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**Oral history interview with Warren MacKenzie,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Warren MacKenzie on October 29, 2002. The interview took place in Stillwater, Minnesota, and was conducted by Robert Silberman 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.

Warren MacKenzie has reviewed the transcript and has 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

ROBERT SILBERMAN: This is Robert Silberman interviewing Warren MacKenzie at the artist's home near Stillwater, Minnesota, on October 29, 2002, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disk number one.

Warren, why don't we begin at the beginning? Could you describe your childhood and your family background?

WARREN MACKENZIE: Childhood. Well, I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, and I do know from what my parents tell me that I was always interested in art, although not very good at it. At that time, of course, if you were involved in art, it was going to be drawing and painting, because that's the only thing that was taught in the schools. So I thought, oh, I'm going to be a painter. And eventually my family had moved near Chicago, and when I graduated from high school, I went to the Chicago Art Institute, and it was there that I thought, well, now I'm going to be a painter. And the Chicago Art Institute did have the best –

[Audio break.]

MR. MACKENZIE: So I went to the Chicago Art Institute, which was the best painting school in the area at that time. And I took painting classes – basic elementary painting classes and drawing classes of all sorts.

In the middle of my second year at school, in 1943, I got drafted into the army, was gone for three years, and when I came back, I tried to get into the painting classes which I wanted, but because of all the returned GIs [the GI Bill], everyone was in school and the classes were all full. So I looked at the catalogue and found that there was a ceramic class offered and that there was space in that. I registered for a ceramic class and some drawing classes, et cetera, et cetera.

What I didn't know at the time was that the ceramic class was not really a very good class. This was many years ago and should not reflect on the conditions at the Art Institute of Chicago to this day, but we didn't know anything and we started to learn about how to work with clay.

About halfway through the year, one of the students discovered a book by Bernard Leach called *A Potters Book* [London: Faber & Faber, 1940] and came into the class very excited. And we all rushed out and bought this book, because Leach talked about establishing his pottery in England, his training in Japan, and the way a pottery can be run. He said such things as, "Any person should be

able to make 50 pots easily in a day's time," and, "Any person should be able to throw a 15-inch-tall cylinder." Well, we couldn't do any of those things.

And so on alternate days, when the instructor was not there, we would sneak into the ceramics studio and try to do what Leach said we should do. Needless to say, we didn't succeed very well, and in addition we angered the instructor, because instead of having just a few pots around the studio with the classes that she had, there were hundreds of very bad pots sitting around the studio, and she, needless to say, didn't appreciate that very much.

We did manage to finish our training at the Chicago Art Institute. When I say "we," I'm speaking of my first wife, Alix [Alixandra Kolesky MacKenzie], who also had been a painter and switched to ceramics because she was working with a Mexican settlement house on the west side of Chicago and felt that the young Mexicans would react better to working with clay than they did to working with a paintbrush and paper.

So we both got into ceramics, you might say, by the back door. Looking back on it, I think this was a very good thing. In fact, I believe to a certain extent a person today who starts with just clay, with no drawing and no painting and no figure drawing, still-life drawing, various things, they miss a great deal. First of all, because in working on a drawing or a painting, one can rework and rework and rework and change ideas until you get it the way you think is right at that time. With clay that's not possible. You either succeed the first time, or you should wad it up and start over again, because you can't mess around with the clay and still have it fresh.

So that was our training. And when we finished that, we came to St. Paul, because St. Paul was the first place where we got a job offer and we needed some sort of a job to earn some money in order to set up our own studio. It's rather ironic that this job offer came originally through the Walker Art Center [Minneapolis, Minnesota], because at that time the Walker Art Center published a magazine called the *Everyday Art Quarterly*, and it was the baby of Hilda Reiss, a woman from Germany who had trained in the original Bauhaus.

[Break for phone call.]

MR. MACKENZIE: Hilda Reiss was the head of the Everyday Art Gallery. Hilda Reiss came from Germany, had trained at the original Bauhaus in Germany, and her training inspired her to think of anything that she liked as art. The Walker Art Center at that time had a permanent exhibition on ceramics – all sorts of ceramics -- explaining to people who knew nothing about it what ceramics could be, from ancient prehistoric things up to modern mass-produced work.

Anyway, we had written to Hilda and told her what we wanted to do, that we wanted to start a pottery similar to the – the Leach pottery, which we had read about. And she asked us to come and talk with her. We spent two days up here in Minnesota, and at the end of that time she said, well, we do not have a job for you, but we'll find you a job.

MR. SILBERMAN: What year was this, Warren?

MR. MACKENZIE: This would have been 1948, the year when I graduated from art school.

She did find us a job at the old St. Paul Gallery and School of Art. They were just opening their school after being closed during the Second World War, and they decided that instead of opening a general purpose art school they were going to open a school centered on the crafts, and so we were hired to help set up and direct that school.

After we moved up here and started to teach, we very quickly found out we were not equipped either to teach or to run our own pottery, and so we decided that we had to have further training. And in searching for this further training we turned to England and Bernard Leach. We thought since we had responded to his book so strongly that this would be the sort of training that we would like to have. We saved money, during the summer went to Europe, and the first stop was to go to England, visit the Leach Pottery and ask Leach if he would take us on as apprentices.

MR. SILBERMAN: Before you make that great leap, can I go back for a bit and just ask you a little bit more about how you came to ceramics? That is, what kind of painter were you when you were a painter?

MR. MACKENZIE: I was a very hard-edged geometric painter, strongly influenced by [Piet] Mondrian and [Theo] van Doesburg and that sort of thing. Alix was a looser, more linear painter, dealing with amoebic forms, let's say, close to [Joan] Miró as opposed to my more static exploration of space.

So, it turned out – I thought I was going to be able to use my painting ideas as decoration on pottery, but my painting did not translate into decoration on pottery. I thought it was going to, and in fact I made, while still in school, a plate with one of my paintings on it, and that's exactly what it was, it was a plate with a painting on it. It was not a decorated plate; it was just a painting superimposed over a three-dimensional ceramic form.

Alix, on the other hand, found that her painting would translate much more readily into decoration, and she could play with the spacing and the intensity of imagery on the form in a way which I could not. So that when we established our pottery, I was most unhappy with my decoration. And finally if I had a pot that needed decoration, I would hand it to Alix and I would say, "Can you do something with this?" And she'd look at it for a while and then proceed with a brush to embellish the form and enhance the form, and it was wonderful. She could bring the pot to life, whereas if I did it, it was a disaster. So I very quickly stopped almost all decoration. I was interested in the three-dimensional form of the pots, but my decoration was nonexistent.

MR. SILBERMAN: When you were first picking up pottery but still a painter at the Art Institute, were you also thinking about other media and working in other media?

MR. MACKENZIE: We had to take a very wide-ranging program. I took a number of graphic courses, lithography and etching and wood engraving. We had to take a tremendous amount of life drawing, which was the one class that we just hated. And particularly as I got more and more into ceramics, I thought, life drawing doesn't have anything to do with ceramics. I found out later on that was not true, that life drawing tells you a great deal about rhythm, about the structure of a human being or any animate object, and this could be directly translated into thinking about proportion and accent, rhythm in a pot form.

Leach was the one who taught us that, because he, too, had started out as a painter and an etcher and had only gotten into ceramics by chance when he was in Japan trying to teach the Japanese how to do etching, which, as he said, they were not ready for yet. [Laughs.]

MR. SILBERMAN: Was the Bauhaus influence strong at the Art Institute or the new Bauhaus influence in Chicago?

MR. MACKENZIE: No. There was a school in Chicago called the School of Design. This was started by [Laszló] Moholy-Nagy, and it was a wonderful school, but we didn't go to that school. We did have friends who went to that school and we would visit there often, and I'm sure it pushed me in

my painting direction very strongly just by association. But we stayed on at the Institute because that was – I don't know, you start at one place and you stay there, I guess. Inertia takes over.

MR. SILBERMAN: But you were doing silk screen and some commercial – you were doing fabric design?

MR. MACKENZIE: I started to do silk-screen in the early days of my painting training, due to a woman who taught art history at the institute, Kathleen Blackshear. She was interested in silk screen and taught a class that I took. Then I got drafted into the army and by pure chance was pushed into a silk-screen shop at this camp where I was, because they could not get training posters fast enough out of a central source in Washington, D.C. So they set up their own shop to print training posters: how to dismantle a machine gun, et cetera., et cetera.

MR. SILBERMAN: High art.

MR. MACKENZIE: All sorts of dumb things, but it did teach me a lot about the silk-screen process. And so that carried over when I returned from the Army and took more graphic classes at the Institute. And Alix and I actually began to produce a line of textiles, which had silk-screen patterns on them.

You know, when you're young, you think you can do anything, and we thought, oh, we'll be potters, we'll be painters, we'll be textile designers, we'll be jewelers, we'll be a little this, a little of that. We were going to be the renaissance people. Well, it doesn't work out that way, as you probably know, and eventually both of us gave up the drawing and painting, gave up the silk-screening, gave up the textile design, and concentrated on ceramic work, because that was where we felt our true interest lay.

MR. SILBERMAN: Before we go to England, one more question about Chicago, which is, what were you looking at there? It sounds as if you were almost self-taught as ceramicists, with some aid, technical aid, but what were you looking at in terms of ceramics and other art when you were in Chicago?

MR. MACKENZIE: Chicago is a wonderful area because it's blessed with a tremendous number of museums of various sorts, not only the Art Institute of Chicago but the Field Museum of Natural History, the Oriental Museum on the south side. There were galleries of great variety showing paintings and ceramics.

Our main inspiration, I think, came from the Field Museum of Natural History, because they had pieces which were selected not for art content but for their relationship to the anthropological history of mankind. And so we could see very simple, primitive, hand-built pottery from Babylonia and ancient Egypt and so forth, Greece. We could see the most sophisticated things that came out of the Orient – Japan, Korea, and China – some few pieces of European porcelain, majolica [tin glazed earthenware], and that sort of thing. But they had a marvelous collection.

And the other thing about it which inspired us was that in a group of pots you wouldn't see a single example of this kind of pot. You would perhaps see a case with 20 different examples. So you realize that these pots could be repeated again and again, and each time there would be minor variations in them.

In looking at these pots at the Field Museum, Alix and I both came to a conclusion individually but also collectively that the pots that really interested us were the pots that people had used in their

everyday life, and we began to think – I mean, whether it was ancient Greece or Africa or Europe or wherever, the pots that people had used in their homes were the ones that excited us. And so we thought, if those are the kinds of pots from every culture that interest us, why would we think that it should be any different in mid-North America 20th century? And we decided then that our work would center around that sort of utilitarian pottery, and that's what I've done ever since.

And I'm not sorry. I don't find it at all limiting. In fact, I find it really enriching to make pots which people are using and which they come in contact with, not only visually in their homes but tactilely - when they pick them up, when they wash them after dinner, and so on and so forth. And this is something which I think I have been able to communicate to both people I have taught and people that have purchased our work since that time, that they all say, it's so nice to have these pots with us all the time and to eat out of them and be in direct contact with them in our homes.

MR. SILBERMAN: I am one and I agree. [Laughter.] I can say that.

MR. MACKENZIE: Thank you, Robert.

MR. SILBERMAN: Did you get to handle the pots in the collections ever? Did you ever actually get to do more than see them at that point?

MR. MACKENZIE: No, not at all, no. Remember, this is back in the '40s, and the idea of a museum being a place where interested people could come in direct contact with works hadn't arrived on the scene yet. That, I think, I first ran into at the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C., where a man named Marty [Martin] Amt decided that he really felt his job – part of his job, as an assistant [to the] director was to make the collection available to interested people. And if you requested a visit, he would take you down in the stacks and he's say, "What do you want to see?" and you could request to look at anything that they owned, and he would bring it out and put it on a padded table, and you could actually pick these things up and handle them and experience them directly, at least as directly almost as the people who used them in their original lives.

MR. SILBERMAN: But at that time, when you were a student at the Art Institute school, you weren't getting to handle pots in the Art Institute collection?

MR. MACKENZIE: Not at all. Not at all.

MR. SILBERMAN: How was your taste being shaped, apart from that basic concern with functional pottery, by teachers like Blackshear? Were you being pointed in one direction or another? Were you developing toward one continent, or were you just loving pots in all directions?

MR. MACKENZIE: Not really. The two teachers that I had in the Art Institute who affected me the most were Kathleen Blackshear and Robert von Neumann; Kathleen Blackshear because she taught a class called design – I can't remember, design something, and in this class – it met once a week – we would do work centered around some theme, word or subject or technique or whatever, and bring it in for a three-hour discussion. And Kathleen was able, in watching and looking at our work, to direct us to all kinds of things which might relate to what we were trying to do, but she never attempted to tell us what to do. She just said, "Have you thought of looking at this?" and so on and so on and so on. And it was a discussion group where everyone had a say, and it was a tremendous learning experience.

Robert von Neumann taught painting, and when I finally got into a painting class of his, he reacted in much the same way. It was a figure painting class, where you had a model, and he would wander

around and he'd come up behind someone and say, "Well, what are you trying to do?" And if you told him what you were trying to do, he would then proceed to discuss this with you and suggest things that you might look at and ways in which you could improve what you were attempting to do, et cetera – never worked on your painting, never touched your painting but talked extensively about what you were trying to do. If you didn't know what you were trying to do, he wouldn't say a word. He would just turn and walk away. So you very quickly learned to think that you'd better be attempting to do something in that painting class.

And those two teachers were just fantastic, I thought. They never directed you in a single direction, but they just encouraged you to think for yourself.

MR. SILBERMAN: A good model for a future teacher.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: Well, now let's make the great leap and take you to England. Tell me what happened when you got there -- you and Alix got there.

MR. MACKENZIE: We had decided we needed further training, and certainly Leach was the one we turned to. So we went to England this summer and we took examples of our work along with us and showed them to Bernard Leach and told him what we were trying to do. And of course he took one look at our work and he said – very quickly he said, "I'm sorry, we're full up," and this was his way of politely saying, you just don't make the cut.

So we said, "Well, now, look, we're here for two weeks." We had a reservation at a bed and breakfast place, and in England since everyone gets a two-week holiday, everyone goes somewhere for that two weeks and you get a reservation for two weeks at a bed and breakfast or a hotel or whatever. We had a reservation. We said, "Do you mind if we stay around, visit the pottery every day, and learn as much as we can in this two weeks that we are going to be here?" And he said that was "quite all right."

And so every day we'd trudge up the hill – it was a three-quarter-mile walk up this steep hill to the Leach Pottery, and we would take our lunch with us and generally, I guess, make a nuisance of ourselves. I mean, we asked a lot of questions and we watched everyone who was working in the studio. And we had an opportunity to sit in on discussions, aesthetic discussions at the pottery, which took place generally over tea breaks in the morning and afternoon. So we learned a lot just from being around there.

At the end of that two weeks Bernard asked us if we would like to sit with him tending the kiln, the big oil-fired kiln that they had. He was still sitting what we call a kiln watch at that time, and he wondered if we would like to sit the watch with him and talk. So naturally this was our last opportunity to talk with him, so we said yes. We didn't realize Bernard's kiln watch was from 1:00 in the morning until 4:00 AM. We went back to the bed and breakfast and caught a few hours sleep and then woke up at midnight, walked up the hill, and we sat talking with Bernard through the night until about 8:00 in the morning. And none of us went to sleep; we just talked and talked.

And the interesting thing was we never talked about pottery. Bernard talked about social issues; he talked about the world political situation, he talked about the economy, he talked about all kinds of things. He talked about painting, but we never talked about ceramics in that evening. But at the end of the evening he said to us, "Well," he said, "I've changed my mind, and if you want, you can come back a year from now and apprentice in the workshop."

And so we went back to St. Paul, worked for a year – again, I guess I would have to admit now, doing a rather shaky job of teaching people -- but at the end of that year we returned to England and worked in the Leach Pottery for two and a half years.

We were more fortunate than most, because Leach had been in America on a lecture tour in 1950, and we made arrangements to travel from America back to England with him on the same boat. It was a very slow boat. I think it took us about seven days to cross the Atlantic.

MR. SILBERMAN: It wouldn't be that way now on a plane. [Laughs.]

MR. MACKENZIE: No, but we had a wonderful trip, a seven-day trip, talking and sitting in the sun and so forth. And as we were approaching England, Leach said, "Do you have a place to live?" And we said, "No, we didn't." We hadn't worried about that. We figured we'd find a room in town, and it shouldn't be difficult because St. Ives is a tourist town and there are lots of bed and breakfast places and that sort of thing. But Bernard had just separated from his second wife, which we had not realized, and Bernard was a person who could not stand to live alone. So he said, "Would you like to share my house with me?" Naturally we said yes, and it was a wonderful opportunity. And so for two and a half years we lived with Leach.

And when we worked at the pottery, we did learn to make pots, that is, the physical act of making the pot. We learned to control clay, to put it where you want it and not just wherever it wanted to go, and that was valuable. At the end of about six months, though, I think if that was all we had, we may have been inclined to leave because the workshop did not challenge us so much as living with Leach did. Living with Leach, who thought about pottery 24 hours a day, was a fantastic experience, and we really began to get inside his mind and understand what had motivated him to work all his life as a potter. Eventually we even got to the point where we could disagree with him. I mean, when we first went there, gee, I mean, this was a man who had written a book. He was, in a sense, God, and we for the first couple of weeks called him Mr. Leach. Eventually everyone said, "You know, you've got to stop that. Call him Bernard or call him B.L.," which was what most of the people in the pottery called him.

And so we became more familiar with him, and with this familiarity came, I wouldn't say contempt, but certainly an awareness that everything that he said was not necessarily what we were thinking. That doesn't mean it was wrong, but Leach was a person out of a different generation. In fact, he was several generations removed from us. At that time we were there, I think Alix and I were 26 and 28, and Leach was about 63, and we thought he was a very old man. I used to always want to help him up the stairs in the house for fear he'd fall. Actually, he was in excellent condition and lived to be much, much older than we ever expected.

But we did respect him, although we also were willing to challenge ideas and at least put forth our feelings about the way the pottery was run, about things that were done, about the pots we were making, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and we would get into sometimes some very fierce arguments. We'd be shouting at one another because of disagreements.

MR. SILBERMAN: For example, what would be a big issue that you would disagree over?

MR. MACKENZIE: Well, when Bernard wrote his book, he wrote about the fact that even when pots are made in a series, there is a personality to each pot and that the person who made it reflects their personality into the clay. In working in the pottery we found that this was not the case, and instead we were working from very exact models and dimensions and weights of clay to make these pots which had been designed some 10 or 12 years previous to our arriving there. And we,

being, I guess you would say young, arrogant Americans, thought that we ought to be able to somehow express ourselves a little bit more in the daily work of the pottery.

Looking back on it now, I understand why that was not possible, because the pottery employed a dozen people, not all of whom are making pots. There was a bookkeeper and a woman secretary in charge of the showroom. There was a man who did nothing but mix clay and pack pots for shipping. There was another young guy who helped mix clay and glazed all the work that we made so it could go into the kiln. And these people had families, children, and they had to have a wage that would allow them to raise their family and they had to get a paycheck every Friday afternoon. So if we had not made pots that would sell it, would not have been possible for these people to be employed.

And for that reason there was a great deal of restriction on the making of the pots in the pottery. We could make our own pots on the weekends and in the evenings, and we used to do that, and these would be fired in the big kiln, along with all the standard ware that we were producing, but this wasn't quite what we had expected when we read *The Potters Book*.

I do remember that when we left after two and a half years, we went home on a boat again – this was before air travel became really easy – and Alix turned to me and she said, “You know, that was a great two years of training, but that's not the way we're going to run our pottery.” And we never did. That is, we never had a catalogue; we never said we were going to duplicate these pots this year and next year and the year after that and so forth. We did make many pots which were repeated, but we allowed them to change and to grow as we changed and grew, and I think that was the big difference. And that's all right; we were working for ourselves. We didn't have anybody we had to pay.

And in addition, I taught. Alix had stopped teaching because we had a child and she stayed home to take care of the baby, and I taught. Eventually I gave up teaching at the St. Paul Gallery because of disagreements with the philosophy of that museum, and I got a job at the University of Minnesota, which was very fortunate because it was a part-time job and that gave us a great deal of time in our studio to work together and to make the pots we wanted to make.

MR. SILBERMAN: Before we go forward on what happened on your return, can we go back to England for a few more minutes?

MR. MACKENZIE: Back to England.

MR. SILBERMAN: You obviously gained great proficiency technically working there. How did you develop your ideas and your forms and the kinds of pots you were making when you weren't making Leach pots?

MR. MACKENZIE: Several ways. First of all, we were living with Bernard in his home. He had a fantastic collection of early English and Japanese and Chinese and Korean pots and German pots, contemporary English work as well. And we had access to this collection. In fact, when Bernard would be called away to go up to London for something and we'd be living alone for a couple of days, we would dig into the storage areas in the house and we'd get out all the pots that we might not see in the course of our daily life, because we weren't using them in the house on a steady basis. But we found some fantastic pots in there tucked away, and we could look at them and examine them and handle them.

And it was there that we really first came in contact with the work of Shoji Hamada, who was

Bernard's best friend from Japan, who had come from Japan back to England with Leach when Leach was establishing his pottery. Bernard had acquired many Hamada works. Some of them, it was interesting – first of all, Hamada worked in St. Ives for about four years before returning to Japan to start his own pottery. He had exhibitions in London, and if these exhibitions didn't sell out, the galleries were instructed to send the remaining work down to the Leach Pottery, where they would go into the showroom for sale. If Bernard saw one that hadn't sold that he really admired, then he would take it (he would buy it), and it would go into the house. It was in that way that we really came to understand the differences between what Hamada made and what Leach was making, or what we were making in the Leach Pottery.

Bernard was, as I said earlier, trained as a painter and an etcher. He was an incredible draftsman, and at the end of breakfast time, for instance, he would push his plate back, and he'd pull an old scrap of paper out of his pocket and a little stub of a pencil, and he'd begin to make small drawings, about an inch and a half, two inches tall, of pots that he wanted to make. And they were beautiful drawings. I really wish I'd stolen some of those scraps of paper, because those drawings were exquisite explorations of his ideas of form and volume in a ceramic piece.

If he didn't like the drawing, he'd X it out and do another one and change the form a little bit. And when he was all done, he would stuff these pieces of paper in his pocket and go off to the pottery, and when he wanted to make pots, he would then take these out and he'd begin to produce the pot that he had designed on paper in front of us.

This was a difference between Leach and Hamada. Hamada seldom drew an exact drawing of a pot that he was going to make. I used to think Hamada never drew, until there was a book by Bernard published about his work [*Hamada: Potter*, Tokyo; New York: Harper & Row, 1975] and at the rear of the book were a number of wonderful little sketches, but they were not drawings like Bernard made. Bernard's drawings delineated every little accent on the pot, every subtle curve and change of angle and proportion and all. Hamada's were little one-line notations of something he wanted to remember about a pot or a piece of furniture or a landscape or something like that, and they were just done very quickly and they had, he thought, no artistic quality. They're not great drawings, but they served to remind him of something he had in his mind, so that when he then went to the studio, that would stick in his mind and he could explore the making of the pot with the clay on the wheel. Bernard was making pots which were duplicates of his drawing, and that was a difference of approach, which I think is quite critical to these two men.

MR. SILBERMAN: And you? Who have you followed in that – [inaudible]?

MR. MACKENZIE: I followed Hamada, because I guess Alix and I, we both saw the danger that lay in planning things out on paper and then simply executing them. And with Hamada there was a much more direct sense that the piece had happened in the process of making on the wheel, and that was what we wanted to do with our work. We weren't always able to do it, though.

I say we wanted to do this as though we were able to. I think back to some of the pots we made when we first started our pottery, and they were pretty awful pots. We thought at the time they were good; they were the best we could make, but our thinking was so elemental that the pots had that quality also, and so they don't have a richness about them which I look for in my work today. Whether I achieve it all the time, that's another question, because I don't think a person can produce at top level 100 percent of the time.

I mean, I make a lot of pots in a year's time and some of them are good and some of them are mediocre and some of them are bad. If they're really bad and I'd be ashamed of them, I throw them

out, but if they're mediocre and they'll serve the purpose for which they're designed, that is, a mixing bowl or a soup bowl or a plate or whatever, I sell them. And this income from the sale of these pots permits me to go on and make other pots. It's even more important now that I've quit teaching, because I do not have a teacher's salary to fall back on.

MR. SILBERMAN: But your thinking about what kinds of pots you would like to make really started shifting dramatically when you were there, and by the time you got back, you had an agenda, or a mission.

MR. MACKENZIE: That's right.

MR. SILBERMAN: What was it like being in St. Ives then? Because there are a lot of artists, I mean, now, known for that period.

MR. MACKENZIE: First of all, we benefited from living with Leach, because suddenly all of his friends became our acquaintances. Bernard knew Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Terry Frost, Peter Lanyon, Johnny Wells. I can think of a number of people that we met there just because we were living with Bernard. Some of them became our friends, particularly the younger artists, but we were privileged to at least meet and talk with the older artists also. And they would come to dinner, and we would simply be included in the conversation, which was quite fascinating.

There were a lot of artists in St. Ives. In fact, since the time of Whistler, St. Ives has been noted as an artist colony. They have all sorts of legends about the quality of light and everything like that, which I guess Whistler maybe talked about, but I don't think that's it. It's a wonderful place to live. It's a small fishing town and one can live there inexpensively. There's a sympathetic population of other artists, where you can exchange ideas, and it's quite rich in artistic thought.

MR. SILBERMAN: What about the other British potters? Were they coming to visit or were you going to travel and meet them?

MR. MACKENZIE: Both. Friends of Bernard's came to visit, and when we went to London, we were given introductions to people like Lucie Rie, Hans Coper, Richard Batram. All these people were, let's say, made available to us by a friendship with Leach. In addition there was a potter's group – what was it called? I think it was called the Cornish Potters Society, but I'm not sure of that. Anyway, they had meetings and we would go with Leach to these meetings and meet other potters, and they would have programs where they would discuss pottery and people would interchange ideas.

And so we got a great benefit from our contact with those people and met people that we wouldn't have probably met if we had simply worked at the pottery.

I don't know, it's very difficult if you're in a strange country to just barge in and say, "Hello, I'm Warren MacKenzie, and aren't you happy to have me as a guest," you know? But they did accept us and we remained friends for many, many years, many of them as long as they lived; like Lucie Rie and Hans Coper were very good friends, and it was wonderful.

Their work was nothing like the work we were doing at the Leach Pottery, and in fact, if you take Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, their work didn't even relate to what we were trying to do, because they were moving in a different direction, both of them coming out of Europe and the Viennese school of design, which Lucie came from, and Coper learning from Lucie and then springing off on his own when she encouraged him to explore more widely. So he created his own work instead of just working for her and doing her forms. So that was a wonderful thing.

MR. SILBERMAN: The people and the work you saw was more just an affirmation of the artist's life or the potter's life than giving you specific ideas or specific influences?

MR. MACKENZIE: At that time, yes, although subsequently – I mean, I've been influenced by someone or their work. I mentioned Hans Coper as an example. About five years ago I was working on some forms which were vase forms with a fairly narrow base, and it was after Coper had died that I saw an exhibition of his, a catalogue from an exhibition, and he was showing some forms which were made by cutting and joining a lot of different parts together to create what he called a spade form, which you can imagine looks a little bit like a shovel upside down. These narrow-footed forms I was making, I thought, gosh, I could push those further, not to construct them the way Coper did but to work in my own manner but push it more toward that form. And I learned to do that and enjoyed it for a number of years. They're not like Coper's at all, but the idea came from seeing this catalogue of his work, although at the time we knew Hans, his work was nothing like that.

MR. SILBERMAN: You read Leach's book, then you lived with him and worked in the pottery, and you talked about how that affected your idea about how to run a pottery or how to do work, but did it reaffirm your belief in functional pottery? Were you tempted to do sculptural work at that time, or try it?

MR. MACKENZIE: No. I never have been. That is not quite true. I shouldn't say never have been; when I was in school in the Art Institute, we had several problems during the course of the time we were taking ceramic classes where we had to do a sculptural piece. And when I say a sculptural piece, it's nothing like what we conceive of now as a sculptural piece. Remember, this is back in the 1940s, and it was sculpture which probably – in my instance probably came out of the European influence, [Alexander] Archipenko and things of that sort, [Jacques] Lipchitz to a certain extent, and I was influenced by those things and attempted to do work that emulated their style.

But it didn't stick with me. I never felt I wanted to go on with that. And as far as I know about Alix's work, I don't believe she ever did any sculptural work at all. It was always pottery.

MR. SILBERMAN: What about the wheel versus slab building or molds?

MR. MACKENZIE: Well, again, in school we did all sorts of things, molds, slab building. We were not very proficient on the wheel because the woman who taught was not proficient on the wheel. And so we learned from her assistant who had learned from her assistant the year before and so on, and that was not very good training.

But in the Leach Pottery we did most of our work on the wheel. Leach did a little work in the studio, which was press-molded forms, plastic clay pressed into plaster forms to make small rectangular boxes and some vase forms, which he liked to make. These were molds which had been made to an original that he had modeled in solid clay, and during our work there, sometimes I would be pressing these forms as a means of production.

But if you press-mold a pot or if you slab-build a pot, the work has got to take much, much, much longer than if you work on the wheel. And I to this day have the ideal that I want my work to be not too expensive, so that if people buy it and break it, it's not going to be the end of the world. I'm not interested in having things in museums, although some of our work has ended up there, but that's not what I'm striving for. I'm striving to make things which are the most exciting things I can make that will fit in people's homes. And in that respect, working on the wheel is economically about the only answer I know, because one can, as Leach said, make 50 pots in a day. You can make 100 pots in a day. A really good potter can make 400 pots in a day.

So since your time is your main involvement here – I mean, the clay doesn't cost very much. Even the glaze and the firing doesn't cost a great deal. But your time is the cost, and if you can keep your time to a minimum and still come out with the results you want, that means the pots can be sold for an economic price.

MR. SILBERMAN: And you like working on the wheel, too.

MR. MACKENZIE: And I do. It is true – for a number of reasons. First of all, because of the directness of it; that is, things happen very quickly and they have to happen quickly in order to have vitality, which I think is essentially part of a good pot. But in addition it means that you can explore an idea and change it and then change it and then change it; I don't mean by changing the one pot, but you make one pot then you make another that's related to that; you make another – you can make 50 pots in a day and none of them are going to be carbon copies of any other, but they'll all be related because there's something going through your mind about the form on that particular day.

And so there is this ability to explore ideas, but with minute changes, and then look at the results. Often you get so excited about what you're doing that you think, "Oh, wow, this is just great." And you look at it a week later and you realize you'd been excited by the act of creation, but what you've created is not really exciting when you look at it in cold blood. And so that, to me, is a valuable lesson also.

Every pot is not going to be a masterpiece. In Japan I learned something. We visited Japan and went to Hamada's pottery, and behind his kiln was the biggest scrap heap I've ever seen in my life. And in talking with him, he said that he destroyed about two-thirds of his production – destroyed it, I mean, just shattered, broken, because it didn't come up to the standard that he had set for himself. I don't do that because I'm not trying to make the super pots the way he did, but it's an important thing to realize that even a person with the talent that Hamada had was not able to make every pot a really fine piece. There was a lot of scrap.

MR. SILBERMAN: But when you were at St. Ives, you started getting the technical proficiency as a foundation for the expressive possibilities.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes, yes, yes, but we were not really allowed the expression in our daily work there. In the evenings, yes. Saturday and Sunday – we only worked half day Saturday for the pottery, and then when we worked on our own stuff in the evenings. Bernard would come in and – in fact, he'd come in while we were working, and we'd discuss what we were doing. And that was really nice because he was then discussing what we were doing, not whether we were making a good Leach Pottery pot. And we got the benefit of his observations.

I would at this point say I think that Leach was perhaps one of the most articulate, perceptive people about ceramic work of anyone I've ever known. He had biases. He had certain shortsighted qualities that we had to learn to put up with, but he could look at a piece and say, "You know, if you'd change this a little bit, I think it would make it a much better pot." And so you'd try one and you'd change it a little, explore ways of changing that part that he talked about, and it would be a better pot, because he had a keen eye and could communicate to you about it.

That's another interesting difference between he and Hamada – that Bernard did analyze, he did theorize, he did try to find ways of expressing himself about pot forms. Hamada seldom talked about it in the same way. When Leach and Hamada were together, they may have discussed these things – I don't know; we weren't privy to that – but Hamada, in terms of control of his thinking, never articulated in the same manner that Leach did. And it wasn't because he couldn't speak

English; he spoke very good English. It was just that he chose not to. I think it had something to – trying to avoid being too intellectual about what was done.

Leach wrote in his book about the Koreans, who Hamada admired as potters – as craftspeople, I should say. The potters, the weavers, the woodworkers, the metalworkers in Korea, all had an approach which was very loose, and Leach spoke about it as they seldom – I must never say never, I guess, but they seldom talked about a pot as being a good pot or a bad pot. They just talked about it as being a pot. He said they had a term, and I think it was the word M-U – mu, I guess -- and this had neither positive nor negative connotations about it. And I think Hamada, admiring the Koreans as he did, tried to put himself into that sort of a situation. So you would think – and yet, no, I'm saying this and just thinking about that great scrap pile behind his kiln. He did decide that some of his pots were not good pots, but he didn't talk about it too much.

MR. SILBERMAN: What were your pots like when you left Leach?

MR. MACKENZIE: They were very much like Leach Pottery pots. [Laughs.] They were –

MR. SILBERMAN: And how long did that take before you got perspective on that?

MR. MACKENZIE: Oh, I guess there are still remnants of Leach Pottery sense to my pots.

MR. SILBERMAN: What are the good remnants of the Leach Pottery pots?

MR. MACKENZIE: An articulation of form, which Bernard was always talking about, an interaction of structural and – what do I want to say, fleshlike, or enhancement of the structure.

Bernard used to constantly talk about the relationship of the pot to the human body, and this is what I go back to – I said that we had to take a great many life drawing classes at the Art Institute of Chicago, and I thought afterwards, you know, these will never be any good to me because I'm going to be a potter. But they are good, because in those life drawing classes you learn to look at the structure of a human being and to think about the skeleton, which supports the structure, and think about the flesh, which enhances the skeleton, and Leach was constantly harping on the structure of the pot beneath the form, that there must be a sensed structure. Otherwise, the pot would just be all soft and flabby, without articulation. But if it was too stiff and too angular, it would perhaps be unpleasant, because there was no warmth or humanity to it, and the relationship of the structure to that warmth or humanity was something that Leach was always harping on and something which I've tried to keep foremost in my own work.

Many times – it's embarrassing to say -- I make a bunch of pots, and while I'm making them, I have something in my mind. And then if those pots hang around the studio for two or three weeks while I'm accumulating the work for a firing, I'll sometimes look at a finished pot, unglazed but let's say the form is finished, and I look at it and I can't for the life of me think what I was thinking about when I made that pot, because I don't see any qualities which I admire. Those pots are the kind that I usually chuck out, because they don't hold up to a more objective view when one gets away from the actual process of making them. But this was something which Bernard talked about a great deal, not only about the pots we made at the Leach Pottery but his own work as well and the work that he wrote about.

An instance happened while we were there which taught me a great deal. Bernard worked in a part of the shop that was away from the rest of us. He had a separate studio upstairs, and so we didn't actually see him making pots so much. But when he wanted to decorate his ware, it had to come

down to the glazing room, where the pigments and slips and so forth were for decorating. And one day he brought down about three boards full of pots, 20 pots, let's say, and then he got called away to the phone, and we, of course, all went into the glazing room to see what he had brought down, and we were able to pick up and handle his work. And there was a man who worked in the pottery, Bill Marshall, and Bill was technically the best thrower in the pottery. He could work with more clay; he could shape it quickly and easily and throw very well. And Bill looked at all these pots and picked them up and handled them and so on. And he finally said something which shocked us, but I guess I would have to have agreed with it. He said, "Bernard can't throw worth a damn." And we all thought, oh, well. And then Bill finished his statement; he said, "But he makes better pots than any of us."

And that's, I think, a truth also, that his pots had a life to them which had something way beyond the technical making, and that's the kind of thing which – well, it woke me up. And Hamada has said similar things. Hamada said once, "I'm not a good thrower. There are many better throwers than I in Japan." But, of course, he was selected as a national treasure, his work was collected and sought after, and he was certainly one of the best-known potters in Japan and around the world when he was alive.

So it's not the technical side of it that matters; it's something beyond that, and that's something which I think I've always tried to keep in my mind, whether successfully or not, I'm not sure. And once in a while I'm kind of horrified. I just had an experience the other day. I had thrown some small covered jars, and I was so intent on the shape of the jars that I somehow ignored the structure. And I took these off the wheel and dried them and put them into the electric kiln for the first firing, for the bisque firing, and two of these jars blew up in the bisque firing, not because they weren't dry but because they were so thick at the bottom. I had neglected to think about the structure of the pot, I was so concentrating on the form of the pot.

Now, if they hadn't blown up, I probably would have kept them. If I was excited by the shape, I think the weight I would be inclined to ignore. And that's just a personal thing. You can agree or disagree with its validity, but that's the way I work.

MR. SILBERMAN: It sounds like by the time you left the Leach Pottery, you had your Hamada side and your Leach side in pretty clear perspective, even though you had to get your work developed to where it would totally satisfy you.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: When you were there looking at this great collection and talking pots 25 hours a day, what were the things you really loved that you didn't know about before, I mean in terms of the different ceramic traditions, and how did you begin to sort out where you might fit between Asia and old English pots at that point?

MR. MACKENZIE: I think we found something within ourselves, which I still believe, I guess. People ask me – let me try and put it this way – people ask me why I am so influenced by Asian pots: Chinese, Japanese, Korean. I'm not so much influenced by Chinese pots, but Japanese and Korean, yes. And if I look for an answer to that, I usually answer by saying, I think that the people in Asia, in contrast to the people in any other country or continent, have paid attention to the things which the contemporary potter in America is likely to pay attention to and worry about.

In that respect I would go to the quality of clay as a beginning. Now, I'm not saying that every Japanese potter or Korean potter was very selective about their quality of clay. In fact, in the old days they were much more likely to have simply used the clay that they were given because it was

the local clay of the area. But being given a particular kind of clay, they then looked at it and learned to exploit it, learned to get the most out of it, so that the clay became a very important aspect of the finished product. It wasn't just a kind of a shapeless paste with no quality whatsoever; it had a texture and it had a color and it had a pliability or a structural quality to it which they could find out about and exploit.

They also studied and exploited the many ways in which clay can be formed, from simple coil building, through the wheel, press molds, slabs, all kinds of things, and got the most out of the technique that they were using to fabricate the piece. And then the quality of the glazes, not just the glaze to make the thing waterproof and shiny but a glaze which had a character in it of itself and a decoration, or lack of decoration, the firing process, all these things.

And these things, in our time today, are very, very much studied by American potters. And so I turned back, and Alix also, to this civilization which had thought about these things before we did and exploited them, and I think we learned a great deal, particularly from having that direct physical contact with these things at Bernard's home. Since then we've built the collection that I have now. This is something you only find out by actually living with and working with a particular pot form.

MR. SILBERMAN: Did you like clay from the start, working with clay as opposed to paint and easel and canvas?

MR. MACKENZIE: Oh yeah, yeah. Even in that bad class I did love clay. I think I went to painting because that was what you did at that time if you thought you were going to be an artist, but I never really got involved in the juiciness of paint and the possibilities that exist in that respect, and the excitement of the way paint can be exploited and used in a variety of ways. I never got excited about it. I was always thinking of a visual image and just trying to get that visual image on the canvas, and I think that's not what being a painter is all about.

And if you reverse the situation, I think that there are potters who are just concerned with a visual image, and they do anything necessary to make that visual image. But their work may just be awful; it may be dead, because they've created the image, but they haven't got any spirit in it. They don't really love making those pots.

MR. SILBERMAN: You like being hands-on with it, getting your hands on the materials?

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: At what point did you start thinking in terms of the relationship between your hands and the hands of the user, and that communication?

MR. MACKENZIE: I guess from the time we worked at the Leach Pottery, because that was constantly stressed. Even though I disagreed with much of the kind of pottery we were making – it was too formal; it came out of an English lifestyle – but still, the way one's hands fit on the handle of a mug was constantly being studied and talked about and all, and we tried different kinds of handles and so on. And it was just always uppermost in our mind, was how people related to these things tactically and visually, even though, as I say, it was very much a British expression and not something that I warmed up to much.

In fact, I just remembered – you know, when you're working in a studio like that five and a half days a week, and you're making someone else's work, you do get a little bit fed up. And we had an old motorcycle, and when we got really just tired of making the Leach Pottery pots, we'd take a day or

two off and we'd go out and we'd visit other potters and visit shops.

[Audio break.]

MR. SILBERMAN: We are rolling, and you were telling about getting on the motorcycle after a bad day at the pottery and going out to see other potters.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes. We would get on our motorbike, and we'd take off a couple days and go visit other potteries and go to shops and galleries and museums and so on. And having been fed up with the repetition and the things that we were doing, we'd come back to the studio, and you would say, you know, in spite of how irritated we get doing this repetition and all, when you come back and look at the Leach Pottery pots, I think they were the best ones at that time being made in England for a production pottery, a pottery that was turning out a fair amount of work and employed people to help in that process.

You lose sight of it if you're buried in it all the time. You just get kind of fed up with it. And it was that, problem, I think that prompted Alix to say, "You know, it was a great experience, but that's not the way we want to run our pottery." But it was a different situation, too, because of employees, because of the fact of having to produce a ware that was going to be satisfactory to people who ordered it out of a photograph in a catalogue, and it couldn't be just something that somebody wanted to toss off sometime, which I can do now. And if it's something a little wild, I can put it in the showroom until somebody sees it and loves it. But they couldn't in England, because they were selling it daily in shops and catalogues.

MR. SILBERMAN: I once wrote, "In overhead begins responsibilities," which is business and employees. [Laughs.]

Well, let's bring you back to America. You had your two and a half years and your training and your conversations and arguments with Bernard. What did you think you were going to do, most want to do, and what did you do?

MR. MACKENZIE: Before we come back to America, our last thing that we did in England, we had quit work at the Leach Pottery and completed our work, and we had gone off to Wales to do some volunteer labor, but Bernard had asked us to come to this International Potters and Weavers Conference, which he and another woman organized at Dartington Hall. This was in 1952. Leach had invited Hamada and Soetsu Yanagi, the leader of the folk craft movement, to come to that conference, and it was the first time that Hamada had been in England, I think Bernard said, since 1935.

The other funny thing is Bernard, who was Hamada's closest friend and Hamada's – Bernard is his closest friend, Bernard would write constantly to Hamada in the intervening years. Hamada never wrote back until suddenly Bernard wrote and invited him to attend this conference, and Hamada wrote and he says, "Yanagi and I will come," and they came.

So that was where we first met Hamada, at that conference, and it was really a wonderful experience. There were people from all over the world and potters from Africa, from Germany, from France, from Scandinavian countries, from Japan, not only Hamada but another potter, and it was a great experience. We lived together for, I guess, about 10 days, and they had demonstrations and they had papers and all, so we learned a great deal.

At the end of that time Leach decided he was going to go back to Japan with Hamada and Yanagi,

but they also, discussing it, decided that instead of going the usual way from England, which is to go through Europe and India and on to Japan, they would continue West and go to America, where Leach had been but Hamada had not been, and Yanagi had not been there for many years.

So Alix had this brilliant idea. She was a great one for ideas, and she said, "Look, if you're going to travel through America, why not do a series of workshops while you're crossing America?" So Hamada thought for a while, said, "All right." He said, "If you will arrange it, we'll do it." And so then Alix naturally arranged to have them stop one of the stops in St. Paul (we taught at St. Paul). The first one was at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. The second one was in St. Paul. The third was at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana, and the fourth one was in California at the Chouinard Institute, I think it was, where Susan Peterson was teaching.

And then Alix, with a great deal of nerve, said, "Well, as long as you're coming to St. Paul, could you send an exhibition over?" And so Hamada said, "Well, I can't do it, but I'll call my son and have him send a show." And so he called his son and his son, Shinsaku, selected an exhibition of Hamada's work and about 20 pots of Kanjiro Kaiwai also, which came to St. Paul, and we had what I believe is the first exhibition of Hamada's work in America, the first major exhibition of Hamada's work at a museum, in America.

But unfortunately it never got the attention it should have, but it was a remarkable thing to see that collection of his new pieces that he had just made before he left for England, and they were sent to the gallery in St. Paul.

So that was a wonderful thing to have happen. But that all happened sometime after we had returned. We came back in, I guess, July or so, and we went back to work at the St. Paul Art Center, but that didn't last too long because we were growing somewhat unhappy with the direction the Art Center was taking. They were doing too much compromising, in our estimation. And so I tried to get another job. And the University of Minnesota was unhappy with their person who had been teaching ceramics and they were letting her go, and so the director of the art department, Harvey Arnason said, "All right, we'll give you a chance." But, he said, "If at any time there is any problem with a drop in enrollment or budget problems, ceramics is going to be closed down." And fortunately there wasn't – [laughs] – and I was able to stay on there from then on. I guess I first got that job in 1953, in the spring of the year, and ceramics went on successfully.

But meanwhile we had found a place, this place where Nancy and I are living now, in the country. It was an old defunct farm. The man had sold off so much acreage that no farmer wanted to buy it because they couldn't earn a living on the little remaining land. It was within our price range, which was just absolutely dead cheap. And the other thing, they had just put in a new furnace in this house and they had drilled a new well, so we knew that the heat and the water supply were going to be taken care of; we didn't have to put any money into that. And we looked at the house, we said we could live in it, we didn't have to put any money in the house, and we put all our money into starting the pottery, which we did in the basement of the old barn just to the west of us here.

We got friends to help shovel out the manure, and we tried to insulate a portion of the lower section of the barn as much as we could. We built a concrete block wall around a section of that lower part of the barn, which we could heat, and work in in the winter.

Meanwhile we built the kiln. I spent the summer building the kiln, and the kiln that I built was a kiln patterned after the one at the Leach Pottery, because it was the only large kiln that I'd ever seen built. We had rebuilt it while we were there. I didn't mention that, but it was one of the activities – the kiln had been built in 1923 or '4 and it had lasted until 1950, but it was in pretty bad shape, and

so they decided to rebuild, and I did see and participate in the rebuilding of that kiln. And then we built our kiln here patterned after that one. So it was oil-fired. Ours was a two-chamber kiln instead of a three-chamber kiln, which was at the Leach Pottery. And it worked all right – not well, but all right. [Laughs.]

We finally began to love it, because it was the only kiln we had had our own control over. Gradually the pottery changed a little bit, and we had a little display area outside the working space, which was – the display area was not heated; the working space was heated. We mixed our own clay. I designed a pug mill and had it done by a local welding shop. And we mixed our clay in that pug mill and then stored it in plastic barrels and wedged it up by hand to prepare it for use.

A lot of things we did in that pottery were patterned after the Leach Pottery. We built a clay storage cupboard which had concrete shelves where we could pug out this clay in long columns and then stack it on these shelves, and you could store it for two or three months and it wouldn't dry out. We had potters' wheels, which we had brought back from England with us, because those were the wheels we had worked on at the Leach Pottery and we were used to them and we liked them. And I still work on that kind of a wheel, although not the original ones, because in 1968 I managed to burn down the pottery and we lost those wheels, but that happened later.

We were given exhibitions at the Walker Arts Center, which was still supportive of the crafts, although the director of that art center left, oh, it would be in the early '60s, I guess, and shortly thereafter the Walker stopped showing craft work, for all intents and purposes. Before that time, they had given us several exhibitions, and the last show, just before Alix died, was in 1962, and it was a really, I think – I think it was a good exhibition for our work at that time. It wasn't a great exhibition if I look back on it now. At that time it was the best we could do, I'd say.

MR. SILBERMAN: What was your work at that time like? What problems, formal or otherwise, were you trying to work through, and what do you like about that time now and what do you think maybe you realize was just of that time?

MR. MACKENZIE: Well, we did make all utilitarian ware. That is ware for use in a home. I don't have any examples of it because we didn't believe in saving our work; we thought you mustn't save your work or you tend to live in the past. And so we had a rule that each one of us could save one pot at any given time, and if we found another pot that we wanted to save for our personal collection, we had to take the one we had been saving and put it out for sale.

I think it was a good idea. I think it was an excellent idea, because it did keep us from living in the past. We had to always go forward. It worked to my disadvantage because Alix died rather suddenly and I only had one pot of hers at that time in my possession. It is a great pot. I still have it. But it means a lot of things that she did I don't have. Fortunately, there are friends who have them and once in a while some of them will send me one and say, "I think you really ought to have this because it's important to you." So I've got a few that we put together, including some of her paintings, which she did when she could no longer make pots – really interesting things.

MR. SILBERMAN: I've seen some of those pots and they're fine, and the decoration is remarkable. She did all the decoration?

[Audio break.]

MR. MACKENZIE: At that time I found out if I picked up a brush, I ended up doing what I can only call cheap Japanese brushwork, and it was very unsatisfactory. So I finally found ways to decorate pots

which kept a brush out of my hand. This is why I concentrate even today on the form of the pots, and when I do decoration, it is usually something, if possible, which is not brush decoration. Instead I'll do beaten patterns on the surface of the clay, or I've learned to adopt one of the techniques I used to use in painting to decorating pottery, but it's not a brush technique. It's a type of monoprint, where I would charge – I was working very geometrically and I would charge a straight edge of some sort, a piece of wood or cardboard, with paint and then press it down against the canvas and print a line. The printed line had a quality of nervousness about it which I really liked. It wasn't a drawn line. And I've tried this and continue to use it now on ceramic work. I print with pigment on the wet glaze, and it fires in and becomes decoration. But I did learn to get rid of the brush, because with a brush I'm not very good.

MR. SILBERMAN: When you were working with Alix and presumably continuing the tradition of nonstop talking about the pots -- apart from the family that you started to have, you had daughters -- what kinds of pots were you making? I mean, you didn't have the production ware versus the individual ware of the Leach Pottery, but were you making cups, dishes, bowls?

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes –

MR. SILBERMAN: How did you decide what to make, and were you discussing the designs of the pots, and then you would make them and she would decorate them? Or was she throwing as well?

MR. MACKENZIE: She was throwing as well, yes. And we'd take the kids down to the pottery and put them in a playpen on the floor of the pottery while we worked on the wheels. Alix threw as well as I did, but she did all the decorating at that time. It was only after her death that I began to really push new techniques that would allow me to decorate without doing brushwork.

There are a few of our joint pieces in existence today in some museums. There are a couple in the Weisman Museum [The Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis], and there are more in the Minnesota Museum of American Art, in which Alix decorated all my work.

When I'd get stuck with a pot that didn't quite come off – you know, you have the pot and then you'd look at it after it's dry and has gone through the bisque firing and you say, "You know, it isn't really quite right." And I'd say, "Well, now can you solve this?" And I'd hand it to her and her solution was, "yes." She'd look at it and size up the form that I'd made and then begin to just draw on it with a paintbrush and iron oxide, and she was always able to relate her painting to decoration, to the form of the pot, which was something I was never able to do.

So she improved a lot of my work at that time. Where it was an unsatisfactory pot, she would make it a satisfactory pot. I mean, a pot can be complete in form, or it can be incomplete in form and need decoration to embellish it, and that was often the case with my work at that time.

I think that a lot of them perhaps would have been – maybe all of them would have been improved by some embellishment, because my form sense at that time was relatively unresolved and not as rich as I would like to think it was. There was not the interaction of ideas and forms, and the technique of making was probably a little stiff because I was not as relaxed and as sure of myself as I am today.

MR. SILBERMAN: Were you looking at different things when you came back or looking at the same things in different ways?

MR. MACKENZIE: We were looking at the same things in different ways, because we still -- in our

museum visits and all we gravitated to the utilitarian objects, but we did look at them in much different ways, because – I think because of the exposure to Bernard and to Hamada. We were looking for a personal expression, which could occur either in the concept of the pot or in the physical making of the pot.

Leach was more likely to have a personal expression in the concept of the pot, not so much in the making. Hamada was more likely to have this personal expression in the making, in the physical making of the pot.

And we were very lucky, we were able to acquire some of Hamada's work at that time. When he had the exhibition in St. Paul, he asked me about pricing the work, and at that time I was really into very low prices. I thought, you know, a \$2 pot was getting up there. [Laughs.] But we didn't have the pots in front of us; we only had a bill of lading. And Hamada would describe the work to me, and I would think about it and I'd say, "Well, if I made this, it would cost so much," but then, this is a famous potter from Japan and therefore I'd multiply that by five or seven and I'd say, "Well, does \$11 sound all right to you?" And Hamada never batted an eye; he just wrote down \$11 and that was the price those pots sold for.

So when we had this exhibition in St. Paul, these pots were available to people at very modest prices. Hamada at that time was, of course, selling for much more money in Japan, but it meant that we were able to buy a set of small desert plates out of that exhibition.

We had to have a lottery, because many people were wanting to buy a lot of work, and we said no, each person could only buy one piece or one set. So we had a lottery and Alix drew number two, and with her number we did pick a set of desert plates which I still have. And I drew number 96, which is almost the end of the line, and we began to despair, you know, we'd say, "Now, if nobody takes that pot, we'll take that one with 96." Well, then somebody would select that pot and it was gone. So when 96 came, we were wandering around in there and we picked up this one pot, but we didn't make our decision right away. We picked it up and we were looking at it and looking around and finally went to the secretary and told her we wanted to purchase this pot. And it was only after we did that that Yanagi came up to us and he said, "You've just bought the best pot in the entire exhibition."

Now, this meant that 95 other people had selected pots out of that exhibition prior to us, and I'm not sure that we got the best. I don't think there is a *best* pot. I think there are many best pots – there are better pots. But I know that that particular pot, which is a very simple piece, continues to excite me every time we use it. Every time I pick it up and look at it, I see something I've never seen before, and I think that is a sign of a really great pot, that it is not going to be something you understand with one use, one look. It's going to come and continue to renew itself with you throughout your life. And that pot of Hamada's is, I think, one of the best ones that we own. We own a number of his now, have acquired them in various exhibitions and so on, but that's a really great one.

MR. SILBERMAN: That's a great story, too.

MR. MACKENZIE: And 95 people passed it over. That's the wonderful thing. [Laughs.]

MR. SILBERMAN: Warren, how were you selling your pots back then? Would they sell at the Walker?

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes, the Walker Art Center had a book corner which also sold ceramics, and so

they had our work for sale there, as well as other people's work.

We sold them at our pottery. We had a mailing list and whenever we'd have a firing, we would just hand-address postcards and send the students out to people, saying, we've fired again and if you want to see new pots, come out and look at them. And gradually people began to know about our work.

We also, I would say, at that time, did everything possible to tell people why we were making pots and how we were making pots, in order to get them interested, I guess. I mean, we would do art fairs and sit there day after day talking to people and not selling very much. We did demonstrations for groups. If they would come out to our studio, we would entertain them in the studio and do demonstrations for the groups. We'd give lectures wherever it was asked.

And in addition, I was teaching at the university, and to a certain extent you have to say you've got a captive audience, you know? I was talking about what I thought was important about ceramics, and some of them were convinced and they would come out and buy a pot because they could do so for not too much money. And that was the way we began to sell. And gradually you built – someone would tell someone else about it and you got more people coming, but it was very slow at first, very slow.

MR. SILBERMAN: The '50s.

MR. MACKENZIE: Fortunately, we didn't make that many pots either, you know. We were not very fast potters at that time.

MR. SILBERMAN: In spite of your experience at Leach.

MR. MACKENZIE: I'm still not a good thrower. I'm not a fast potter. But I'm a lot better potter now technically than I was then and – I don't know. But we made – I suppose we fired our big kiln – the big kiln held about 400 pots and we fired it about six times a year, I guess. And now I've got a kiln that holds 600 pots, and working alone I fire it about 12 times a year, so that explains the difference in making.

MR. SILBERMAN: Maybe we can turn to the university in a moment, but when you first came here, were there many other potters in the area?

MR. MACKENZIE: No, there weren't. One woman I remember was Martha Cutkomp [ph], who is a potter, and she was the only other person that I remember as a working potter in this area. Gradually, potters have moved in. First of all, some of the people who took classes at the university stayed on and became potters when they graduated from school, or they went somewhere for graduate work and then came back here because they liked the atmosphere in this area.

There is something about living in Minnesota, or living in the Midwest, I think I'd say. My pots are really most at home in the Midwest, and I think there's a number of potters who have gravitated to this area because they find it sympathetic to hand pottery. And it doesn't have to be fancy hand pottery, such as you're likely to find in the big galleries in New York or San Francisco and so on, the latest thing. They want pots they can use in their home. And there are a lot of potters around here now who are making that kind of work and are earning a living as potters. Also we've got the development of the Northern Clay Center, which is a studio and a classroom situation for people, and many more of the schools around have got strong programs in ceramics. Not only the colleges and universities but the high schools have now got major programs in ceramics, which is wonderful.

Instead of your having students at the university who are starting from scratch and have never seen clay, now you're getting students who have had two years of it in high school maybe, and if they had good training, it's wonderful.

MR. SILBERMAN: You had a long career at the university -- and I should say for the record that you retired as a university professor, regent's professor, which is the highest honorary rank the university can award -- but what was it like when you started teaching that way? You taught at the Minnesota Museum, but to teach at the university, I mean, in an art department?

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes, in the art department, which was much smaller than it is now. The director of the department had been hired to bring together a group of art offerings, which had been under different areas, and they said, let's get an art department. Now, he was an art historian, but he really knew enough to hire -- this sounds very self-serving -- excellent people. [Laughs.] I can't remember all their names, but Kyle Morris, a painter, and there was a woman who taught sculpture.

MR. SILBERMAN: He hired Jerry Liebling, photography and film.

MR. MACKENZIE: Jerry Liebling, teaching photography, and Allen Downs and Walter Quirt in painting, and Phil Morton taught jewelry. Malcolm Myers taught printmaking. Malcolm Myers taught printmaking right up through the time that I retired from the university, and he was a marvelous printmaker, studied under Lasansky.

There was a woman teaching weaving. When she retired, they hired a weaver, Ginny Nagle, who kind of took, not a moribund section of the art department, but one where it had been pretty safely taught, and she just got those students so excited that everyone was truly amazed that the weaving department began to expand. Although when she retired, the person who took her place was not very good, and so we lost the weaving department. The man who was the director of the department, Harvey Arnason, said, "As long as you teach and things go well, I won't be saying anything to you; it's up to you. But if things don't go well, then we're going to have to get together and talk about why." And when the weaving department fell on bad times, he said, "They're not teaching weaving as an art form; they're just teaching weaving," and so he got rid of it.

And Phil Morton, who taught jewelry and was an excellent jeweler, lost interest in jewelry and wanted to become a sculptor, and so the jewelry department disappeared.

MR. SILBERMAN: But initially there was a strong presence of craft materials?

MR. MACKENZIE: Correct, correct.

MR. SILBERMAN: And ceramics continues to flourish.

MR. MACKENZIE: Ceramics grew and we became a very strong area in the department.

MR. SILBERMAN: How did the relationship between functional and nonfunctional play out? Was that an issue for you in terms of teaching functional ceramics as opposed to art or sculptural ceramics?

MR. MACKENZIE: No, no, but the thing is that my work is functional. I am not a sculptor, and I felt really unable to teach sculpture as a ceramic expression. Fortunately, there was one of the sculptors who was willing to let them do ceramic sculpture if they so desired. But when we got an additional position added to the ceramic area, the one thing I knew was that we wanted someone who was not going to be a functional potter, and so Curt Hoard was hired, and Curt was much more

interested in a sculptural expression. He also was interested in glass, and that was another thing which was added at that time, and Curt started the glass department. Although when he lost interest in that, then we had to find another person to take over the glass department.

And by that time Arnason had moved on. He went to New York as an executive in one of the big foundations, and a different art historian took his place. And we began to have some friction between the studio section and the art history section of the department. And that got worse and worse and eventually the two were split into two departments, as you know. I think our first – I think our first chair that we selected was Malcolm Myers, who was one of the senior instructors and we felt could run the department.

MR. SILBERMAN: And you at first, as the ceramic teacher, taught everything? You had to teach the chemistry as well as the art.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: How did you develop your method of teaching? You've said – you talked about what it was like being at the Art Institute. You had many, many students and many, many students who went on to be professional potters.

MR. MACKENZIE: Well, I guess I realized that one of the basic things you need if you wanted to understand pottery was the ability to physically make a pot, and that was the basis for my beginning instruction, that you had to learn to make a pot either by hand or on the wheel, and actually we studied both methods. Although I was not a hand builder, I could teach the elements of it. Secondly, we looked at a lot of pots, both at the museums around here and I brought pots in from our collection, which was growing constantly, so that people were able to look at and handle and discuss work by potters from other countries, potters from other cultures.

This also expanded at the University Museum, as it was then called, what has subsequently become the Weisman Museum. It was the University Gallery, I should say, because they did not have much of a museum collection. But the woman who was the director at that time used to talk the president of the university out of some of his excess money at the end of the year, and she was very interested in ceramic work. Ceramic work was not too expensive, so she would take that extra money and go out and buy a pot, and that was the way they acquired work by Marguerite Wildenhain and by Michael Cardew and Bernard Leach, from an exhibition that came over during the war, sent by the British consul, and eventually mounted exhibitions in the gallery by very well-known potters. And this was, I think, a great thing for the students, because they could – it wasn't just a case of looking at my work or even thinking about things the way I thought about them, but thinking about them in a variety of ways from the work that came in from outside.

And the university gallery collection -- because the woman who was in charge of it knew that we would take care of it, she allowed me to bring students over and to set up a study area in the gallery for a class period. And the students could select pots they wanted to talk about and bring them out and look at them and handle them and talk about them and argue about them in class. So that was a wonderful experience, too, a hands-on experience, which I think is critical to any real learning about ceramics.

MR. SILBERMAN: You've done a lot of workshops as well and taught at other craft centers and schools.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: What had been your experience there? Which craft centers have you been at, for example, among Penland [Penland School of Crafts, Penland, North Carolina] or Haystack [Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine] or the Archie Bray [Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, Montana]? What have the experiences been like when you've gone to places like that as opposed to teaching in the university?

MR. MACKENZIE: Very exciting. The people who came to those centers came because they wanted to study with a particular person probably. I mean, these centers would have a changing faculty and you would go for a summer session because you wanted to work with one of the people who was going to be teaching there. This is an advantage that those centers have over a school, in that they can have a faculty which varies from year to year, and varies as – I hate to say it, but there are fashions in ceramics.

MR. SILBERMAN: I'm shocked.

MR. MACKENZIE: [Laughs.] And as these fashions change, why, they change their faculty, you see. At a university we can't do that. We try to cope with it by talking about these things, but you don't always have an instructor who's intimately involved in a particular way of work.

The disadvantage of those summer sessions is that you have to come into contact with these people very quickly. It's a one-shot affair. You meet them, you work for two weeks usually, and then they disappear, you disappear, and that's the end of it, unless you go back and teach at the same school, or you teach at another school and a student may come because they want to hear something more about what you're doing.

But it is a short-term exposure. The disadvantage is that you never get to really know your students well in that short period of time. You're expressing your ideas, but it's very difficult to get in contact with the students' desires and the students' background, what they do, whereas at the university, you meet students, you get to know them for two, three, sometimes even as much as four years, and you can watch their development and you know what they're working toward and therefore can talk, hopefully, about what they're interested in doing.

Obviously you are limited by your own interests and background. I used to say to the students that I could not talk intelligently about ceramic sculpture to them. Curt Hoard could. And I always used to think that Curt's teaching of pottery was limited because that was not his expression, and so we would try to steer people into a class where they would have a sympathetic instructor.

MR. SILBERMAN: You, of course, said earlier you went to the Art Institute and then turned to pottery, and in some ways that was a good idea to come to ceramics after having been a painter. Looking at the scene now, what do you see as the advantages or disadvantages of going through a university art program versus a craft school or summer program or learning through an apprenticeship, as in a way you did when you got to Leach, in some commercial – or individual potter or company?

MR. MACKENZIE: I think it depends on the school, of course, what sort of a program they've set up. At the University of Minnesota, in their good sense, they say all students must take a class in the drawing and painting area, all students must take art history, all art students must take a class in each of the major areas that the department offers, ceramics, printmaking, photography, and so on, and these are required of all art majors.

In our program at the Chicago Art Institute, we didn't have that breadth of instruction demanded of

us. You'd get painters there and they thought anything except painting was just mud, you know, and I don't mean mud in terms of ceramics. They thought photography was terrible. They thought anything that wasn't splashing some paint on a canvas was just unexpressive; that's all there was to it. And I think that very often you get a student in Minnesota and they might start out, as I did, thinking they were going to be a painter, but if you get them into a ceramic class or into a photography class, they would find that this was what they really wanted to do and they would respond to it much more strongly.

In these summer programs, as opposed to a university, you are divided. You just take a one-shot deal with metalwork or woodworking or ceramics or whatever. And most of those – I'm not sure I can say this with any degree of authority, but most of the schools that I've taught at in the summer, those summer programs only are dealing with the crafts. They don't have – they didn't used to have a painting component, although now I think some of them are adding that to their programs so that you do have painting offered as well.

I think painting is, to me, an essential thing, drawing or painting or drawing and painting, because this is a case of, particularly if you're drawing, you're often observing and putting down your interpretation of an observation, and it teaches a student to really look very sharply. And that's the reason I think that it's better to have a variety of classes, because in each class you have to look at your material in a different manner, and that may influence – the way a student looks at a photograph may influence what they see if they look at a pot and vice versa.

MR. SILBERMAN: And if you had come to ceramics from sculpture?

MR. MACKENZIE: I might do much different work.

MR. SILBERMAN: Did you do sculpture at the Art Institute? Was that one of your requirements?

MR. MACKENZIE: No. No. We did not have requirements of that sort. As I said, you could be a painter and never do anything except drawing and painting.

MR. SILBERMAN: When you did the summer craft schools, did you do any one in particular regularly or –

MR. MACKENZIE: No.

MR. SILBERMAN: You were here many summers, so you would go out and do one workshop at one place and then the next summer or several summers later go somewhere else?

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes. I made it a point never to teach summer school at the university, first of all because I was very jealous of the time and wanted to work here at the studio, and secondly, I thought if they want to have a summer program, it's better they bring in a visiting artist from some other place. And so that worked out well for me.

But I have taught at Penland and Haystack and Anderson Ranch [Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, Colorado] and Archie Bray and so on. They're all exciting in a different way. It depends on – it really depends on who comes to your class, you know, whether you truly hit it off or not.

MR. SILBERMAN: And I feel compelled to ask, for the record, you've also taught at Black Mountain [Black Mountain College, Asheville, North Carolina] one summer? The most famous of all avant-garde art centers?

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes, but that was – just it was by accident. When Hamada and Leach and Yanagi went to Black Mountain as the first stop on their American tour, I was sent down as an observer from our school, and the St. Paul Gallery, because the St. Paul Gallery anticipated – having been aware that Alix had arranged these four stops, they anticipated maybe publishing something about the four different workshops that these men gave. And I was sent as an observer to Black Mountain. It was there I first met Karen Karnes and David Weinrib, who were the potters in charge of the program down there.

I guess because when they wanted to do a summer program the year after that, in 1953, my name was still in their mind, and they asked me to come down and teach a session. And so we went down there and stayed for, I guess it was three weeks or a month; I can't remember. It was very exciting because there were such people as Merce Cunningham and John Cage and David Tudor, and so you met a great variety of people that you wouldn't have ordinarily rubbed shoulders with. And that was fun.

But I don't think it was as good an experience as most of the other summer programs I've taught in, and the reason was at that period of time Black Mountain was really running through a lot of problems. Josef Albers, who had been the head of the school, had quit and moved on, and a man named [Charles] Olson, a poet, had taken over as the director of the school. And Olson was, I think, somewhat – how can I put it politely? – he had this strong ego and he really didn't sympathize with anyone who was outside his range. And so there was not a lot of support for the ceramic area at that time. And it's, I think, typical that within several years, Black Mountain folded, because Olson was preaching anarchy and the students were destroying the school. They loved it, but they were destroying the school.

MR. SILBERMAN: The '60s before the '60s.

Warren, you've touched in passing on figures like Michael Cardew and now Karen Karnes. There was the Leach group, and then you came back, you were sort of part of a generation of American ceramicists, including Karen Karnes and others, who were widely scattered in some ways, but how did you establish contact with those people, or friendships with people like Karen Karnes and Ken Ferguson, Rudy Autio, Peter Voulkos? What did that mean at the time in the '50s, '60s, '70s, let's say, when you're at the U?

MR. MACKENZIE: At that time NCECA, the National Council on Education in Ceramic Arts, was just building its organization, and we used to go to these yearly meetings, and it was there that I met many of these people for the first time and became friends with them. Pete Voulkos was, just in the early '50s, changing his approach to ceramics from one of producing a lot of narrow-necked bottles, with wonderful decoration on them but not very exciting form, to the sculptural expression, which he was moving into. He was at the Archie Bray Foundation and then eventually out to California.

Pete was certainly one of the, if not the *most*, important American potter that I can look at, because he had such an influence, and the interesting thing to me was that he influenced many people who went in – not in his direction but in other directions -- which have become important in American ceramics, I mean, people like Paul Soldner and others, who learned from Pete, but not working the way he did, and that I think is the sign of a great teacher.

Pete had a personality, too, which just affected everyone that he met, because he was full of energy and a certain irreverence, which young people do respond to, and they flocked around it. I think he was a really great, great ceramicist. I wouldn't call him a potter, because what he did is not pottery, generally speaking, but expressive use of clay in a manner that nobody else had thought of

up until that time and now it's a fairly common way to work, with the freedom that Pete brought to that field.

There was a time when if you didn't tear the hell out of a piece of clay, why, you just weren't much of anything, and functional ceramics really went downhill for a long time. Now I think people are realizing that there are ways of working which are sculptural; there are ways of working which are moving toward a painterly expression; there are ways of working which are conceptual; and there are ways of working which are pottery. So there's more of an understanding of the validity of each one of these ways, whereas at one time pots really almost went off the board.

MR. SILBERMAN: In the early days of NCECA was that an issue, or only later when you were active?

MR. MACKENZIE: No, no.

MR. SILBERMAN: You were the president, yes.

MR. MACKENZIE: It was only later on. Yes, I was the president. That doesn't mean much. It means you've been around a while and, you know, they need somebody who will run the organization and be responsible for it, but that doesn't mean that they're accepting your viewpoint of ceramics or anything like that.

MR. SILBERMAN: It's a democracy, an artistic democracy.

MR. MACKENZIE: That's right. [Laughter.]

MR. SILBERMAN: Or an anarchy. [Inaudible] – Anarchists. Authoritarian as president.

What about locally? Around the same time the Minnesota Craft Council was going –

MR. MACKENZIE: Well, yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: – or starting. What was your role there, Warren?

MR. MACKENZIE: I was involved with them when they started out, and then I kind of – living out in the country like this, you know, you're removed from a lot of activities that take place in the Twin Cities, and so I lost touch with the Craft Council. And there was one person who was elected as president and his whole desire was to close down the Craft Council, and for a few years it did close down. It had been an active, productive group dealing with exhibitions and meetings of various sorts and so on, and then it suddenly disappeared, because this man wouldn't do anything to keep it going. And when your president won't do anything to keep it going, it just fails.

Then after a hiatus, Peter Leach came along, and he remembered the old Craft Council and he thought it was worthwhile starting again. It centered mostly around ceramics at that time because there were more potters than other craftspeople in the area. And when it started again, Peter started it as a ceramic group, which has grown, and I was involved in that. I met with them – I was the very cautious member in that renewal. I remember they wanted to rent a big building and have a place where they could have studios and have exhibitions and all, and I said, "No, you can't do that, you know, we have no money." Fortunately, no one listened to me, and they did rent a building and they got a director who was very good, and it grew and grew. And then that director moved on and they elected another person and another person, and now they have Emily Galusha, who is an incredible livewire, and under her direction this has grown astronomically.

They now own their own building, and it has drawn money from local and national foundations for projects that they have instituted, and it's one of the major forces, I think, in this area for clay work. They have a gallery, which brings in wonderful exhibitions; they organize exhibitions and then take traveling shows as well. They have studios where students can work, where professional potters can work, and they have classes that they give. It's just expanding every day. And I think it's one of the strongest elements in ceramics, around this area anyway. People know about it from a distance and come because of it.

MR. SILBERMAN: I agree. And there are major workshops featuring visiting people, so it brings in outsiders to help the community –

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes, that's great. Yes, yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: – by exposing them to work and ideas.

MR. MACKENZIE: And they set up a series of lectures and awards. They got support from –

MR. SILBERMAN: Regis.

MR. MACKENZIE: The Regis Masters series from a man named Kunin, who, interesting enough, runs the Regis hair salons, but, I mean, this is a big corporation, and the Kunins are very interested in art and he has supported the series of lectures and visiting artists and exhibitions, which they bring with them. That's gone on now for about four, maybe five, years, maybe longer than that. And then they, in a sense, felt that they hadn't exhausted all the American artists, but they wanted to expand their view, and they brought in a Japanese artist, Tatsuzo Shimaoka, who is a national treasure in Japan, and he sent an exhibition over here with pots priced extremely high. I mean, you're talking about thousands of dollars, and to the amazement of everyone, all the pots which were available for sale sold here in Minneapolis-St. Paul. So that's, I think, a sign of how important clay work has become in this Midwest community.

MR. SILBERMAN: I agree, they were great pots.

MR. MACKENZIE: They were great pots.

MR. SILBERMAN: They were worth it.

MR. MACKENZIE: But, you know, \$20,000 for a pot is a lot of money to put out. [Laughs.]

MR. SILBERMAN: The prices have gone up a bit since the time when Hamada's pots were on sale.

And I should mention here again for the record that of course you were one of the people honored as a Regis Master, along with many of your great contemporaries like Peter Voukos and Karen Karnes.

[Audio break.]

MR. SILBERMAN: Well, let me ask you about some of your travels. When you were in Japan for the first time, you were in the army, and that was your experience of Japan. Did you go out and see pottery?

MR. MACKENZIE: That was my first exposure to Japan, and I didn't know anything about ceramics and wasn't interested in ceramics, although I did buy a couple of pieces of ceramic work while there,

none of which I now own. We had a cat that broke one and that sort of thing. But it did stick in my mind, and after becoming a potter, a group of us went to Japan to visit – I think it was in 1974.

[Audio break.]

MR. SILBERMAN: So we're going to ask about the second trip to Japan, in 1974.

MR. MACKENZIE: No, we're going to ask about the first trip to Japan because –

MR. SILBERMAN: Okay, tell me about the first time you were in Japan, just to be sure.

MR. MACKENZIE: The first time I went to Japan was I was sent there by the U.S. Army. During the Second World War, I was in the States all the time because my eyes were so bad I was not suitable to be a soldier, a combatant. And then after the war was over, the army sent all of us who had been in the States overseas to relieve the people who had been fighting so they could come home, and I was sent to Japan.

The army also had the stupid idea that you had to be placed in the same job that you'd had in the States, and I happened to have been working in a printing plant printing charts about how to dismantle a machine gun or things like that, so they said, "You're an artist, you have to be an artist," and there was no work for an artist in Japan until I found a mapmaking outfit that had an opening for, I think, five artists or something. So they requisitioned me and I worked for this mapmaking outfit. This outfit ran a printing plant in Yokohama, but they only officially ran it. The actual manual work was done by the Japanese printers, who were superb craftsmen and could run all the machines and did wonderful printing.

But those of us who were in the army, we were told we had to look busy, and so several of us said, "Well, let us paint the activities of the army here in Japan and also the scenery around Yokohama and Tokyo," and so they said that was all right and we did that. But we did the painting in the morning, and then in the afternoon, why, we'd go to galleries and we'd do things like that, and it was in one of these galleries that this other young guy and I met a painter named [Shigeo] Miyata, an elderly man who had studied with George Rouault in France. He was a medical doctor but a part-time painter. And we got to talking, and he persuaded the gallery owner to give the two of us an exhibition, which was how I got my first professional exhibition in Japan [Nichida Gallery, Tokyo], of paintings which were not very good, but that was it.

MR. SILBERMAN: Did people come and did they sell?

MR. MACKENZIE: People came and a few of them sold, yes. We were a curiosity I guess you would say. [Laughs.]

MR. SILBERMAN: And were you aware of Japanese crafts, and especially ceramics, then?

MR. MACKENZIE: No, no. I was not aware of Japanese ceramics – I was aware of it but not interested in it, although I did buy a few pieces while there, and I bought some weaving and things like that. But no, I thought I was going to be a painter, and so I couldn't wait to get back to art school and get back to painting classes.

But that was my first exposure to Japan. It didn't stick in my mind when, in 1974, one of the fellows around here heard about some space on a charter flight, that we could get to Japan very cheaply, and we got that space, about seven of us, seven potters, and we went to Japan for two weeks. And our idea while there was to visit all the old traditional kiln sites that we could in the two-week

time and see what was being done and so forth. And we were on such a short schedule that we traveled at night and went and toured around during the day and then traveled at night and toured around during the day, but we did see a lot of different places. We went to Mashiko, of course, and met Hamada again and Shimaoka, his best apprentice, who had set up a studio right near Hamada's, and we went back to Tokyo and Kyoto, up to Shigiraki and Tamba, down to Kurashiki, up to Hagi, down to Onda, and eventually back home.

We were exhausted at the end of the two-week time, needless to say, but it was a wonderful exposure to the traditional world of Japanese ceramics, and I think it did affect my work, again quite strongly, just by coming into contact with these people who were making pots and earning a living making pots and succeeding very well in an economy that was not going great guns at that time.

MR. SILBERMAN: What surprised you when you actually saw Hamada's place of work as opposed to having met him and seeing the pots? When you actually got there or to some of these other sites, what surprised you most or what fascinated you or interested you the most?

MR. MACKENZIE: Keep in mind, he had been declared a national treasure in, I think 1955, and he was incredibly wealthy. His compound consisted of about eight different buildings. Nearly all of them, perhaps all of them, had been old buildings which he had bought, had dismantled, moved to Mashiko, and then reconstructed. His main house was a gigantic farmhouse, a big old farmhouse that he'd bought. Perhaps the workshop proper was a building that had been built just from scratch, but it was an amazing compound of activity.

Unfortunately, when we were there, it was the middle of summer, August – not the middle of summer; it was the end of summer – and it was so hot that he had told half of his workers to take time off and go to the sea to have a vacation, and so things were pretty well shut down. But he was so generous with his time and he spent a lot of time with us showing us around the studio, and then up on the front porch of his so-called treasure house, where he had all of his collection stored, he said, "I'm sorry, you can't come in the treasure house because it's chaotic." And he brought pots out in their boxes, and he'd open them up and show us these pots that he thought we'd be interested in. And if we said the right thing, then he'd go in and get another one. And they were wonderful pots. They were pots from all over the world that he had collected and which eventually, of course, went into a museum.

But he also gave us introductions to potters in other parts of Japan, which allowed us to have access to potteries in Shigiraki, for instance, that we would never have seen if we'd not known Hamada and had his introduction to tell them that they should be nice to us. So that was a wonderful experience.

We also met Shimaoka, his best apprentice, who at that time had left him and started his own pottery practically next door. He was the personal friend of this friend of ours, Taeko Tanaka, who was traveling with us. This is a woman who was born in Japan and knew Shimaoka before she came to America. And so she introduced us to Shimaoka and he very kindly showed us around his place, a completely different situation than Hamada's, and then we went on to these other traditional villages, where we saw all kinds of ceramics being made.

But it was fascinating because it was also coming to grips with the day-to-day operation of a ceramic village. I mean, the village of Onda, where practically every family was a pottery family, there were these big water-driven clay crushers, which kept thumping up and down all day long and all night long, driven by the water from a small stream, and the people there made pots as a living. They also farmed a bit, but essentially they were potters, and that was a fascinating thing to see.

MR. SILBERMAN: And did you spend time in Tokyo? Did you see a lot of museum and masterpiece pots?

MR. MACKENZIE: We went to the museums in Tokyo, yes, but we didn't meet any potters there. But we did go to the museums and saw their collections, which were incredible and really an eye-opener about Japanese, Korean, and Chinese pots, because what we had seen in this country was just the tip of the iceberg, as you can imagine, and there they had these fantastic collections, which went on room after room after room. We spent a lot of time in Tokyo looking at that.

MR. SILBERMAN: Any specific changes when you got back, or just general inspiration?

MR. MACKENZIE: No, it's just – I guess it was a reinforcement of the direction that Alix and I had started out in and that it was – it just said, it's really a pretty nice life being a potter. [Laughs.] And I think that today, too.

MR. SILBERMAN: You've gone back since, Warren, to Japan.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes. When Fritz [Walter] Mondale was Ambassador to Japan, he and his wife, Joan, lived there, and I had known them before he became ambassador. Joan is a potter and a pottery devotee. While she was there, she asked me for some slides, and she and a friend of hers, Amy Kato, went around and they finally found a gallery that was interested in having an exhibition of my work. So that was the first time that I went to Japan to exhibit ceramic work. And this man was a very interesting man. He owned a gallery in Tokyo, but we had corresponded considerably before the show was set, and I, in letters, talked to him about my feeling about pricing pots, and I was concerned that they not become too expensive for the ordinary people to buy, and he went along with that.

I don't think he made much money on that exhibition. I mean, it sold out, but even so he could have only made a few thousand dollars on that show of quite a few pots. But he has continued to show my work, and also recently the shows have been dual shows with my wife Nancy [Nancy Spitzer MacKenzie], who is a fiber artist, and he has shown both of our work a number of times now. He keeps wanting to have a show almost every other year, and, frankly, it's expensive to go to Japan, and even though he allows us to stay in his home with his wife and himself, and it's a situation which is quite wonderful for us, but even so, I'm coming to the point where I'm ready to say, I'll send an exhibition, or we'll send an exhibition, but maybe we won't come over this time.

I mean, it's foolish to think that we have to be there – although this is very Japanese. Apparently, Shimaoka, who is now a national treasure, when he has an exhibition in Japan, it is expected that he will be at this exhibition all through the running of the show in order to talk to people and explain his work to be kind of a host. Fortunately, an exhibition in Japan traditionally only runs for about a week and then they change. But Shimaoka will be in a gallery. Even if there is no one else there, he will be waiting for people who might come to visit his show and talk with him. It's not in our makeup to do that, and particularly since we don't speak Japanese. [Laughs.]

MR. SILBERMAN: We should mention that Japanese television sent a crew over to make a documentary about you, and David Lewis's fine book on you and your work was published by a Japanese publisher, Kodansha [*Warren Mackenzie: an American Potter*. Tokyo; New York, 1991].

When you've gone back the last few times, have you been able to explore other areas of the country or other aspects of culture and art?

MR. MACKENZIE: Oh, yes!

MR. SILBERMAN: What have you seen that you brought back with you?

MR. MACKENZIE: The first time that we went over, when Joan arranged that first exhibition, we did travel around quite a bit. And since Nancy had never been there before, she was interested in seeing many parts of Japan. Subsequently, we've tried to visit a different part of Japan each time. But if you're only there a week or two, you don't get very far. There's so much to see. But we have been fortunate to meet potters and fiber artists and to see areas that I had not seen before, and to meet potters that Leach knew when he was a young man in Japan. They're now all very old, naturally; you can understand this. But we've done that and enjoyed that a great deal.

MR. SILBERMAN: And you spoke at the Folk Craft Museum, the Mingei Museum.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes. I've given several talks at the Mingei Craft Museum, trying to explain American crafts to the Japanese public. And I believe they've been well received, although they were always, of course, having to be translated into Japanese, and that means that you don't have much time to explain yourself. But with slides and so forth there is a communication, and I think people have liked what they saw.

The first time I talked mostly about American ceramics, and then the last time I talked, I talked about American work in the crafts, in all crafts – metal, wood, weaving, basketry, and so forth – which had been influenced by what they call mingei, which is traditional or people's art, things which are made to be used in an ordinary home. And they went well.

MR. SILBERMAN: You've also done workshops in other parts of the world, in South America and in Europe. What have those experiences been like -- the people you've met and the work you've seen and what you've been able to do as a teacher?

MR. MACKENZIE: I'm not sure what you're able to do as a teacher. Again, you're talking about short-term workshops, you know, a couple of weeks, similar to the summer programs that we spoke of earlier in America. But there has been an interest in the kind of work that I'm doing, that is, the kind of work which I would say belongs in people's homes. Even though many of the potters who live in these other countries are more oriented towards a gallery existence, I mean, they're making art which is shown in galleries, and once it's purchased it's probably put on a pedestal in someone's home rather than being used in the kitchen. But there is a communication about this, and generally I think there's been an acceptance of what I am trying to do.

We were recently in Denmark, and that was for me very interesting, because most of the Danish potters I met were, well, I'd say they were trying as much as possible to make their handmade work look like industrial, machine-produced work. And I don't know whether this is a characteristic of all Danish ceramics. No, I know it isn't, because I've seen some that is not that way. But there is certainly a strong carryover from what we used to call Danish modern design, which found most of its expression in furniture probably, but it had an effect on the ceramics as well. It's a little disturbing, though, to find a young potter sitting down at a table with a piece of paper and a ruler and a protractor and drawing designs on this paper which are thought of as being ceramic designs. I mean, it just doesn't enter my world.

MR. SILBERMAN: Not your style.

MR. MACKENZIE: No.

MR. SILBERMAN: You did a workshop in Venezuela. Was that closer to a folk tradition or utilitarian tradition or more –

MR. MACKENZIE: No, because, again, most of the people there who attended the workshop, they considered themselves artist potters. I did meet one young man there, Guillermo Cuellar, and he has since come to the United States a number of times and has actually worked with me in my pottery, because he's married to a woman from Iowa and so they come to visit her family. He also is faced with a situation where he needs to buy materials from the United States and there's no way of getting dollars out of Venezuela because of the economy down there, and so he makes the pots up here and we sell them, and he has a dollar account where he can purchase ceramic materials. But he's a very good potter, and I would say he is convinced that there is a possibility of earning a living in Venezuela as a functional, utilitarian potter also, and his work is closely related to mine.

MR. SILBERMAN: Great. Functional pottery lives for a particular time.

Well, you've touched on it before, but let me ask you directly about your relationship with dealers and galleries. How have you viewed that over the years?

MR. MACKENZIE: Well, frankly, I do sell in galleries in other parts of the United States, and I sell in a gallery showing in Japan, but essentially it's not something that I feel very close to, because a gallery is a commercial business, and depending on where it is, it has to earn a living for the gallery owner who has, of course, many expenses of publicity and photography and openings and all that sort of thing as well as rent and lights and electricity, and so these people have to push the price of my pots quite high.

Maybe I'm not being realistic about it when I say anyone who comes to the studio here buys the work at wholesale price. In other words, I cannot discount my prices for a gallery and earn a living at it. At the same time, Nancy and I are blessed with living at the end of a dead-end road, and everybody – most people who come here are looking for pottery, and for that reason we can have a self-service showroom where people take care of themselves. I don't have to stop work to wait on customers. I mean, you can't very well run a showroom and stop work if you're trying to sell a \$5 or a \$10 pot, but on the other hand, if people wander in and buy a \$5, \$10 pot, okay, that's \$5 or \$10 which is sold, and that's the way we're able to work our showroom.

And Nancy's work – now I'm married again, and Nancy is a fiber artist – she has fiber work for sale in the showroom as well and it works well enough. It works better than hiring someone to do it and it works better than selling through galleries on a regular basis.

But I do understand the galleries' problems, but on the other hand it moves against what I'm trying to do and so I tend to try to avoid that.

MR. SILBERMAN: And is the work of other individuals besides you and Nancy in the shop?

MR. MACKENZIE: That's correct, yes, because –

MR. SILBERMAN: Other potters?

MR. MACKENZIE: – there are a lot of potters in this area, in this general area, who do not have a studio or a showroom near the metro area. We are fortunate. We're within 15 miles of Minneapolis and probably 12 miles from St. Paul, and people think nothing of driving out here on an afternoon or evening and buying pots. These other people live maybe a hundred miles away from the city, and that's a trip that people don't undertake lightly. So we've asked some of these people if they want

to show in our showroom, and they have to accept the fact that there will probably be some losses from dishonest people. There's breakage that occurs, some of which is paid for, some of which is not, but everyone is happy to participate under those conditions.

MR. SILBERMAN: It has been difficult for you because of your well-deserved reputation to stop certain people from coming in and buying too many pots.

MR. MACKENZIE: That's true. I've had to – well, I didn't have to, but I put a limit on how many pots a person could buy out of any given firing, and it has meant that the pots get spread around among more people. But again, it's a showroom run on the honor system, so I don't know whether it's held to or not. I can't say that. It's an attempt to try to say, "Look, you're not building a collection; just buy pots that you want to use in your house and treat them that way."

MR. SILBERMAN: And I would say, just as an interested observer who's in the shop occasionally, that you do get people from, sort of, down the road and in the community who are buying pots for that purpose or perhaps as a special gift and people from the cities coming out to use them in the way you wish and also as gifts, and so it works as well as it can under the circumstances.

Overall, Warren, how do you think the market for American craft has changed during your lifetime, what you've seen, your career as a professional?

MR. MACKENZIE: I think, first of all, the education in schools has improved tremendously. I mean, most colleges and universities have a strong ceramic program. Many high schools have a strong ceramic program. Those people who take ceramics, whether they become potters or not, have certainly become educated about what it is to be a potter and what the possibilities are and what they should be looking for, and they may not become potters, but they may be more inclined to purchase handmade work for use in their homes. So that much has changed.

When Alix and I started our pottery out here, we used to send out postcards and we'd say there was going to be a sale on Saturday starting at 9:00, and 9:00 would come and no one would be here, and we'd sit looking down the road and wonder whether anyone was going to come on that Saturday. And this was nerve-wracking. And we never sold all of our work at that time, but we had a little display area so we could leave it there for later.

But nowadays many potters in this area, either singly or in groups, have sales at their studios, and those sales are extremely well attended. There is a group of potters in this area, and these are – I would have to say these are all potters; they're not ceramic sculptors; they're all potters. There may be eight or ten in this group, stretched for a distance of 30 miles up along the St. Croix River, and they have started a group sale, which is well publicized. And in that group sale, in one day's time, those people will sell between \$50,000 and \$70,000 worth of pottery, and that's, I think, a very good situation.

MR. SILBERMAN: And you've been the model. You're the firstest with the mostest.

MR. MACKENZIE: We didn't set out to be a model for anything, because many potters are very happy to deal through galleries and exhibitions and earn their living that way, and that's just another approach, that's all.

MR. SILBERMAN: Have you ever done commissioned work, Warren?

MR. MACKENZIE: When we first started our pottery, we did. We thought about the Leach Pottery, and the Leach Pottery used to sell work which had been commissioned. Bernard would take on

commissions to do specific pieces. When we started out, we said, "Well, we'll accept orders for up to one-half of a kiln load," which at that time was about 400 pots in a kiln load, but we did reserve the idea that for half the pots, they would be pots that were not ordered, for the simple reason that an order always meant that somebody had seen something of our work somewhere and they were asking you to do the same sort of thing. That meant you're repeating yourself. And I repeat myself all the time, but I want to do it on my terms.

And also, nearly always a person ordering a pot has something in mind, and there are so many things that can happen in the course of making a pot, firing the pots, glazing the pots, all these things. Some of them you can control; some of them you can't. And whether your idea of what you're going to make is the same as the person who orders it, that's a big question. And they walk in and you more or less can tell by the look in their face that this is not quite what they expected, and we always tried to say that this is not a firm order; we'll make something and if you like it you can buy it; if it's not what you want, forget it; we'll sell it to someone else.

But still we felt it was not going well and gradually cut down the orders – cut down the orders. And then when Alix died, I took that opportunity to simply write everyone who had ordered anything and saying, "I'm sorry, I'm wiping all the orders off the book." And since then I've not taken orders and I'm much happier and I hope that the people who buy the work are happier, because now they see a finished pot in the showroom and they either like it or they don't like it. If they don't like it, they walk out of the showroom; if they like it, they can buy it.

MR. SILBERMAN: Simple enough. Maybe you could describe the environment now as opposed to when you and Alix were in the basement of the barn, your working environment. And we mentioned the salesroom, which is very nice and in a separate spot, but what about your studio and where you work?

MR. MACKENZIE: Well, in 1968 I did have this disastrous fire. This was after Alix had died, but I was firing the kiln and evidently broke an oil line or something like that, and the barn was completely destroyed. Fortunately I had a friend who was an architect who came to dinner the following evening, and he said, "Well, don't sit around on your butt and worry about it; let's design a pottery." And that evening, with a pad of typing paper and a pencil between the two of us, we designed a three-unit building, which was going to be the new pottery.

The kiln was not damaged, although the burners and the air blower and the oil pump and so forth were destroyed. The kiln brickwork was not damaged, and so we started building around that, a building which is completely concrete, including a concrete roof so that it can't burn down again, and then a studio off to the side, connected to the kiln room, of course, in which I wanted to have tall ceilings, because working in the basement of that barn, the ceiling was about a foot over my head and that leads to a kind of a depressing feeling. And so we made a two-story room there where I could work, and clay mixing room attached. And it was interesting, because it did change my work. I found that the pots, somehow they opened up a bit. They maybe increased in scale somewhat, but they also had a better feeling to them than the ones I made in the basement of the barn.

Eventually I added another room to that complex, always with the idea – at that time I was still teaching – I had the idea that if I wanted to quit teaching, I might like to have an apprentice or two to work together, because I had always worked with someone in the studio, with Alix. And so I built a fairly good-sized studio which could accommodate several apprentices. Subsequently I've learned that I really can't bear to work with another person in the studio for a long period of time. Sometimes for a short period I can do it, but I can't do it on a steady basis. It's just my shortcoming; I can't help that. I'm quite happy working alone, and in the summertime when Nancy is working on her

dyeing of silks (she works in the loft above the throwing room), and so we do communicate. There is another warm body there to exchange ideas and pleasantries with, but I don't work with apprentices.

And then the last building, which we added relatively recently – well, come to think of it, it's not relatively recently; it's about 20 years ago, I guess – is a new showroom, and it's a separate building nearby. It's an unheated building with good southern exposure, and on a warm sunny day, even in the middle of winter, it's pleasant in there, and people come and look at the work and purchase it if they so desire.

MR. SILBERMAN: Great. I'd like to ask more about the work, but I want to ask a footnote, which is about technology. Has technology changed in any way that affects your work or affects your ability to do the work at the wheel?

MR. MACKENZIE: Well, when you say technology, I'm not sure whether you're talking about machinery that I use – I still work on a treadle wheel because that's the wheel I'm comfortable on. At one time I had a stiff knee and I thought I was not going to be able to treadle that wheel anymore, so I bought an electric wheel, thinking I could go on potting on an electric wheel. I then found out that I really can't work on electrical. I'm just so imbued with the connection between my foot and my hand that I can't work on an electric wheel, and so the wheel sits silent and I'll probably sell it. I've decided now, I guess, that when I can't treadle the wheel around anymore, I'll give up potting or make smaller pots or something else.

There was a time, however, when my wrists and elbows were giving out from wedging clay. I mixed the clay in an old dough mixer and then stored it in plastic barrels, but before working on the wheel every bit of clay had to be hand kneaded to make it homogeneous, to get the particles of clay laid up together so that it would work right on the wheel. I use about 12 tons of clay a year. It takes about a ton of clay to fill my kiln, and I fire 12 times a year. Now, hand wedging 12 tons of clay is just a job that I can't do anymore. And when my wrists and my elbows were failing, I bought a pug mill, a de-airing pug mill, and it's a wonderful machine and has permitted me to go forward and continue to make pots. I'm sure if I did not have the pug mill, which does most of the kneading for me, then I probably would have quit potting some time ago. I'm just not able to do it.

But other than that, technically – I mean, essentially, I guess pottery doesn't change that much, and I'm still mixing my own glazes and using the same chemicals and so forth that I've always used, so it hasn't changed that much.

MR. SILBERMAN: What about the working process? Have you changed that much in terms of the working, what you decide to make or how you go about it? You talk about the sort of the discipline you learned from Leach, the ability to make work in a series, but has that changed in terms of how you go during the day, in terms of choosing what to make and how you go about making it? You're not doing drawings, as you said.

MR. MACKENZIE: No, but I do repeat ideas for pots, even though the individual pot may vary from one to the next. People need something to eat out of.

One thing, now you ask, I realize I used to make dinner plates simply because people wanted dinner plates. I dislike making dinner plates. I find them limited as far as form goes, and since form is my main concern, they're not very satisfactory to make. They can be made, but they're not interesting. And I feel they really need some treatment, some decoration on them in order to become a complete unit. So I don't make dinner plates. There are other potters who sell their work here in our

studio who do make dinner plates, and that's wonderful, so I don't have to. But I make a lot of eating utensils, mugs, drinking vessels of various sorts, bowls to eat soup or cereal out of, bowls for serving, bowls for mixing, bowls for all sorts of purposes.

I think I've moved somewhat into, I shouldn't say a concentration on, but certainly I'm making many more vase forms than I used to when we started out. A vase is a wonderful thing to play with because anything with a hole in the top of it you can say is a vase, so you can make anything you want. You're absolutely unlimited. And at the same time, with that freedom you have to relate the vase to whatever is going to go into it and to your relationship with forms that you're involved with at that given time in your life.

And sometimes I've made vases which pursue an idea I have, and I try to push it as far as it will go and see what the limits are. Often when I get involved in something like that – I just discovered this last week – I mean, it's very recent for me to be saying this. Very often when I am pushing an idea that way, I'm more interested in pushing the idea than I am aware of what I'm creating, and I've decided this is not a good thing to do because I end up making bad pots. When I look back on them, they're bad pots, I think. I think now that's what I believe. Now, I'm not saying I'll never do that again, but right now I'm not.

MR. SILBERMAN: Even when you're making a lot of something, for example, vases, are you still making other kinds of pots?

MR. MACKENZIE: Oh, yes. When we worked at the Leach Pottery, they had a system which was designed to utilize the work of the people in the studio and accommodate orders which they had on their books for pots that people had ordered, demands from shops that they sold through for certain other pots, and also to fill the kiln economically. And that kiln took about 1,500 pots to fill. It was a three-chamber kiln, and the first two chambers were full of glaze ware, about 750 pieces to each chamber, and the third chamber was with a tighter packing because the ware was unglazed; it could be stacked. It held the 1,500 pots for the next firing in the glaze chambers. And this bisque firing was a free firing by overflow heat on its way to the chimney.

So we had a making list at the Leach Pottery, and each person, depending on their abilities and demands of the pottery, was assigned so many pots to make for the next firing. And I've retained that idea: to make up a list of things that I want to make, and I know it's going to take me about 600, 650 pieces to fill the kiln. And that's everything from small wine cups to large vases or big serving bowls and so on. And so I make a list of 20 of this and 50 of this and 10 of this and so on and so on to come up with what I think is going to be needed to fill the kiln. The only difference between what I do and what the Leach Pottery did is I don't feel stuck with that making list. If I'm bored, I just stop making whatever I have on the list and go to something different, or I may just scratch some things because I don't want to make them that month, that firing.

But it's a good beginning, and instead of going down to the studio in the morning and sitting there and twiddling my thumbs and looking out the window and wondering, now what am I going to do, why, all I have to do is look on the making list and pick anything off it and at least I can work. I can start making something. I may lose interest in it and stop, but it gets me working in the morning.

MR. SILBERMAN: And then there's always what happens in the kiln to the work.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes, that's true. Sometimes the kiln is a vehicle for expression which produces work that's better than what you put in the kiln. I mean, something can happen in the firing that you never expected; you put in a very ordinary pot and it comes out just fantastic, and you had nothing

to do with it; it's just chance. Sometimes you have a wonderful idea of the way this pot is going to come out, and it doesn't come out that way at all; it comes out a real disaster. But that's part of what's exciting about making pots. I mean, you never – well, you can. I'm sure there are potters who can control everything that they do, and if they do that, I feel sorry for them, because they lose that possibility of the discovery of wonderful things or of the shock of finding a disaster in their hands.

MR. SILBERMAN: Did you have a salt kiln here at one point?

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes, yes, at one time we built a salt kiln and it interested me for about three years. I thought – this has happened several times in my life -- I thought, okay, I'm going to learn about salt firing, and so I thought the best way to do this was to really concentrate on salt firing. And I stopped doing glazed ware for a bit and did a lot of salt ware, and then I lost interest in salt.

The same thing happened – I was doing some porcelain and I thought, oh, well, I can go ahead with porcelain and stoneware at the same time because they're both fired at the same temperatures, use the same kinds of glazes, roughly, and I can mix them up and have a great time. I found out I couldn't, because I started to make porcelain and all I was doing was making white stoneware pots, and the feeling of them was of a stoneware pot. I didn't know what my feeling about porcelain would be. It didn't want to be thin, translucent, perfectly formed, but it didn't want to be just a gob of clay thrown on the wheel either. And so I quit doing stoneware for three years and did nothing but porcelain, but then I got bored with that and so I went back, and now I've decided I'm a stoneware potter; I'm not a porcelain potter.

MR. SILBERMAN: And you have your old favorite glazes.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: And you also are always experimenting with some new things on the side.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes. I try to have a few glaze experiments in each firing, but the ideas you have for experiments, the percentage that work out as being worthwhile is very small. When we worked at the Leach Pottery, Bernard put me in charge of the experimental aspect of the pottery, and he dreamed up all kinds of things he wanted to test, you know. So my job was to weigh these out and make tests of them and put them in the firing. And I remember the year I did this – it was the second year of our being there – I must have made 120, 150 different glaze tests, and out of those only one came out to be a glaze which we wanted to use in the studio and which would repeat itself satisfactorily. And that's just the percentage you get. Sometimes you're lucky and you get more, but if you get one out of 100, I think that's pretty good.

MR. SILBERMAN: But you keep trying.

MR. MACKENZIE: Yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: Warren, just a few more things. I'm not going to ask you as a writer about writing and craft writing, but I would like to ask you just what role the craft periodicals, *American Craft* or the ceramics periodicals like *American Ceramics* and the *Studio Potter*, played for you in your development as an artist or your role as a teacher?

MR. MACKENZIE: As a teacher they were good, because they kept me aware of what was happening in other parts of the country and of, I hate to say it, but the trends in the ceramic world.

When I quit teaching, I have to confess that I simply dropped most of my subscriptions to

magazines. I found that they interfered with my thinking rather than helping it. And so I muddle along on my own now. At one time I had an idea of writing a book, and I started to collect some photographs about utilitarian pots, and then I sat and when I got a few photographs together I thought, well, you'd better start and see whether you can write or not. But then I very quickly found out I can't; I'm not a writer. And so I returned the photographs to the people and that was the end of that.

Leach was a great writer. He thought in complete units. I visited Bernard just before he died – I mean, not a month before he died. He was practically blind. He couldn't hear very well. And I lived with him in his apartment for two weeks. He dismissed his housekeeper and secretary and we just lived there together. And in that time he had a request for an article about something; I can't remember what it was. He had a tape recorder, so he thought about this for a while and he sat down and turned on the tape recorder and he spoke this article, which ended up to be about a page and a half long in printed form. And when he was done, I took the tape and took it to the woman who had worked for him as a secretary, and she transcribed it and put it in typescript, and I read it back to Bernard when it was typed, and he only had to change about one word in that entire thing. There were no "uhs" or badly constructed sentences or ideas that did not follow in the correct order for the article. It was a fantastic experience, so as anyone who hears this tape will know, you hesitate, you change, you "um," "ah," "er" and it doesn't always follow in a proper sequence.

MR. SILBERMAN: Well, that's a rare gift to have Bernard Leach's ability as a writer.

MR. MACKENZIE: It was. It was a wonderful gift, yes.

MR. SILBERMAN: Since we've gone back to England, I want to ask you one more question about coming back to America. When you came back to America after being with Leach in England, did you have a different sense of historical American pottery and older American pottery, or did you have that before you left? Because he taught you to look at old English pottery.

MR. MACKENZIE: True, but also Bernard antagonized a number of American potters when he came through America lecturing and giving demonstrations, which he did not only in 1952 with Hamada and Yanagi but in 1950, when he did a whole circle tour of the United States. And Bernard antagonized so many American potters by saying that we had no history; we had – as he put it, we had no taproot, which means a history that goes back 500 years or something like that and on which you build and it narrows down and narrows down, narrows down. He thought that was a tremendous loss and that we were deprived because of this. I think that American potters, they don't have a taproot; they have a dozen taproots, because America is a country where people have come from other countries where they have traditions, and they bring these traditions with them and build upon them.

And so today we're an amalgam of a lot of different countries, and we don't absorb it all, but we certainly absorb a great deal of it. And, of course, things have changed since Bernard was young, also, because publishing has increased and travel has increased and people not only can read and absorb ideas from other countries, they can travel to other countries and have other people come to this country to bring their ideas to this country, and you explore those and benefit from them.

So I don't think we changed our view. In fact, Alix and I, even before we had any money, we had started to put together a collection of pots, pots from all over the world, because we usually bought them in junk shops or antique shops. And it was amazing what we found, I mean, Early American pieces, yes, but also pots that people had brought with them from Europe, pots that people had

imported from the Orient, and pots that came from the American Indian culture, all of these things, which were available in shops. And if you picked the right shop, you could sometimes get something for a few dollars that was an extremely important pot, not in a museum sense but an important pot in that it meant something to you and became part of your life. And so I don't think that the lack of a taproot is any big problem.

MR. SILBERMAN: Does the international travel and the availability of, sort of, being in touch with things going on change what's going on from what you can see in terms of American ceramics? And it sort of rolls it – is everything becoming more internationalized?

MR. MACKENZIE: I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

MR. SILBERMAN: Let me rephrase. I mean, how do you see your Americanness coming out in your pots? You're regarded as in part under the influence of Hamada and the Asian, Japanese tradition, Korean, and part Leach, but where does the Americanness come out, just as a model of one American potter as opposed to all American potters?

MR. MACKENZIE: First of all, I don't think I can make anything but American pots. And I would go back to something that happened to us in England. When we were working at the Leach Pottery, there was a theater group that wanted to produce an American play. They wanted to produce Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. And they asked us, as Americans, to come down and tell them how to act like Americans. Of course, we went down and we said, "Well, the only thing you have to do is lose your English accent," which is not what they wanted to hear. They never did produce *Our Town*. They couldn't get enough people who could do it, but they did produce a play with several American characters in it, and so we did work with them.

But the thing that amazed me was that the director of this play tried to point out to the people acting like Americans, that look – and Alix and I were both involved in this; we were just down there trying to talk with them – and this director suddenly said, "Well, look at the way they're standing. No English person could stand that way. They just don't do it." And I think that there's probably something about the way our bodies move and the way we tend to gesture which is different than an English person or a French person or Italian or a Japanese or anything else, and so we can't help but make American pots.

I know I've been accused of making pots which are very Japanese. They're influenced by Japanese qualities, but they're certainly not Japanese pots. In fact, I think Japanese would find – the Japanese, let me say, are unusually chauvinistic about pottery, and they believe, and perhaps rightly so, that Japan is a very important ceramic nation. But they are also jealous of the fact that people, in a sense, imitate Japanese pottery. I don't imitate Japanese pottery, and the Japanese people who I've known are well aware of this fact. They say, "Oh no, your pots are American pots; they're not Japanese pots," even with a strong influence.

Now, why it happens, I don't know, but I think it's something to do with the fact that I just live in America. I've said before, and I've repeated, that I think my pots are Midwestern pots. I'm most comfortable in the Midwest. I'm not comfortable on the East Coast or the West Coast, and that may be a very narrow view, but it's the way I am and so I like it here.

MR. SILBERMAN: We're glad you're here. As another Midwesterner, I'm glad you're here.

One last question, since we want to end with the work. As a practical matter or a specific example, could you describe what you made today and what ideas you might have been thinking about as

you made the pots today? What was behind your thinking in terms of what was interesting?

MR. MACKENZIE: No, I can't because I wasn't making pots today. Today, I was glazing pots this morning. I mean, my month sequence runs through about ten to 12 days of making of pots, and as they dry, they're being fired off for the first firing in an electric kiln, and then when all the pots are made and bisqued, I start to glaze. And that's what I've just completed, was glazing pots today, and then tomorrow I'll start packing the kiln. It takes a couple days to pack it, and then it is fired.

But I don't know what I think about any given day in making pots. The making of the pots is the part I like the best, but you may know that. Michael Cardew has said, "There are people who are glaze people, there are people who are fire people, and there are people who are mud people," and I guess I'm a mud person, because it's the making of the pots and the manipulating the clay in a variety of ways which I enjoy the most. But, no, I can't describe a sequence.

MR. SILBERMAN: That's a perfect statement to end on. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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