to go to visit these sign painters. And we'd sit there and talk about art, and they were already very much in the art, and they were very knowledgeable, and they have studied European art, American painting, and they were doing some very fine work.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you have any sense of where they had studied, or how widely they had traveled, were they born in Japan?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, no, they just picked it up in Japan, but they stayed in Seattle. They never traveled beyond Seattle.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So their contact and association with the art world was mainly through the Seattle Art Museum and a handful of painters like Callahan and Isaacs, and Dr. Fuller, and a few people. And that was about the limit of it. But they were very, very sincere and very intent and hard working.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And they painted many urban subjects?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, street scenes, mostly. In fact, I don't know if I have any more left; I used to keep quite a few of those but I gave them back to their relatives after they died in Seattle. But I do have quite a few paintings by Miyazaki, which I'll show to you some time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that was a very interesting time for me, because I felt that, besides my daily exercises in art classes, I was getting closer to the professional activity in Seattle. And eventually leads to my acquaintance with Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, and other great Northwest painters. So that was very good for me.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can you say any more at this point about people like Fay Chong? Was Fay Chong a student with you?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. Fay Chong. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was he the same age, same place in school?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right. Fay Chong and I were both attending Broadway High School at the same time -- I graduated in '32 -- and we were in Miss Piper and Miss Jones' art classes together, all the way through, maybe four years. And those are wonderful days. Fay did lot of very fine woodblock prints. I did some too, and Andrew Chinn also. We were sort of Miss Jones' pet students.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you were sort of a triumvirate?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: (chuckles) Yeah, more or less. Right. They were very good to me.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How much older were Tokita and Nomura?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, they were -- gee, I can't remember ages, but probably 20 years older. And they died soon after the war ended. They were evacuated, sent to internment camps and came back to Seattle and they died soon after that. Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did they recover their business after the war?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, they lost their businesses, and most of their paintings. But they kept painting. And Nomura had to find a job after the war, and he went to work for a Seattle picture frame company. He was making picture frames. And Tokita, he had nine children, and after the war, when he came back, he was very, very weak and he had a stroke. They bought a little dirty old hotel downtown, on Dearborn Street, where --well, after Tokita died, which was soon after the war ended. Mrs. Tokita raised all nine children. But she did a marvelous job, and all the children are doing very well. So she has 20 or 30 grandchildren now. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was either Tokita or Nomura able to paint during the war? When they were evacuated, or do you know?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I really don't know. I can't remember, because I was in the army and we kind of lost

contact from each other. And then when I came back from the war and they came back from internment camp to Seattle, everything was all torn up; it was not like the old days anymore. We had a heck of a time trying to locate them, because they had lost their place, residence, homes, business, everything was really dislocated. So it took some time before we got together again. However, now I remember. I'll have to find that picture, though. We had a group show at Zoe Dusanne Gallery, Nomura. I think Tokita was dead by that time, but he showed too. And then, that's when Paul Horiuchi comes in; and John Matsudaira and myself. I'll have to find that picture.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When was that? Late forties, early fifties?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, it has to be after the war, so late forties or about '50. Let me see if I can find that.
[Break in taping]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Geology and flowers.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Dr. [Kyo ---Ed.] Koike was?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, he knew all the glaciers and he went, I don't know, over a hundred times, he climbed Mount Rainier.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: To the top, you mean?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Not to the top, but around.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, but way up.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: He's been to the top, too. And he always took a old-fashioned box camera with him, and took all these marvelous pictures.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When did you know him? Before the war? Or after the war? I don't know when he died. I think. . .he must be much older than you.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Let's see now. No, after the war. He had retired, but he was still climbing. He had trouble walking because he injured his leg, but he still did [it]. And a few young people, like myself and Joshel Namkung, used to accompany him to the various glaciers and different areas. Just a good hike, you know. And he would tell us about all the rocks and all the pebbles and all the plants and everything along the way; it was just marvelous following him. Then he'd take pictures.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Like a completely rounded naturalist.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, he sure was.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And was Namkung photographing then also?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, he was very much interested, but he wasn't taking pictures then; not yet. Yeah, it was very interesting time, you know. So I remember him very well, although I think he passed away soon after that. I don't know what year. It probably says in Mayumi's book [Turning Shadows into Light: Art and Culture of the Northwest's Early Asian/Pacific Community, ed. Mayumi Tsutakawa and Alan Chong Lau (Seattle: Young Pine Press, 1982)--Ed.]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you remember his photographs? Were they meticulously sharp-focused then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, in fact in those days Koike used to have small exhibitions of his photographs downtown in Japanese Chamber of Commerce or some small hall. He used to do it periodically. In those days, there were at least a half a dozen very good Japanese photographers working in that area, and their works were being accepted in the national, international photo salon.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you remember the names of any of the others?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I know one fellow. His name is Noma, Yoshio Noma. He's still around; I understand he's still taking pictures. But I haven't seen him for many years. In fact he used to work for me, when I was managing that grocery store.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. (chuckles) He's still in the Seattle area, as far as you know?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yeah. And he was a very good photographer. Of course, he was a student of Koike too. Koike taught many Japanese people, young students, to take pictures.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The techniques of photography? Developing?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, while you're on the subject of other artists who are also Japanese, and since you mentioned Zoe Dusanne's gallery, do you want to tell me a little more about that exhibition and your early acquaintance with Zoe Dusanne, and also about Horiuchi and Matsudaira, who you say appeared there?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, we could talk about that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That photograph we found was dated 1953.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that was actually the last time we all got together and had a group show. And. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, that was the last time, not the first time?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, I think it was the last time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: There were several then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well, at Zoe Dusanne Gallery, we just had this group show once, but we used to have annual Asian artist shows in Chinatown. We used to, once a year, rent a small storespace and have a group show, which included Japanese, Chinese, Filipino -- all the Asian people who painted, and they were very good days. And Nomura -- let's see, by that time, Nomura was gone, so we had to backtrack a little bit. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I'm just trying to remember when I got to know Zoe.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were the exhibits that you mentioned in Chinatown? Were they unjuried exhibits?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I don't know that one.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .the one's you mentioned in Chinatown, for all the Asian artists. Were those open shows?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, that was open shows. Well, there was always a discussion about whether they should be juried or not, because some of the people were already professionals and they didn't think the amateurs should be included.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, I can understand.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And so. . . Yeah. Well, you know how that goes. But anyway, we did have very interesting shows. And that lasted several years before Wing Luke came. Let's see, Wing Luke -- I don't know what year he started -- what was the fellow that was a city councilman? Wing Luke. Yeah. Well, we were very old, very good friends, and he was very enlightened man and he used to encourage all this cultural activities in Chinatown, but suddenly he disappeared, you know. You know the story?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No, I don't. Tell me.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, you know Mrs. Gerber, Anne Gerber? Remember her husband Sidney?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. And the plane accident.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. Wing Luke was with him.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I didn't realize that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, yeah. Okay, so after that the Chinese people got together and established a foundation and eventually opened the Wing Luke Museum.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And so, later, there were exhibition, and juried exhibition, of Northwest Asian artists' work, at the Wing Luke Museum. I think you could say that the first group show, or the group show at Zoe Dusanne Gallery was probably the first time something like that was attempted although this was limited to four or five who were Zoe Dusanne's artists, you see. But that show was very successful. And then after that I had

one-man show there, and I think Paul Horiuchi had one- man show. In fact, he had several one-man shows with Zoe. And the first showing took place in her old gallery overlooking Lake Union. You know the old gallery?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I've only seen pictures of it. That was the gallery that was her house and gallery combined?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right, and I think, if I'm not mistaken, Bob Shields designed it. And it was a lovely place on Lake Boulevard, which is freeway now. It was torn down to make room for the freeway. But anyway, it was not a big house, but it was very nice, had a tremendous view, very convenient, and there were so many good shows held there. And Zoe was so proud of it; she really took excellent care of a lot of Northwest artists. And most of the well-known artists today had shows there at one time or another, starting with Tobey, Graves, and Guy Anderson, and many others.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Zoe Dusanne was the first gallery you were associated with?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, that's right; in fact she was about the first gallery in Seattle, of that quality.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you exhibit with her in 1947?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Gee, I can't remember.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I think you mentioned to me once that your first one-man exhibit was in 1947, and I wonder if it was there.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I'll have to look that up; I can't remember what year that was. Well, no, my first one-man show was downtown. It was called Studio Gallery, and it was owned and operated by a man -- oh, I wish I could remember his name. He was a young man, very brilliant and quite enterprising. He eventually moves to San Francisco and becomes successful down there. But when I was still a student at the university, about 1947, I had a two-man show with Blanche Morgan. You know that name?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Blanche Morgan was an interior decorator who was in charge of the interior decoration at Frederick and Nelson [leading department store in Seattle for many years--Ed.] for 30 or 40 years. She ran the interior department there. But anyway, she was also a very good painter. Okay, I had a two-man show there.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That was my first showing anywhere in Seattle, right. I remember this very well because Paul Bonifas, among all the other professors in the art department, came to see the show. And the newspapers picked it up and it was quite a bit of celebration.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You showed paintings and she showed paintings; you were both painters?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, mostly paintings and some sculpture in this showing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you remember what your work looked like then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, it was something like the one you saw in this book. You know, my early paintings?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, I know quite a number of early styles of paintings that you did. You mean like that?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well, that was part of it. But I guess you haven't seen my old paintings upstairs in my attic.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Not all of them.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, well, I'll have to show them to you sometime.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Now, I know a number of works you did like this one, and like the mural, and like the one in the Bellevue Art Museum with interlaced figures, sometimes more cubic, sometimes more curvilinear.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, you see I was still a student then and I was trying everything. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But I also know that early landscape by you, with the big curvilinear forms.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Um. Um hmm, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Something like Eastern Washington?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I don't know whether you did many works of that sort.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I did many of those.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you go out to Eastern Washington, or other places?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes; it was interesting. In those days, the Northwest Annual was always held in the early fall, like October, or November. And lot of us artists -- some of them were Sunday painters, you know -- had to get ready for the Northwest Annual. With a bunch of painters, we used to take a trip back to east of the mountain, around Dry Falls and Wenatchee and Grand Coulee Dam, that country. Somehow I just loved that country. And then we did watercolor and oil paintings, quite a few of them, in those days. And we'd try to finish one or two up for the Northwest Annual, hoping that they'll be accepted.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So it'd be late summer and September flurry of activity, getting ready for the show.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right. The museum has one or two of my early oils, which I did in those days. I know that because Sidney Gerber purchased quite a few of my things in those days and gave them to the Seattle Art Museum. And there were some other people, patrons like Dwight and Ann Robinson. I don't know if you know them.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No, I don't.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Dwight was a professor in economics at the University of Washington. This is beside the point, but Ann Robinson is one of the daughters of the Grosvenors, who own and [publish] the National Geographic; they're from Boston. And Dwight is her husband. They are all collectors of art. And they bought several of my things in those days. So. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: These early works that we've just been talking about, the figures and the landscapes both, on what kind of work or on whose work do you think you modeled your painting?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: What kind of what?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You said that you were still a student then, and I wonder if you have a sense that you modeled your work on somebody else's, or some style. . .?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh. I don't know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .or that you admired something else?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, of course I was very much influenced by Cezanne or Van Gogh and a lot of the French painters, or Dufy. And some of the early Americans, like Burchfield, and John Marin [and Marsden Hartley-George Tsutakawa].

[Tape 3; side B]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I just have to get some of these things together.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, it's much more fun to look at the works than to talk in the abstract.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, you see, my children all have my works now.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Your works have dispersed.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: When they bought their houses or build a house, I just told them to take some paintings with them. I didn't want to keep them all up in the attic, you know. It didn't do any good up there. And so, maybe sometime we can go down to my boy's house, which is right below here and take a look around. He has several of my old things -- good ones, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, let's see now, where are we?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, we're talking about the thirties and the forties at the same time. Do you want to stop for a minute?

[Break in taping]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Okay. Shiro Miyazaki I met in 1928. This was about a year or two after I came back to Seattle. He had just come from Japan. Son of the foreign correspondent of one of the leading Japanese newspapers, Mainichi paper, who was stationed here in Seattle. So his family, a wife and three children, came to Seattle. And Shiro Miyazaki had just arrived; he was about my age, and he was already very much interested in painting. He attended Garfield High School while I was going to Broadway High School, but we became very close friends from that time until his death later in 1940. The interesting thing was -- and I can show you many of his paintings, too -- he was an extraordinary person who also studied French post-expressionism and he was a great admirer of van Gogh, Gauguin, and also, oh, Bonnard, some of the pointillists, and also the early American Ashcan School painters' works. And he painted beautifully, either in oil or in watercolor, and he did some marvelous prints, block prints like you saw in this book.

Well, he had one problem -- in a way, it's a problem. He was a die-hard communist. And against his father's wishes, who was a strictly Japanese nationalistic Japanese father, he turned around and became a real staunch communist and participated in all kinds of communist activities. So you can just imagine, in the thirties and forties, you know, how the communists were regarded. And so he couldn't stay in Seattle any more. He was arrested and put in prison many times, and he'd get out. He finally went down to California, especially in the farm community around the Sacramento Valley, and he joined the communist movement, activities, and in fact he was leading and he was making paintings and posters and propaganda stuff, which are very powerful, you know, and he had quite a following. Well, he went down to California about 1935, I believe, and he lived down there until 1940; he was completely exhausted, had tuberculosis and other diseases, and he finally died. But the sad thing was, his father disinherited him because he didn't consider him his son any more, because he was a traitor to the imperialists and all that. And so, when he died he was penniless, although he left all his paintings with me -- and most of the prints -- when he went down there. And you know, I used to send him about \$20 a month.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, so you stayed in touch with him when he went to California?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes, very much so. And I have many, many letters he wrote to me. He used to write too, beautifully. He wrote some novels about Japanese immigrants and farmers. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were they published?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: [He wrote--Ed.] in Japanese, you see. No, they were never published.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were they good?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, they were great. And he used to. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you have those manuscripts?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, he sent me some of the manuscripts. I still have some.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You have them?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. So he was a kind of a amazing man. And I'm sorry that he got involved in this labor movement and died the way he did because I had lot of respect for him; he was a great painter.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Before he went to California, when he was here in Seattle with you, was he also very active in the labor movement?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, he was already starting, in Seattle. But when his father found out, you know, he wouldn't have this, you see, so he decided to move to California.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It was partly for the family situation, not entirely for the political?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that's right, yeah. But he used to come to my house. I had a small studio. I was living with one of my relatives, but he came and we spent many, many days, hours, together, and we went sketching together. And we had many paintings that were done together. In fact, he was very close to Nomura and Tokita and the sign paint shop.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, we were all close together, and every Sunday four or five of us would go out, down to Duwamish River and Tukwila, and along out to East Waterway [of the Duwamish--Ed.], and do paintings.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did he believe or did he come to believe that art should serve social purposes rather than aesthetic purposes?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yeah, eventually he just used his talent to help the communist cause, which he believed in very strongly.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Before he left for California?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, you see, in those days, we were very much aware of the Mexican artists, like Orozco, and Siqueiros, and all those revolutionary artists and their powerful paintings and prints. Well, Miyazaki had contact with [some of--George Tsutakawa] these revolutionary artists down southern California and Mexico, and so he was very much influenced by their work too.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did this lead to many discussions among you about what your art should be for? Why you should do it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, yes, we did, very often. And since I was really not involved nor interested in the labor movement myself, I was always kind of neutral on the subject.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Uh huh. I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But somehow he liked me and he depended a lot on me for support because otherwise he had very little support. He was not understood by Japanese community. He was not understood by Northwest artists, although he entered, and was accepted in the Northwest Annual show, several times. His prints were also accepted in the Northwest Printmakers' show. So people like Callahan, Patterson, they all knew Miyazaki, yeah. So that's kind of a short sidelight in the history of Asian art, artists, in Seattle.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You mentioned the importance of the well-known French painters, like Cezanne, to yourself and to other artists, also.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And contrary to that, we frequently hear of the importance of the Mexicans that you just mentioned. And while you've been talking about Miyazaki, it occurs to me to wonder again how much conflict might have been felt between the known political aims that school of Paris artists seemed to have and the much more social or political art that was also so much admired. Did it ever seem to be a problem that an artist should have to decide between the two courses?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, I never considered that or thought of it that way. To me, whether he was a communist or imperialist or (chuckles) capitalist artist, if he's a good artist, he's a good artist. That's the way I felt.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And that seemed to be the primary. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, because I have studied European art, and I know how some of the great European artists like the Reubens and the Van Dykes and some of the other artists were conscious of the politics of the day, and they played the game and they were actually recognized as such. But, in the final analysis, I think it's the art which really speaks and not the content so much, whether it's a political intent. That's what I think, and that's why I always admired Orozco, [Rivera--GEORGE TSUTAKAWA], and Siqueiros and the Mexican artists, just as much. I always felt sorry for them when they came up and did murals in American cities and public places, [because--Ed.] they were always attacked, you know, and criticized for their communistic inclination. But that never bothered me. You know, I wanted to paint like a good painter, good artist.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And to project a particular content in one's painting never seemed to be an obligation that an artist had to assume?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, I, I don't know, I just didn't think about that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay, I understand.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: For instance, I never considered myself belonging to any particular school or ideology. I always wanted to be myself and not identified by any school or trend or fashion. I think I mentioned this before, that some of the Japanese art critics used to see definite American or modern trend in my work, in my style. And then Americans think my things are very Oriental, very Japanese. Well, it didn't bother me; in fact I was very delighted, that they didn't identify me as an Oriental artist or American artist.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. You preferred not to be. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, it didn't matter.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . . put into a drawer, or a category, or . . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right, because I think my sculptures, especially, I don't know if there's anybody else doing things like this.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Has there not been a recurrent tendency through all your career for people to question whether your work is characteristically Japanese or whether it's characteristically . . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, it has.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you tire of that point of view?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, it didn't bother me, really. There's one little thing I like to say and this may sound very presumptuous. But you know in most of my adult life I have traveled quite a bit and visited so many art museums, wherever I went. And often, when I see a good painting, I'm very impressed and I come away with great excitement and inspiration. But, after a while, it kind of fades away, and then I think about it. Why do I go around looking at people's work -- especially the so-called great masters' work -- East or West, doesn't matter. But I always enjoy them. Then at sometimes I think what I'm doing is to look for something not to do.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How do you mean?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Not for copying somebody's work, no matter how great they are.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh! But for avoiding?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. I try to do something that the other people have not done, or don't do, or don't think about. And that is a very, very difficult thing, I think, for anyone.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, particularly if you travel widely and look at lots it becomes very hard to think what hasn't been done.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I've seen so much. And I wonder about other great artists who think that way. I don't know. I haven't heard or read about these people's attitude and why they look at other people's work.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Whether for example to emulate or to avoid? Or a little of each?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I don't know. It's a kind of interesting thing. Because I do know also, on the other hand, that there are many artists who just can't help themselves and they emulate other artists' work despite themselves. And, if it's done well, it's okay.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You've mentioned a good deal about Japanese artists that you knew in the decades of the thirties and through the war years. How much were these artists, many of whom lived downtown and showed downtown, associated with the artists you referred to as the downtown group?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: In the period, you know, there's a kind of a shift and change because the nature of the Japanese people, very modest, extremely modest. They were ashamed for themselves, to talk to great artists like Mark Tobey.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: They were?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: They knew Mark Tobey, and Mark Tobey was very good to them. Mark Tobey wanted to talk to Nomura and Tokita, you know, but they always shut up when they're confronted with a great artist. Because he was regarded as so superior, they were modest. . . . Of course this was in the thirties, you know; it's not today. Many Japanese people still considered themselves inferior people, or low class people. They were immigrants and they were barely making a living by engaging in the low class activities, professions or business or whatever. There was a very strong feeling about this. So they always told themselves that they were not supposed to talk with a great American artist, face to face. They have to contain themselves. And this is actually the Japanese attitude toward anything foreign, you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Even in the case where they were interested in the foreign or American manner of painting themselves.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. There are few people like Kuniyoshi, who went to New York, young man, and went right into the middle of the New York art scene. And eventually teaches at Art Students' League for many years, and of course he wins many prizes and he's widely accepted as one of America's top painters of the day.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's right. And he must have been well known to the people you mentioned, to the people here.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, he was already. And soon after the war, when the AEA, Artists' Equity of America, was formed in New York, Kuniyoshi was the first president.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I didn't know that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and he voluntarily traveled to all the major art centers in the United States to establish chapters. And he came to Seattle -- I don't remember the exact year -- I think it was between '47 and '49. We had a series of meetings at that time, where Kenneth Callahan and Guy Anderson and some of the leading Northwest artists were very much involved and we were too. And we had many meetings and parties, you know, to welcome Kuniyoshi.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. Kuniyoshi.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And a chapter was established here, which was a very fine thing for the Japanese artist, because we really got to know the American artists through Kuniyoshi at that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So that in the forties a kind of separation broke down that until then had existed between the Japanese and other artists?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yeah, it helped that although it didn't last very long because Nomura and Tokita died soon after that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So I, for one, and Horiuchi, and the others became more independent. But, by that time, this sort of embarrassing feeling had disappeared, and so of course I was employed by the University of Washington art school. Isaacs hired me and I joined the staff there and so I felt very secure. And I felt that I was equal with the American artists, you see, at that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But even before that time, in the late thirties had you felt quite free to make the acquaintance of the downtown artists?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I thought you did.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I did, because I attended the art school, anyway, and I was already acquainted with the Seattle art scene. And the uptown and downtown artists and the museum people and all that. And so I was, in a way, kind of a in-between.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think going to the university helped you very much to get distance from your Japanese. . . ?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I think so. Because I was accepted, you know, immediately. And so I feel that I helped the downtown Japanese artists somewhat by being in between and acting as a go-between, shall we say. It was very interesting times.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you know -- you've mentioned Kuniyoshi -- did you know, before the war or even right after the war, of the work of. . . ?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I knew who he was.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: We used to read about him. One of the things that impressed me very much was that at the Carnegie International, in Pittsburgh, during the war, when Japan and the United States were engaged in this big war, Kuniyoshi won second prize.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: During the war?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: At the Carnegie. I didn't know that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: In 1943, yeah. It's a pretty well-known fact. And he received two or three thousand

dollars and great honor. Being a Japanese -- and Kuniyoshi, like all the Japanese immigrants, never got their citizenship, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: They never did?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Didn't they later?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, very recently, yeah. After 1950. Before that, they all [were--Ed.] resigned to the fact that they were never going to be American citizen.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, there are other interesting facts about this too. Kuniyoshi was an enemy nationale, yeah, Japanese enemy nationale, and he received this great prize, international.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But it's like the American political community talking out of two sides of its mouth to be shipping off Japanese to camps at one level, and honoring some single individual in the other realm.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, this is very interesting. It still puzzles me to this date.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Schizophrenic.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Whether the jury of the International Pittsburgh show knew that he was an enemy nationale or not, and if they did, I always thought, gee, these Americans are so big-hearted, you know. They would give big prize to an enemy. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: They must have known he was; anyone would know from the name that he was Japanese. So it raises the question whether they were making a protest against government policies on behalf of the Japanese? And whether it big-hearted, as you say, or whether it was just schizophrenic? But I was starting to ask you also whether you knew of the work of Noguchi?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Ah, I didn't meet Noguchi. He comes in on the American art scene quite a bit later.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, he was active before the war, but I guess his work was not nearly so well known, until later.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Let me see if I can remember.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Certainly, he did a lot of sculpture, and stage sets also.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, yes. Well, I was -- as a art student at the university from 1932 to '36 -- I was already aware of the New York scene. And I used to take Art Digest and some of the old art magazines, in those days. And I knew very well in 1939, I believe, when Morris Graves made a big hit in New York, and he was bought by Rockefeller, and he had a big show at Willard Gallery, and this and that.

[Tape 4; side A]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And about the same time as _____.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And about the same time, and even before that, Kuniyoshi comes in on the American art scene as one of the biggies.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Kuniyoshi or Noguchi?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Kuniyoshi.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Kuniyoshi.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And I think Noguchi starts right after the war, because Noguchi goes to Japan soon after the war, and then he marries this famous Japanese actress. What's her name? [Yoshiko Yamaguchi--George Tsutakawa] And then he lives in Japan for some time and does pottery with some of the famous Japanese potters, and then woodwork and stone carvings before he come back to New York to have a big show, his first big show. And that was probably about, oh, just before the fifties, I think. Yeah, I haven't read his biography lately and I am pretty hazy on that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Before the war, I think it would be easy to associate his work more with School of Paris

and surrealism and European work.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right. Noguchi, I remember now, before the war his first big piece was for the Telephone-Telegraph Building in downtown New York, at the Rockefeller Center. A big relief. Either aluminum or stainless steel. I remember that piece because when I went to New York for the first time in '42, that was one of the things I went to see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, it was!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and he had already had the scholarship in Rome and he studied in Rome -- I think. I don't know whether he studied with Brancusi and so forth.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Have you met him?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes. I met him many times.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Beginning when?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Let's see, the first time I met him was probably around late fifties, early sixties. And he has come through Seattle many times and he would occasionally drop in, call me and come see me. We also, by coincidence, met in Kyoto. The year before the big Osaka world's fair Noguchi was doing some big fountain things in Osaka, and we somehow got together in Kyoto with Yanagihara, you know the potter that was here [who was in residence here, taught at the University of Washington Art School--George Tsutakawa]?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, he and, well my wife was there, and the Yanagihara's were there and Noguchi; about six of us went to a Japanese geisha house. And we had a wonderful time until about four o'clock in the morning, and there were no taxis; we couldn't get home to our hotel. (laughter) I still remember this. But anyway, Noguchi could be quite a playboy.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: He's a man around the world. Oh, yeah. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, I didn't want to distract us from the earlier years that we were concentrating on, but that question I wanted to ask sometime.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Well let's get back to Seattle scene again.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You mentioned at one point that you wanted to say more about the downtown community. You also mentioned at one point that you wanted to comment on some of the people who were important to you at the university.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I think I already mentioned the fact that there was a sort of a division between the university artists and the downtown artists.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: We haven't really talked about that on the tape. So go ahead.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I thought I taped that passage about Gonzales and I going to Mark Tobey.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Hm umm.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I tried to get him to join the staff, even part time. We tried so hard on several trips but he wouldn't do it. So that was it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That was after you were on the faculty yourself?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In the fifties.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes, surely yes. That's when Gonzales came.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yes, of course. Boyer Gonzales.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, we all knew that Isaacs and Tobey didn't see eye to eye.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But you thought maybe you could overcome it, now that Isaacs was not head of the department?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, we tried to, but we couldn't. I think we got Kenneth Callahan to come and talk to the students just once, kind of a seminar situation, but that's the only time I can remember. And none of the other so-called Northwest painters, artists, ever came to the art school to participate in the various educational programs.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you have any sense of whether this coolness was due mainly to the personality of Isaacs himself, or whether it was due to more general feelings about institutions and academic situations.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I really don't know; I could never figure that one out. Although the downtown artists, during the war and after, just barely existed. I mean they didn't have a steady job, they didn't have any money, and they depended on WPA for a small check to keep alive. Whereas the university professors, even though the professors compared with other professions their pay was supposed to be very low, they were professors, and they had. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: They did have a salary.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .they had a regular salary, and they had good life. And I think there was a sort of a sense of jealousy and unfairness about this.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, the downtown people always felt that. I suppose this notion starts from the Bohemian school in Paris and the Ashcan School in New York. There was a tradition that the artists were always starving, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, the Depression gave them a good opportunity to put it into practice.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I know many of the people at the university then were designers and art educators, and I've wondered if artists in the outside community resented or looked down upon the kind of things that the people at the university did.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Umm, probably. You mean, the designers. . .you don't mean the interior designers or decorators or. . .?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, I'm not sure who I mean. I'm in a way probing. Not so much as there is today, but Ruth Penington, for example, was less a painter than someone who did a variety of media and work.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, they were educators, mainly.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, that's right.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And the painters, the downtown, Northwest painters, were really not interested in educating people.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I wondered if they regarded the people at the university as, in a way, less serious artists, not truly professional, in a way that they themselves wished to be?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Maybe. I don't know. They had a feeling against, let's say, Columbia University art teachers, or the major Eastern universities.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How many of the people here in Seattle were from there?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, in the beginning, quite a few of the artists -- let's see now -- Penington, and Hope Foote and most of them went to Columbia?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I know several did; I'm not sure how many.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and they had maybe. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Helen Rhodes, maybe?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Helen Rhodes, yeah. But they were very influential, very powerful in the Northwest, well, the high society, let's put it that way.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Because most of the young ladies of the wealthy -- bankers -- had to send their children to university, you know. And it was fashionable to take art, whether they really liked it or not. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: A lot of them did; it was pretty fashionable.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So then they were studying with these women from Columbia Teacher's College?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I believe that was true, yeah. Because they'll say, well, who's Guy Anderson? Where's he from? What is his family background? You know?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yeah?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were the exhibitions at the Henry Gallery regarded as something of much interest to artists downtown?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I think Henry Gallery was actually, in a way, much more liberal. They tried awfully hard to serve the community by exhibiting both the academists and the free-thinking, downtown artists. And so they used to have very good comprehensive showing of Morris Graves, Mark Tobey, and the so-called Northwest painters work. Yes, I believe that was a good thing. As well as shows from back East, and of course, I think the range of the subject matter was very wide, including decorative art and painting, fine art and sculpture, and all those things. Which I think was a good thing for the students.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I know that was certainly the case in the sixties and fifties, before I came.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, quite consistently, all the way, Henry Gallery was fairly open-minded, I think.

[Break in taping]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Someone told me that you knew Yamasaki, and that George Nakashima had been a friend of yours in your university days.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, my recollection of both Yamasaki and George Nakashima, somewhat hazy. However, I went to the university art school from 1932 until, well, almost 1937. And during that time, I being in the art department, I had to take history of architecture, down in the architecture building, and the lecture by Arthur Hermann. He was the director of the architecture school in those days. Dudley Pratt was our sculpture professor, and all the architecture students were required to take probably about a year of clay modeling and plaster casting from Dudley Pratt.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh. So there was a lot of interchange between the two programs?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right. So, because I was a sculpture major, in 1935, '36, '37, I used to just about live there in the sculpture loft. And [there were--Ed.] all these architects about that time, I remember so many of them, like Victor Steinbrueck, and Perry Johanson (he just passed away), and his wife. I can't remember all these names. Perry's wife was Jean Petersen, and married to Johanson. She was a sculpture major. And there are other architecture students who came up to the sculpture department.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was Paul Kirk among them?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, Kirk was one of them. And Bob Durham, and --oh gosh, many of them. So I got to know them. And then there was an old architecture classroom which was an old, torn building, which was called the architecture shack, where the architecture students very often spent all night drawing. And also they did a lot of other things, too, raising hell and having party and all that. And I was often invited to go down there and join the party. And in those days, Yamasaki was one of the students, and I remember him, and George Nakashima was a few years before that [and I didn't meet him until about 1938--George Tsutakawa].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Another thing: A lot of Japanese students used to go to Alaska to work in salmon cannery for the summer to earn our tuition and book money and bus fare, in those days. Which was a wonderful experience, too.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Bus fare?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, street car fare.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, street car fare here.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, it was three cents.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. (laughter)

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And then we got hot school lunch for eleven cents, twelve cents. The tuition, attending university, including incidental fee, was about \$23 a quarter. Imagine.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I can't imagine actually, outside my capacity.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Although we worked two months in the salmon cannery and come home with \$150, and that was very good. One season, \$150! But that paid for books and tuition, and street car fare. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: For the year. Did you go up as a group and work as a group in the same place?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well, see there were many salmon canneries, so we'll be assigned to different ones and sometime we go together, and sometime we meet on the boat somewhere in Ketchikan somewhere on the way up or down [to Seattle--George Tsutakawa].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think these early friendships with architecture students made you feel at home when you finally began working with architects again in public settings and commissioned sculptures.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think so, definitely. In fact, after I started to teach in the art department, I was assigned to go down to the architecture school to teach drawing and sculpture.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: To the architects.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And I did that for ten years!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh! Working with architecture students there. I didn't know that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well, that's why while I was still a member of the art department, I only spend one-third of my teaching time in the art school, and two-thirds I spent down in architecture school.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: For ten years, therefore, I got to know all the instructors, all their methods, and their philosophy and attitude, and all those things. And it was a very good ten years for me. So much later, when I got involved in these large architectural and sculptural commissions, I was ready to work with the architects and I understood their language and, you know, their methods, which helped a great deal.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You mentioned once last week, when we were talking about your sculpture, and you mentioned once today when the tape recorder wasn't on and you were talking about painting, how primary your concern with space and form is. And I wondered whether you see this as coming partly out of your concern with the architects, or whether they were primarily concerned with that then? Or is this an emphasis that comes from your contact with Archipenko and painting and sculpture?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think it's both. It's all of it. And, well, about the time I started to teach at the university, which was 1947, the whole art world, so to speak -- which included painting, sculpture, architecture, music, drama, and even literature -- was very much influenced by the Bauhaus theory. And that had, I think, profound influence on just about everybody involved in this kind of work, [who--Ed.] did read and understood and really believed in a lot of that theory, which had to do so much with the relationship of the total space -- and everything in it, including time, and light, and movement, rhythm, and scale. I mean, size, volume, weight, and vibration; we were always talking about this.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, which I'm sure had influence on the interior decoration, the industrial design architecture, painting, sculpture, modern sculpture, just name it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And this focus and its vocabulary was something held in common, very much, between the separate disciplines.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, right. So I was one of them. But I was even more influenced by this thinking. By the way, fellow by the name of Ron Wilson was in charge of a highly integrated architectural design education for the beginners. And they called it basic design in architecture, in which he tried to integrate all these arts together in this one big course, which lasted one whole year.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were you a participant in that course?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I was one of the artists he invited to take part in this. And there were actually two or three artists too, who took part from the art school. And then all the rest of them were architects, but some architectural draftsmen, some theorists, some historians, some practitioners, professional architects. They were all thrown together to teach about 150 students.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you taught as a team?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, as a team. And we had a very definite program. And each instructor was responsible for a certain phase of this. I was in charge of the drawing and the design, or sculpture, and things like that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And your participation lasted the whole year also?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, and I did that for ten years.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you remember whether that constituted the students' whole program their first year, or was it part of their program?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, this was the whole program for the first year.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm, I see, uh huh.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And they had to make the grade there; that was a way of separating the amateurs from the would-be professionals.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: As a clearing house.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And anyway, in this course, we were always very concerned about this Bauhaus theory. Of course, later I began to wonder about this. You know, we'll talk about that some other time. So I was a very strong Bauhaus student. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Among all the things that you just mentioned or listed, as aspects of this thing, one thing that I didn't hear mentioned was materials. Was that something that was relatively down-played, or was that an important aspect also?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no, no, no. No, I just didn't, I forgot to mention it. We were very concerned about materials and textures and strengths and, you know, the inherent quality of material.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. I thought that would ordinarily be a part of that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes, very much so, especially for architects, you know, it was very important. I just didn't mention that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Then did your own personal friendships with the architecture students you've known continue through this period?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, you'd be surprised.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Some of them left the area.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Many, many students, I mean, many, many of my former colleagues in the architecture school still very good friends. Yeah, we keep in touch. And I'm always pleased to find so many architect students who are now all grown up, of course, and in profession and some of them doing very well, very often come to see me and talk to me, call me, write to me, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: People who were your students?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, that's wonderful.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: You know, the other day, I went to the Bumbershoot [September festival in Seattle--Ed.],

and I was just wandering around with my family, and I think there were about four or five former students who came and talked to me.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Then your teaching has meant actually a great deal and you have encouraged them.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think so. I was really in it, all the way. And I really believed in this teaching, taking active part in the students' thinking, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you continued that fundamental belief even when you weren't teaching in architecture, when you were teaching in sculpture in the School of Art later?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right. Later, I came back to the art school, when Gonzales became the director of the art school. He said, "You can't do that; you can't spend all your time down there."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, and so it changed then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So he just told me, "Come back, full time, to art school." (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: At what point did you come to question the Bauhaus approach that you'd been using?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, well, this is kind of a very interesting subject that I have been thinking about quite seriously for some time -- in the last ten, fifteen years. Watching all this development of so-called modern art. And very often I wondered, because a lot of the so-called modern art, abstract art -- two-dimensional, three-dimensional, it doesn't matter -- looked like extension of Bauhaus design exercises to me.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I kind of have a feeling that the whole world, all the people engaged in the business of art, just took it too seriously.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you have the feeling that there was supposed to be some distinction between the exercises and the result to which they put, and that distinction was lost?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I don't know the answer for this. But anyway, I felt this very strongly in the last ten years, or maybe longer than that. For example, a little while ago I was interested when you, after I mentioned all the involvement in Bauhaus theory and teaching, I didn't mention material. So you asked me, well, how about material, you know?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Like I know all the lines.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, I remember that. Well, I thought that was interesting because, just as an example, we had -- oh, probably ten years ago -- a whole exhibition at the Henry Gallery or Seattle Art Museum which was all texture. Everything was texture. From any texture you can just imagine, exhibition of texture. And although it was very interesting, it really didn't mean anything to me. There was disregard for form, balance, relationship of parts and so forth. Things were all just thrown together, textural art. I've seen a lot of those. New York too, Museum of Modern Art. And in Japan; everywhere. And I begin to wonder now why are they doing this? Well, to me it's exhibition of texture.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But it's not presented as that? It's not presented as education for the layman who doesn't have a chance to study Bauhaus?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I guess so; I guess. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: A kind of substitute for that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, it really doesn't mean anything to me; there's no form, there's no message, no -- I don't know. It's so detached. I don't see the relationship to man and his living and his thinking. Pile of texture of all kinds.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think that the genuine Bauhaus teaching implied those things also? Relationship to man and. . .?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I always understood Bauhaus to be a very total thing. And not isolated examples.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah. So this has become, as you say, like pieces of exercises with. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, or display of examples.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And the total goal has been lost sight of?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well, but then you could say this for other things too, like sculpture, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, you can say it of almost anything; if that begins to happen it can pervade.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: This new New York painting, for instance, is very much like the texture exercise. You know, display.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You're talking about the new expressionists; they're very extreme.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, maybe I'm so far behind or so old-fashioned that I don't read it, you know.

[Tape 4; side B]

[Some of George Tsutakawa's remarks missed due to change of tapes--Ed.]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .prevail all around the world, and you know very well if you travel today, you go to New York, you go to Tokyo, you go to London. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And it all looks the same, you mean?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, Chicago, Los Angeles, you know, they really do look very much the same. And this I think is true with almost everything. We eat the same food. You get on the airplane and stop at any airport around the world and they have the same menu, and they serve the same food, you know. And we wear same things and we look at the same movies and pictures and we look at the same radio, television. Everything is becoming so unified and controlled by certain ideology or philosophy.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think the Bauhaus has provided much of this ideology, for visual forms?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I'm sure Bauhaus had a lot of influence in this thinking, attitude and direction, that the whole world is taking. And, which is all right in a way. I think it's very good for industry. I think it's very good for mass production. I think it's going to make a lot of rich people and banks are going to get rich. But this is leaving people out. Man have to step aside and let the machine do all these things in a uniform way, live in the same kind of houses, drive same kind of cars, and everything is all prescribed for you. Actually, they talk about freedom, but I wonder if we're getting freedom. I don't think we are, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think it's produced a wide-spread production of art in which the personal element and the individual element is somehow left out of the. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right. Yes. Each individual is no more consideration. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You were speaking earlier of how you think you look at art, other people's art, sometimes to see what not to do, and how you want to be very much yourself, and not part of a trend or part of a group or part of something else. What you're suggesting is the elimination of that in much current art?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, actually it's frightening sometimes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you at a certain point become aware in your own art of a need to be more personal and more separate from what Dudley Pratt was doing, or what Ray Hill was doing, or did you always feel that way?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, somewhat. Not so strongly until maybe last 20 years I became more aware of it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Let's see, the last 20 years. From the fifties, maybe?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Late fifties, no 1960 on, I think.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's about the time that you began doing sculptures that involve water.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is there any relationship?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, fountain sculptures. You know, it's interesting. Talking about fountain sculptures, which I started about that time, you know I have made so many of these things, and placed them around different parts of the United States and Japan and Canada and here and there. And this book that just came out about public art around the world, there are so few fountain sculptures, you know. I'm kind of wondering about this thing. Why don't more sculptors make fountains?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I've read or heard you speak of all the technical difficulties. Do you think it's partly a desire to eliminate certain complications? That you have to work with many other people, you have to have it engineered.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that's true, but I'm sure that man, if they have a genuine desire to do something, they'll do it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: True.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: My feeling is that, going back to traveling and observing and talking to other professionals engaged in sculpture or painting, whatever. I think one of the most important things in the communication with other fellow artists, and also studying the history of art, is learning about technique of making something. Although I don't regard this as the most important thing in producing work of art; that's only a means of arriving at certain ideas and images that one has in his mind. So when I said, well, I go around searching for, looking for something not to do, you know. But on the other hand, I'm always looking for a method, a way to do things. Now, getting back to what I started to say a little while ago, I think any great man or artist, once he has a certain image and conviction, and he believe in something, he'll find a way to make it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah. So if people wanted to make fountain sculptures they would.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And that leaves you with the question why don't they.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's why, I wonder why there are not more fountain sculptors?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And do you have any hypotheses?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Not really. Although we know very well that the Romans have been making these things for 2,000 years. And they placed them all over the world.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And the Baroque period made enough to last for a few centuries. (chuckles)

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Boy, yeah. I've traveled a lot, you know, studying or looking for the old Roman fountains. So, just wondering about this point. The modern artists today, sculptors today, whether they don't care about fountains, or they don't really see it as part of their contemporary living space or what? I don't understand it. So far I haven't met. . . I know [only--Ed.] one person who doesn't like fountains.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Who doesn't like fountains? And everyone else likes fountains, you mean? And yet no one makes them.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: (laughs) I haven't found anybody who doesn't like fountains, except one. (laughs) This is a little, I don't know if you print this or not, or record this or not, but about 1967, when Dan Evans was a governor in Olympia [Washington State--Ed.], I was asked to design and construct a fountain sculpture for the Governor's Mansion in Olympia. All right? And then soon after that, Governor Dan Evans steps down and Dixie Lee [Ray--Ed.] comes in, as the governor.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And this fountain that I was designing was just about all finished and ready to be installed and -- well, we still had to do the plumbing and construction of the pool and all that -- but it was about ready to go. And when Dixie Lee came in, she said, "I don't want no fountain."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: She's the one person?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No reason?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I think she had many dogs, which she wanted to keep in the back yard there, in the mansion. And that was amazing she didn't want a fountain, but I don't see what's wrong. We have a pool here all around, we have two big dogs.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, they can co-exist with a fountain!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: It's good for them, you know. Well anyway. Now, this fountain is installed. I installed it about two weeks ago.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh you did? In Olympia?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, in Olympia.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In its original place?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, in the Governor's Mansion.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Good. That's a long time.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And we'll have a dedication some time this month, later. I don't know when it's going to happen because so much is happening, you know. Spellman's [current Governor, 1983--Ed.] so busy, running around. (chuckles) But anyway, getting back to fountains, I really don't understand why there're not more fountains.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think it's the case that for many 20th-century sculptors the notion of a sculpture has become nearly identical somehow with the notion of a monument, as a kind of static, self-enclosed object, almost archaic in many people's minds, in a way that eliminates the on- going liveliness of that interchange between water and material?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I thought about that, too, for a long time. But when I see some of these examples of so-called best public sculpture around the world, by golly, whether it's abstract or not, and even those very way-out abstract ones, all monumental.

You see, I think the concept -- well, let's put it this way -- I think every sculptor, a real, genuine sculptor likes to do big things, permanent things, placed and be seen by more people. I think this is just a born natural desire of almost every sculptor. There may be a few who doesn't care about this, but most of them I think do. And so when they do have piece of sculpture, good size, heroic size, well-placed and he's pleased, this indeed becomes a monument.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Now, whether, you see, it's not equestrian or general on the horse. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No, I understand.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .but it's still monumental, and it's a monument.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think there is a kind of threat with regard to a fountain that if one's fountain is turned off, if the plumbing doesn't work, or if someone presses the lever, then it isn't the same piece anymore? And doesn't stand for the artist's work in the same way?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I think there's a part of that, I'm pretty sure it is. But that's because it's not well-designed, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You think it's possible for it to be perfectly self-sufficient with or without the water, so that it's not ____.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, no I didn't say that. But if it's designed well, it shouldn't have all these problems, you know, although there are certain things like the climate where the water has to be turned off in the severe wintertime. You know, causing the sculpture or the pump to freeze and bust or break under these conditions. But normally, or if it's well-designed, even in the winter it's very beautiful. Or if it's allowed to freeze it's very beautiful too, oh yes. So I think that depends on how well it's designed. One thing, though, a fountain is very expensive. It's a lot more expensive than just plain sculpture, a single sculpture without water. It costs over twice as much, you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. Doubles the cost or more.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. The construction of the pool and the tank and depending on the size, the volume of water, you have to have a pump room underground and huge pump and plumbing and electric work and hydraulics, and all that costs twice as much as making, casting a bronze sculpture.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I remember your saying to someone else, though, that there seems to be widespread interest on the part of the public in fountains, so that corporations can buy fountains from a fountain catalogue, I believe you said once, indicating that the people who give commissions are willing to pay for fountains. What you're suggesting now is that it's the owners themselves who perhaps are reluctant to make the financial commitment.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I see, yeah. Well, I don't know about this. As far as I'm concerned, I've been more than busy, or commissions came to me. In fact I turned down many commissions because I simply couldn't handle them. So, personally, I'm very happy. It doesn't bother me. I'm just thinking -- when I say there are not enough fountains -- I'm just thinking of the general scene, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I understand, yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and that's why I'm wondering. I know quite a few sculptors attempted to do fountain. They do one or two and then they quit! See, they don't keep on.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. It doesn't engage their interest.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right. For instance in our own city, there are people like Ted Johnson and John Geise and [James--Ed.] FitzGerald. Of course FitzGerald died after doing several. But other people, they make one or two fountains and just quit. I don't know why. I can't understand that, and this is true everywhere.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I guess it was Valdis Zarins recently unveiled a fountain sculpture here in the city.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yeah, that's right. I hope he keeps it up, though. I don't know if they're discouraged and frustrated after the first one or two. They should keep, you know, pushing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What led your interest to turn to fountains or fountain sculptures?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, this is actually almost coincidental you know. Because when the city fathers decided to tear down the old library building at Fourth and Madison, in late 1950s, and when it was finally decided to build that new library, there were a number of people on that library board who decided that there should be some public art on this new building. And they were strong on this idea, and they did indeed set aside certain percent of the total budget for art. And they successfully carried it out. At that time, there were four or five major art commissions given out. And for some reason, they decided that I should do a fountain. That was a major commission.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It wasn't your idea that it should involve water?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, it wasn't my idea at all. So one day, I receive a letter from the board and Bindon and Wright architects. They called me and asked me if I would do a fountain. So I said, "Well, gee, you know I have never done a fountain before, and I don't know whether I could do it or not, but I'll come down and talk about it with you." Which I did, and they already had a drawing, very comprehensively planned layout, of the Fifth Avenue plaza, and they had a space next to that small auditorium in the corner, about six feet by eight feet block of concrete sitting up already, in the drawing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Already there? Oh, in the drawing?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: In the drawing, yeah. And they said, "Well, we want you to design a fountain for us right here."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In this little corner?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah! (laughs) So I thought God, this is a real shocking thing; they have \$15,000 or \$20,000, you know. I'd never seen that much money in my whole life, a big commission. And, I'd never done a fountain. So I said, "Well, I'll have to think about this for a while." (chuckles) So I came home and I really thought about it very seriously, day and night; I couldn't sleep sometimes. But I couldn't see putting a small fountain, and when they talked fountain, they were thinking maybe a figure, standing on this pedestal, you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, and little jets here and there.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: With a little water trickling down. Or something like that. I think that's what they had in mind so they already gave me a pedestal there. I didn't want to go along with that, so I came home and then I started to draw the whole plaza area. I already had some drawings. And I took this pedestal and pulled it out in the middle of the plaza and started designing. Oh, I guess it took me about a month, and I finally came up with a certain idea, which is as it is now. But in the beginning I wasn't so sure, nobody was so sure, but anyway I presented this design and model to the library board and the architects. Well, they liked it, so the architect told me they'll stop all the drawing and construction out there. No more pedestal.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh! Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And then a new pool and all that. So they were very cooperative and very good to me. So I was able to go ahead and build this thing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And the work you built there -- am I right? -- is fabricated like your later ones?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, it's fabricated [in bronze--George Tsutakawa].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It's made out of sheet metal and welded?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, right, it's welded.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And had you ever worked that way before?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No. This is another thing. I had never done any metal casting -- metal casting that size -- or fabrication. Well, first I was going to, after designing the piece, and completing the drawings, details, and making a model, send it to Japanese foundry, and have it cast in Japan, because I knew there are big bronze foundries in Japan for centuries.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you first envisioned it as a cast piece?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right, yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But much the same in shape as it actually is or did it become revised a great deal?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, of course, there were, certain design changes were necessary, but anyway, I went ahead and I made some search and I wrote to many people in Japan, museums and sculptors, all kinds of people, hoping that I would get someone to do it. But you know several months passed and nobody answered. No foundry in Japan wanted to touch this.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Discouraging.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And, well I think I understood all this afterwards, but at first I couldn't understand it, why they didn't want to do it. The Japanese foundries, you know, they've been casting big things like Rodin, French impressionist school, horses and equestrians [i.e., statues as well as the Great Buddhas--George Tsutakawa], for centuries.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes? I didn't realize that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: They do a beautiful job. But no one's ever done a modern abstract fountain piece before.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So they couldn't understand my design.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So it just looked crazy, impossible.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, they didn't want to even touch it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So, when I found that out, I said I'll have to build it here in Seattle myself, but I'm not going to cast it. By that time I found out how much it's going to cost and then no one in Seattle could cast it; I had to send it to Roman Bronze in New York or the big foundry in Europe, Paris or Germany, or Rome. And that was just out of question, absolutely. In the meantime, I found a very good engineer here in town who is still with me after 22, 23 years, doing all my hydraulics and structural engineering for all my fountain jobs. I found this man, and he came to me and we just discussed this matter, and he said, "Oh, we can do it." (chuckles) "We'll fabricate it." You know, in bronze. And he was a very good welding engineer and a welder. He was a welder for the navy shipyard and also Boeing Company for 20 years, before he became an engineer. And then he stayed on, and so he was helping me as a side job. We worked out a very good system, fabricating this, and by golly we built it right here in my garage.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Had he ever worked with an artist before?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It was a first for him and you both.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But he was a very sensitive man, and he understood exactly what I wanted. So he advised me on all the technical aspects and engineering, mathematical calculation, and all that. And so I went ahead and bought a welding machine and you know all the necessary tools and went to work on it and by . . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did he teach you those techniques so that you do much of the work?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, then I learned welding. Now this is a very highly sophisticated welding technique; it's not the ordinary welding you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, I noticed that your seams don't show. (chuckles)

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, electric welding, and it's very expensive but effective welding technique. And of course since then I bought other machines and we got involved in all kinds of difficult welding situations, always solved them. And then my son started to do the welding. He's been welding for me for about ten years now. But I used to do a lot of welding too, myself.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What was the name of the welding engineer?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Uchida, Jack Uchida.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He doesn't work with you anymore since your son has taken over?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, he's still my consultant, engineering. But my son does all the work now, welding and metal, you know, shop work. Because welding was very hard on my eye, and also my ears. All that pounding and grinding you know for ten years.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What metal do you use? Is it always bronze?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: It's mostly bronze. It's a silicon bronze, very highly sophisticated tough and permanent bronze, but also malleable and workable and just ideal for sculpture work.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And the fountain at Seattle Library was made out of it also?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, all my work is silicon bronze, except a few stainless steel pieces and some aluminum pieces which we did.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yes, that's right, some of the smaller pieces.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: You see, the Spokane fountain is aluminum. That's about 17 feet high.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh I'd forgotten.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, it's right by the opera house in Spokane.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I remember some of the little ones with the flat plates that make a kind of ring.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, those are stainless steel. I did a big one for the KING TV station, the new building; stainless steel one, 35 feet high, hanging on the ceiling.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I was going to ask where it was. Inside?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, you haven't seen it? I'll have to show it. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Thirty-five feet. And it's hanging? Is it a fountain?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, it's a hanging fountain.

[Tape 5; side A]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: This is a continuation of the interview with George Tsutakawa and Martha Kingsbury for the Archives of American Art. And we're going to go back to talking about the war years, which have been mentioned before, but not really finished.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, the Second World War, as you all recall was really a very sad experience for all of us, especially the Japanese people, and then people on the West Coast in general. It lasted over four years but fortunately or unfortunately all the time of the war, over four years, I was in the U.S. Army. In other words I didn't have the experience of being uprooted from my domicile, or whatever you call it, and transported inland to the so-called Japanese war internment camp. Although my sister and her family, and two uncles and their families, were all interned.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was your sister married then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, she already had five children.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Five children.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, married, her husband and her children were all. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And did the family stay together or were they. . .?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, they did, but my uncles' family didn't stay together, because one of my uncles was suspected of being a spy or objectionable character and he was put in -- what do you call? -- a [concentration--George Tsutakawa] camp in New Mexico where most of the suspected Japanese people were really imprisoned for three years. Well, he was very unhappy about the situation and so he decided to pull out and take the exchange boat, take his family and go to Japan during the war, on this -- what do they call that? There was a Swedish boat which took those Japanese nationals who chose to go back to Japan, and they traveled, the name of the ship was Gripsholm [?], I remember. And it was an exchange boat. And so at certain point, somewhere in India, the American citizens who were in Japan during the war and then the Japanese citizens in the United States were exchanged -- the same number.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. On neutral territory, in India.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and there was a name for that certain action. But anyway, one of my uncles took all his four children and wife and went to Japan during that time. The other uncle stayed [in camp--George Tsutakawa] with his wife and children, and eventually they come back to Seattle after the war, and he died soon after that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The uncle who left with his family and went back to Japan, had he and his family been in one of the camps before they left? Or did they. . .?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, they were. [They were separated. Uncle George in Lordberg, New Mexico, and the rest of the family in Idaho--George Tsutakawa] In fact they stayed in these [separate--George Tsutakawa] camps for two years before they were shipped to Japan.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you were in letter or phone communication with these family members?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. After I was inducted in the U.S. Army -- A bunch of Niseis from the Seattle area -- there must have been hundreds of them or more -- were taken to Monterey, California, where we were all inducted [in the U.S. Army--George Tsutakawa]. From there we were put on the [troupe--George Tsutakawa] train and traveled for three, four days and we didn't know where we were being taken to, and during the day and night, we had orders to keep the blinds down, so we can't see outside. It was strange experience, and I don't know why they did that. And I think we were all suspected, you know, still suspected of espionage or some [subversive--George Tsutakawa] act.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you were treated as a group?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: As a group, yeah, and more like prisoners.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And although we knew where we were, we could look outside and we knew we were in New Mexico and Texas and Oklahoma, and we were traveling down south somewhere. Well anyway, our group ended at Little Rock, Arkansas, one morning, and then taken by truck to Camp Robinson, Arkansas, which in the lower Ozarks hills, very beautiful, lovely area, to an infantry training camp. And we were split up into various companies and different compounds. And then we had our basic training as an infantryman. Well. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And so you were not assigned in groups of half a dozen, but just randomly split up.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, we were all split up, maybe one or two Japanese-Americans in each company.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: At this point did all Japanese in the United States still have no citizenship? What was the citizenship status?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, the citizenship status, according to the Constitution, is that anyone born in United States, regardless of their parentage or religion or race, are American citizens.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. Okay.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So, at the time of the war -- I don't remember the ratio -- but there were probably fifty

percent of the Japanese who were immigrants who came to the United States from Japan. And they had no citizenship; they were not allowed to own property. But the second generation, the other half of the Japanese population, were American citizens.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And the first half, who had immigrated, were still denied the right to become naturalized citizens?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Surely! They weren't allowed to become naturalized until way after the war ended, about sixties, or something like that. Yeah, that's true. And that's where all the problem arose, because the American-born Japanese American citizens of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned, you see. And their properties and their rights as citizen was denied, at that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And when you got to Arkansas, and were as a group split up and assigned to separate companies, did you or any of the other Japanese infantrymen you knew find that you were in a peculiar situation, or you were treated differently? Had the people in Arkansas even known Asian residents in the United States? Did the officers view you with suspicion, treat you differently?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No. Of course we didn't know where we were going, and there was rumor that we were going to be imprisoned or enslaved or something like that. Although when we arrived in the Little Rock area and at army camp, we found out that we were all treated equally with the rest of the army. And so we were free to go and do as we pleased. But in those days I had very interesting experience. I soon found out that I had to have no fear of my freedom and movement in the city outside of camp as well as inside the camp.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But that was the first time I experienced the deep South. And I used to explore and wander around downtown in Little Rock, and a number of times I was fascinated and drawn by the Negro culture, and especially their religious ceremonies, rites and rolling!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And so I used to go in to these places and watch them. And then I was arrested many times by the American M.P. for being in the Negro district. And then M.P. would say, "Well, you ain't no nigger. Get in the wagon." They'd take me back to camp! (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So the racial tension between black and white was so great that no racial tension about being Asian existed.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right. So I found out that, to the American soldiers, it didn't really make any difference who we were. Because there were already some Chinese merchants in Little Rock, running dyework, laundry, and chop suey house.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Quite a few of them. And to the Americans, they couldn't tell the difference between Chinese and Japanese or Korean; they all looked the same to them. (laughs) But anyway, in Little Rock, I made many very fine friends, native Little Rock people. And one of them, in particular, was a grandson of the famous Senator Robinson. Tom, the grandson, was a very fine artist and painter, and printmaker. And we became great friends. And I remember they lived in a huge southern mansion, had Negro servants, and he gave me one big room with a screen porch where I could go and sleep in this luxurious bed with a canopy, real Southern style. And so all that time I was down there, I was having a great time; it was like a fairy tale, unbelievable! (chuckles, coughs) So anyway, that didn't last very long. Well, I guess I was stationed there for about a year, and after that, our outfit moved to Texas to a place called Camp Fannin, which is near Tyler, Texas -- Tyler and Gladewater, Texas -- to activate a new infantry camp, training camp.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Camp Fannin?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, Camp Fannin. And so they took me with them. And by that time I was camp commander's pet artist.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Already, I see, from Arkansas.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So wherever he went he had to take me. So I was always riding the jeep, you know, going around and inspecting bivouac and maneuvering areas, you know, make sketches and maps and do little things like that for the commander. And so that life was fine too, because I didn't have to run around the field with a rifle and pack. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You'd been through basic training and then relieved of those duties and. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, my basic training was cut short too.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh it was also?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, because of the demand and the. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: To do portraits!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. To do the camp commander's portrait, yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You mentioned that before.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So the duration of the war you spent in camps in the United States?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I did. But that's the first two years in army. About that time I was shipped to -- let's see now -- Camp Shelby, Mississippi, where the all-Japanese combat teams were being organized for active duty in Italy, for the landing, Sarano landing. So there's a famous 442nd battalion and 100th infantry battalion; they were all formed in the jungles in southern Mississippi. And they shipped me to that. Now, imagine after two years of very easy life as camp artist, they suddenly gave me all this equipment and rifle and we trained for landing and jungle fighting and all that. And I was just completely exhausted; I just couldn't take it, because I was in no shape. So as a result, after about a month or so, I became hospitalized and I had to go through operation and this and that. Well, I was in the army hospital in Harrisburg, Mississippi, for about a month or so. And then when I came back my outfit was gone, they had shipped to Italy, Sarano landing. And in this action, many of my buddies were killed. This is the very famous outfit which is one of the most decorated outfits in the U.S. Army, you know, during that war. Well, I was in that outfit briefly.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But did not go along.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, I didn't go.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So you never rejoined them?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, I didn't. In the meantime, when I was recuperating in Mississippi, another order came, which ordered me to go to Fort Snelling, Minnesota, where there was a large Japanese-language school -- this was a U.S. Intelligence army language school -- to become an instructor of Japanese language. Well, it's interesting that all the time since my induction to the army somehow we were always afraid to show any knowledge or connection with Japan. I say "we" because there were quite a few Japanese Niseis like me who were born in the United States and raised in Japan, came back at an early age, who could read and write and speak Japanese fluently. Well I was one of them, but for some reason, there was a rumor that we were going to be all imprisoned and mistreated for being Japanese. So we kept denying this; it's real funny, because I think any smart American officer interrogating me would know right away. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That you knew Japanese?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. That was funny, afterwards we. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But you would say, "No, I don't know Japanese"?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, I'd say, "I don't know any Japanese." (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well anyway, they finally found out and caught up with me and said "You go up to Fort Snelling and teach Japanese; we know your history, we know your background."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Which I did. In fact, there was a small group of Nisei soldiers who were all rounded up and sent up there with me.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Then you were to teach Japanese language to American. . .?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and I stayed there about two years. And I became an instructor, and I was well-treated. We had good life there, and, oh, every so often, when we have a weekend or a little furlough, I would take the train and go to Chicago Art Institute, go to New York, go to Boston. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh really!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And during that time I really educated myself and I visited major museums in the country.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You could get back to the East coast as well as to Chicago?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, I went to Chicago, I mean, New York, that was about 1944, I guess, '43 or '44.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you'd go into Chicago for several days at a time, or for a quick weekend, and go to the Art Institute.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, we used to, let's see, stay at the Palmer House.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yes!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And The Loop.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's doing it right!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And walk to the Art Institute every day, and then go around and go to the rock and roll, jazz joints.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: On the near north side?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Basin Street is it?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, around there, and I was really absorbing all the American culture there, both the academic and traditional as well as the modern and the peoples, you know, culture. A great time, and. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you become acquainted with any practicing artists when you were in Minnesota, as you had when you were in Arkansas?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I met quite a few people but all very fleetingly, so I really never got to know them too well, although there are a few people with whom I still correspond with, since that time. Now one thing about New York, briefly. I went to New York, I believe in '43, first time. And of course like any young art student, I was very excited and I was trying to absorb everything. I remember 57th Street. And most of the galleries were on the east side 57th, east and west both, 57th, anywhere from 54th to 57th street. And first time I went to the Museum of Nonobjective Art, and they were having a big retrospective show of Kandinsky. I still remember this. And this very impressive interior with velvet curtains, you know?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And playing Haydn, Bach, or some classical music behind the curtain somewhere, with all these paintings like Bauer and Kandinsky, beautiful paintings. First time I saw the original, nonobjective painting, and I was so excited about it, I still remember that. (chuckles) And then there was Janis Gallery and the Buckholz was having a first Henry Moore show, first time I saw Henry Moore, real Henry Moore, you know. It was so exciting. And of course Matisse and other French modernists were on display. I'll never forget that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can we backtrack a minute, while you're talking about going to New York, and tell me what you had seen just prior to the war when you went to San Francisco? You mentioned the San Francisco World's Fair in, what, '40 and '41?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And so you had gone there before the war?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right; before the war started I was in San Francisco.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you mentioned how much sculpture there was there, and how excited you'd been.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can you remember who was in that exhibition?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I think I mentioned sometime ago, the most popular sculpture in those days was what I call -- some people still call -- the World Fair sculpture. There was a world fair in San Francisco, world's

fair in New York and Chicago, different places, and the old members of the Sculpture Society were doing all these monumental figures, standing, and they were still doing very romantic figures as well as military, and what do you call -- politically-oriented kind of sculpture.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sculpture with a message.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. And so everywhere we went we saw these pioneers, heroic figures standing with an axe or. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, something like that. And so, of course, they learned watching these things. Now. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But in San Francisco a few minutes ago you had said that there was an Archipenko torso that impressed you very much?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right, right. There was a special exhibition. Oh, I remember, there was a Van Gogh show, the art of Van Gogh, that was very, very impressive. I really was impressed by that. And then there was another room, the so-called moderns at that time, in 1940, in which there were pieces by Archipenko and, oh, Rodin, Maillol, and I don't know the others. These were real moderns those days, and that was particularly interesting to me. And of course Archipenko was one of them.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. Were there any Matisse or Picasso?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, many Matisse, Picasso, and the French cubists. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .and Braque, Gris. There were special, specially selected pieces from Paris were shown there too. Paris and New York. I have a catalogue of the show somewhere. I don't know where it is now, but maybe sometime I'll find it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So that preceded your trips to Chicago and New York?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You'd already seen that on the West Coast?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, that's right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When you were in the army, having this good life as you describe it, were you relatively out of contact with friends and family who were Japanese civilians in the United States?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, I was not out of contact, because during the four years -- Well, I never went overseas, you know; I never saw combat. And I was what you might call a pencil-pusher. They called me the artificer; that was my title in the army, which just meant artist, official artist in the camp. I was artificer [or instructor of Japanese language--George Tsutakawa], you see. Well anyway, in that capacity, I was very free to take my furloughs. I think I had more than my share of furloughs, and so when I had a week or so I would come west to the various internment camps where my relatives were, and my sister was. My sister was in Tule Lake, California, and my two uncles and their family were in Minnedoka, Idaho. And so I used to take the train, oh, the Union Pacific, Great Northern, whatever I could get hold of, and travel west to visit my relatives. And they were always writing to me and I wrote to them too. So I did keep very close contact with my relatives and friends of the Japanese community.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were they extremely demoralized by their circumstances?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No. I don't think so. I think they were quite philosophical about this.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And, well, it's kind of ironical that the Japanese people, most of -- I'd say 99 percent -- the people that were interned, were really hard working people. And they had businesses, they had hotel, they grocery store and fish market and farming -- over half I think were farmers. Well, the only problem they had was that for four years they had nothing to do. And all the food was provided for, although they didn't care about it too much (chuckles), it was all army ration.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But, so they had enough milk and butter and canned beans, macaroni, and. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But nothing to occupy their energies. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .and no way of safeguarding the investment of their work previously.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, they had no money; they had nothing. And so most of the people took this very philosophically, and they did small craft work, painting, sculpture. They had Kabuki theater formed in various camps. They were having concerts, traditional Japanese music. My wife was still very young when she was interned in one of these camps, but she took flower arrangement, tea ceremony, Japanese dance and cooking and sewing -- all those things which her mother taught her.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And there was plenty of time for it because there was no pressure to do anything else.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right. And she became one of the stars, performing classical Japanese dance. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So in a way the internment forced these people to fall back on their own cultural resources?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I think many of the people really took advantage of the situation and didn't waste their time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And they also had organized farm projects and they were given a lot of land where they did. . .

Tape 5; side B]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .attended the farm, which was a good thing. So when the war ended they came out. Although they had no money -- it was very difficult to start any kind of business, but they did. And they were ready to go back.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You mentioned a day or two ago that you wanted to say something about how the war years and the experiences in the war years affected the later attitudes of Japanese in the United States. Do you remember what you meant?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, let me tell you a little experience I had during the war. When I was stationed at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, one of my uncles was imprisoned in a war relocation camp -- they called it something else because this was a camp where the suspicious Japanese characters were actually imprisoned. And this was in a place called Lordsburg, New Mexico. I think it was New Mexico. And he was very bitter about the situation because he -- actually we all know and also found out that he had no intention or had not acted against the United States in any way. And so he was very bitter about this, and therefore he decided to pull out, take his family and go to Japan. Well anyway, during the time when he was imprisoned there, he wrote to me many, many letters, asking me, as a member of the United States Armed Forces, if I could be of some assistance in persuading the American military government to free him, you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You were not in a position to do anything of the sort?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, I couldn't. But he kept writing to me and he wanted me to come to the camp and talk to the camp commander. So one day that summer, my first year in the army, I obtained a seven-day furlough to go visit him, in Lordsburg. So I took this train -- I don't even remember the name of all these trains or railroad lines, like Missouri-Pacific and Oklahoma-Texas this and that. Anyway I remember traveling day and night, finally went to Lordsburg. And then this was just a desert; there was nothing there. I got off the train, and there was one small town, maybe half a block long, one laundry, one beer parlor, one small hotel. And all the people around there seemed like either Spanish or Mexican people, running the businesses. And then I finally made contact with the camp commander of my uncle, and went out to this camp, which is way out in the desert -- nothing! Barbed-wire, you know, and guarded.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Fenced.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Go through two, three gates and be interrogated and had to show all my credentials or whatever I had and finally went to see my uncle, and we had conversation, limited time. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: With a guard watching you all the time, you know. And my uncle was of course very happy to see me, and we had conversation but there was nothing much I could do. Except I did write some letters to the camp commander and also to the Japanese internment camp commander -- whatever you call it -- but nothing happened. Well, this was kind of an interesting experience, because I was still kind of scared myself, and then traveling all by myself for a thousand miles by train in a strange territory where I have never been to before, just for this purpose. And one little thing I want to tell you about this is, on the way to Lordsburg, New Mexico, after we passed through Oklahoma City, as I was sitting there, a gentleman, a very tall, handsome, bewhiskered gentleman, in sort of a Southern style -- a big hat, you know. . . He came and sat next to me. And I didn't say anything; I just sat looking out. And he just sat there for a long time and he was reading paper or something like that. But somehow, eventually, he started a conversation with me. And he was a very kindly man, you see. And then he said, "Where you going? Or where're you from? Where you stationed?" You know, very simple conversation like that. And then he said, "Are you Japanese?"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And at that time, somehow, I didn't want to say I was Japanese so, "No," I said, "I'm Korean." And then he looked at me, "Oh, is that so?" And then he started to ask me some questions like, "You speak Korean?"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So, "No, I'm a second-generation Korean; I don't speak Korean." And then silence for a while and he started asking me a few questions. And then he said, "You know, I was American ambassador to Korea." (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oooh! (laughs)

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So many years!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And he's been to Japan so many times, you know; he was a foreign diplomat for the American government. So he knew all about the situation and I think he suspected, he knew already that I was not Korean. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you were Japanese?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, anyway, somehow he really didn't pursue this any more. And then he got off the train, he said, "Well, good luck, soldier." You know, like that. And then after that, there was a lot of hard thinking and soul-searching, you know. I said, "Gee, why in the hell did I say that? Why did I say I'm Korean?" I think it was because of my whole fear and attitude about this situation, anti-Japanese, anti-American, working from both directions, and a lot of imagination. So after that experience I decided that I should never lie about my birth, my origin, any more; I should be always honest and say who I am and not lie about it. I really learned a big lesson, and I think it paid off in the long run. It was a very interesting experience. So I think in a way this will tell you something about the thinking and the condition of Japanese people during that time, especially the second generation.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think it made that whole second generation, then, feel in a way more deeply tied to their origins. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .and less able to forget about them or not deal with the, than if they had never been forced to confront it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I think so. Now, let me tell you something else here. This is something that I have just learned very recently. There was a Japanese correspondent of one of the leading Japanese newspapers, who has been stationed in Washington, D.C., and New York for the last seven years, a very brilliant reporter who came to interview me. And he said the newspaper, called Mainichi newspaper, which has circulation three times more than the New York Times, big newspaper. But anyway, he told me that his newspaper is running a series of daily report -- for three months -- on the Japanese people in the United States, and the history and social conditions and culture and living -- everything.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Their history here as well as their current situation?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, the Japanese in the United States. He's been doing research on this for almost seven years. He moves from one city to another, and he spent over a week in Seattle and interviewed quite a few

people. Well, what he told me I thought was very interesting. You see, the Niseis, and the Sanseis -- they're the second and third generation -- and even some of the Isseis -- first generation -- who became naturalized after the war, they all really feel that they are subject of the United States. So they feel a responsibility and allegiance and their duty to serve the United States first. They really do, as American citizen. The Japanese people [in Japan--George Tsutakawa], as a whole, don't look at it that way. They think all the Japanese immigrants who came to the United States since the turn of the century and their offspring -- second, third, fourth generation, doesn't matter -- are still all Japanese.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh. They can't understand the degree to which. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: . . .those who left have changed their mind.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right. And this is a very interesting, to think about this, you know. The attitude and you might call racial trait of the people. How tight and how close they are, and also independent they are. Well, you know the Japanese history where people ruled by the feudal Tokagawa family lasted for almost three hundred years?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And during that time, they closed all the doors to foreigners.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's right, sure.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And they just existed in, well somehow they became a more strongly homogenized nation during that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So to those native Japanese it is impossible to believe that their own kin would become part of another country?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And not remain part of Japan? Does this, is this manifested in your own relations with people you know in your own family? You mentioned once that of your many brothers and sisters only two came to America; the others returned and stayed.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do they find it difficult to understand, then, how you and your sister feel over here?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I don't know. This never came up in our conversation, and I've been to Japan so many times, and my relatives, my brother and my sisters, have come and visited us.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And this subject never came up. We never even questioned that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you think that, as this reporter suggests, their assumption is different from your assumption? It never comes up but they just assume something different.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I guess so. I haven't really given this much thought.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's what's implied by what he said.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, it just came to me about a week ago, after our conversation with this Japanese reporter that I thought was interesting. Well, then I tried to figure out this kind of a thinking or attitude among the Japanese, so-called Japanese artists in the United States, which there are many.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And well, starting with people like Kuniyoshi, and Noguchi, and quite a number of these people, who are accepted and established in the United States, but they're definitely of Japanese origin.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The other aspect of Japanese history, which also is very distinctive and almost astonishing, is that in addition to having closed themselves off for three hundred years, they then in the late 19th century made the most determined and self-conscious effort to incorporate European culture.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And of course did it so relatively completely and successfully that they seem to manifest a great ability to both live without culture from abroad, if they choose, and to live with it, if they choose. And this too might have some bearing on the question you're raising of Japanese artists like Kuniyoshi and Noguchi and Yamasaki, many others who are Japanese but may feel themselves to be thoroughly part of American or European culture also.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I have talked about that aspect of the cultural developments -- I say developments in Japan for let's say over a thousand years in Japan. And many Japanese scholars and art critics and people believe that this is one of the strengths of the Japanese people because in the 6th century and 7th century, they took the Chinese written language, writing, and all the cultures and they. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. The architecture, the painting, they took it all.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes. Everything! Yeah, and Buddhism, through China and Korea. They took that too. And they made it their own for the last thousand years. Now Buddhism is almost nonexistent in China, you know. Very little Buddhism left. And whatever Buddhism that was in China in the 6th century, or before that, all came to Japan it seems like. And Japan kept it and they thrived on this. And so now what they're saying is the Japanese will take the European culture, American culture and absorb it all, make it their own.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. And perhaps preserve it after America and Europe have lost it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and so they're saying they're not ashamed of it; they've been doing that for the last thousand years.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. (chuckles) So I thought that was kind of interesting side of this development.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And when you think about 20th-century artists of Japanese origin you find that they're able with great confidence to do this.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well, I don't know. I sometime wonder about these things too. The makeup, the physical makeup and the mental makeup of the Japanese people I think are quite different from the American people. I'm thinking about artists.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. How do you think they're different?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I really don't know, but there is a difference. Maybe the Americans are more bolder or more reckless in their art adventures. I don't know; maybe I'm wrong. Although the Japanese are trying to -- I'm talking about the modern Japanese artist -- are trying to emulate and copy that too, very strongly. But I think they'll end up with something else.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Something less wild and reckless than the extremes to which Americans can carry things?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Eventually, more Japanese, although it might appear to be or look very American or European, in appearance.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, what about an artist like Arakawa, whose works seem bold and inventive and reckless to many people.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Is that -- the printmaker?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He's a painter, he does. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Arakawa?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The man who ten, fifteen years ago was working very much with words incorporated into paintings in a way that led people to associate him with concept art and minimal art?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Gee, you know I. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He just comes to mind as an example of someone very bold and reckless, in a way.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, I don't know him.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Well, we won't use him as a focus, then.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, you know Shinoda? Japanese lady? A calligrapher and abstract artist?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Barely.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Shinoda. She's very well known. She did these huge sumi paintings, you know -- abstract, completely abstract. And decorated screen -- what do you call -- the curtain for the Japanese Kabuki theater, things a hundred feet wide. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .with big brush strokes. I'll find her work somewhere. But anyway, I'm thinking about Shinoda as one of those people. Hmm.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Who reassimilates through something Japanese, you mean.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Do you remember, meet Yuji Abe?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's a Japanese art dealer, who owns and operates one of the oldest print galleries in downtown Tokyo. He's very well known, especially in this country.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, he was here just recently, and he always comes through Seattle and stops here for a few days. Anyway, through Abe I met and knew about Shinoda.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Shinoda, you say you probably knew about from the time that you had the exhibit in the fifties in Tokyo?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, but I never met her, somehow. She's well known in New York, too; she has lived in New York many years and did very well.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, she did?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. So did Okada.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He has exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art in '54. And in the Schaeffer Gallery. [There are some fairly long pauses here, suggesting that they are looking at a scrapbook.--Ed.].

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Now, did you know about Okada's work?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. I know him too.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Okay, there was a very interesting coincidence here. Let's see now, where's that. . .?

[Break in taping]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: About two years ago, my wife and I went to Japan and in Tokyo, Seibu Museum was having a retrospective show of Okada's work, Kenzo Okada. And we walked in and he and his wife happened to be there.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So we took his picture. And we have some pictures taken together. But anyway, we pasted up and you know Kenzo Okada died about a month after that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh no!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: He came back to New York where he keeps his studio -- has for many, many years. And when we saw him he was in very good shape, and we had long conversation, visited. And then he died soon after that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was that the first time you had met him? Or had you known him before?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, first time we met him. He said he had heard about me, and so we had friends in common, and we had a nice visit.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Hmm. How did you come to have your first exhibition in Tokyo, in the fifties?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh. Well that's because of Yuji Abe. And Yuji Abe is the dealer I just told you about.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That you just mentioned, yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, actually Kiyoshi Saito, you hear that name? Printmaker? Japanese printmaker?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I don't think I know him.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: He's very well known in this country. He in fact taught at the art department [School of Art, University of Washington--Ed.]. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh! Came and did a workshop; a short-term thing.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Kiyoshi Saito. Well anyway, he came to the United States first time -- gosh! I don't remember dates -- about 1950 or thereabouts. And I met him at that time. He came as a guest of American State Department.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Which had a very extensive and ambitious program of inviting Japanese artists, scholars, writers, musicians, composers -- all kinds of people in the cultural area -- to come to the United States to visit for two, three weeks at a time. And at that time, many people came through Seattle, and I got to meet them. And many of these people became great friends, eventually.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. Well, you mentioned once that you were almost a receiving committee. That you were put in contact with many visitors.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yeah. The State Department office here in Seattle had my name on the list for one of the people to contact because I and my wife -- both of us -- could speak Japanese fluently, we were very useful to them. Because then they came and they really felt very much at home. We entertained them and as a result we became good friends for many, many years.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And that goes back many decades now.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well, late forties and early fifties is when those people visited, while the State Department program lasted. But the interesting thing is. . . Well, the State Department-sponsored visit as well as the Fulbright Scholarship program brought many Japanese people to the United States, you know. And some of those people are in the leading position in the cultural world in Japan today.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But again, you met many of them in the late forties and fifties.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, museum directors and art school directors, doing very well, showing their work and very active and very well-known people, which is, well, very fortunate for us, because when we go to Japan now, we have so many friends everywhere in Japan and most of the major cities. And they invite us, and they entertain us, and they take us around so we get to meet more people. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Maybe one last thing to mention before we leave this whole area of consideration is the monument that you just recently unveiled in Puyallup [Washington--Ed.]. The memorial to the war years, and the people involved in it.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can you say anything about what feeling and experiences it grew out of, either your own or other peoples? How that commission came about, perhaps?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Did you see some of the pictures that came out in the paper?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, I did.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Okay, so you know what it looks like. Well, actually. . . The way it turned out and was received by the public and the critics was really a complete surprise to me. Now, I have already told you about my experience during the war and after the war as a member of the Japanese community as well as member of the university faculty, and my endeavors. Which is actually very unusual from Japanese peoples. Because in spite of the fact that there are a few Japanese artists -- some well-known like Paul Horiuchi and. . .

[Tape 6; side A]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I already mentioned about the war years and my profession and my association or relationship to the Japanese community, which has not been very close. Because of my work at the university and the kind of work I do, which is really not understood by most of the Japanese people -- which is very interesting; strange but that's true. And so, several years ago -- and maybe longer than that -- I knew that the Japanese community, especially the Niseis, who live in this area wanted to commemorate that event of the war days at the Puyallup Fairground, where it [evacuation--Ed.] all started. And there was talk about that for a long time, but nothing definite was decided until, oh, perhaps about three years ago. The committee of the local chapters of what is known as the JAACL -- Japanese American Citizen's League -- Seattle chapter and Puyallup chapter formed a committee, and they decided that they should have a memorial built and dedicated there.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. And it was to be at Puyallup because that had been the gathering point and a temporary residence for Japanese who were sent elsewhere later.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, yes. That was the assembly point, right. That's where [the evacuation--George Tsutakawa] started. So they approached me. They first wrote to me and asked me if I'd be interested in undertaking something like that. So I had to think about it for a while, then I decided that I could probably contribute something to this effort, because I understood the situation, and I knew some of the people down there and the so-called Japanese leaders in the Japanese community. So we had a series of meetings to discuss the various possibilities and what it should be and how big and then how much money they can raise and this and that, which went on for two, three years. (chuckles) Until I think late last fall it became very definite and it seemed possible because they had some help from the state and also the Washington State Historical Society and then there were funds pledged from various sources in this area. So they wanted me to go ahead and design something. Well at that time I really didn't take it very seriously because I was right in the middle of so many big bronze sculpture commissions. In Japan I was doing one after another, and back East and here and there, so I didn't take it too seriously. I'd say, "Well, if I have time I might do something."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. My attitude at that time was like that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But then more and more it became apparent and it started to gain momentum among the people down there. And so I started to think about it more seriously. I started making sketches and models, and we had a series of meetings and we finally signed the contract and it was all go, which was fine.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Was it specified from the beginning that this would be a static sculpture with no water incorporated in it? Or was that your idea?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No. They wanted a fountain but they couldn't afford it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see. A simple matter of. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Because a fountain is very expensive you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It was not a matter of aesthetics; it was a pragmatic decision?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well no, that's right, it was a matter of available funds.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And so they didn't think they could raise that much money. And well there are other reasons too. I don't know if you've been to that fairground recently. Right inside, as you enter from the main gate, there's a little area which used to be kind of a pleasant landscaped area. Well, couple of years ago they built a great big fountain, like a French waterspouting fountain. (chuckles) Right in the middle of this. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I've not seen that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . . plaza, you see. And so it's a very common, you know, jetting fountain. Which leaves very little room for any kind of sculpture anyway, and then I can't even think of building another fountain right next to this one.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So that was out. Now so [I--Ed.] proceeded and made some models, like I already said,

and then there was a meeting scheduled for me to appear before the Washington Puyallup or State Fair Association's board meeting at the fairground office. The members of the fair board and some of the leading citizens of City of Puyallup and about seven, eight people came and myself and my wife, and one of the representatives from the Puyallup chapter of JACL came and we had a meeting. But it was very surprising to me that during this meeting the -- what do you call -- the feeling and the climate of the meeting was all anti-Japanese, anti-monument.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In what way? Anti-monument, anti-Japanese?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Which was a complete surprise to me because one of the board members, who is a member of the American Legion, presented the sentiment of the Legionnaires, members, and the Veterans of Foreign War.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Which was that they didn't want a monument to the Japanese?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, they didn't want a monument. I found out a lot of interesting things about this because first I found out that the fairground is a private industry; it doesn't belong to the state.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I didn't know that either.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: It's owned and operated by businessmen in Puyallup. All right?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh! I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So their argument was that using the fairground as assembly point for the Japanese internees in 1942 under the Western command of General [Dewitt] was not their intention. You see, the U.S. Government or the army, Western command, just took that place and used it as assembly point.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So what they're saying is the citizens of Puyallup and the management of fair had nothing to do with it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But they think putting a monument there would make them appear responsible for something that they hadn't done.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, that was their argument. Which I didn't know anything about.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: It went on and on anti-monument argument. So I just sat there and I said, "Gee, what I am doing here?" Because I was already to present my design; I had drawings and model and all that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: No anticipation of any controversy like that?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No. I was really shocked! Well, that's what came out in the newspaper that time, you see. In fact there was a big spread by Tacoma newspaper and Seattle newspaper, and even went to United Press and also Japanese press and was reported all over the United States. I kept getting clippings from my friends back east -- New York, New Jersey, Minnesota. . . They kept sending me the little clippings. They said what are you doing out there in Seattle, you know?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And then even in Japan, Japanese newspapers printed it. It was real funny. Well anyway, toward the end of this board meeting, as a matter of courtesy, they wanted to see the design. So the last three minutes I made my presentation. But by that time they were all determined not to have it anyway. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How did that change then?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, they said, "Well, if you want to put this monument out in the parking lot, or little city square in Puyallup. . ."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Off their property and on city property?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Then they said they'll accept it or tolerate it. So at that very point I said, "No! I don't want to do that for various reasons." One of them was that it would be subject to vandalism and who's going to take care of all this. And I wanted nice landscaped area and not just stuck right in the middle of the

parking lot, so I said, "No thanks." So I pulled out; I refused to do it. And that's what came out in the newspaper - they reported that George Tsutakawa pulled out. . . To that effect. But, the interesting thing is after that, the members of the JACL were really very, very excited or. . . They felt that it was not right, because the State of Washington and the Historical Society had already sanctioned this, and they had already agreed to give so much money with a matching fund to this effect. And also -- which I didn't know about -- they said there was an agreement with the Washington Fair Association to allow the Japanese-American community to establish such a monument on the fairground. There was an agreement.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So, they had to go back to that. And they had many more meetings and finally the fair board and the anti-monument elements withdrew and they said, "In that case, it's all right." So few months later the Japanese JACL members came back to me, and said, "The whole attitude, everything is changed, so we want you to do it. Will you do it?" By that time I had just about scrapped the drawings and models, you know, I didn't want any more to do about it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But they kept asking me. They sent a committee here. We had long meetings. So I finally gave in. I said, "Well, okay (chuckles), in that case, I'll do it."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So there was no controversy at all about the design. The controversy was all about the existence itself.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right. So finally I made some compromises and I kind of modified the design to make it less controversial -- if you want to put it that way. Anyway, the design was finally accepted again, the second time. And I [started the sculpture project--George Tsutakawa]. But it got to be a little bigger than I thought it was going to be -- which is all right; I didn't mind it because it worked out pretty well.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You mean the sculpture itself got to be bigger?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Bigger than my original sketch, as far as the scale, size, weight goes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I didn't know that.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. But it's all right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How did you modify it to make it less controversial?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well. . . That's another point, which really made me think about this thing. At one point, I wasn't so sure whether I wanted to do this or not, knowing and understanding the feeling of some of the elements in the state here, I didn't want to stir up any more controversy and cause any more hard feelings among these people. So I wanted to make the design more universal and less related to the incident itself -- the war, the relocation, the internment, and the hardship that the Japanese people went through.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Had your original concept related to that more?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, more or less, yes. I made many, many sketches, and some of them were very definitely reminiscent of the hardship. But I felt that by repeatedly reminding people of the injustice and the hardship, and the loss to the Japanese people, it was not going to improve anything; you'll just remind them of the bad feeling, hard feelings. And instead of doing that I decided it should be a more friendly gesture of all the people gathered and in harmony, and that's what I made. And eventually it was accepted -- universally you might say -- by all people, all the elements, and all the community.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You've spoken of it as representing the harmony of all peoples and as symbolizing in a way people of all ages, and I assume you mean all continents and. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, well that's what I had in mind.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So now you see it as a monument which is not even specific to Japanese-American relationships at all, but more to any decade or incident.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: There is a plaque in bronze mounted on a little pedestal there, which tells a little bit about this history and how it happened. But other than that, the sculpture itself has no suggestion of that, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So it's the fact of its placement and where it's placed that relates it to a specific history, but its internal content is very broad. And most of those changes resulted during the months in which you had to

think about it and develop it.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Right. And so I think sometime in the spring, March or April, everything was decided and I started to work on this, because they wanted to dedicate this fountain before the opening of the Puyallup fair, which is. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Ah, this year, yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .in session now. So the dedication took place at the end of last month, and it was attended by almost 1,000 people.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh it was!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Big crowd of people and it happened to be a beautiful sunny day. In fact, it was almost too hot. And I was sitting in the front row facing the sculpture and facing the sun. By the time my turn came to speak I couldn't see anything. I was just dizzy and blinded. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really? One whole realm of experience I wanted to ask you about was your thoughts on working for public situations. Would you like to leave the forties and fifties and address that?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I'd be glad to talk about that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you've been working for now almost. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, over 20 years.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah, almost a quarter century I was going to say, doing commissions for, in many instances, public situations.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yeah. Public places.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And I wondered whether you'd like to talk about some particular commissions that you've found either very satisfying or very challenging, or whether you have thoughts in a more generalized way about what the pitfalls and the challenges and the pleasures of working in that mode are.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Let me talk about this in a general way first.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Because you know that I did over 50 pieces in public places in the last 23 or 4 years.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That comes out to two a year.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, that's right!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Steady long output, and I know some of them are very large and ambitious; some of them are very intimate and. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Well, the large pieces usually take almost a year to do, you see. Which includes designing and preliminary studies and a site study -- I always go to the site before I start designing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You do? Always do?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Because. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Some of them are relatively remote, I know.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, yes they are, you know. I made preliminary study trip to all my major sculptures -- Washington, D.C., or back east, or Florida, or wherever it was -- I always did! Because I believe outdoor and public sculpture is for the public, is for the people. And I think it's very important that you design something which is appropriate to the scale, and to the environment, and to the wishes of the people, and also to the wishes of the owners, who put up this money. Because public sculpture of this scale usually very expensive, you know. And so I do feel strong sense of responsibility to the community and to the area where it's going to be used, or set up.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you find that in many instances you come to sense a conflict between what those who pay for it want and what the public at large needs or would benefit from?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, not really. Fortunately, in most cases, I was left alone and allowed to design whatever I want. There was one time I was doing a commission in Kansas City, Missouri, for a large bank, banking family there. It was interesting because at that time, this building was pretty tall, I think 40-story bank tower in downtown Kansas City. The owners were in Kansas City, naturally. And then part of the architectural firm was in Kansas City. But there was a design consultant in New York and my sculpture agency was in Los Angeles, and I lived in Seattle. In spite of the fact that I had made several trips to Kansas City for this design, the New York design consultant rejected my first design. And we used to have telephone conversation, four- or five-way conversation!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. (chuckles)

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Which to me was always very stupid and not very productive. We just talk, talk on the phone, and you try to talk three or four ways on the telephone -- I can't do it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And keep track of everyone.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: It's impossible!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: This was one your relatively early big commissions, too, wasn't it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. That was probably middle of the sixties. Well, anyway, I got kind of fed up with this situation, because they rejected my design, which I thought was a good design, but they couldn't understand it. So I called telephone conference once and I said, "Let's stop all this nonsense, talking on telephone; let's have a meeting in Kansas City -- all of us, everybody come!" And then I had my agency in Los Angeles work this all out. So we decided to meet in Kansas City, and I brought my second model, design, drawing, and the whole set for presentation. But somehow, everything went fine, beautiful, and we all congratulated each other -- we had big dinner, a few drinks, and everything was fine. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. Had the obstacle again been the design consultant? Or was it more complicated than that?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no. This woman designer or consultant; she finally became very understanding.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So she agreed; everything was fine.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The owners had never objected, and the Kansas City neighborhood had never objected?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No. The owners didn't object; it was just this agency from New York, and I think she was just trying to impress somebody with her authority. (laughs) But that was the only time they gave me a bad time at my design work. In most cases, I had the free hand in designing and. . . Well, sometimes I would present two ideas, two designs, with drawings and sketches and models, of both ideas, which sometime help. Sometime it didn't work because then they had a hard time deciding themselves.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (laughs)

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: You know, they didn't know what to do! So I have come to the conclusion that I shouldn't give them too many choices, just give them one. Say this is it, which works better. Now let me say something else here about sculpture in public places. It's obvious that the design, whether it's for a church or school building, office building, or downtown park, it's important that the artist really understands the environment: the space and the scale and size, whether it's in an area with concentration of large buildings or open space. It's very important to understand that. And then the sun angle, the prevailing wind -- especially now I'm thinking about fountain sculpture which mine are usually -- wind situation, the weather, climate. In some areas you have to anticipate deep-freeze. You've seen some of my pictures here and I design to allow the water to freeze on the fountain. It's all considered in the designing.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So that the pipes and the plumbing are all constructed to withstand that stress?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right. Although eventually, depending on how deep the cold gets, you have to shut it [the fountain--George Tsutakawa] off at some point.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Which of your fountains are designed to be spectacular under iced conditions? Kansas City or Sendai, for example?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I have quite a few. . . I have two in Ohio, and one big one in Michigan, and also one in Indianapolis, and one in North Dakota, and all those places. In fact I think the upper half of the United States

and inland they have very severe cold -- and Spokane too.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh sure. Spokane.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So I have designed it with that in my mind, many times. Another thing about public acceptance of art in public places.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And I'm not the only one. I just happen to be doing more fountain sculptures. But like in some of these publication, you know that there have been many large public sculptures made by contemporary artists.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Particularly since the sixties.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Roughly the same time period as your own interest.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, right.

[Tape 6; side B]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: One thing I always keep in mind, and I just can't help it, because I still say, if you're making a sculpture for the public places, you are making it for the people to look at. If you don't want people to look at it, if they don't like it, you have no business putting a piece of sculpture out in the public, you see. Along with this -- I often think about this -- if you erected a piece of outdoor sculpture, pretty good size, in a busy downtown square or corner, or in front of some building, imagine how many people will see that every day. If 500 people look at it, every day for one year, five years, ten years, fifty years, and maybe a hundred years, how many people look at that thing?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: It becomes astronomical.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, you know! And so it becomes frightening, you know, Gosh! If nobody liked it, what happens? Or if half of the people like it? Or half the people don't like it? You're still talking about 10 million people in 50 years.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How do you respond to that situation?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .I think it's awfully presumptuous -- for any artist -- to want to make something to stand out there for 50 years. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Don't you though?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .and expect all the people to respect it, or enjoy it or at least accept it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I really do! And so I always [think--Ed.], "Gosh, all these big-name sculptors, they sure got a lot of guts!" (laughs) No I really can't help but think that way.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But you don't hesitate to be among them?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that's just in me, and I guess I got started and can't stop. Keep doing it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How do you gauge the reaction to your own works? Through newspaper accounts and the accounts of critics, or by any other ways?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, fortunately I haven't had too many bad reports, contrary or against my design.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Has there ever been a controversial reaction?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, a few things, a few kind of hints, but nothing real bad. And I'm very thankful for that. Another thinking is that there are very few people who really don't like fountains.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. That's right. You told me about that one! (chuckles)

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Most people young and old. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That governor!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .regardless of their background, literal or illiteral -- it doesn't make any difference -- they all like fountains, thank goodness. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can you elaborate or specify any of the differences you see? You mentioned not only the scale but the way people use a space, depending on the nature of the space. Can you differentiate between how you think a sculpture functions in, say, a large very open unstructured space like the park in Sendai, and in contrast, how it functions in a very enclosed place like the Safeco Building courtyard here? Or some other contrasting pair.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Do you sense a big difference in what your fountain to do?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Let me just talk about one fountain, which I always felt was forced, unfortunately, because of lack of space mainly. And that is the fountain on the waterfront in front of the Washington Ferry terminal.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: ____ cars going, turning there.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, and I had very interesting experience about that. Because Joshua Green, Senior [Seattle pioneer who made a fortune in navigation, founder of People's National Bank--Ed.], is the one who commissioned that fountain. And he was very charming about the whole thing. But he always kept telling me, "George, make it big! Make it big!" you know. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. This was after the site was designated?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah! The ferry terminal building was already built; there was only small space in front, but he kept telling me to make it big, which was kind of funny. Lloyd Lovegren was the architect, and we had many meetings here, right here in this room, and Mr. Green came. And he was a very charming gentleman, and my wife always served green tea, and he liked that. Mr. Green's tea, you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: (chuckles) I see, I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Let me just tell you a little experience I had with Mr. Green, which has nothing to do with the fountain, but it was very interesting. I was very impressed. And that is at one time we had a meeting of the Seattle Art Commission, in the city mayor's office. And I can't remember who was the mayor, Clinton or somebody, at that time. We had a very cordial meeting up in the mayor's office, and then after the meeting, Mr. Green said, "George, how would you like to come and visit me in my office?" Well, I had time so, "Yes," I said, "Fine. We'll do that." So we all came downstairs, went out to the front, to the street, Fourth Avenue, and then I thought there'd be a big limousine waiting for us, you know. Mr. Green says, "Well, we'll walk." It's quite a steep hill from the City Hall up to the old People's National Bank Building, which was on Third and Pike, or Union, somewhere in there. It's changed now; it's a new building. At that time it was the old building. But anyway, we walked up that street, four or five blocks, which is quite a climb, you know, but Mr. Green was right ahead of me. And when we cross the street, he always held my arm, you know, "Be careful, George!" And he was already over 90 [years old--George Tsutakawa]!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I was thinking he must have been very elderly even then.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. And then we came to his bank building. There was a doorman, and then all the employees came running out bowing, you know, Mr. Green, "Good morning, Mr. Green," and all that. And we went [in--Ed.] and I was following him. There was a elevator on the left side and staircase on the right side. I thought we were going to take the elevator. No! He says, "We walk!"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He took the staircase? How many flights?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I don't know. Three or four flights.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really?!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: He says, "We'll walk."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is that part of his exercise program?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I guess so, but anyway, he was that kind of a person, you see. He had his own conviction about things and he really carried it through.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And if you were with him, you carried it through too, then.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But I really learned a lesson from him. He was a great man. But the only thing is I regret that the fountain didn't work out the way I wanted to because of the tight space there. (chuckles) And designing that shape of the pool was so difficult.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Why do you feel that it's too cramped? Because people should have easier access to it? Because of too much car traffic?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. A little more space around and more distance from the automobiles, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Cars whiz by only three feet from the fountain, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's right. And I suppose you couldn't make it more vertical because the blowing water would be right on the sidewalk.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, because there's an overhang, which comes right over it.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh that's true too.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And then there's pedestrian traffic with a long escalator right on the right side, people entering constantly, up and down. Well, there are a lot of things about it, and I tried to do my best. And then another thing: amongst all the fountain sculptures I designed, that fountain is the only one which has been damaged by drunken [vandals--George Tsutakawa]. The hot summer night you see drunkards sitting on the fountain just cooling off.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sitting on the structure of it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. So [the sculpture--George Tsutakawa] is in pretty bad shape and I like to repair that one of these days. But then I was told that there are plans for rebuilding and enlarging that whole entire terminal.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh. Maybe a different site would result from those changes?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: The architects for that project came to see me about relocating the fountain, and they promised that they would give me a bigger space, better site. Which I hope will happen, but right now I guess the state doesn't have any money to rebuild it. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: What among your works do you think are some of the most successful or pleasing? Do you have favorites?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I guess so, but it's hard to say. You know, people ask me that question many times, and then I tell them, "Well, a fountain is like one of my children, and I love them all." (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Uh huh. And some days you think about one more than the other, but you still respond to them all.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I think I do. But it's hard to say which one, just right off. I still like the fountain I did for the Seattle Public Library, my very first fountain.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You do?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. There's something about that that still pleases me. Then, gee, I don't know. The one in Washington, D.C., I still like very much, the one I did for National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., yeah. And, gee, I don't know, the Safeco fountain's still good. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I read in brief descriptions, or when I hear people speak sometimes of your fountains, of sometimes a quiet degree of representation or allusion to figures, to arms or spears or heavenly bodies, to natural phenomena like rain and so forth, that appear in some of your sculptures. I wanted to ask you whether connections like that are often part of the developing concept or whether that's something that emerges in people's minds afterwards? And also whether it's very common in your sculptures, whether it's almost always the case that there is a reference to a figure or a heavenly body or the natural force?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I can say this, that in most of my sculptures, well like this one bronze, since I started to work in metal, bronze mainly, I have almost never made reference to human figures, human bodies, or any part

of human bodies.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So that such comments are apt to be something people are projecting on to the work.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. In most cases they're related, at least in my own mind, to natural forms. And I'm always fascinated by the growing things. Plant forms and flowers and leaves and trees. I'm also interested in the rhythm, recycling movement of everything, especially water. How water envelopes our whole world and it moves constantly, it evaporates, and it fills the atmosphere, and sometimes it's clear and sometimes hazy, foggy, and then eventually the water falls to the ground in the form of rain, snow, and wet mist, and then it accumulates in places, top of the mountain, become glacier, snow, and then in the valleys it'll flow down and form lakes, then eventually go out to the ocean, and then it evaporates again. It's a constant movement of water. And this same movement, the water is going through our body all the time, all the living things, the water is moving in and coming out, evaporating, drying, and, oh, rotting, you know, and disintegrating, and reforming again. This great cycle and movement of water, which has been going on ever since the earth was formed -- I don't know how many million years, still going, and it'll probably go, I'm sure, for another hundred million years. To me it's the most permanent phenomena that we live in, and we can't do without.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: This reiterated cycle?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. And that's what I like to express in my fountains. Now the sculpture itself, they don't really look like flowers or trees, anything. It's the spirit and the movement, the cycle [that I try to express-- George Tsutakawa].

[Break in taping]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Let me ask you something about what you're saying now. I have a sense. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Okay now, before you ask the next question, let me go on a little bit more about this.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay. You were talking about plant forms and. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. My idea about fountain, and the general accepted concept about fountain, which was probably started by the Romans, two, three thousand years ago, two thousand anyway, and also became very popular and adopted, used and created all over the world. No matter where you go, in large cities or private gardens, you always find a Roman fountain somewhere. And especially Europe and Italy. There are many great gardens, like the Villa D'Este and the Versailles one, you know, everywhere. But the concept of the Roman fountain is always based on Greek or Greco-Roman mythology and water. And so you have sculpture, a nymph or trident, or Europa on the bull, or some such figure standing there and shooting water, or they're shooting water at the nymph. This is the main concept in fountain design.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: They sometimes deal in a latent way with forces of nature, but these have been personified as Neptune or Venus, so they take a very human form and somebody squirting something at something.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right, yeah. So actually, up to the time when I started to do fountain designs, I had already traveled quite a bit around, and I always liked fountains, but I was also very surprised that since the war, let's say, about 1950, about that time on, in spite of all the new architecture, new city planning, new bridges, new highways, new reservoirs, parks, and new abstract sculpture, everything was just going full swing in all direction, all kinds, and all sizes imaginable.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. Everything reinvented, in a way.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, but there was so few fountains, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And no new concept in fountain?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I can't think of any great fountain built between let's say 1950 and 1960. Now before that it was the World's Fair fountain, like the Chicago World Fair, San Francisco World's Fair, New York World Fair. They built fountains but they were all just glorified Roman fountains. You know what I'm talking about?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Okay. So I was real surprised and kind of wondering why they're not building modern fountains based on modern abstract sculpture. So, in 1959, when the Seattle Library Board and the architectural firm of Bindon and Wright were planning this new library for downtown and they approached me and asked me to design a fountain, I was really quite surprised and I didn't know what to say about this. But I think I was already thinking about the fountain as a whole, historically.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And I was thinking, gosh, why doesn't someone do something about it? And so when this opportunity came, I took the chance. I said okay, I'll try one, I'll do one, anyway. And that's how I got started.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I can well imagine from many things you've said about your earlier work that, for example, the Bauhaus concern with space and solid in relationship to each other would translate into a concept of fountains and water and hollows in relation to form.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And so I can imagine how your work with Archipenko would translate into a concern with negative and solid in relationship to each other. But I still don't have any clear sense of whether there were, in your mind, satisfying examples of fountains themselves. Were there only the notion of Roman and Baroque sculptures, fountain sculptures to work against? Or were there in your experience fountains also that seemed satisfying in a better way, in a way that related to how you ended up working?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Hmm. Well, I don't know whether I can just answer that simply as your words.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I can recall encountering out-of-the-way fountains, which have no names and the architects aren't known in which only a small amount of water is deployed into a basin, and the only thing that really happens in the fountain is the collecting of water in a basin, out of which it spills when the fountain, _____. That seems to me more like the principle of your work.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Let's attack this problem in an entirely different way, different angle. I already mentioned about the Roman fountains, and how it was started by the Romans, way before the Renaissance, and still going. But you know, in China and Japan, Korea, and all those countries in Orient never made fountains.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I wondered! You know, I tried to think in my head before I talked to you; I couldn't think of any.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, they never have. And I didn't realize that until the time when I started to do fountains myself, that the Japanese never made fountains. The Chinese never made fountains. And then the Hindus, some did; I've seen evidence of fountains, oh, two thousand years old, in some of the old gardens and old temples. But anyway, very, very little fountain design in all over East, Southeast Asia, and India. Then I started to wonder why. Why it is so?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And one of my observations and conclusion is that the Japanese, for instance, designed beautiful gardens and did a lot of very extensive landscaping. So did the Chinese, in their palaces and private gardens. And very elaborate things. But you know, they never made fountains. When they used water, it was usually as a waterfall or stream or pond, or one of these very interesting devices where the water falls into a pool through a bamboo tube which tips [when filled with water and made a hollow sound--George Tsutakawa].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, they had things like that?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yeah. They had those in Japan and they were, according to the name [Shika-Odoshi--George Tsutakawa], designed to scare the wild animals, the deer, from coming and disturbing the garden.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh! I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. And then they did have waterwheels to water their rice paddies.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Which was a man-operated, pumped, waterwheel. They had those. But that's about all the fountain, or anything remotely resembling a fountain, was made in Japan and China.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: There's one other example that came to my mind when I thought about that and that's the water that is piped in a tea garden, through a bamboo pipe, to wash the hands, for the purification, and then falls into a stone basin.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, that's right.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And then it falls out of the stone basin into an array of rocks and pebbles.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So, that's a man-made waterfall, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's right.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So, then the more I think about this I think the reason why they didn't do it is because water is very precious and water is again the source of all this life and energy to a certain extent and the Japanese people, the Oriental people, didn't want to use water or force water to do something, like Roman fountains. All right. They felt that, the Japanese people always wanted to live with nature, but not make nature do something [or dominate nature--George Tsutakawa].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So to make water squirt in the air would be a kind perversion of its nature?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's right, and I think that's the reason that they never even think about it. So they want to be part of the nature, and not control the nature. And this is one of my thinking and I think I have mentioned that in some of my short statements I made.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. You have in your recent statements.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, especially the Renaissance man wanted to be a master of the universe and set himself as the center of the universe. And all the knowledge and all the power and all the control coming from the man, and he wants to control the world, the universe. Which is just the opposite of the Oriental idea. They never thought of it that way. They always wanted to be part of nature's workings.

[Tape 7; side A]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So I think some of that thinking goes into my fountain design, and that's why I don't have a Neptune, and David and all the great gods in my fountain.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Let me ask you a slightly more specific about the forms of your fountain, that perhaps is related to this. It seems to me from looking at your fountains that they're predominantly vertical, most of them, and there are, as you said in talking about Japanese gardens, many other ways to make water flow, water often can flow in a very low and horizontal way. But it seems to me your fountains themselves are vertical, and also when you were speaking a few moments ago, of the patterns of plant growth, and when you spoke even of the cycle of water evaporation and fall, your gestures and your speech were again very vertically structured. Beyond simply making this observation, I wanted to ask whether this coincides in any way with some thinking about the way nature is or the way universe is? Is there in Japanese thought, for example, a sense of the universe as a series of vertically arranged sequences or ways of existence in a way that relates at all to your feelings of plant growth and the cycle?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Again, this is not very easy for me to explain or tell you. But I am aware of that; I have been for many years. And I sometimes question myself why I make these things vertical, most of the things.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. They usually have the vertical axis, around which there's some symmetry.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Ohe thing I can say is that ever since I was a student, young sculpture student, I was always very strongly influenced by Brancusi, his endless tower. . . Things like that. I was also very much interested in the Northwest Indian totem pole designs.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And another thing which happens a little later, even after I started to design fountains, is my visit to Nepal. When I trekked up in the foothills of Nepal, especially toward Mount Everest, and I climbed up to about 16,000 feet, which is near the base camp for the Mount Everest climbers. In doing this, I discovered this thing, I found this thing which I was looking for, and that is called the obos. Now, even before I started to do fountains, in fact around the fifties, when I started to do my wood carving, which are very vertical.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. They're vertical and they're stacked, or segmented as your fountains also are.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Okay, that is, really comes from the obos concept.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Does it come, as you said, from Brancusi also? Or is it a coincidence?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, Brancusi comes before that, yeah. But. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: In your experience. But it was the obos that stimulated you directly?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. In 1956, I believe. . . A very good friend of mine, Johsel Namkung, who was a very

literary man; he read very widely. He introduced to me a book which was written by the late Justice William Douglas, who wrote a book called Beyond the High Himalaya. A very interesting book. His real personal experience of traveling in Himalayan countries, the Nepalese, the foothills. . . He encounters these objects called obos and Chorten, which are very primitive construction or pile of rocks erected by the natives at sacred places in mountain pass and extraordinary scenic spots, looking at Mount Everest and all the other mountains around there. That had a very strong influence on my sculpture about that time. And then later, when I started to do fountains, this same concept works through in my idea of stacking forms. First it was stone, then it was wood, and then in metal. Okay. In 1977 -- now this is not long ago, only about six years ago -- I joined a small party out of Seattle, we went trekking in Nepal. And at about 16,000 feet, place called Labouje on the trail to this base camp I already mentioned, I saw the obos.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That's when you finally saw some! In 1977!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, and I really wanted to see this thing called the obos, which I did. And I was so excited about this. It was a very cold, freezing day, and I was far behind in the climbing party because the blizzard started. But about that time, I looked around and I saw piles of rocks.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: How big?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, anywhere from five feet; some are six feet high. Not very high. And then there's another thing called chorten, which is a little more architectural structure, some are fifteen feet high.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You found them too?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I saw them all in one area, and so beautiful, I got so excited. Well, the next day, I started to come down, through the same area. It was very beautiful, clear, sunny. And I saw them again, and I took many pictures of this called obos. Well, that notion, with this modern thing and the recycling thing, and verticality. . . Now, another thing about this obos: My interpretation and also talking with the natives, the Sherpas who took me to these spots was that the natives erected these things. They're not professionals, they're not craftsmen, they're just plain travelers. Some are Buddhist lama, traveling through, but mostly by mountain people. When they came to a sacred spot, a source of water, or place of extraordinary beauty, and vista, they just naturally or automatically gathered rocks and piled them. And their idea was to first try to balance these perfectly, and the rocks are all shapes, not perfect at all, in fact odd shapes. By positioning these and turning these they could balance them, they learned. And this was for the native people to achieve greater heights toward heaven. And to create perfect harmony and balance. So it's attempt of the people to create something which is in complete harmony: earth, heaven and man.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And it's construed as vertical and as you say there's a deliberate effort to incorporate all the irregularity and diversity of stone, not to oversimplify or pick nice rocks.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no. They just picked what they have there. They didn't even try to reshape it, or carve it, or do anything.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see, yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And at one spot I saw 20 or 30 of these standing. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .against a huge valley, thousands of feet down and then looking at Mount Everest in front of you.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: So if many people come to the same place, they hope to add their own to the environment.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, it's one of the main route when they cross the mountain into Tibet, and also to climb Mount Everest. And for hundreds of years, travelers have gone up and down this route.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And finally finding these, going there and seeing them for yourself at that point became a confirmation of something you had been doing in [your medium].

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, that was most exciting experience I had in my whole life. So that's still -- that concept, the whole notion -- is still very, very strong in my mind. And so whenever I make sculpture. . . You know, my paintings are entirely different.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: They are; that's true.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Well, somehow when I make my sculpture I keep thinking, you know, how can I make this thing right, balanced? I have another idea about sculpture also, and this comes from study and observation of architecture, let's say from the pyramid time, and through the romanesque and renaissance, and through the whole history of man, east and west. I think it's the easiest thing to make a symmetrical design -- like a church, or a steeple, or skyscraper, something which is perfectly symmetrical -- and make it stand; it's the easiest thing to do. But, it's the hardest thing to make it interesting. Something symmetrical.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And do you attempt to do both, in many of your sculptures, to make them. . .

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, and I believe the success and the rightness of the symmetrical design is in its proportion, of all the parts. Now there are a lot of cathedrals, beautiful cathedrals, and Greek temples, and, well, pyramid are some, well, many of them are symmetrical. They're not all beautiful.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Because many of them are very ill-proportioned?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Some are, you know, just symmetrical.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And so I always thought about this, you know. I think, to me, it's the hardest thing to do to make something symmetrical and beautiful at the same time.

[Break in taping]

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I notice, among the main things you have in your living room is a self-portrait by Mark Tobey, over there? And I remember well from your showing me years ago the painting which is, I guess it's a large single brush stroke by Tobey, over the mantle.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, that's Tobey.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And I wonder if you could tell me about your association with Tobey and the other artists in his circle. What his and their art meant to you, and vice versa, what you were able to contribute to them?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: All right. My association with Tobey, and Morris Graves, and some other of the so-called Northwest painters really goes back into early thirties, before forties. But I didn't get to know them more closely, more intimately, until after the war. Now, before the war, my family owned and operated a very large grocery store, and it was a market, more like a supermarket. And I happened to be the manager of this store, which position I held until the war started, right after Pearl Harbor. Now, when I was managing this store -- I think maybe I mentioned this, so I'll just go over it very quickly -- people like Kenneth Callahan, and Tobey, Morris Graves, and other Northwest painters, used to come to my store and buy groceries, regularly. And in those days, all except Kenneth Callahan, who was a curator of Oriental art and assistant to Dr. Fuller at Seattle Art Museum, all the rest of them had PWA, or WPA?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: WPA?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: WPA jobs. And they were drawing regular checks which I recall was about \$27 in two weeks, you know. And they brought these checks to me and I used to cash them. And they of course never had enough money so I very often, and very gladly, gave them credit to buy more groceries. Well anyway, my store became a little meeting place for the Northwest artists. And so they came, they just dropped in. We used to stand and talk about the Northwest Annual and the Northwest Printmaker's show, and the other art activities. Well, these people, especially Callahan, had very close access to the Oriental collection of Dr. Fuller at the Seattle Art Museum. And they worked there in some capacity, maybe part time, during those years. And they examined Japanese paintings, Chinese paintings, at close hand, and they understood it very well. Also, about that time, before the war, almost every one of them went to the Orient, either working on a freighter, or Mark Tobey had some sort of a scholarship and I think that's when he was teaching at Dartington, in England, you know?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm. Dartington Hall.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: He was quite a traveler. He went to China and Japan, and in Kyoto he went to one of the Zen monasteries where he stayed for some time. He studied sumi painting and calligraphy and also Zen meditation, things like that. And I have one painting he did when he was in Kyoto, called The Noh Player. I'll show it to you later.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Okay.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, in those days, he picked up the sumi technique and even to this day, I'm convinced

that Mark Tobey -- and Morris Graves also -- are the two American painters who thoroughly understood the sumi technique and philosophy. And I say this because I know, especially after the war, many French painters went to Japan to study Zen and study sumi technique. And then later, many Americans went to Japan to study this, and some still do. And I've been very much interested in how they do it, how they respond to this Japanese traditional art form, and I'm convinced that so many of them have picked it up and learned it quite superficially. But Tobey and Graves are the two who thoroughly understood this. I don't know any other American or French artist who mastered sumi philosophy as well as Tobey and Graves.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Can you specify a little more what it was they understood, that other people missed? Or misinterpreted?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, there were many painters, oh, like. . . You know I can't remember all the names. Name some of the French abstract expressionists.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, I don't know.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Klein, Matthieu.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Matthieu comes to mind very much, yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Matthieu, and there're, oh, quite a few them. Hans Hartung.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Hans Hartung.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. And there are quite a few of them, and they were having big shows in Paris and New York, great big canvas, you know, with bold strokes [often just black and white--George Tsutakawa].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Very gestural, yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Very gesture. Oh yeah, there were many of those. Well, somehow, I always felt that their things were quite superficial. We, I think, talked about the Shinoda Toko, Japanese woman calligrapher, who was very popular in New York and Paris, who also does these things, you know. Very wild and bold brush strokes, huge brushes, three-, four-, five-inch brush, you know. It's very similar to that. But somehow I -- this is my own feeling -- don't think that they really understood the true meaning and the depth of the sumi painting. There's one there, and one over there [appears to be gesturing to paintings in the room--Ed.]. And I think Tobey and Morris Graves' work has much more delicate, more sensitive, and has more depth. They don't rely, mainly, on these sweeping gestures. But they rely on their manipulation of the brush in bringing out certain peculiarity of nature -- it doesn't matter whether it's a animal, or bird, or plant form, or just a cloud form, or a just the atmosphere. They, I think, had the uncanny ability to differentiate between big sweeping lines and delicate expression that the Chinese and Japanese did so well for thousand years. I just feel that.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You feel Tobey and Graves had already acquired much of their understanding before the war?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yeah!

MARTHA KINGSBURY: That in itself differentiates it from the other people you're talking about who were interested in [the, a] quite different context.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, that's what I mean. So what I want to say is that I already told that I didn't have a formal sumi painting education in Japan; all I had was sumi brush writing, which everybody learns in Japan, which is a wonderful thing. It's a basis for manipulation of the brush and ink on soft paper. But as painting, as a means of expression, I never had that formal training. And I can almost say that I learned some of this from Tobey, Tobey and Graves. Now, before the war, we used to get together and discuss these things, and I used to watch Tobey work, in sumi. In our previous session, I said how I tried so hard to forget everything about Japan, and become Americanized.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So I went through all the academic European training in painting and sculpture -- charcoal drawing and plaster casting and clay modeling and oil painting, watercolor, English style watercolor. While I was doing that as a student at the university, about that time, I met Tobey and Morris Graves, and they almost thought it was strange that I'm trying to paint like European master, you know. "What are you doing there, you know? There's so much to learn in Japan. Why don't you go back to your heritage?" They told me that over and over, many times. And at first I didn't understand these people. Gosh, you know, what they're trying to do? But gradually, I began to realize how important that was to me. And so I started to experiment myself. I went to the museum, and got a lot of art books, Japanese art books and magazines, and I studied, very slowly and very

carefully. So eventually I dropped all my oil paintings and Windsor-Newton watercolors. Then I went to sumi, and mulberry paper, you see.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: When did you do that?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, I think it was after the war, actually. Because during the war, I was still very much in same process of Americanization. I had to be a good American soldier.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sure.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Learn to drink all the whiskey, you know, and all that. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Did you ever have drawing sessions with any of these people, mutual activities of any sort?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: After the war, after we came back to Seattle, and I got married, and in the early fifties, we acquired this property and we moved here. And about that time, we used to have small dinner parties for some of these artists, especially Mark Tobey. And he came to this house, had dinner with us, and usually when we had these evenings, Paul Horiuchi joined us, and John Matsudaira, and then we had some visitors from Japan like Kiyoshi Saito, and some of the printmakers, who happened to be around. And at those sessions, after dinner, I would clear this table here, and then bring in a thick pile of rice paper, mulberry paper, and sumi for everyone. And we all sat and painted. And Tobey did most of these sumi paintings right here on this table. We have quite a collection of those things he did here. And when he got excited he painted people, just abstract, just everything. One after another; he would do maybe twenty or thirty in the evening, during the evening, while we were just sitting and talking. And of course everybody else got drawn in to this state of mind, and we all tried to paint each other or something. Well, I used to sit next to Tobey and watch him, and he would, if he liked something, he would sign it and give it to us.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But if he didn't, he would just crumple it up, or tear it up or throw it away. "Give me another piece of paper."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: It went on like that. So lot of times, watching him, I used to grab the drawing. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Before he could crumple it?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .before he destroyed it. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And he allowed you to do that?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So we [have a--Ed.] lot of those without his signature.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: But sometime, the next party, I'd ask him if he would sign this. Well, you know, look at and "Okay, I'll sign this one. The other one, no, that's no good." (chuckles) It was funny. (coughs) Well. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Had he already worked on rice paper and mulberry paper and with ink before the war?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes. He always had a collection of good brushes and good paper. He picked that all up in Kyoto, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Had you seen him work before the war?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I have. But you know, it's interesting. Before the war, I used to go up and visit him, up on Brooklyn Avenue? He used to live in a old house across the street from Safeway store.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Right.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: When Safeway came, he just hated that place, so he moved.

[Tape 7; side B]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .studio up on the alley, behind old coffee shop [Manning's Coffee Shop--George Tsutakawa]. What was that?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Still in the university district?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But down below 45th?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. Between 45th and 47th.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And on the east side of the street.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, on the alley. He had a studio in the alley.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I know the one you mean. The coffee shop that's on the alley now.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. He had a studio upstairs there for many, many years, and he did most of his paintings there. Well anyway, he was very kind to me and my wife, and we used to visit him and just sit and talk and watch him. And those are the times when he would bring out his old collection of sumi paintings and landscapes and then also Zen paintings, which he had quite a few of, small scrolls which he bought in San Francisco.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, not his own works, but things he had collected.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: No, no. He was collecting all these very fine old paintings. I don't know what happened to them. But anyway, he would bring them out and hang it there and he would talk about it for a long time, 20, 30 minutes, sometime an hour! Philosophizing. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Really!

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .on the brush strokes and the spaces and the balance and simplification and many, many things. He could just talk about it for hours. And that's when I really learned a lot from him about sumi painting technique and Zen philosophy and all that about these paintings. And they were just wonderful times. And so he would come here or we'd go there. Now occasionally Morris Graves, well, he was already very successful and he took off, went to Ireland, Scotland and somewhere. And then, well, before that he had a house down in, above Carkeek beach, 110th or somewhere around there. I remember that first mansion he had built, and that's when he was doing crazy things like sending invitation to his friends and say you're not invited.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: This was in the late thirties, before the war that he did those things?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, before the war. We used to go visit him occasionally. And then he used to come and see me at the market, yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Um hmm.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, anyway, when Tobey moved out of Seattle, first he went to New York. He had a studio there for some time. And then he went to Europe and he decided to settle in Basel, Switzerland. Well, since that time, he came back to Seattle once or twice, just for short visit, as I recall. And in 1957, he came back briefly and then that's when he did most of his sumi paintings. Either here or in New York, about that time. And then he had a very big successful show of his sumis at Willard Gallery, either that year or the following year. Then he went back to Basel again. Now since that time, I went to see Mark Tobey in Basel twice, to visit him. And first time I went to Europe with my son Gerry -- he was 15 years old ; I took him there, to Europe for three months-- and at that time we went to visit Tobey. Later, in '69, my wife and I again visited Europe, and then went to see Tobey, a wonderful experience. He was always very cordial, very good to us, and he would take us on a tour of the city. And I remember so well the museum, the modern art museum, and there was also a wonderful ethnic art museum, South Sea Island, some doctor collected fantastic and rare pieces from New Guinea, and gave this all to the city. Then there are some wonderful cathedrals that Tobey just loved, and he used to take us to these cathedrals, and point out all these stone carvings, from the gothic times, and he loved that city. And then he would take us to a marvelous little restaurant on top of a cliff overlooking the Rhine River, and we had lunch there, couple times.

And then also at his studio home -- what's his name -- Mark Ritter, who was his sort of a companion, housekeeper, and secretary -- he did everything for him, especially after Pehr Hallsten passed away. Pehr was there too, on my first visit. And so we really got to know them very closely. [Tobey--George Tsutakawa] wrote to us regularly. I have a big envelope full of correspondence from Tobey, who very often philosophized on his art or somebody's art, or he just sent us new cards, with very small writing, and commenting on certain things that came to his mind. I remember one time when we visited Tobey in Basel, he had one room, sort of a small office-like room, where he had huge, old-fashioned, heavy hardwood chest with drawers. And these are very old European, German probably, furniture. And in these drawers, he had hundreds of small, miniature paintings

about this big [gestures--Ed.], half the postcard size. Some were even as small as a stamp size.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yes?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And they were all neatly mounted on cardboard, with a little mat, with a hole cut in and mounted. And every one of these was a miniature Mark Tobey painting. Just exquisite, just so beautiful.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And dating back many years?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: He had done these in Seattle?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think he always had them with him, but I didn't see them until I visited him in Basel.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Until then.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And just imagine, all these white writing and all that miniature painting about this big.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And he had piles of this. After he died, you know, all his belongings were split among different parties who claimed ownership to his things. And I often wonder what happened to that collection of miniature paintings.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Very tiny things.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I don't know who got them. But gee, it was so exquisite. And my wife remembers seeing them too, and we often wonder.

[Break in taping]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: We got some very small sumi paintings from Tobey, quite a few of them. Every time I went to visit him, he would say to me, "Take this, take that. You like this? Take it." (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And you think he was impractical in a business sense in general in that way? You think he was very generous.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: He was very, very generous, yes. He certainly was. And then when he moved out of that house on Brooklyn, you know, he had a sale of a lot of his furnitures. And I think he sold quite a few of his collection of Zen paintings at that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh, oh, maybe it went then.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So Ayame [my wife--George Tsutakawa] and I went to some of these sales, then he wouldn't take any money, see, "Well, take this, take that."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: We have one wonderful rocking chair, which belonged to Mark Tobey, and I always call it Tobey's rocking chair, or thinking chair. We still have it; I think it's upstairs now. Black, old American rocking chair, just a beauty. We still have that. He just gave it to us. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Wouldn't take any money.

[Break in taping]

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .in a way relates to the lamp. About the time Ayame and I were married, we lived in a small shack, a real small shack, one-room wooden shack, at 309 12th Avenue. Anyway, I'd just come back from the army, and I started to teach Japanese language in the Far East Department, then called at the University of Washington. And I taught this course for one semester -- they had the semester system during the war. But I soon found out that I was no linguist, although I had taught Japanese language in the army language school, Fort Snelling, Minnesota, for two years. I still took the job because I needed some kind of job when I came back to Seattle and we were getting married. I had no money. (laughs) But anyway, soon after that, I went back to the art department to do [more--Ed.] graduate work in art. And about that time Mr. Isaacs asked me if I would teach art, which was kind of a shock to me; I didn't feel that I was prepared to do so. But anyway, Isaacs just insisted that I take a class. That's when all the GIs started coming back, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And we didn't have enough instructors.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: I see.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: That's about the time when Mason and Fuller, Anderson, I, joined art department. And that was about 1946, '47, about that time. All right. Gee there was something I was going to say. (chuckles)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You started to say that you and Ayame lived in this one-room shack and it had something to do with the lights that you made.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh, all right. All right. We didn't have any furniture.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So I said, "Well, I'll make them." So I started to make these tables, chairs, and lamps especially. About that time, I was studying pottery with Bonifas, and Bonifas was a great philosopher, and he used to sit with us, and talk to us about, oh, painting, sculpture, architecture, pottery, anything. Of course he was one of the founders of purist school and Bauhaus school. And he was closely associated, before he came to Seattle, with people like Le Corbusier and, oh, name some of the founders of Bauhaus. So he used to lecture to us, and we were small group of graduate students, working toward our masters degree at that time. So he used to talk to us a lot about everything. Well, about that time, I started to make these lamps. And when I had that first one-man show at Studio Gallery downtown, I showed some of these lamps. And Bonifas came and he liked them very much. He said, "Ah, wonderful!" And then we used to have long discussion about lamps. He says most of the lamps are very ugly, they're too heavy, and to hold one lightbulb, how much does it weigh, you know?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Almost nothing.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And to have a Chinese jardiniere this big, and a shade over that weighing five, 20 pounds, you know. "It doesn't make sense," he says. "It only weighs few ounces, so lamp should be light. And the design and the structure of the lamp, everything should be just enough to support one lamp." (chuckles) And that was kind of interesting. So I made many of these lamps around that time. I sold some of them, but the ones you see here were built around that time.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And were all of them that you made like the ones I see now, hollowed from bamboo, with sections of the bamboo cut out?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, the ones behind here. These are all hardwood sticks, you know, also. Very, very light.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And what's between the sticks? Cloth?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Pardon?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Is it silk, between?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah, I worked them. I notched them. You can see. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh I didn't see this one.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: . . .how light this is, you know?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Oh yes. With very delicate strutwork.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Very delicate. And I made these when we were living down there, on 12th Avenue, and gosh that's about 35 years ago. We had them around the house, and our four children growing up, they used to knock them down, throw them around, and still hasn't broken.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: You're right.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah! Very simple structure, and this one too. Same idea.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Were they always vertical and resting? Did you make hanging lamps?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes, I did. I did a lot of hanging lamps too. See how open that is?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, completely.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: In fact I sold quite a few hanging lamps to people who were building, they were hiring modern architects, and building houses, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, yeah.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And of course I was teaching down in the architecture school, and so I'd be introduced to a lot of these new house owners, builders. And they would commission me to design lamps for their house, and lot of people still have them.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: And when you designed these, did you think -- well, you must have, I suppose -- thought of the interplay between the light and the structure as a very special aspect of the functioning?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Oh yes. Very much so. And then the spaces, you know, and illumination, and the soft light, depending on the application, wherever it went. So I designed some special ones to be placed in the different parts of the interior. That was a sort of fun thing to do. And then at the same time I was making these furnitures, you know, all fit, dovetailed and fit [joined with wooden pegs; no screws or nails--George Tsutakawa].

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Then when you moved to fountain sculptures, later, and you worked with the interaction of solid material and something moving through it, it in a way, was not the first time you'd done this. You had been working with light.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that's right. I was always very much interested in the structure, structuring things, constructing things. And to take advantage of the property of the natural strength and property of the material, and exploiting it to its maximum. I was very much interested in that. And so in all my large bronze pieces, the relationship of total design and the gauge and thickness of the material, as well as the vertical and horizontal stresses and compression, it was very much like building a house. To support not only its own weight but to support the water and to make something permanent. Now that just reminds me of something I'd like to touch upon. And that is in recent years, in design especially and sculpture and craft, there has been some very interesting notion about permanency about something. And there have been sculptors like [Jean--Ed.] Tinguely, who made a self-destroying sculpture, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes, to take an extreme case.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yeah. In craft shows I've seen things which are not supposed to be permanent, you know.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: It's momentarily fleeting thing, which I think expresses in a way the hopelessness and the desperation of the modern generation, maybe, I don't know. But, I found out, in my long experience as a sculptor and observing other people's sculptures, especially some of the large, monumental things, well we can talk about the pyramid again in Egypt, or the wall in China -- what do you call that wall?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: The Great Wall?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: The Great Wall of China. I have visited some of the fantastic stone cave temples in south India, which have been standing there for over 2,000 years, built by man, and still beautiful, still admired. Some of the old cathedrals in Europe, and many temples in Japan and China, architectural examples from the past. Well, what I'm saying is that you don't judge a work of art by how old it is, but you certainly have great respect for a work of art which has stood, or withstood, the time. And to me, time is one of the greatest elements and proof of the value of a work of art, or true essence of the work of art. Anyway I kind of believe that. Now, there's a lot of incongruity or inconsistency in our world today. And one of the things I remember when I'm commissioned to do a fountain sculpture by some company or bank or somebody, and I go to all the trouble preparing models and drawings and sketches for the presentation of an idea to the client, and always someone comes up during the meeting and says, "You know, George, we want you to design something permanent here, you know."

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: So, then they'll say, "Well how long will this last?"

MARTHA KINGSBURY: As though you might not have thought of that?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that's sort of my question. My answer is that Chinese bronzes from the Chou dynasty, or the Egyptian bronzes, are three, four thousand years old, and they were cast. . .

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Will that do?

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: They were cast in the most primitive method of metallurgy and knowledge, but they still lasted three, four thousand years. So I say "Well, I'm using silicon bronze, which is the latest copper alloy known today, result of hundreds of years of study and high technology, and so if the Chinese bronze lasted three thousand years, mine will last twice as long!" Then I turn around and say, "Well, how long is the building going to last?" You see?

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Well, that stopped the conversation right there, because we know very well that no architect is going to guarantee that his building's going to last more than 50 years.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yes. And they're all recycled.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Or 100 years at the most.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Yeah.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: And so, and very interesting. (laughs)

MARTHA KINGSBURY: But you're saying that the character of permanence is something to be deliberately sought and incorporated in your work.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: Yes. Surely. We hope to create something, and hope that it will be accepted.

MARTHA KINGSBURY: Sure.

GEORGE TSUTAKAWA: I think we touched on this a little while ago, you know, that [it] be seen and accepted for many, many, many generations to come, hopefully.

END OF INTERVIEW

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