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Oral history interview with Harvey K.  
Littleton, 2001 March 15

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Harvey K. Littleton on March 15, 2001. The interview took place in Spruce Pine, North Carolina and was conducted by Joan Falconer Byrd for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Harvey K. Littleton and Joan Falconer Byrd have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written prose.

## Interview

JOAN FALCONER BYRD: ...2001, for the Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution. Harvey, you might give us a little background on when and where you were born. Just touch on that, I think, fairly briefly.

HARVEY K. LITTLETON: Well, you realize that this is being given on the Ides of March.

MS. BYRD: Yeah, I was concerned....

[Laughter.]

MR. LITTLETON: And we have to beware. However, I was born very early in the morning on June 14, 1922. And I was named Harvey K. Littleton, which my father said meant "high cost of living."

My father [Jesse Talbot Littleton] was a physicist, the first physicist to enter the glass industry in Corning, New York. There was a physical chemist there, Dr. E.C. Sullivan, who was my father's boss. And they were the laboratory, the Corning Glassworks. And later they were joined by many other Ph.D.s and specialists in glass. So, we lived in a glass community, Corning, New York, and the Corning Glassworks.

My father often explained that, when he came to Corning, the large glass furnaces were started in the dark of the moon. They were started in the dark of the moon because they'd done it once and they didn't know whether it had any effect or not.

MS. BYRD: [Laughter.] Amazing.

MR. LITTLETON: And so it was his job to get rid of the dark of the moon as a factor in making glass, among many other things. He defined annealing, the softening point of glass, which became an international standard.

MS. BYRD: The Littleton Point.

MR. LITTLETON: The Littleton Point, one way of determining what is a glass and differentiating one glass from another. There are literally an infinite number of glass compositions possible. And so, it's difficult to say precisely what one glass is without some kind of comparison to another glass. And, glass was table talk in our family. When my father was stuck with me on Saturday - I was the youngest of four children - he would take me to the factory. A child could go through the front gate in those days when you were six years old. So he'd turn me over to the stockman in the laboratory and he [the stockman] would take me through the factory, or sit me in front of a bunsen burner with some glass tubing. And those were my early experiences.

I always thought I would be a physicist like my father. In fact, I was his last chance to get a physicist out of the four children. But, actually one of my brothers did go to work for the Corning Glassworks and ended up as a vice-president, and so on. But I went off to school to the University of Michigan to become a physicist. After three semesters - I had been taking sculpture classes from Elmira College in high school, and I took a sculpture class at the University of Michigan as a freshman. [he went off to Cranbrook]

MR. LITTLETON: My first sculpture teacher was Enfred Anderson in Elmira, New York. E-n-f-r-e-d. And, quite a colorful man with a beard, and so on, a trim, pointed beard. He taught extension courses in life drawing and sculpture at the high school. They were attended by artists in Corning. I think I was the youngest, without any question. And, at the University of Michigan my teacher was Avarad Fairbanks whose son, Jonathan, is the furniture guru for many years at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The world gets smaller as we get older.

MS. BYRD: You really were always interested in sculpture.

MR. LITTLETON: Yes.

MS. BYRD: And then you went to Cranbrook.

MR. LITTLETON: I went to Cranbrook after three semesters at the University of Michigan. And – or maybe it was.... At any rate, I entered the University of Michigan in September 1939. And, I went to Cranbrook for the spring semester of 1941. And I studied with Marshall Fredricks. And I also worked in the studio of Carl Milles, grinding clay and things like that.

Another sculpture student, Winslow Eaves, who later taught at Syracuse, and I were hired by Marshall Fredricks to polish the monkey, the chimpanzee on the steps of the new museum at Cranbrook. The stone carvers had screwed it up. And one arm was particularly bad. And Marshall Fredericks was a clean-clothes sculptor. He liked to have other people work for him. It wasn't that he couldn't get dirty, but he was generally very well dressed. So Winslow and I were hired to work under his direction, to hand polish and chip away at this monkey. In fact, when I visited Cranbrook about a year ago, I went to the monkey and looked at him very carefully. And I found one spot where we couldn't get a very deep chip out.

MS. BYRD: Did you remember that?

MR. LITTLETON: Oh, yeah. It was very interesting to step back. Cranbrook was a very unusual place then, because the director was Eliel Saarinen. And Eero Saarinen [his son] was teaching design along with – oh, I can't remember – oh, yeah – Charlie Eames. They were all involved in the chair competition. And the plastic chairs came out of that. They had a frame of chicken wire coated with plastic. And they took it all around the school with plasticene. And they would build it up here and tear it down there to get the, to get it to fit most of the bottoms in the school. And they did a pretty good job, because that chair is still being made.

MS. BYRD: And that's when you...

MR. LITTLETON: In fact, that chair, the first experimental forms in fiberglass, were done in the Corning Glassworks laboratory under my father.

MS. BYRD: For that chair.

MR. LITTLETON: For that chair. It was – it again was – My father liked to see glass used in any way possible. He claimed he wanted to be buried in a glass coffin, which he was – fiberglass. And, we couldn't get him a glass tombstone, but we used the fiberglass coffin. It was his idea shortly after he got to Corning to use glass as a cooking utensil for ovenware. And so he sawed off a battery jar, which was made of Corning's low-expansion borosilicate glass, originally developed by Dr. Sullivan. And my father sawed this battery jar off and my mother baked a cake in it. See batteries were lead acid and they didn't have the rubber cases, you know, the way batteries are made today. So the acid would eat up most any other material.

MS. BYRD: I see.

MR. LITTLETON: The development of electricity in a storage jar involved sulfuric acid. And heat was given off. So, an ordinary glass would break. And so the Pyrex was the thing. And they had for rural electricity in those days, they had the Delco systems, 32-volt systems. General Motors manufactured the Delco generator, which people used.

MS. BYRD: Individual generators?

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah. And they used the storage batteries for that.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. LITTLETON: So, in fact, some of the family – my aunt had a farm in Mississippi, and they had a Delco system. My father worked with insulators, glass insulators, of course, and many other things. He had a number of patents. I think 37 or 38 patents. But, in the long run, he was best as a director of research, hiring people and guiding them in their research and working with them, with everyone, all of them, to produce the advances in glass that were characteristic, that characteristically came out of the Corning Glassworks.

MS. BYRD: Well, he took the battery jar home....

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah, yeah. A little dish about so big. My mother baked a cake in it. They were round at that time. There were square ones later. And, in fact, the Corning people used to exhibit a square battery jar as the original cake dish, but my mother said, "No! That wasn't it, and that it had to be – "

Well, my father was a good southern boy. He did a lot of hunting and fishing. And, so he had coon hounds in those days. He went to Corning in 1913. And, so he hunted at night with coon hounds. That's how they did it. And, so he got enough coons to make my mother a coonskin coat, if I remember. Well, at any rate, they said

that the square dish was the one. But, my mother said she fed the coon hounds in the other dish and they broke it. So, she knew it wasn't the right one.

Well, perhaps my father influenced my brothers and myself more with the hunting and fishing and the outdoor life than he did with anything else. Though, our table always revolved around glass talk. He could never go in a restaurant. If you remember my seminar - we used to go have coffee.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. LITTLETON: And, I would describe how the shapes of the glass ashtrays weren't very good and where the problems were. Among the interesting jobs they found that the Coke bottle was the strongest shape that had been made in glass. You know, we used to - in the '30s and even into the '50s, they reused Coke bottles. And they would get pretty beaten up. And milk bottles, too, and so on. So we would discuss all of those things.

And his book that he wrote - and it's over on the shelf over there - was published in the 30s on the electrical properties of glass, by Littleton and G.W. Morey [*Electrical Properties of Glass* (1933)]. And it was a standard work and still is, though it's not in print, I don't think - I don't think - after all those years. But he was instrumental in founding the glass division of the American Ceramic Society, as well as the International Glass Organization. My father was president of the American Ceramic Society. And, so it tickled me when the design division, not the glass division, but the design division, made me an honorary life member of the American Ceramic Society. I don't participate in the meetings since I really don't have much to give on the scientific end of things.

MS. BYRD: What year were you given that award?

MR. LITTLETON: It's all down in the office [1986].

MS. BYRD: Was it for your glass or was it for your ceramics?

MR. LITTLETON: Glass. Ceramics were not very glamorous. Glass was much more glamorous, much more credit for the glass. Though, I like my work in ceramics. I did ceramic sculpture, one or two pieces, when I went to Cranbrook in 1941. And, I continued to be interested in it. And, later, when I went back to Cranbrook for my master's degree in 1949, I did mostly stoneware and no sculpture. When I took ceramics in England, I modeled the torso in clay and fired it. And I brought that back and I made a mold and cast it in the multiform.

So in the summers, most young people in Corning would go to work in the factory for the summer to earn money for school, if they weren't already working in the factory. But, my parents didn't want me to work in the summer. They thought if I was working hard at school, I should have the summer off. Well, I didn't want that; I wanted to work. So like every other kid, a number of my friends, we went down to the employment office to the Corning Glassworks and applied. Well, I sat in the employment office for three weeks cooling my heels while all my friends marched in and marched out with jobs. I think our wages then were 50 cents, 49 cents an hour, something like that. But, that was a lot of money then.

Finally, after three weeks, they relented and put me on a night shift from 10 at night to 6 in the morning inspecting the hand-blown coffee pots and top-of-the-stove ware. And, they were blown by shops of six or seven men. And, after they came out of the annealing, they were then heat treated to make them resistant to the flame. And, if they were too thick in any part, they had to be thrown away, or if they were too thin, or something was wrong with them, they would be thrown away. And, I was the one who threw them away. And, you got to love broken glass. Though you had to be careful, because the men were paid - they got a double bonus if they did 700 in a six-hour shift. And my shift was eight hours. And, fortunately, it didn't coincide with the glass-blowing shifts, because if you threw away too many pieces, they didn't count towards the bonus. And you could find somebody laying in wait, two to three people laying in wait for you when you got out of the factory at 6:00 in the morning. And so it behooved you to be very careful.

MS. BYRD: So, these were actually blown, not machine made?

MR. LITTLETON: They were hand blown. Corning Glassworks at that time still made the vacuum tubes in what were called German shops, three men. They were blown by hand. But the ribbon machine, which was developed about 1902-1903, somewhere in there, could make 6,000 light bulbs a minute. And, they got it much faster than that. But the earlier ones were 6,000 a minute, perhaps.

So the problem was that all the books and everything said you couldn't blow glass by yourself. And I worked in the factory long enough to know that I was not a corporate person. I couldn't work that way. I wasn't a very good soldier in World War II because I questioned everything. And you can't do that in a corporate situation. So I became a potter, finally. I graduated in industrial design. And I had designed a coffee pot for Corning and they made a mock-up of it and my idea worked, but it didn't come out of the design department, so it was never

manufactured, of course. And things like that.

We had a business after we graduated from the University of Michigan in industrial design. I graduated in 1947. I was originally the class of 1943, but I was drafted in September, sworn in in September 1942.

MS. BYRD: But, you actually volunteered.

MR. LITTLETON: Well, I volunteered - didn't do any good. The requirements for enlisting as a volunteer were higher than for draftees. I tried the Coast Guard, I tried the Navy, I tried the Army, because with my background I could get into OCS or Officer Candidate School. None of them worked. But then I was drafted. [Laughter.] So I was sworn in in a camp near Niagara Falls, New York. I did my basic training in Camp Crowder, Missouri. Then I was taken into the Signal Intelligence, which was a strange outfit. They had priority over all the others for the Signal Corps. And if you had foreign language and mathematics, an Army IQ of over 135, you couldn't get out of this outfit. It was terrible. So I was a T-5, or a Corporal. When you finish basic training in my field, or in that thing, you were immediately promoted to T-5. And I was sent to Vint Hill Farms Station, Virginia, which was the most amazing camp. My teacher there was McGeorge Bundy, among other people. It was a radio intercept station, as well as a training ground for cryptanalysts. And, our school was in a barn. The barn had two wings and it came together and there was a silo in the middle. You know, it was all camouflaged. And out of the top of the silo came this smokestack from the heating plant. And there were radio towers all over this farm.

MS. BYRD: Not too well concealed, then.

MR. LITTLETON: We spent most of our time digging holes for these 100-foot poles. And if you had to dig a hole for a 100-foot pole by hand - and they were quite big around, because a tree that long - it was something. So we spent most of our time digging holes or ditches and not very much time going to school. We once passed the word down the ditch we were digging. And, we found there was 1,200 years of college education and teaching experience in that ditch. It was quite a place.

Well, finally, after six months of that nonsense, I was shipped overseas to the 849th Signal Intelligence Unit in North Africa. So we landed in Oran in March or April 1943. And we were shipped then by train in the, literally, the "40 and 8 cars." That is, they're freight cars, which would handle either 40 men or 8 horses. And they didn't clean them out in between. It took us two days to go from Oran to Algiers, only a couple hundred miles. It was amazing.

Well, the war was still on in North Africa, so I got a battle star from that, I think. At the headquarters we did some more training. And I remember I sort of misbehaved a bit. I got sick and when I came back from the hospital to the outfit, I told the duty sergeant that I had gone back to work. And, I told the sergeant at work that I was on duty. So I got - finally, they caught up with me after a couple of weeks, and I got my strength back digging a garbage pit. Four feet by four feet.

So, you see, I wasn't really a good soldier. However, I had a nickname in that outfit [Smorgasbord].

[Tape Change]

MS. BYRD: And Smorgasbord....

MR. LITTLETON: Yes, well, I had had three years of French in college. And in North Africa I could speak French well enough to get what we needed or what we wanted. And I was often sent into town to get something or other. We were about 20 miles outside of Algiers, in the mountains. At the foot of the mountains, really. So I was pretty good at that kind of thing. But I wasn't a good soldier.

Then we were sent out in teams to provide US code to the British, for instance. That's where I got sent in the invasion of North Africa, invasion of Italy, I mean. And we were attached to the British Eighth Army. We went up the east coast along the Adriatic with Montgomery. And, finally, they were planning a fake advanced landing on the East Coast. Montgomery bogged down. There was a lot of mud and so on. He boasted he was going to be in Rome by Christmas, but he got stuck in the mud. Well, the English convoys didn't travel very fast. They averaged about two to three miles an hour. And the American supply convoys of the Red Ball Express averaged 50 miles an hour --

MS. BYRD: Goodness.

MR. LITTLETON: Fifty miles an hour. And the drivers were mostly black. And they could handle those big trucks like you wouldn't believe on those terrible roads.

So that's why the American troops in France really were able to make breakouts, and so on. They didn't outrun their supplies, whereas the British always had to wait for something or other, tea or what have you. And, they

sent them into an attack. In the British navy you got two ounces of neat rum every morning at 11:00. That was to prevent scurvy or something. And it was a very prized privilege. But the army got one ounce a day ration, and they saved it up, the officers saved it up for the men. So when they went into battle, they went in drunk. They passed out quite a bit at a time of an assault.

But I was detached from my little outfit of one officer and four men. I was sent on ahead to this English landing, advanced landing group. They were navy. And I had a little device for American code. So I was attached to them for four months. And they were going to send me up where there was some action, about a mile from the front. But I was living on this LCI, landing craft infantry – no, LSI, landing ship infantry. And we were tied up in a harbor, and I had to have a room by myself for the secret code, etc.

So my friends were out living in the mud and I was onboard this nice, warm vessel, getting my two ounces of rum every day at 11 o'clock. And I was the Yank. That was my nickname there. And, we lived on bully beef and biscuits, the English biscuits. Well, we had a southern boy among the four of us. And he couldn't really eat the biscuits very well. So he soaked them overnight, and then he bit into them and broke his tooth. They were meant to be stored in these tins and last for years. You could eat them, but not very easily.

MS. BYRD: Those were like ship's biscuits.

MR. LITTLETON: Yes. That's what they were. British Navy. And the bully beef was Argentine. The Americans had C-rations. But, the English had either M&V, meat and vegetables, which was – we always maintained it was the rejects from the American C-rations. Or bully beef. And the normal ration would be a half a can of bully beef and biscuits for breakfast. The other half for lunch. And for supper you'd get a whole can. And if you were lucky they'd cook it up. Otherwise, you got it cold. And biscuits. And at teatime you got biscuits without any bully beef.

MS. BYRD. It was heavy on the biscuits.

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah, yeah. So we were there for four months. Then I was sent back to my home outfit in Caserta. Well, there were American message centers in Alexander's headquarters. It was American and British and whatnot in Caserta, which is near Naples. We were housed in the summer palace of the King of Naples. It was a beautiful place. But, we lived out in a tent in the woods. And, we were there because General Taylor – who was in-charge of the Americans there at the time of Anzio and the Volturno Crossings, and so on – he liked to observe the battle from the air. So, he had a little Piper Cub with pontoons on it. And he would land on the ponds and the waterway in the grounds there. And, of course he had a small palace for his – to live in. But our headquarters, message center, were in the large palace.

I got a very jaundiced view of our American Officer's Corps as a result of some of these experiences.

MS. BYRD: I know you made a major contribution with your encoding device.

MR. LITTLETON: Decoding device.

MS. BYRD: Decoding device. Excuse me. I think that was covered pretty well in the Columbia tapes –

MR. LITTLETON: I got a commendation for the Chief Signal Officer in Europe for it. It happened to occur just at the end of the war. So, that's how I got to go to school in England.

MS. BYRD: Now, did you choose Brighton?

MR. LITTLETON: No, there were these places that would take so many people. And the Brighton School of Art was one of them. We were a problem to them, because we didn't conform. I mean, we were used to quite a different thing. In life drawing they would have a nude model and they would start to draw this little bit of the eye first. And, all of the rest of the body as a result.

[Laughter.]

MS. BYRD: That's amazing.

MR. LITTLETON: Well, they were working for the Academy exam. So they would have the same pose over and over, so that they could make a drawing of that pose in an hour or two hours, whatever it was. The same in sculpture, you'd model a figure, and you had to remodel it several times in order to pass the exam. The royal – I've forgotten what it was called. And so we took the classes, but we were not really in it. You know, we did whatever we wanted to do. We saved our work and shipped it back. That torso that I cast in glass in 1945, January 1946, was modeled in clay that fall, previous fall, in Brighton.

MS. BYRD: So you were taking drawing and sculpture and clay.

MR. LITTLETON: And metal work, and lettering....

MS. BYRD: Oh, my word!

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah. I had a full load.

MS. BYRD: Now, Norah Braden was your teacher in ceramics?

MR. LITTLETON: Yes. Yes. But, you know, I was a cocky young American. I was so sure we did everything better in the States that I must have been a real pain.

MS. BYRD: Now, I know later you developed strong feelings about the [Bernard] Leach tradition. Did it begin then, do you think?

MR. LITTLETON: Well, really it began with that – well, let's see; one, two, three, four – on that shelf up there. See? Right dead ahead of me.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes. *A Potter's Book*.

MR. LITTLETON: *A Potter's Book*. That's where it began. That was a terribly important book. But, you see, Leach really felt that you were a better person if you drank your morning coffee out of a hand-made coffee cup. And, he felt if you made 1,000 pots, maybe ten of them would be really good. But, you sold the others to make a living. Most people couldn't tell one from the other. So, he really believed in production pottery in the Japanese way. And most American potters bought it lock, stock, and barrel.

One of the reasons why the Glenn Nelson book [*Ceramics* (1960)] was very good was that Glenn traveled not only to the Orient, but his background was Danish. He was born in Racine, Wisconsin. West Racine was known as Kringleville for all the Danes and Danish bakeries. So Glenn was very much a part of Wisconsin and that area. You know he's still alive today living in Nokomis, Florida.

MS. BYRD: And you're still in touch with him.

MR. LITTLETON: Yes. Bess [Littleton, his wife] carries on a correspondence with him. And I go at least once a year to see him. And we go out and have lunch. And he has his two martinis. He's 88 or 89 now.

MS. BYRD: Getting back to... Had Leach's book come out at the time? Or were you --

[Momentary interruption.]

MR. LITTLETON: Oh, yes. Leach's book came out in the 30s, late 30s.

MS. BYRD: You were aware of it at the time you were working with Norah Braden?

MR. LITTLETON: I don't remember. I can't remember that.

[showing a copy of an announcement of a Leach presentation at the University of Wisconsin in 1960] Do you remember that?

MS. BYRD: 1960. I wasn't there yet. This is an exhibition of Leach's...

MR. LITTLETON: It was a visit and an exhibition [at the University of Wisconsin]..

MS. BYRD: I wish I had been there [reading] then.

MR. LITTLETON: [Reading] Seventh American Edition. 1956.

MS. BYRD: This says *A Potter's Book* was published in 1940.

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah.

MS. BYRD: And his first American tour was 1950.

MR. LITTLETON: I met him in 1950. He came to the University of Michigan with [Shoji] Hamada. And, that's when I learned to make a teapot.

MS. BYRD: The University of Michigan...

MR. LITTLETON: I came up from Toledo to join the group.  
[to Bess Littleton who has entered with a pot of tea.] What tea is this?

MRS. LITTLETON: Prince of Wales.

MR. LITTLETON: Oh, you didn't give me my good tea. Well....

So we all got to know him through this book. And, so many people bought his point of view, because these were special things. But, the University of Michigan hired the potter....

MS. BYRD: Was that Sam Haile?

MR. LITTLETON: ...Sam Haile just before World War II. And then he had to go off somewhere and they hired Grover Cole, a California potter, whose main claim to fame was that he later was the Art Director of the "Ed Sullivan Show." But at the time, he taught at the University of Michigan. And I took pottery every chance I could get. So I had a lot of credits in pottery before I graduated. And, in fact, I had this little design studio after the war with two friends, Bill Lewis, who later became the Associate Dean at the Department of Art at the University of Michigan, and Aare Lahti, but Lahti dropped out. Lahti was the brother of our design teacher at the University of Michigan. So Professor Lahti didn't encourage or discourage us. But we had this little design studio. Wallavi stayed with us for three months and that's about the size of it.

I taught nights in this private pottery in Ann Arbor to pay our studio rent and to finish up some pots I was making. They weren't very great pots but, at any rate, we thought they were. And, that was quite a job, because I got started there by going in to see if they could refire some pots that weren't fired right. So they wanted to know how they were made. And I said, well they're made on a potter's wheel, of course. And they said, well, we're trying to get some potters' wheels, but we haven't been able to get this guy going to make us one. So I said, well, I've got a wheel. It's in parts. If you let me put it here and work on it, I'll bring it in. So I went off to the junkyard and got a flywheel.

MS. BYRD: You're always such a mover, Harvey.

MR. LITTLETON: [Laughter.] We put the wheel in the studio. And they said, well, can you make us two more? So I made some more. And, then they hired me to teach them to throw. And that's how the Ann Arbor Potters Guild got started and, incidentally, just celebrated its 50th anniversary with an exhibition, and so on, in Ann Arbor. They own a building. They have a very going thing. I've got the catalog of the 50-year anniversary thing here somewhere.

And Bess finally said my unemployment insurance from World War II, the 52/20 Club, 52 weeks at \$20 a week. That's what American soldiers were given. They were given some bonuses and that. Well, it finally ran out and Bess said we can't live on what you're getting now, and so you've got to do something. If you want to be a potter, go and get your master's degree. So that's what I did. And I got at the same time - one of the women in the Potters Guild was Harriet Waite from Toledo, Ohio - there was a Waite High School in Toledo, so it was a prominent family - and she knew the people at the museum and the museum school. And so she literally got me on there as a teacher. And I taught three days a week there and went to Cranbrook four days a week.

MS. BYRD: Amazing schedule [leafing through a catalog].

MR. LITTLETON: There's one.

MS. BYRD: Oh, one of your bowls from the 1950s, in this catalog for the celebration for 50 Years of Clay at the Potters Guild in Ann Arbor.

MR. LITTLETON: Yes. So it was something that I've been very proud of.

MS. BYRD: Having started the Potters Guild?

MR. LITTLETON: Yes. You see they quickly learned all I had to give them when we got those first wheels. And they started to make a lot of stuff. And, they didn't fit the classes anymore. And so I persuaded the owner of this private pottery to have what was called a studio group. In other words, when there weren't classes, they could come in and work, and fire their things, and pay for the firing, and so on.

Well, finally, Harry Truman was elected. And the woman who ran the Potters Guild's husband was in gray markets steel. That meant that steel was rationed and there were these guys who - you want some extra steel, you went to him. Well, it was on the verge of being illegal. And so when Harry Truman came in, there wasn't going to be any need for this, or so they thought. So he decided to quit sponsoring this pottery of his wife's. And so they just one day closed it up. And the studio group tried to buy the equipment. But she wanted what she paid for it.

And so Bill Lewis and I said, well, we'll build you some more potters' wheels and a kiln and find a place. And we'll start it up somewhere else. So that was the beginning of the Potters Guild. And Harriet Waite's husband was in



the Law School. And he drew up the constitution, or whatever you want to call it, of the Potters Guild. And it turned out, as I used to say in my classes, that a good idea will transcend the individual personalities within it. If there are destructive personalities – if the idea is good and the need is there, they will transcend any individual or destructive group within the larger group. And that's what I said at Penland when there was such a hoopla when Bill Brown left. I said, if the need for Penland is strong enough and the service is good enough, then Penland will succeed beyond anyone.

MS. BYRD: And you were on the board....

MR. LITTLETON: I went on the board the day that he was asked to resign. So I was not a part of requesting his resignation. But the board caught all the flack. And I was on the board then. And there were serious attempts to shut down Penland.

Well, our mutual friend who shall be nameless was teaching a class. He asked his students not to sign up.

MS. BYRD: I hadn't heard that.

MR. LITTLETON: Well, that happened in a few instances, but enough people had already made their plans, so they came anyway.

[Momentary pause]

After the war, about the end of the war, I was in our office and I had just received a commendation from the Chief Signal Officer in France. And this lieutenant was talking to me about something, and I didn't agree with him. And he finally looked me up and down. He'd just come from the States. He was a 2nd lieutenant. And he said to me, "Soldier! You know, I don't like your attitude." And I said, "Well, sir, I'll tell you, I don't like yours either."

But I'd been there almost three years, and he'd just arrived. And he didn't know anything. So it was not hard to say things like that.

MS. BYRD: What was it you said? Oh, you said you couldn't just sit still when you were in....

MR. LITTLETON: Oh, well, you can't sit still. You see, the army is organized so that you have, for every man who has a real job to do, they take 99 others. So the 99 others just sit around taking care of each other so this one guy can do a job. Well, once you understand this, then the pressure of doing, you know, your duty and great things for the army – you realize there are 99 other guys to do it, too. So if you just do what you can do, forget about all the rest. Nothing's going to happen. It's going to be all right. And, so you relax, you know. Some guys entered the army only to play poker on payday night. Of course, that implied that they had to work until payday. But it also implied that there were enough of them so that nobody had to do any work.

And they went out of the army rich men, some of them.

MS. BYRD: That's from playing poker?

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah. That's what they went in the army for. They were gambling every second of the day in some situations. Wherever there was a pack of cards, some money, and a blanket.

MS. BYRD: And that would mean not just Americans with Americans, but Americans with...

MR. LITTLETON: Oh, Americans with Americans mostly.

[TAPE CHANGE.]

MS. BYRD: Falconer Byrd interviewing Harvey K. Littleton in the library of the artist's home in Spruce Pine, North Carolina, on the Ides of March the year 2001 for the Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution.

Do you think of yourself as part of international tradition, or one that is particularly American?

MR. LITTLETON: I think that's a very significant question, because there were – I have to make a long explanation, but it's important. American art as we know it today is the product of several government programs. And it's very seldom acknowledged. The WPA, for instance, was very, very vital in the development of present-day American art, because it was the first time that American artists who were trained in America were paid to do their own work. They got \$20 a week, or a month, or whatever it was, \$20 a week just to paint paintings, or to make pots or whatever. Wharton Esherick was part of this thing. There were a great many people who benefited by that.

Then, along came World War II and immediately after World War II – probably the most successful government program ever was the GI Bill. It took more than 10 million men, paid them to go back to school. Not only paid them to go back to school, freed them from any parental influence, and gave them a living amount of money along with all tuition and materials. A great many of us took advantage of that. In my case, I would have gotten my degree without government help, but I wouldn't have gotten my degree free of my background, able to write my own ticket, so to speak.

Then the other thing that was important was all of these men and women went into the universities and a high percentage wanted to take art courses. Their parents would never have permitted them in the past. Well, they came to places like the University of Wisconsin. The University of Wisconsin had an Art Department of five people, one of whom was a painter. The other four were art educators to train teachers.

By 1951, when I went there, there were four art educators and 20 painters, potters, sculptors, and what have you. And, where did those people come from? They either came from a few institutions like Iowa, Cranbrook, Art Institute of Chicago, that had graduate art programs, or they came out of WPA art. And, they created – the pressure of these students – the universities couldn't pass up this good money – created art departments where there never had been art departments before. At Madison, it was the School of Education where the Art Department ended up. Illogical, but nonetheless there's where it went. At Purdue it was the Home Economics Department, at Indiana it was the Art History Department, where they had a captive artist or two. And, all of a sudden they had Art Departments. These were prestigious institutions. The University of Michigan, it was the School of Architecture. So they created these things.

Now, in Europe art departments, art academies, are not in the university. A child grows up, he takes the competitive examination to determine what his education is going to be, and the top 20% go to university free. But there's no art in the university. Art history, yes, but no art. So what they in essence have done is to eliminate from art the brightest, most brilliant 20%, top. Now, Bert Van Loo in Holland was educated as a pharmacist. And he wanted to be a glass sculptor. So what did he do? He had to apply to the Ministry of Education to get permission to go back to school. Whereas in America it's a free-for-all. Totally undisciplined. But we injected among the art students people with degrees in chemistry, people with degrees in psychology, people with degrees in sociology, people with degrees in economics, people with degrees in damn-near-anything, who decided they wanted to take art. In 1970, 70% of our graduate students at the University of Wisconsin had come to art with other degrees. I always use Fritz [Dreisbach], because Fritz in 5,000 years of glassmaking was the first glassmaker who handled the blowpipe with five university degrees on his back. Now, that was never possible anywhere in the world, at any time, in those 5,000 years.

MS. BYRD: That's interesting.

MR. LITTLETON: You see. So this is a very special kind of thing that has happened here. And then a lot of people say, well, the Fulbright made a big contribution, which it did. But, you see, it had very fertile soil. When we sent Americans overseas to study, we sent Americans with strong backgrounds in art and other fields, as well. So, they went to these Kunstakademien and schools, trade schools, Fachschulen, in Europe, and they brought a totally different background than the students there had. So that they influenced what was going on all over the world because of the kind of people they were. And, of course, they produced an art, which was richer and stronger, more experimental, and so on. You see the American art student is trained as a researcher, as well as a trained hand. The Kunstfachschule trains the hand, but not the mind, you see. We were very impressed. That's why we created the Fulbright. But, we were very impressed with the skills in Europe. So by sending people there and by bringing teachers from there here, we fertilized our art with greater technique. And we married our restless spirit and our ability to research, and so on, with that thing. So the whole thing is open.

Now, in glass I have made a discovery recently. And I always said to you as students, there are no secrets. In the first place, glass is transparent. If you understand how it's made, every piece has its history right there for you to read. All you have to do is be able to read it. So an Italian makes a piece. All the technique is there for us to see. It's a transparent material. And it's transparent to a trained mind. There are no secrets.

And, you see, we turned loose on Europe the Dante Marionis. Sure, they learned from Europe, but they made things that Europeans never made. It's like – a wonderful story about Peter Voukos. I was talking to him once, and I said, well, Peter, how did this stuff happen? He said, well, I was a student in Montana, or Idaho – I don't know, one of those places – and I was putting myself through school flipping hamburgers. His brother took over that restaurant. And he said, I got interested in clay because of Archie Bray, who supported the clay in this university. And he said, the only thing we knew about clay was what we saw in the craft magazines, and we saw the pictures of the things made that won prizes in the Syracuse Exhibition, which was the great national exhibition at the time. And he said, I'd look at them and I'd see there were prizewinners, and I would have thought, gee, if they were prizewinners, then they have to be big. So he said, I want to make something like that. So he made these big things. And for three or four years after that, he dominated every exhibition, because there were these little pots and there these were the Voukos pots. And he changed the face of pottery in this

country, not intending to.

MS. BYRD: Because he didn't know they were small pieces.

MR. LITTLETON: No, he couldn't translate that. You know, in the book by the man from Alfred, Charles Fergus Binns, there is a wonderful series of pictures in there on how to make a twelve-inch cylinder – in three parts. In three parts. I saw Peter – he came to us for one demonstration about 1962 or '61. He took a square piece of clay, slapped it on the wheel, punched a hole in it and pulled it up. It had four points at the top and it was easily 20 inches tall. In two or three pulls. You know, not in pieces. Nothing like that. That was the year he made the instant teapot. Do you remember that? Or were you there then?

MS. BYRD: What was the instant teapot?

MR. LITTLETON: Well, he made a teapot. Somebody said in the class, can you make a teapot, Peter? They were trying to give him a little dig. And Peter said, sure, I can make a teapot. Here is an instant teapot. So, he made a teapot with a spout, with a handle, with a cover. Of course, the cover was fused in as soon as he stuck it in there. But I've got it. It has been shown in several exhibitions. Peter Voulkos's instant teapot. And I've got one of those cylinders he just pulled up and punched holes in, and painted. We fired the hell out of it. It's wonderful.

But, you see, that freedom from tradition, and yet recipient of all of the traditions, gave a quality, which just wasn't possible under the master-slave apprenticeship system. The greatest thing that came out of some of these nostalgia – we talked about the nostalgia of Leach....

MS. BYRD: He believed in apprenticeship.

MR. LITTLETON: ...and some of these other things, is the fraud that's perpetrated on this thing. You know, in the old apprenticeship system the children were sold to the master as indentured servants for seven years. If they left that servitude, the sheriff and the dogs were sent after them, just like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. They were slaves. And what kind of freedom do you have as a slave? Then you had to pass a journeyman's examination and a master's examination. And it wasn't oral. It had nothing to do with concepts. It had to do with training of the hands. And no wonder pottery and other fields took a hundred years to change forms and decorations, and so on.

The American system, which didn't presume that you were going to work as a potter, but you would study art, you would study the craft, and so on, produced great people, because you had everybody to draw on. There was no stigma in being a potter, no untouchable status as in Europe. You know, you can be very nostalgic about Japanese pottery, but, you see, the Japanese considered potters just one step above the guy who cleans out the latrines.

MS. BYRD: Not people like Hamada, though.

MR. LITTLETON: That was the genius of Hamada. He said, well, I am an unusual person. I can make the same pots as everyone else, and everyone else will be able to see my pots as something special. You see, it was not the product of the training, but rather the supreme ego that allowed him to transcend that local tradition, so that the best pots from Mashiko will be known as Hamada, and the worst ones, regardless of who made them, whether it was Hamada or somebody else, will be known as the others. See, it was [Soetsu] Yanagi who wrote about Hamada losing his tail by immersing himself in Mashiko pottery. He only did that – he was a university-trained ceramic engineer – he only did that because he knew that he was strong enough to come out of it on top. He didn't have to sign these pots. You see, the best were his. In reality, or not, it didn't matter.

So he was the first of the modern artist potters, in that sense. Leach, in a sense, was trained as an artist. And in that way, he was more modern. See, he then studied pottery and brought his training as an artist to pottery. But then he talked all this nonsense about you're a better a person if you drink from a pot made by somebody else. I mean, it's absolute slavery when you make \$5.00 mugs. You're competing with the peasant potters of Korea and Japan, you know.

You've got to get paid for what you're doing, for who you are and what you're doing. And if you make good stuff, you've got to get paid for it, because, it's like buying a stock, which has no potential. It's not going to be worth anything in a little while, as we've all seen by NASDAQ. But if you're a working artist, and each piece is a richer experience than the previous one, when you buy an early Harvey Littleton, or an early Joan Byrd, or an early something else, then that's all your experience to that point in that pot. But you pay a little more for it because you're buying into the future. It's that little more that allows you to change your pots, to grow, and to develop. And, you see, the people who buy your stuff have to understand that they are investing not only in that object, but in the next ones, in the potential, so that that pot will grow in value as you grow in value. And if you don't do that, you're starving. It's like planting certified seed in the field, and not cultivating it, not fertilizing it, not doing anything to it. It's going to end up a patch of weeds. And our young people have to be cultivated, have to be

fertilized.

MS. BYRD: While we're talking about other countries, could you talk a little bit about your travels and the people you've met, and how you've been influenced.

MR. LITTLETON: Well, of course, my travels started with the army. You take the young people of America, you take 10 million of them. You disperse them from Japan to Europe, North Africa. You leave them there with not much to do except wade around in the mud and so on, and something's going to happen, because they have eyes, they have sensitivities, sensibilities, and they learn. I had studied alkaline glazes before I left the university in those early years and seen the roll as the glaze came down, the kind of roll that it had. While I was in the Casbah, as a soldier, I saw a lamp in an antique shop. It was about 100 years old, in a Persian blue alkaline glaze, with this beautiful roll where the glaze terminated. And I bought it and I carried it in my barracks bag until I got back. I lost it for a while, but then I found it. I used to teach in the Potters Guild. I took it back. And, I've got it somewhere. Probably down in the other building.

And so that was just some little thing. I was going up a mountain to a village at the top of the mountain called Sera Capriola near Foggia in Italy. The great air base for the American planes was in Foggia, and we had just taken Foggia, and we were moving on up. So because of bandits and whatnot, these people lived on the mountain and farmed down below. That was just from the medieval tradition. Well, in Sera Capriola they didn't have any power. So coming up the mountain one time, I saw a kiln. They were firing it with straw. And they were making oil lamps. And I bought one of those, which I've still got. Unglazed, it burned with a rag and some olive oil, which they had lots of. And one of those potters turned up as an Italian prisoner of war in Dijon in France, and he remembered my visit to that pottery, and he worked for me for a while as a war prisoner. I mean, the world is so small.

And, but to fire a kiln with straw was amazing to me. And later when I had wood-fire kilns, I began to realize that as a kiln gets hotter and you put organic material in it, the smaller the pieces, the hotter the fire, because the quicker they'll burn, and they'll burn completely. Of course, you have to work like a dog to get it to burn that way. In Spain, when I worked in the pottery there, they finished the kiln off with bundles of brush, you know. They would start it with big pieces of wood.

And then I read when I was thinking about the copper-red glazes - I've told you about this in class, I don't know if you remember. There was a book we were required to read, Hetherington on Chinese ceramic glazes. And it was a book where they had taken the glazes and sliced them down and analyzed the different layers. And, some of the colors, they determined, were involved in alternate oxidation and reduction. So everybody thought to get Chinese ceramic reds - the ox blood and the peach blow, and so on - that you had to have this alternate oxidation reduction. Well, then I went to Jugtown. And I saw the ground kilns down there, groundhog kilns. And I began to remember some of my other experiences, like the Italian kiln, the kiln in Spain, and so on. And they started the big groundhog kiln with logs, like this. Then they got smaller and smaller. Well, I began to realize that every time they charged the firebox, they had too much fuel. So, what was it?

MS. BYRD: Reduction

MR. LITTLETON: And when the fuel burned down, what did they get?

MS. BYRD: Oxidation.

MR. LITTLETON: And so, of course, the charging of the kiln was alternate. And so, of course, that's what you got. So, instead of being some great scientific achievement as it was portrayed in Hetherington, it was just inherent in the process. And it's that simplicity. To understand that simplicity, you have to have a free mind. You can't be concerned about tradition. The freedom of American art is the freedom from tradition.

So they could take house paint and dribble it on a canvas, watch it move and play with it. Take a floor brush, a stiff brush, and dip it in paint and paint the painting flat on the ground. Well, that was very exciting to Europe. I went there in '57-'58, and the action painters, the Abstract Expressionists were showing in Europe for the first time in a traveling show. And we saw these things and the results of them in several places. And the Europeans were flabbergasted with this action painting, and so on. And it was tremendously successful. Because, you see, they didn't think of it that way.

Now, Bess studied painting with Taubes who was famous for having his students grind their own pigments with the oil, you know, in the very traditional way. So, for them, with that kind of background, to see the freedom of the American painters was wild. So Soulages and others became influenced by Americans.

MS. BYRD: I was going to ask you, when Bess studied - this is Bess's teacher - was that in Hawaii or when she was at Michigan.

MR. LITTLETON: In Hawaii. At Michigan her teacher was Carlos Lopez, who was one of the *Life* magazine artists

who were commissioned to go with the troops and paint, record the battles, and whatnot.

So I think you can begin to understand how all of these experiences allowed me to see in a different way.

[TAPE CHANGE.]

MR. LITTLETON: But, rather, I was from the outside looking in. And I think that all of those Fulbright scholars, those strong ones who got something out of it, were able to look at what was there with an American eye, the product of American educational system. Now, many people denigrate our system. On the other hand, I sat at the commencement at Wisconsin and watched the graduate students file through. Fifty percent and more were from other countries. They're sending us their brightest to finish their education here. Is our education so bad, you know? Their competition are the kids who are the product of our high schools, and the product of our education, which is - there's a socialization, there's a freedom in our primary and secondary education, which is not approached. You know, I think it's ludicrous to put our kids in uniforms and march them down the street like the kids in Japan that walk with their little flags up in the air, and each one a cookie-cutter copy of the next one. How can you get freedom out of that? You can't. See, and that persists all the way through. A student would come to me with a question. And all I could say was I don't know. Look it up. Well, they had the ability to go to the library to talk to other people and to find out about this.

You know, the electron microscope was developed in America and other places, but in one of my first classes at Wisconsin, I had a student who was head of medical microbiology, Dr. Seastone. And we were talking about the structure of clay. And Dr. Seastone said, well, I can show you what it looks like. And he brought me an electron-microscope photograph of the kaolinite particle. Well, it was like one of those cartoons where the electric light comes on above your head. There was a secretary of the American Ceramics Society by the name of Ross Purdy, who had done his doctoral work on the plasticity of clay. And he theorized that if the kaolinite particle was essentially the particle with the least mass and the greatest surface, that it would take 27% water to coat those surfaces and allow the clay to slide, like two microscope slides - you can't pull them apart. Well, the more perfectly plastic clays were about 28-30% water. But all of Purdy's suppositions were borne out with one electron microscope photograph, which showed these octagonal, planar particles, the kaolinite particle.

And so, you see, by being really open, part of the university, part of having an open mind, we were able to put together these ideas. So my pots were thinner than most peoples, because I really was trying to get those particles lined up and flat and sliding on one another. And it gave tremendous strength to the wall of the pot.

Now, we all noticed, for instance, if you had porcelain you wedged the porcelain, and the more you wedged it, the sloppier it got. Now, the clays, the more you wedged them, the stiffer they got. See, the porcelain particles, a lot of them, were round. So, as you begin to fill, to work particles in the voids, it shoved the bigger particles apart. So they were no longer as tight. But if you shoved the flat particles together, they got tighter and tighter. And, the water coated more and more surfaces. And you didn't displace stuff into that water to push the particles apart. See, the wedging pushed them together, like shuffling a deck of cards. And you can't tear a pack of card apart. You can tear them apart individually, or if they're loose you can pull them apart that way. But if they're packed tight, they won't. So that's where your strength comes.

And so I didn't learn to teach so that my first classes were as rich as my later classes. You know, it was an on-the-job training. And that was happening all over the country. But the fact that we were in the middle of institutions like the University of Wisconsin or the University of Michigan, or so on. We had people coming and going. We could draw upon such wide resources that, of course, we developed something quite special.

MS. BYRD: Well, there's a question here about - is there a community that has been important to your development as an artist? So, you would say the University....

MR. LITTLETON: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think the communities like anywhere artists gather together and find a sympathetic milieu, whether it was Paris at the turn of the century, or New York in the '40s, or the mountains of North Carolina in the '80s. These are all places where one artist works with another. And because Fritz was up in Penland and I was over here, and we got together, I learned to do overlays. And Fritz went with me to Europe, and so on.

So these were experiences that we both had, which were based upon getting people together in a community. Bill Brown [director of Penland School of Crafts from 1962 to 1983] was particularly good at that. And as people got ready to go out into the world from their classes at Penland, he created a system where - he called it the artist in residence system, or whatever - and so they could use facilities of Penland and create a body of work. He gave them half-price meals, and so on. They had to pay something. But they had three years in which to become professional beyond training, beyond classes. And I think that that was very good.

The good thing about Cranbrook in the old days was that they provided excellent studios and housing and minimal teaching. And they had what is also important is they had a lot of scholarship money.

There's an old saw in education that if you've got one scholarship that you can offer, you will attract three students. One that gets the scholarship and two or three that plan to come simply because they applied for the scholarship, but didn't get it, but come anyway. And so you don't need very many scholarships to populate your classes provided you give good places to work and a milieu, a surrounding, that's fertile and strong. The art schools like Cranbrook and Art Institute of Chicago – not as much the Art Institute of Chicago, but Cranbrook – sort of went downhill after a while because the universities all offered the MFA programs. You see, the MFA program was a very revolutionary idea in a university. There was Longman at Iowa, who was dean, and together with the university administration and a Carnegie grant back in the late 30s early 40s, who created the terminal degree, the MFA, they hired artists to teach and that was very experimental. That was before the GI Bill. And, of course, they were then set up for the GI students. So a lot of the university programs were peopled by Iowa graduates immediately after the war. At Wisconsin, we had Hal Lotterman, we had Don Anderson, and in the course of events a couple of others that had Iowa experience. We even hired Al Brizio from Iowa. And you have to understand that that was quite an unusual thing because he had a fourth-grade education. And here he was a tenured professor at the University of Wisconsin and later at Iowa – with a WPA background.

So the things that happened to break down the academy – what a pernicious idea, terrible.

MS. BYRD: Speaking of the academy, the whole idea of Black Mountain College was so much in opposition. Did you ever have any contact with Black Mountain?

MR. LITTLETON: Peter Voulkos, Bob Turner....

MS. BYRD: So, you didn't go there yourself, but you knew people who were important figures there.

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah. I think Bob Turner was the first one that I knew who had been there. Partly, it was this Society of Friends. You see, that was the savior of Black Mountain in the later days, the Quakers, but at the same time it created factions that helped to destroy the school, the total school. But the fact that Black Mountain was open to the refugees from Europe, like Gropius, like Albers, and so on. I've been very fascinated with the education concepts of the Bauhaus, which – in essence they thought that the modern masters were not possible under the old system. So they brought together a man from industry and an artist.

The person who gave criticism in clay from the aesthetics side was Marcks, Gerhard Marcks, a sculptor. And the person who gave technical criticism was – oh, I can't think of his name – but, his grandson is married to Gertrude, the girl who came to Madison as a hanger-on in glass, now is teaching at Höhr-Grenzhausen, teaching glass, starting a glass program there in the Fachschule. And, she married this Lindig, who is the grandson of Otto Lindig, who gave technical criticism at the Bauhaus.

So my travels led me, for instance – this wife of Lindig came to Frauenau. She'd been a designer and she came to Erwin Eisch and asked if she could study glass. And, he said he couldn't take her. He had no facilities for an apprentice of that sort. And I was working there that summer and I invited her to supper, and she slept on the couch or something in our place. Then she went on and she applied for a job at the Fachschule in Zwiesel. And she taught design there. And I also invited her to come to America and to audit our classes in glass. I said she couldn't – there wasn't anyplace in Europe to learn to blow glass in the same way the Americans do it. And there were places to learn to blow glass, but you lined up with a punty on your shoulder in front of the furnace, and you went and you made a gather. And you took it over to a cullet barrel and you docked it off. And you did that all day for 2-3 months and then you were allowed to bring a gather to a gaffer.

In the beginning, there was a woman – a friend of a weaver, a very well-known weaver, taught at Penland and other places involved in the craft council, and so on – who wanted to learn to do glass. So she went to England, to Stourbridge, about 1961–62. And she started this making gathers and knocking them off, and so on. After six months she was able to bring a stem to somebody and to put a stem on a gather. And so she said to hell with it then and quit. She was an exhibiting artist.

And another young man had attended the second workshop I had. And he applied for a grant, which took him to Finland to learn to blow glass. So he went to a factory, presented himself, and got to blow glass. So they gave him a cold blowpipe and he blew until he fainted. And that was the last he blew glass. He made some pottery at Arabia. But that was the end of it, you see?

What we wanted to do was to investigate the material, like the painters were investigating paint, and, not with the thought of making anything, you know, but, as another material to investigate, just as the original experimental course in the Bauhaus took all kinds of materials. Investigated them. Paper was flat and floppy. So in that class they had the classic problem of folding the paper to make a three-dimensional structure that had strength.

Well, some of those basic things resulted in the hollow-core doors that had the corrugations inside. You know. It's frightening that they took that supposedly free-design course – part of it was kites, and so on – and made it

into a formula, whereas it was originally designed to see how creative a person was, how free they could look at a piece of paper and think of it as two or three dimensional, and so on. Do you remember in one of my seminars I had everybody buy the paper airplane book. I thought it was very creative book. And also to buy Jonathan Livingston Seagull, because I thought that portrayed a sense of looking at flying as an aesthetic experience from a bird's standpoint.

MS. BYRD: Let me ask you. Some of your contacts, starting with Erwin Eisch in Europe, a lot of your contacts have been very valuable, and I think....

MR. LITTLETON: Well, Erwin Eisch Was absolutely unique. And he wanted to be an artist. He had no limitations. And, Europeans didn't understand him at all. You know. To my knowledge, he has never been called upon to talk to the students at the Fachschule in Zwiesel seven kilometers away. Here's a man of international standing, just unbelievable in his concepts. And he's a graduate of a Fachschule, glass technology.

MS. BYRD: What did he do for you in terms of your development?

MR. LITTLETON: I saw his work and I realized that he was doing what I wanted to do - play with the glass, to make forms that had no other reason for being than that he wanted to make them. Function was something to be used or not used. Totally free. Free with glass, glass, which had been - you know the story in Corning was that it took 20 years to make a glassblower. Well, I said you could teach somebody to blow glass in three weeks. And, of course, Penland proves that. But, you see, the skill that the Fachschule taught was the skill to make each piece exactly like the previous one. Our training teaches someone to make each piece different from the one before, a richer experience, a stronger form - not to be tied to a tradition, but to look at the tradition and understand it, to move somewhere else, if you want to.

MS. BYRD: But the involvement of Europeans and Japanese, and so on, has enriched the glass movement.

MR. LITTLETON: Oh, absolutely. But in the same way that the Syracuse show enriched Peter Voulkos. Peter Voulkos took those ideas and transformed them into something we'd never seen before. Dante Marioni took the Venetian techniques, transformed them into pieces this high, something entirely different. Let me get you the last catalog that Maurine [Littleton, his daughter] produced.

MS. BYRD: I think I've probably received it. The....

MR. LITTLETON: Marioni?

MS. BYRD: Yes. The Marioni, yes.

MR. LITTLETON: And then there was a Don Reitz. Okay.

In both of those guys, they took the techniques and used them. One totally free forms, very influenced by Voulkos, but certainly abstract expressionist. Marioni took the tightness and the technical skill of the Venetians and made pieces twenty times bigger. You know, so that the scale was overwhelming. He took the elegance of these 18th century, 17th century Venetian forms and techniques, and made an overwhelming statement in size and in impact. You may never have seen them, but I tell you they're this tall or taller. In a gallery of craft, they reach across the room and grab you because you've never seen it, you see.

MS. BYRD: Now, in terms of the development of glass, do you have any special comments on what's happening on the glass scene now?

MR. LITTLETON: Well, I've been asked especially by people like [William] Warmus, and so on, what do I think is going to happen in glass? Haven't people pretty much done everything? Won't it sort of fade out? And I tell them that as long as children are born - and they're born every minute and more often - each one has unique experiences from the moment of birth that are waiting to contribute to what they will be. Some of them will be influenced by glass as a material. And they will put all of that unique experience, things that we can't understand now, and they'll bring that to glass. What that glass will be who knows? We don't care. We just know that they will have the opportunity to go on with it. The world is their oyster, you know. We've broken the trail for a lot of them.

MS. BYRD: Yes. And you've got the glass into their hands. And you feel real good about that.

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah, and they're coming along. Again, what they do, we don't know.

MS. BYRD: Do you have a tremendous sense of accomplishment when you see what people are doing?

MR. LITTLETON: Sense of awe, rather. If I hadn't done it, someone else would have, sooner or later. Even Peter Voulkos had tried fooling with glass. Burned up his electric kiln. And there are many others, you see.

MS. BYRD: He melted glass and it ran over and into his elements...

MR. LITTLETON: Oh, I don't know. Yeah, something like that. And, but I happened to have been born in Corning, so I was able to get past certain problems in the beginning. And, then, my students were able to have the same approach to get past the tough start.

MS. BYRD: The market for American crafts has changed markedly in your lifetime. Do you have any comments on...

MR. LITTLETON: Well, I think that one of the things that was the difference between glass and pottery, for instance, was that - when I took over at Wisconsin, I replaced Carlton Ball, who had a great sense of activity in the pottery and all kinds of activities there. Part of it was due to the fact that he had a sale of student work every semester. And they sold pots for five bucks three bucks, and so on, to help the program. Well, in glass we needed money more than they did in pottery. But, we said, I don't think anybody should sell anything under \$50 or \$100, because even....

[TAPE CHANGE.]

MR. LITTLETON: Well, the misinterpretation of this phrase "technique is cheap." All I meant by that is that technique is available to everybody, that you can read the technique, if you have any background. Technique in and of itself is nothing. But technique in the hands of a strong, creative person, like Voulkos or Dante Marioni, takes on another dimension. And it's that other dimension that is the product of our educational system, of our uniquely American freedoms, and so on.

The difference between the university and the people that come out of the university and the people who come out of the Fachschule is just amazing. I only know maybe two people in Europe who have taken Fachschule training and built on it: Erwin Eisch by kicking it in the teeth, and Klaus Moje by developing his own qualities after it.

There have been a number who have looked at what's been happening here and have learned from us, and applied it to the training they got in the Fachschule and have grown. But it's one person in Europe and a hundred people here. It's very difficult to struggle against a system, which - it's like Bert Van Loo having had to go to the Ministry of Education to get the additional training.

Yes, we have to pay for our education, for the most part. There are scholarships and so on, but for the most part you have to pay. And in Europe, they don't. If they're sharp enough and they pass the exams, they go to the university. And in Holland if, for instance, you graduate from the Rietveld, the first three years the government will buy most of your work. But there just aren't any potters in Holland like there are here, you know. There's a reality here that that other system doesn't produce. They can't go beyond.

MS. BYRD: There is a question here about the difference between a university-trained artist and one who has learned his or her craft at that academia, and that would be....

MR. LITTLETON: That's just what I'm talking about.

MS. BYRD: But in this country, as well.

MR. LITTLETON: Yes, in this country, as well. But for the most part, education begins when the child is born. You see. Why is it difficult for a plumber's son to become a playwright in England? Why is it difficult for someone to rise above their status in a lot of these older communities, academic and otherwise? You know, Eton is able to add to a person's lifetime earnings, just because when he opens his mouth he speaks a certain kind of English. Then, not everyone who graduates from Eton can go to Oxford or Cambridge, you know. The public school - they don't call it private school - you see - it's public, maybe, because if you've got the right connections, you could get in there. It's a sad thing that you have people limited by a system. It's the transcending of the system that allows for progress.

MS. BYRD: In this country, the fact that we do have schools like Penland, like Pilchuck, and so on, is the training you get there comparable there to what one would get in a university? Or do you think a university is still...

MR. LITTLETON: I think that the craft schools like Haystack and Penland and Pilchuck are equivalent to the best of the universities in many respects. On the other hand, they are avocational training. The bulk of their training is avocational. Pilchuck, perhaps, has a little more professional background. But, there are an awful lot of people who go there who do not go on. But for those who are going on, it can be a wonderful experience. I think it falls down when it says to a young person, well if you learn this technique, you've got it made. You can be a Dick Marquis, or you can be a Dante Marioni, or you can be something else, without really investigating who Dante Marioni is, only what he does. Because what he does would not have been possible without knowing him. What



his motivations are and so on.

Dick Marquis, a magnificent person who took technique and transcended it in every way possible. Once he learned to make Murrini in Italy, what did he choose for his master's degree? To make the Lord's Prayer on a little Murrini this size. Well, why did he do that? In his own words, he said, I'm not very big. I'm 5'4". Why do things have to be big to be good? So, I'll do for my master's thesis a big project that ends up so big, you know, a half-inch square.

MS. BYRD: And, he was a student of your student, Marvin Lipofsky.

MR. LITTLETON: That's right. So his whole career was based on the fact that it doesn't have to be big to be good. And he made fun of all kinds of things.

MS. BYRD: Oh, yes. Still doing it.

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah. Well, he enjoys it. So, humor becomes much more important than the Venetian technique. That's just where he hung his hat. What he has to say is something else.

And, in my case, in my film, for instance, I talk about mathematics. And I hung my hat on some of those things. But I created forms which went beyond that.

MS. BYRD: Is there interesting tension between abstract expressionism and mathematical form in your work?

MR. LITTLETON: Mine really isn't abstract expressionism.

MS. BYRD: It was early on. Was it not?

MR. LITTLETON: Well, that was based on a denial of function and denial of the smooth, blown form, and so on. It went back to those broken pieces in the factory, when I threw them down the chute. That's more action art, like action painting. I think that the multiplication of color through the use of four colors in most of my pieces in the 80s fascinated me a great deal. And that carried over into the prints. In fact, well I would say it started with the prints. When we built the gallery down here - you know there are 4-foot bays because of the structure of the building. And I put a print in one of those things, put a piece of glass in front of it.

MS. BYRD: In your gallery.

MR. LITTLETON: In the gallery.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. LITTLETON: Well, one day I walked in the gallery, and I saw these things where there were four-color prints with overlapping transparencies. They're transparencies because the vitreograph has a kind of pointillistic mixing of color. And I began to look at the print and the glass down below it. And I looked at the print and saw when I'd done it. I looked at the glass and saw that I'd done it afterward. So the color I was looking for in the prints, I began to look for in the glass. The mixing of color by layers....

MS. BYRD: I think that Origami series is so clear.

MR. LITTLETON: Yes. Yes. And that gave me the understanding of what I had done. I'm sort of stupid, I guess, that it took me so long to put these ideas together, to reduce them to their essence, in other words. We do an awful lot of things, which are automatic. My objection to the Fachschule is in the concept of the master, that you do things so over and over that you master them. Well, that isn't mastery, you see. That's creating a situation where by happenstance you're going to do something better. That's all right. But as a career to depend upon that, it doesn't do it.

MS. BYRD: And that's what you object to in the Bernard Leach idea.

MR. LITTLETON: Yes. Yes. Leach says you put a hundred pots in the kiln and they're all alike. And they come out and ten of them will be better. Okay, what does that? You know, you don't study them to see what makes the ten better. And make 50 better the next time. Or create a situation to get beyond the whole hundred, to make a breakthrough. And I think our training, our educational system is such to allow you to go beyond what you're taught.

MS. BYRD: Well, we were talking a little while earlier about marketing and you were beginning to talk about the difference in pricing between pots....

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah. Well, I think that you have to realize that - you have to ask your market to pay you. And

your gallery system has to encourage this. To get a little more for your work so that you can take that economic freedom to allow you to take chances, to go beyond the ordinary. You can't be so concerned about selling something that you can't do that, any more than you can let your dowry tell you, oh, we love your teapots, we sell them all, why do you do this other stuff? You see? You make such beautiful teapots. Well, yeah, we need teapots, and that's good. But if you break the teapot that you've had for 15 years like that one, to go back to the same artist and say, I want that teapot, he can't just go back to his calendar and flip the pages back and arrive at that point and make that teapot again. That's a denial of his value as an individual. It's a denial of his growth. It's a denial of him as a person.

MS. BYRD: That's a Cynthia Bringle teapot, and she would not take that very kindly.

MR. LITTLETON: Well, she wouldn't make that teapot again.

MS. BYRD. No, I agree. I agree 100%. She would be right. And you're right.

MR. LITTLETON: And that teapot has a value based on what it is. But, if I paid her more for it than her time and cost in firing it, and so on, and she took that extra money and changed the body a little bit, changed the glaze on it, changed the shape, then that would be the proper function of me as a collector, which allows her to grow. The collector makes a contribution. The dealer makes a contribution by being able to say, this is a growth situation here. We have to put in a little extra so that ten years from now when you buy another one, it'll be better. Otherwise, you're just squeezing the person down to nothing.

MS. BYRD: And you have always been very knowledgeable, I think, in your dealings with galleries.

MR. LITTLETON: In the first place, most galleries, when we started, immediately said to you, well we're paying you a good commission. And I had to say to them, you're not paying me a commission at all. I'm paying you a commission. I'm paying you to sell the piece, I'm paying you to collect the money, and I'm paying you to pay me. Whatever you get, whatever I pay you for your share of the sale has to be justified. I can give you more from the sale, if you put more into me. If all you're doing is taking my work and sticking it on the shelf and hoping somebody will buy it, you're not investing very much time or anything in me. And you can't expect to get 50% of that piece.

If you, on the other hand, give me a show, you print a brochure, you do some advertising, I'm willing to pay 50%. And then there's, another thing. The gallery says, well, after the exhibition's over, we will pay you within 30 days. You know what that means? That means that you've bought the clay, you've had to pay for it. You've paid your gas bill when you fired it. You paid your electric bill as the time went on. To have a show, you've got to take 4-6 months to accumulate the pieces, unless you're Don Reitz and can do it over a weekend. So when you deliver that show, all of your share of the money from the sale of it has been spent. And for them to say, okay, we'll pay you your part of it 60 days - the show is up 30 days and they take 30 days more to deliver the money - that's 60 days more that you've invested your time and energy. And to say, oh, we're paying you. The hell they are. You've invested all of this. You've set them up in business. If everything in their shop is consignment, it's the artists who have created that gallery. It's up to the gallerist to learn enough about the artist to be able to convey that to the customer and thereby earn his money. His way of educating the public is through advertisements, through exhibitions, through talking, through lectures, etc.

I'm amazed at some of the magazines and the people that they revere. I've got this *Art in Auction* magazine. The heroes in that magazine are not the artists, but they're the gallerists. The artist somehow magically got to where he is. And the genius of the gallerist is that he can bring together a group of this artist's stuff, you know? What about the genius of the artist, you see? To get down on your knees to a gallerist and say, please take my work, please pay me something, is such a denial of your abilities. And the gallerist who says, oh, I love your stuff. I'd like to sell it. Okay, great. Show me some proof of your devotion to my work. In other words, guarantee me a certain number of sales.

We had to do that when we started, when we started handling artists, to get Joel Myers represented in our gallery we had to say to Joel, we'll guarantee you a sale of at least three pieces. So it's not unreasonable for you to go to a gallery and say, well, we'd like you to have this stuff. We'll work with you on all of the things, but we need to have some money to guarantee that we'll go on being able to furnish you with work. And, you see, this six months that I've invested has to support me for the next six months. Not only pay back what's been spent, but allow me to go on spending. Especially, if you're going to do what one gallery did. They sent me a \$15,000 check 30 days after the show was over, 60 days from the time I took them the work. Maybe 60 days plus a 150 days to make it. Okay. Then they gave me this check. It was sent to me without a signature on the check.

MS. BYRD: Intentionally, you think?

MR. LITTLETON: Well, I didn't think so in the beginning. So I sent it back to them and said, would you please sign it. So they sent it back to me, I took it to the bank, put it through. The check was refused not because

"insufficient funds," no. It was because their bank said they couldn't read the cancellation numbers. But I was in my bank when the vice-president for check-cashing was there from the head bank. And he said, I can read all those numbers. Something's going on here. So he phoned the bank in the town where the gallery was. It was a big place, so there were branches. The gallery was working with a branch. Well, what had happened was they didn't have the money to cover that check. The gallery did not. So they had worked with their person in the bank and got them to hold up checks for a variety of reasons. So it was a total of something like 90 days before I got my money.

You see there are new developments in the world since the days when I started, one of which is New York and California have pioneered laws on the sale of fine art on consignment. And, these are terribly important. The National Endowment has gotten into the act and commissioned a couple of lawyers to write a book. It's still very valuable: *The Artist-Gallery Partnership*, which explains all of these things very nicely. And, it also lists the states that have consignment laws. Now, it's pretty much all 50 states that have the consignment laws.

But I rewrote my contract based on this book. And, with a few of my own changes. One of the first things it says is that the works on this invoice are to be considered works of fine art, according to all definitions. And, of course, the front of the invoice and shipping sheet, and so on, says, signature here indicates you have read and agreed to abide by the conditions on the back. Well, they spell out the time, they spell out all the conditions. And it's not all in favor of the artist, but because there are a number of artists who used to play tricks. Like, they would go to the opening of their show and they said, well - privately to the collector - if you don't buy it here, you can come to the gallery, and I'll give it to you for 30% less, and, you know, bypassing the gallery. Well, I said that the artist would not sell anything to somebody who'd seen it first in the gallery at anything but full price within 30 days of the end of the show, 30 days when it was back in the artist's hands. It could be sold for so much less after 60 days. And could be sold for whatever price the artist wanted after 90 days, but they would protect the gallery during that time.

So there were a lot of possibilities that I tried to cover based on my own experience. But, the best experience is to take your work out of the gallery that mistreats you. I mean, why should you lay down and let them kick you more than once? There are lots of galleries. I mean, a sensitive person who wants to sell art and likes to sell art can set himself up in business where he has no inventory. He's paid for nothing. All he has to do is display this work and sell it. And he gets up to 50%. Now that seems like a pretty good deal to me. And, who makes it possible? The artist makes it possible. The artist has a vested interest in the gallery. So they haven't got anything to sell, if the artist doesn't give it to them. So the artist has the ultimate control. And so I think that that's key to the artist-gallery relationship, is knowing who you are, what you're selling, knowing that it has a certain value, and insisting on it.

MS. BYRD: Now, let's talk a little bit about your relationship with museums. The Museum of Modern Art....

MR. LITTLETON: Well, they asked for a piece of mine in 1964.

MS. BYRD: Which is very early.

MR. LITTLETON. Yes. And I refused to give it to them. I said, well, I really have to sell the piece. I want you to want it enough to pay for it. I won't ask you the same price as a retail price. But I think for the piece that's been in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art since 1964 was \$75.

MS. BYRD: Oh, my.

[Tape change]

MR. LITTLETON: - to pay for this piece. And I think they, maybe, appreciated it a little bit more because they didn't get it for nothing. Gifts from artists to museums - there's a little conflict of interest there. And it denigrates the work of the artist. I remember one glass person who very early on traveled around Europe, maybe 1963. And, he had a basketful of his chatchkies, which he gave to each museum. And when he got home and he made out his vitae, he listed all these museums, all these foreign museums. Well, I'd seen the pieces in these basements of the museum, and I knew that they weren't really legitimate, you know? And so I didn't want to make that same mistake. So I've insisted that museums buy - they can have a healthy discount, but they should buy. They should have faith enough in the work to ask their patrons to support the artists that they collect.

There are a great many demands on artists these days to give works to auctions, even for political parties and so on. Well, those places that allow the artists to get a minimum sales price, and then what it's sold at above that sales price, that part goes to the institution. That's legitimate, that's fine. But there are lots of instances. Now, there's a funny thing that's happened in the last few years in places like The Renwick. They have these yearly dinners and they make some fine award to an artist. Well, really what they're doing is they're inviting you to this dinner so they'll have somebody to show off to their patrons. And you get an engraved piece of glass, a

little trophy and they get to show you off. You're sort of a shill for the organization. American Crafts Museum did this with a dinner at the Rainbow Room – and I don't know what they called the people. The Renwick has done it several times. I've got all these things down in the office.

MS. BYRD: Yes.

MR. LITTLETON. And, the more they do it, the more it doesn't mean anything. Now, I got the third gold medal that the American Craft Council gave. But, they've given so many now that it doesn't mean anything.

MS. BYRD: Well, I can understand. And one thing I was going to ask you about is your involvement in the American Craft Council and so on. Before you do that, Harvey, could I just mention – I'm supposed to say this on every tape that this is Joan Falconer Byrd interviewing Harvey K. Littleton at his home in Spruce Pine, North Carolina on March 15, 2001 for the Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution. And I forgot to say that at the beginning.

MR. LITTLETON: It's not, for institutions that I'm interested in, that I object to doing something in turn for them. I just say it does get a little old when you go and it always costs you money. And, yes, you're helping them raise money, you're their exhibit of the year. And they put you up on display. And so this happens. But it does get a little old.

The American Craft Council in the beginning served an amazing function. There were artists all over the country. First meeting of the American Craft Council was in 1957 at Asilomar camp ground, conference center, on the Monterey coast. And it brought together, you know, John Mason, Peter Voulkos, myself, Laura Andreson, just potters from all over the country. Bob Turner. And we were sort of captives in this place. It's out in the country. And we all brought something to drink. And we talked way into the night and drank and got to know each other. And we had never known each other before. They were pictures in a magazine, you see. And at that point, Mrs. Webb decided to bring onto the board of the American Craft Council craftsmen from each area of the country. And that was a concept of the Midwest Designer Craftsmen, which I'd been involved in, the founding of and so on.

And so in the meetings, I was called upon to explain our position in the Midwest. So, when a Midwest trustee was elected, I was elected a craftsman trustee. There were things that I objected to in that was that the craftsman trustee was distinguished from the other trustees, who are mostly friends of Mrs. Webb and people with money. They were there for that reason. But we were supposed to be special and bring the point of view of the artist-craftsman to the organization. And I think we made a contribution. And, they had four yearly meetings. One in Asilomar, one in the Midwest at Lake Geneva, one in the east at Lake George, all in the country, and a final one in Seattle at the University of Washington. And the last one was called Research in the Crafts. And I gave a paper on my work with glass.

And all of these things were very important. In Lake George, we had outlined what a glass movement would be. And, I had sort of accepted the challenge at that point. And so the Toledo workshop followed on the course of that. And University of Washington reported on some of these things. And I think those were functions that were very important.

Then Mrs. Webb decided to do the same thing for the craftsmen around the world. But she didn't really understand the difference between the indigenous craftsmen and the artist-craftsmen. So those World Craft Council meetings became a division that was unbelievable. I remember in Mexico we had a panel on preserving the crafts. One of the panel members was Tom Buechner who talked about the problems of medieval stained glass and how to preserve it without destroying it. Somebody else gave the problem of preserving weavings and the breakdown of jute fibers and other things. So that was conservation of the crafts.

But there was also on the panel a man from the Dominican Republic who talked about how you're going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris? How are you going to keep them working in an indigenous manner when this society is not tuned to that anymore? He was a government official. He was concerned with the sociology of the craftsman, the indigenous craftsman, and in a modern society.

So it was strange. There were two concepts of conservation, which were totally involved. And the later meetings of the American Craft Council had all of these government UNESCO people who never made a pot in their lives, who were running a separate meeting. They were the ones who got all the money to come and talk, and so on, whereas the craftsmen that they were talking about had to pay their own way. And I got totally disgusted with the whole thing, because it wasn't real, you know? Well, Mrs. Webb had to have to somebody who was a Swedish Count or an English Lord as head of the damn World Craft Council. And they didn't know how to do anything.

MS. BYRD: [Laughing.] I thought you were going to say something colorful there.

MR. LITTLETON: Well, I thought of several things, but I didn't say them. And, so, you see, you have to, in the end,

do your work and be secure in it, do what you think is the best thing you can do, and hope that somebody out there will buy it. There are venues for selling it. It's interesting that the Crafts Council has really broken down now so that the only thing they're doing - and it's done under subsidiary because it's for profit - are these crafts fairs around the country. And they've engendered other groups that are having competing fairs. So there are a lot of craftsmen earning their living now and selling at these fairs and meeting galleries and selling to galleries through the introduction of the American Craft Council fairs. Now, it's called - that part of the American Craft Council is called American Crafts Enterprises. And there's a show in Charlotte. Now, that's fairly good. I've taken advantage of it in this sense that the Paoli Clay Company that I started in Paoli, Wisconsin, makes its contacts with the artists through these fairs. And now the Spruce Pine Batch Company, which provides batch, makes its contact with artists through these fairs, and other things, of course.

In the long run, the sale of art, art supplies, art crafts, all that stuff is word of mouth. Somebody sees something, they like it, and they go on. There have been great supporters of the crafts, like the Johnson's in Wisconsin through their OBJECTS: USA [opening in 1969] show, and so on. Yes, it promoted Johnson Wax all over the world. But, it also promoted us. They tried to sell the crafts, but it didn't fit the big business framework. It's hard to sell unique pieces or even an addition through the kind of exposure of that sort. And Lee Nordness, who was commissioned by them to write the book OBJECTS: USA and to oversee the installation and so on of the shows, did the best he could. But when it came down to it, they couldn't pay for the project. It had to be a promotional thing for Johnson Wax. All around the world they had these fabulous openings. Well, most of the people who came to the openings were clients of Johnson Wax. And it didn't result in a lot of sales. It was great while it happened, but it was a one-time thing.

MS. BYRD: Now, getting back to your print studio. You do not promote that by going to printmakers' conferences, and so on, do you?

MR. LITTLETON: Well, we have gone to the one really viable organization - I've forgotten what its name is - but it mainly is southeast printmakers - and in various colleges they have these conferences, demonstrations and workshops. And Judy O'Rourke has done a whole series of workshops in these conferences. And we have brought people here that we met at those conferences to collaborate with us in the production of prints, of vitreographs, first. I got onto the printmaking - I think I've told this story before - from a workshop that we gave at the University of Wisconsin, which was jointly supported by the University of Wisconsin Research Committee, the National Endowment for the Arts and Corning Glassworks. Corning sent us a glass engraver and glasscutter to augment the staff, which was mainly me.

MS. BYRD: Did you do your own sandblasting experiments?

MR. LITTLETON: Yes. Yes. Young people wanted to see sandblasting as a way of cold-working glass. Not only cutting and polishing, and so on, but sandblasting. So we tried a whole series of resists. Among them, hot glue, Elmer's glue, electrician's tape, scotch tape, et cetera, et cetera. And we took all of these things on pieces of glass, mostly inch, one-centimeter flat glass, float glass, to a monument works in Madison, Wisconsin, which was run by a sculptor. But he had beautiful sandblasting equipment. And I had used it before.

[Momentary break in recording]

MS. BYRD: You were talking about the prints. The print that I know was called *Trial Two*? Is that because *Trial One* is the one that broke?

MR. LITTLETON: Well, I don't know. *Trial One* was a different one, much smaller.

MS. BYRD: Because I know one piece broke, and I always thought....

MR. LITTLETON: No, no. That was just a first piece of glass we put through. So, but *Trial Two* was a piece I had laying around the studio, which was an inch and a quarter thick. So it's something we didn't do after that. We settled on of an inch or one centimeter float glass.

But it was a result of that workshop in cold-working techniques that we were - these things stayed in my studio, these experiments at sandblasting for about three weeks when I kept looking at them and decided they really ought to be printed. And so that's how I got together with Warrington. And that article that he wrote in the *American Crafts* magazine.

MS. BYRD: It was really a relief print, too...

MR. LITTLETON: Oh, yes. Yes. It was what I called a fake-viscosity print. So you printed the same plate in three, four different colors, and according to the pressure of the press, because glass has such a resistance to compression, it's better than any other material. That's why it's good for printing. See, it's the same kind of thinking that my father used in using glass for cooking. He found that it cooked more evenly because it was an

insulator. And people thought it wouldn't be a good cooking material because it was an insulator. But he turned the thinking around.

The same way with printing. People think glass breaks. On the other hand, it's the strongest material under compression. See, that's why glass balls support an undersea cable, because they're strong enough to resist the compression of a mile of water column above them. So they resist that and still have enough buoyancy to support the cable, whereas a steel ball would have to be so thick that it wouldn't have any buoyancy at that depth. So, if you follow me, in the first place a sphere is one of the best shapes to resist compression. And glass is the best material.

So we had to get over the concept that glass breaks. Once we got through that, then we were home free with the best material for printing because it resists compression, far better than metal or stone, both of which are crystalline materials and tend to fail on lines of the crystal. Ah, I've forgotten the terms. They tend to fail because they are crystalline.

MS. BYRD: And is vitreography being picked up now at universities?

MR. LITTLETON: Oh, yes. Creighton University. Different artists like – many of them who have come here, for instance. But [the] University of Florida now has vitreography in their graduate program. One of my former assistants got his masters at the University of Florida and went from there to a college in Minnesota, Preston Lawing. And, of course, Western Carolina has been interested for a long time, but they never get around to hiring anybody who can do it. Though we're perfectly willing to work with a teacher who has an interest in it, as we did with Creighton University. At Creighton University, the teacher took his students around to the exhibition and showed them the work and said, now we can figure out how to do this, can't we? So he was a former assistant of Lasansky, a very talented guy. I can't think of his name right now.

MS. BYRD: Is your work with glass in this way – is the work in printmaking as important to you as the work with hot glass?

MR. LITTLETON: Yes, because I can't do the hot glass. You know, when you're approaching 79, there's a limit. Hot glass is a young man's job.

MS. BYRD: But to me there's a tremendous richness to it. And you are certainly exploring something in a way, even though this was explored in – was it the 18th century? 19th century?

MR. LITTLETON: Nineteenth century.

MS. BYRD: Nineteenth century. It was explored in a very narrow sense.

MR. LITTLETON: Yes. Yes. Very narrow. And whereas today we've just broadened our concept through the use of the computer and combining what we call siligraphy, which is a waterless lithography method applied to glass and with digital transfers, so that it allows painters to paint with their own brush strokes and reproduce them faithfully.

Well, Rick Beck just did a poster, which is terribly exciting. He'd never done any prints, never did much painting. But he just is such a talented young man that what he does in the next 20 years is going to be amazing. He's caught on with the Heller Gallery and a few others. He's having a show in Denmark with a good catalogue, which I can show you next time you're here. And we produced the poster for these shows at Birmingham Museum of Art and Ebeltoft, and the other one is the Heller Gallery. And the pieces are very big and cast with his own particular point of view.

MS. BYRD: We saw his show at the Green Hill.

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah. Well, the poster for that show was done here.

MS. BYRD: But do you have something to wind things down?

MR. LITTLETON: Well, I think we're just getting started. You know, I wish we had the same springboard that we had for glass with a generation of students to spread the word.

MS. BYRD: And the expanding....

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah, we don't have that. We don't have the same viability. But we have worked with 200 artists. And we've editioned several hundred editions. And we have 6,000 prints out in our drawers. And I think I'm buying a building in Florida, which will be a print gallery, as well as the print gallery here, so we'll have a little broader exposure. And we've hired a curator, not completely yet, but she has worked for the Center for the Arts in Vero Beach. And she's capable of writing and doing the kind of promotion that we haven't been able to

do. She has contacts in the print market, and so on. She's thoroughly professional. She worked at the University Museum in Lafayette, Indiana and also at the Center for the Arts in Vero Beach.

So if we get the building we want and we're able to go on, we'll have a world-class gallery in Florida.

MS. BYRD: You have the building in mind?

MR. LITTLETON: Well, I made an offer on the preliminary building, the smaller building. And then we'll work next year on the larger building, which will be 4,000 square feet. This one is just 1,000 square feet, not quite. So we're starting. If I don't do it, somebody else will.

MS. BYRD: Is this the way you felt about hot glass?

MR. LITTLETON: Yeah, because the material cries for it. It's perfect. And it has so much ability. And, we have a store of knowledge here that resides in Judy and Dan [Durrance] and the rest of the staff that's quite phenomenal. Their ability to work with other people, and so on, is tremendous. So all of the prints here are collaborations, which is different from the other glass. So the technical side is quite rich now. We can do things that, with 99-year inks, outdoor inks, that have never been done before.

MS. BYRD: That sounds very exciting.

MR. LITTLETON: So a lot of the things that people are doing on computers are very transitory, whereas our transfers are very permanent. Joan, we haven't started yet. We're really coming. Every day something new happens.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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