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Oral history interview with Jesús Moroles,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jesús Moroles on July 19-20, 2004. The interview took place in San Antonio, Texas and was conducted by Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Recuerdos Orales: Interviews of the Latino Art Community in Texas.

Jesús Moroles and Cary Cordova have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MS. CARY CORDOVA: All right, we are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Jesús Moroles on July 19, 2004. This is session one, disc one. And with that, Jesús I'll get it started by just asking when and where were you born?

MR. JESÚS MOROLES: I was born in Corpus Christi, Texas, September 22, 1950.

MS. CORDOVA: And where were your parents from originally?

MR. MOROLES: My father's from Monterrey, Mexico and my mother is somewhere around the Texas border. We're not sure - quite sure.

MS. CORDOVA: How come you're not sure?

MR. MOROLES: We say Robstown, but she doesn't have - didn't have a birth certificate. I think back then it wasn't so common to get that kind of paperwork.

MS. CORDOVA: Where was she raised?

MR. MOROLES: In Robstown, I believe.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And how did they meet?

MR. MOROLES: They met on the - like a bus stop.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh yeah?

MR. MOROLES: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. CORDOVA: A little pick up action?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah it's a real funny story my dad tells that he met this girl and weeks later he gets a call and he doesn't know who it is. And so he says I'll meet you at the bus stop. And so he goes over there and he's like looking around the corner to see who it is, to see if he wants to go over there. And he sees my mom and decides to go over there. I'll show you a picture, but they're the cutest couple, you know, when they were young. They were very young.

MS. CORDOVA: How old were they?

MR. MOROLES: Sixteen, seventeen years old -

MS. CORDOVA: Very young.

MR. MOROLES: - seventeen, eighteen something like that.

MS. CORDOVA: How long did they wait before they got married?

MR. MOROLES: I think they eloped fairly soon. And it was funny because my dad's - one of my dad's best friends, he would talk to my dad and they'd hang out together and it turned out it was his sister. And he always told him he didn't have any sisters so nobody would go - and he had a lot of sisters but he didn't want anybody dating. And so they ended up having to elope, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And so they're - how many children did they have?

MR. MOROLES: Six, three boys and three girls, and I'm the oldest.

MS. CORDOVA: You're the oldest, oh my goodness.

MR. MOROLES: And I was named Jesús and my mother was named Mary and my father's name is Jose. And so it's like - you know, everybody says, well, you had to be named Jesús. But actually Jesús was my uncle's name who had just gone off to Korea. And the Korean War was very hot and heavy and they didn't expect him to come back. It was hot and had very heavy casualties back then. And so I was named after my uncle Jesús, who has been working for me for the last 15 years. And he's a full-time painter. I don't know if he's on the video.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. And he's been a bit of an artistic influence for you, right?

MR. MOROLES: No. He's - my mother's family, the boys - she's from a big family, like 14 kids or something. And so they were painters, house painters. And so, he still paints. You know, he paints the studio, the shop, and goes to New Mexico and paints a place over there, gets ready for the exhibitions. And so he still just comes and paints. He's, I don't know, 70 something years old and just works hard.

MS. CORDOVA: Now, you were born in Corpus Christi but mostly raised in Dallas. Is that correct?

MR. MOROLES: Born in Corpus Christi and moved away and started the first grade in Dallas. My father's boss decided to expand his business and move to Dallas, and asked my dad to go with him. And that's another whole story in itself.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, what kind of work was your father doing?

MR. MOROLES: My father started working with him, this doctor, sweeping the floors for a doctor that made eyeglasses. And he ended up, you know, making the deliveries of the eyeglasses. You know, they didn't make them in an hour like they do now. And so they would deliver them to the offices or wherever after they were made and things, and he would deliver them and sweep up. And he started like looking to see how everybody was running the machines and everything, and ended up taking over, you know, working machines and everything. So he was an asset to the doctor when he left, and asked him to move his whole family up there.

And he ended up being efficiency expert for this company of like 3,000 employees, the largest optical company in the world, Pearl-Searle Vision. And Dr. Pearl is my godfather.

MS. CORDOVA: I think I got my glasses from them. [Laughs.]

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Now, let's see if - by the time you were in first grade, how many other children were there when you moved?

MR. MOROLES: There were all of us.

MS. CORDOVA: All of you?

MR. MOROLES: There were all of us.

MS. CORDOVA: You were all -

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, my mother was - ever year and, you know, a few months she was having a baby, all the time.

MS. CORDOVA: Wow.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. We were all in the span of, you know, maybe seven years or so, or eight years.

MS. CORDOVA: That must have helped make you guys very close.

MR. MOROLES: Actually because I was very active at school, I was very - so I was, you know, always in the ball clubs and I was drafted right out of high school. So I would say I wasn't as close probably to the two younger ones as my sister and brother who were right underneath me. Or at least three of them were a lot closer than the two younger ones.

MS. CORDOVA: So there's yourself, Jesús, and then there's?

MR. MOROLES: And then there was Joe Jr. and then there was Cristina, Maria Cristina, and then Diana. And there was Lalo. Hilario. His nickname is Lalo, Hilario. And Suzanna. Suzanna, who works with me, and my brother has

worked with me. And the two younger ones.

MS. CORDOVA: And so you already I think – did I read somewhere you were very interested in art from a young age?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I always said that I could always name my art teachers from the first grade. You know, back then in public schools we had art every day for an hour, which is very different than now, where they have art a la carte every – once a week if you're lucky, or something. So it's a disgrace, I think, what's happening in the arts. But I was encouraged very earlier on by my art teachers that, you know, you're doing a good job. And so I showed some promise early on.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you think you wanted to be an artist as a child or –

MR. MOROLES: No. I didn't know really what an artist was or did or anything except that even at the age of 11 I remember that I was doing commissions. Actually, my father said that he gave me probably my first jobs. My father would. And I was just reminded of this the other day, where I would do cartoons for my dad of like a guy working at a workbench at his work and looking over this way while working and looking at a girl walking by, and his lens is flying off. You know, like accident posters that I would do, like one a week or something. It was like these little funny papers that would come out, you know, things to look out for because it was a big factory, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. So you were creating this for a warning poster for the people at your father's work?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, yeah. And then they sent me to the YMCA for art lessons for \$1 a lesson at the art classes, where our teacher was donating her time.

MS. CORDOVA: And that was in Dallas?

MR. MOROLES: In Dallas, Ms. Chandler, and she actually taught private lessons in Oak Cliff and she was donating the time at the YMCA. And then after that couple of weeks was over, she went back to teaching her private lessons, and they were like \$15 an hour, and so we couldn't afford that. But she asked me to come over and just not tell the kids I was paying \$1 a lesson. And she just liked me.

I was a little kid and I guess she thought I showed promise. And after being there for a while, she said, well, let me show you some other stuff. And so she started showing me illustration, because it was mainly like oil painting classes and things.

And then someone came in and they wanted a commission for a public space. And she said, well, he can do it. And so I did these 45-foot murals for a public space, and got paid, in Dallas in a big bowling alley when I was 13.

MS. CORDOVA: There were like four of them or –

MR. MOROLES: There were two of them.

MS. CORDOVA: Two of them. And they were both 40 feet?

MR. MOROLES: Forty-five feet.

MS. CORDOVA: Forty-five feet?

MR. MOROLES: Uh-huh.

MS. CORDOVA: And so what did they look like?

MR. MOROLES: Well, one was a landscape, like a fairway, with trees and grass. It was just a landscape. Another one was an illustration. It was called Sherwood Forest. So I actually blew up all the letters and had like a fellow shooting an arrow and all of the old English numbers for the different lanes. It was an archery range. And so I did these two murals on top of – in this amusement park.

MS. CORDOVA: That's a phenomenal amount of space to cover as a young kid.

MR. MOROLES: Well, I was doing commissions before that for people who would bring in their photograph of the Grand Canyon, their 25th anniversary, and I would do like what I call sofa paintings, you know, big paintings to go over their sofas. And I was getting like, you know, \$250. I was like 11 years old. And that was a lot of money back then. So I was – I learned early on that I could help the family with money. And actually my father was getting ill at the time, and he was spending time in the hospital. They have never figured out what it was, because he would still get sick.

And we think it was just stress from – because my dad’s father died when he was like 3 years old, and so he had to go to work early on. And so, again, he had to – he got out of school when he was third grade, never went to school after that.

MS. CORDOVA: Really? So that was the end of his education?

MR. MOROLES: That was the end.

MS. CORDOVA: What about your mother?

MR. MOROLES: And my mother went to high school. And so my father was self-taught from the comic strips and the newspaper.

MS. CORDOVA: Before he worked for the eyeglass company, I had read that you, as an infant, had picked – or your family had picked cotton.

MR. MOROLES: They were cotton pickers. And my mother was like the fastest cotton picker. And I don’t know if you’ve ever even tried it, but if you just stick your hand in a cotton ball it comes out bleeding from the thorns. And somehow she would just go through there. And it might be – that might be part of her arthritis, because of all the chemicals on the plants and things like that.

But they would drag these big sacks of cotton, you know. And my dad was just the worst cotton picker. You know, she was like the best and he was the worst. And he couldn’t figure out how she could do it, you know.

And so literally I grew up under the wagon where they weighed the cotton on the cotton field, because it was the only shady spot in the whole thing. And my nickname when I was growing up was called “Blackie” – “Negro.” Because – I told them, because they wouldn’t watch me and I’d crawl out from under the wagon and I’d just get toasted out there. So I’ve always been – if I get in the sun I just get solid black, you know. But that was – yeah, kind of started out in the cotton fields.

MS. CORDOVA: How did it happen that your father was able to shift to this other –

MR. MOROLES: Well, my dad realized that that was – he couldn’t do that. And so he ended up starting his own business, and he would – got a truck and would take all the workers to work at the cotton fields, and then he would go off, and he started a window washing business. And he would wash all these high-rise buildings and new homes that were getting built. And had crews working for him and decided that he was more of a manager, more of a facilitator more than a worker. He learned, you know, that – and then he would take everyone home.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, that was a big job. Or still is, I guess now.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, yeah. I mean, they have some machines I guess that do that now, but somebody has to come back and sometimes cleans up what the machines don’t get, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Did your mother continue to work outside the home or did she –

MR. MOROLES: She worked all her life. In Dallas I remember she’d go off to the sweat factories and do sewing. And so they were both gone when we were growing up, because they needed two incomes. I remember my father would make like \$100 a week. You know, that was the lot. That was all that he was getting. And, you know, with six kids and everything – and I remember we finally were able to get out of the projects. And he bought a house. That was \$35 down and \$35 a month, and it was \$3,500.

MS. CORDOVA: How old were you when he bought the house?

MR. MOROLES: I was in like third grade.

MS. CORDOVA: So from first until third you were living in the projects.

MR. MOROLES: In the projects, yes. And we pretty much ran wild because our parents weren’t home. And I was sort of a bit of a wild kid. Actually got kicked out of school at that point. I had to change schools. I threw a rock at some kid and he happened to be on a merry go round and coming toward the rock and kind of – you know. So the teachers all chased me around and they couldn’t catch me, and they got mad because of that so they kicked me out of school.

And so my parents started looking for a house. And it was the best thing that ever happened to us because it moved us out of a very rough neighborhood into a more home style. The only problem was that it’s three minutes from downtown Dallas, which is not a problem, but it was a ranch house that was the ranch house for the whole area. It was all homes around there now. But it was the original farmhouse, so it didn’t have a

bathroom in it. It was a four-room ranch house and had an outhouse outside. So we had probably the only outhouse in the city limits in Dallas. So my first -

MS. CORDOVA: Well, that's something to tout.

MR. MOROLES: So my first stone carving, I remember now, was digging a ditch from the backyard to the front yard to put in a sewer line, because we added a room for a bathroom. My father did. And so every day after school we'd come home and we'd chip away at this, because we lived in Oak Cliff and Oak Cliff is made out of one big rock. And so we'd go over there and chip on this rock. And so when you start at the back, and -

[Audio Break.]

MS. CORDOVA: No worry. You were living in Oak Cliff.

MR. MOROLES: In Oak Cliff. And we were digging this ditch. And at the street it had to be 8 feet deep. So you're in a ditch that's like this wide and taller than that. It was as tall as that, in solid rock. So I remember that was my first stone carving, chipping at the rock.

MS. CORDOVA: Wow. Now, what kind of neighborhood was Oak Cliff then?

MR. MOROLES: Oak Cliff, we ended up changing schools to Sidney Lanier Elementary which was a life-changing experience, because they knew I was a troublemaker and so they latched onto me right away and were going to straighten me out. And so the coach there, I guess, was the discipline guy. For the first year I don't think I ever got to play. I had the duck walk, where you squat down on your legs and you walk like this.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, as a sort of punishment?

MR. MOROLES: Uh-huh, yeah. And stand against the wall during play period outside with your nose against the wall, and you could hear everybody playing behind you. And then in class they'd draw a little circle on the wall, on the blackboard, and you'd put your nose on it. You know, I mean, I was kind of a troublemaker coming in.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you - I mean, not that any child deserves that kind of treatment, but did you feel like this was a justified treatment of you or were you sort of upset?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I don't know what I did. I don't know what I did. I don't remember because it was in the fourth grade or something.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MR. MOROLES: But I think it was a good thing. I don't think it was bad to do that. You know, I think it was a positive thing for me because it turned me around, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: So you needed that kind of discipline?

MR. MOROLES: You know, my father was very strict but he wasn't home. Everybody was gone. So the school had to take up the slack. And a lot of teachers go to school now and they're afraid to go to school because the kids push them around and cuss at them. And, you know, it's horrible.

MS. CORDOVA: So you -

MR. MOROLES: You know, they didn't let you do that back then.

MS. CORDOVA: So you changed? You turned yourself around?

MR. MOROLES: I turned myself around totally.

MS. CORDOVA: Because you wanted to play sports?

MR. MOROLES: I wanted to interact with the kids - [laughter] - and be part of the group.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MR. MOROLES: So I turned out to be the fastest runner and the best jumper. I won all the medals and turned my grades from Cs and Ds to As and Bs and to straight As.

MS. CORDOVA: And you had an especially influential teacher at that point, didn't you?

MR. MOROLES: There was the coach that was making me do all that stuff.

MS. CORDOVA: Who was that?

MR. MOROLES: Coach Gandy.

MS. CORDOVA: Gandy.

MR. MOROLES: Ended up being murdered, I think, maybe. Who knows, maybe a bad student who did him wrong or something. But he was murdered. I don't know who or why.

MS. CORDOVA: But well after you had been at that school.

MR. MOROLES: Yes, well after. Yeah. But, no, I think that he was very influential. And he would take me out – my teachers would take me out and buy me clothes from their own money, and then I would hand them down to my brother. So they really – it was a real transformation.

MS. CORDOVA: Were you the only troublemaker child in your family?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I was the leader. I mean, I was the oldest so, you know, if I did it, they went along or whatever. So, yeah, I was kind of –

MS. CORDOVA: So when you turned around, did everyone else turn around?

MR. MOROLES: No. No. [Laughter.] No. You know, they were also hard on my brother. And I had cousins. And I think it's just a matter of the way you connect with your teachers. I think teachers have a lot to do with what ends up happening. I mean, I took their guidance, okay, go to this school, instead of just going to the next school that you're supposed to be in. And you have talent, you should go to this art school or something. So, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And so you had done these murals already, which is pretty impressive. When you got to high school, what were you doing in terms of art?

MR. MOROLES: In high school the first thing that we learned was silk screening. And I thought this was amazing because you could all of a sudden just wipe the ink like that and you can make copies of something, you know. And you could go like that again and make it again, you know. It was like your handmade hand press. And so after I learned design and things like that, I made a logo mascot, re-drew our mascot and designed a banner for our school. We were wolves, you know, so it was Crozier Technical High School Wolves – Crozier Tech Wolves.

And so I started silk screening these on felts and I would sell them to the key club and to the cheerleaders, and they would cut them. I wouldn't even cut them. I'd lay them out, one triangle next to another triangle, make a square out of it – rectangle. And they would cut them up and put them on sticks and sell them to raise money to go on cheerleading workshops or whatever, you know, and on trips. And I said, this is a good idea here, and so I started doing it for the other schools and re-doing their mascots and wholesaling them to them. And then by the end of high school I had my own business and had employees working for me and I was doing silk screen on fabric.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you get your own press, or how did you –

MR. MOROLES: We built tables. We built tables and had the electrician from my dad's work design a curing table to a conveyer belt, where heat coils would heat the fabric and cure the fabric, the inks to the fabric. So we started making sheets and pillow cases for companies. Raincoats, you would see a raincoat that had little flowers and things and so on.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you always been a precocious sort of entrepreneur? Has that just always been with you?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I worked at many, many jobs. I worked on the assembly line, doing water heaters before I was 18. Because I was as tall as I am now when I was like 13, in the fifth grade. And so everybody thought I was older. And so I was able to get jobs and I was working restaurants. I don't know how many restaurants I worked at, from dishwasher to manager and so I went up and learned all about it.

So by the time I got to some restaurants, they would say, where have you worked? I'd worked at about 10 places. Well, you know, we need a manager. And so, you know, they just thought that I was older, and I wasn't even out of high school. So I was always working. Work was just natural. You know, I just thought you had to. That was part of what you do.

My father was very hardworking. He always set a great example. And one of the things I forgot was – you know, we didn't have money. And so we would fix everything. You know, my father would say, when I get home, after school you need to re-do the back stairs. And it was made out of big old planks like this. And I forget what grade I was in, but we were out there with electric saws trying to cut and stuff. And I remember getting the saw caught

up in my pants. And it pulled in. And I don't know if you can see the saw blade going across there. Can you see it?

MS. CORDOVA: I can. You've got a scar there.

MR. MOROLES: And I was a little kid. The saw grabbed my pants and almost cut my leg off. But, you know, it was always work. And, you know, under the car, hand me the box end wrench for 7/16th. And so we learned how to take anything apart and put it back together. And the big thing was, you know, if a door doesn't close, you know, don't slam it. Look to see why it doesn't close. You know, it just takes the tightening of a screw. And a lot of people just keep slamming the door and never look. And so that was something that he taught me, to look.

MS. CORDOVA: So he made you very detail-oriented?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: What about your mother? What were some of the influences you think you got from her?

MR. MOROLES: Well, everybody said that I have my mom's kind of traits because, you know, she's very - I shouldn't say this about myself, but she's very sensitive. You know, she's very - and I think my charity work, I think, is probably a lot - my father says, to hell with everybody else, you know. Take care of - he says - every time I walk out the door, he says, don't trust anybody, you know. And my mother's like - everybody thinks she's an angel, you know. She's a living angel.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, that's a nice one. [Laughs.]

MR. MOROLES: And they've had their 55th anniversary and they just got re-married. They never really had a ceremony, so they had their ceremony when they were 50 out here in the backyard in a wedding dress and everything. It was so unbelievable. But, you know, it's a different combination.

MS. CORDOVA: Now, were you finding time to sort of - how did you find time to draw, or did you - I mean, it just became part of your work or -

MR. MOROLES: Because I was an art major. Because when I finally got into high school, I was totally - you know, I was taking - the only art you could get was really at this technical school, which is advertising commercial art. You know, that's the only way you could really get any art. So I was taking that. And they phased out our school, Crozier Technical High School and modeled it after and built Skyline, which was an arts magnet school in Dallas.

And so when they closed the school off, our teacher, Reese Kennedy, went off to teach college art. We had a college art teacher. You know, when we got out, I had so many offers from all over the country for me to go and work for them. But I had my own job. I already was making money. I had gotten an offer to do illustration for a company that did the major illustrations like of buildings before they're built, you know, what they're going to look at, and they use that for a sales tool. Before it was computerized and everything else, there was a guy that did all the - from Texas to the West Coast, and another guy that was the other guy.

MS. CORDOVA: You were sort of doing the dreamscapes, right?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I didn't get to do it. That was an offer that I had to go work for him as an apprentice, because he was just over-loaded and he needed an apprentice. And I didn't do it because, for one thing, as soon as I got my diploma, the same day I got my draft notice.

MS. CORDOVA: The very same day?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. And so, you know, I was captain of the varsity basketball team when I was a sophomore. And then when I was a junior I was captain, and when I was a senior I was captain. So I saw all those older guys - I was a leader of all these older guys that went off every year to Vietnam and came back in a box. So I knew what was going to happen to me.

And we were a minority high school, so we all went to the front lines immediately. And so I was just scared. And as soon as I got my notice, I was not planning to go to college because, you know, I was making good money and had all these great job offers.

And so I decided - and so I went down to the Air Force Recruiting Office and said, you know, I'd like to join, but I've got this draft notice. And they said, well, you're theirs. They've drafted you already. But take these tests.

You know, so I took these tests. And it just so happened that we had a math teacher in high school, Captain Gilliam, and he was a navigations officer in the Navy. And he made math visible. You could see it. You know, I mean, it got you from point A to B. I mean, it was not an imaginary thing.

And so we ended up taking trig, analytical geometry, calculus. Anything he offered we would take. They were college prep courses. And so when I took the test, my math was just, you know, high math scores.

They said, wait a minute, if you sign this paper, we can get you out of the Army. You won't get shot at. You'll go to electronics school. This paper is a critical career field. We can take you out of the service because we need you more for something that's lacking. It was the beginning of the computer age.

And so I said, sure. It's for four years instead of two, but I won't end in a box. And the guys that did come back that didn't get hurt, they were mentally hurt. So either way, I said, sure. But I had to like - if you flunked out of school, you ended up in the same place. So you had to pass two years of electronics school. And so I went off to school and went through that and ended up being a computer repairman.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you ever think about just trying to leave the country or anything like that?

MR. MOROLES: No. No, I never -

MS. CORDOVA: So you knew that, one way or the other, the military was going to get you.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. Yeah. No, I never thought of - that wasn't ever an option, to not -

MS. CORDOVA: How did you feel about the war in Vietnam, I mean, other than seeing these friends of yours that were dying?

MR. MOROLES: I wasn't that - I wasn't very political, so I really didn't know what was going on other than that people were going over there and they were dying. You know, so I always felt that our government knew better and we were just doing our job.

MS. CORDOVA: So it wasn't any sort of resistance to the -

MR. MOROLES: To the war?

MS. CORDOVA: - to the war at all?

MR. MOROLES: No.

MS. CORDOVA: But you did end up in Vietnam. Is that correct?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. My last year ended up going to Southeast Asia and being in Thailand, stationed in Thailand, where we were flying over Vietnam and working on all the computers and reconnaissance equipment on the planes that were - for a year.

MS. CORDOVA: So what kind of lasting experience was that for you?

MR. MOROLES: Well, again, I was over there and it was kind of traumatic. I mean, it was - the service was good in a couple of ways. It got you away from home. It got you away, starting to travel and see the world. I always thank the service for doing that because I think a lot of people live their life within 50 miles of where they're born and never leave. Sometimes they never leave. And so I really feel that a lot of the problems we have, we would be better off if students were able to do - you know, go off and live in other places and experience other people to see how similar we all are. And politics gets in the way. But other than that, the people are really wonderful all over the place. But it opened my eyes to traveling.

But I did see people go off and get killed all the time, you know, because our equipment was what kept them from getting shot down. And sometimes we couldn't fix it and they'd still have to go. So, you know, it was kind of traumatic.

MS. CORDOVA: So you mean you actually had moments where you were sending people off -

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. The planes would have to go whether their equipment, the equipment that they had, would not work. They'd still have to send up so many planes. And our equipment had actual little bombs inside of them so if the plane crashes, it would burn up the box so they wouldn't get the box and discover our codes for countermeasures.

So if they landed too hard, it would burn up the little boxes, and we'd tweak them so they wouldn't burn up when they landed too hard. And so sometimes when they crash, they wouldn't burn up, so then they would get our boxes and figure out our codes and then they'd get shot down because they'd figured out how to go around our countermeasures to avoid our bombs and stuff.

And so we were always sending – you know, and so they were like human guinea pigs. You know, they didn't know when they had figured out this stuff. And so they were all on drugs and going up high because they just didn't know when they'd hit. Sometimes the only resource they had was to try and outrun a missile with their plane. And so it was kind of crazy.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you feel like you were in a safe place where you were?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, I was relatively safe. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And you had – within the military you've traveled also within the United States, right?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. I was in Biloxi, Mississippi, where I went to electronics training. And then my first station where I was stationed was SAC [Strategic Air Command] headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska, and outside of Omaha, in Bellevue, at Offutt Air Force Base. When I was there they called it General's Row. That's where they have the command station, you know, the plane that's up in the air at all times in case the president gets killed there's a set of generals up there that can run everything. That's General's Row up there.

MS. CORDOVA: You must have had a phenomenal education in this situation actually.

MR. MOROLES: Well, like I said, it opened my eyes to a lot of things and gave me a much broader view of – I realized that I didn't want to be in the service. I couldn't have people tell me what to do, how to dress and how to – I mean, I was an objector in the sense of authority while I was there. My hair was long and I was always getting in trouble. You know, I just knew that I wasn't going to stay over four years. [Laughter.] I knew it.

MS. CORDOVA: That was clear. [Laughs.]

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. I knew that I was going to do my time and I was going to get out of there.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you get in trouble?

MR. MOROLES: Oh, yeah. All the time. They'd send me to go get a haircut and then come back, and they'd say, you go back and get another haircut, you know, because I was just – I mean, I was always trying to get around the rules because I didn't feel like they were necessary. Right from the beginning I felt jilted in the Air Force. When I was in basic training, everybody went in like for a job fair. What are you good at? So I went in and took a test for an illustrator for the Air Force, and I got the job. They only have two medical illustrators in the whole Air Force and they needed one. One was retiring and I got the job.

And they said, after the – weeks later they said, oh, you can't have that job because we found this letter in your file that you're in a critical career field. You know, I could have been an artist in the Air Force. I could have been doing –

MS. CORDOVA: Well, now, I don't know if I quite understand that, because you had tested, they had decided –

MR. MOROLES: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. CORDOVA: So they had decided that you were a valuable electronics person, but you also were clearly –

MR. MOROLES: But I was also with a whole bunch of guys that didn't know what they were going to do. You know, they just joined the Air Force. And so I got to go in and test with them. They just test everybody. And they didn't know about this letter that got me out of the Army into there.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, I understand.

MR. MOROLES: And then so I had just finished advertising commercial art. You know, college things. So, man, I took that test and I was just – I mean, when I came out of high school, I had a portfolio. I had ads for cameras and then all these things and layouts. And, you know, I could go into any design place and say, here's what I can do. And so –

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. And the Air Force did not have the flexibility to recognize that they could shift your career?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. So I felt jilted after that and I just was like, all right, I'm here, I'll do a job, but that's as far as it goes.

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: So when you came back – so what years exactly were you –

MR. MOROLES: Oh, before I forget –

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MR. MOROLES: – while I was in the Air Force and in Thailand, I took a famous photography course out of New York with all famous photographers who were curating our photographs. And so I was taking – they would set an assignment and I would go out and shoot temples and things with a large medium format camera and develop them myself and everything and send them – print it and send them in and get critiques while I was in the Air Force.

MS. CORDOVA: So that was like a correspondence course.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, correspondence. Famous photographer course, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, taught by who or –

MR. MOROLES: It was all by famous photographers. They would send the portfolio to a famous photograph and he would look at it and write his comments on it. I wish I had –

MS. CORDOVA: And, yeah, did you keep the comments?

MR. MOROLES: I don't know. I don't know. [Laughter.] Like I remember some of the photographs. I'll have to dig through and see if I can find some of those.

MS. CORDOVA: So you took pictures of temples and –

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: – what?

MR. MOROLES: Mainly temples because, I mean, you're in the jungle.

MS. CORDOVA: What kind of camera did you have with you?

MR. MOROLES: I had a Yashica 120 and we had a whole darkroom. And it was – it kept me from – everybody was going downtown and messing around and everything. It kept me kind of grounded and on base because it was crazy – craziness kind of out in the towns.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. So you maybe were keeping a little bit to yourself too?

MR. MOROLES: I had a small group, very small group, of – well, in a darkroom you're by yourself. Totally by yourself. And I – spare time we'd play squash. I mean, we'd play squash. I know people don't know what that is, you know. It's handball with a different racquet and stuff. And we did diving and stuff. It was just things to pass the time whenever you had time.

MS. CORDOVA: So the photography was entirely on your own time kind of work?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, spare time. Because we would work like three days straight, 12-hour shifts, you know, then you'd be off for three days. So you would have a lot of time, but you worked long hours straight. On the days that you worked, you just slept and worked. But the days you were off, you had a lot of free time. You know, so you had a good chunk of time to do whatever.

MS. CORDOVA: Had you played with a camera much before that?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. I was yearbook editor. [END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A] I was the photographer for the yearbook. I was the designer for the yearbook.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you feel like you came up with this very strong sense of design?

MR. MOROLES: Well, advertising is – they show you, you know. You have to compose and – you have to compose in a camera. You're always composing, you know, your layout, design sense. I think it was mainly from Reese Kennedy from high school, I think.

MS. CORDOVA: And that just sort of sensitized you to various ways of laying things out?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. I think it was high school from that time.

MS. CORDOVA: And I was going to ask you, what were the exact years that you were in the Air Force?

MR. MOROLES: I was drafted in 1969, when I graduated from high school.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. So 69 to 73?

MR. MOROLES: Seventy, 71, 72, 73 I got out.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And then -

MR. MOROLES: And I got out a little bit earlier. I got out three months early out. I was the first person to get an early out from Southeast Asia. The war was starting to wind down. And it was crazy. Nobody was asking for "off" because the war was going on. But I was - it was like the end was coming near and they were starting to - wanting to get rid of people. So they let them get out to start the fall semester on time.

MS. CORDOVA: Because you already knew that you wanted to start school?

MR. MOROLES: No, I just wanted to get out of the service. I didn't want to go to school, but I did go to school because I got out to go to school. I wasn't going to go to school but I had lost my businesses and everything, so I was kind of starting all over, so I didn't know what to do. So I enrolled in a school. The only school I knew of was where I used to catch a bus to go home from downtown, which was El Centro [El Centro College, Dallas, Texas]. There was a community college downtown, which was El Centro.

And so the funny story was that I enrolled, coming from Thailand, but I didn't get a counselor, you know, because again I showed up out of the norm. I was always kind of out of sync with everything so I didn't get a counselor. So I walked up and they were offering arts so I took art classes. I took 12 hours of art.

I was having a blast. It was the best. I mean, a whole semester of nothing but art. And the next semester I signed up for 12 more hours of art. I had a whole year of nothing but art, you know. I mean, I was just in heaven.

MS. CORDOVA: And what were you taking?

MR. MOROLES: I did nothing but art all day. Painting, drawing, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: What were you creating?

MR. MOROLES: Just life drawing and, you know. And then the teachers - and then the counselors like called me down. They said, well, what are you doing? And I said, I'm just taking art. And they said, who's your counselor? And I said, I never got a counselor. And so they're, oh my God, you know. And then I had to pay back - not the money, but then the next semester I had to take English 1 and 2 the same semester, biology 1 and 2 and history 1 and 2 all in one semester. Twenty-one hours.

And then the next semester I had to take 3 and 4, and 3 and 4 of history and government. I mean, it was like major payback. But I was so hooked on art that it was just like I had to. I mean, I had to endure anything to get back to art. So that was just - I just totally hooked back into it.

You know, I was always the best in class because I was older than everybody else. I didn't think everybody was taking that as serious. And I always felt like I had to work harder because I was older, and I think, you know, people didn't take it very serious. They tried, but they wouldn't try very hard.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, how did that second year go, that very painful year of -

MR. MOROLES: It was hard. But I always was keeping in mind that I wanted anything to get back to art, because I was hooked by that. I was totally hooked.

MS. CORDOVA: So by then you knew that was what you wanted as a career somehow?

MR. MOROLES: I knew that I had to get back to the artwork and so I endured all that stuff. And then I got - I received my associates after that second year of doing that, and then enrolled at North Texas State University [Denton, Texas].

MS. CORDOVA: How did you pick there?

MR. MOROLES: Well, it's one of the biggest art schools. And I think it has the largest fine arts department now. And I took my first sculpture class there. And I received my B. That's where I received my B.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. Now, tell me about that sculpture class, because I guess that was a very challenging class.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, it was a very challenging - and he was the best teacher that I had while I was at school. He

gave me the B and –

MS. CORDOVA: Who was that?

MR. MOROLES: Mike Cunningham. And he was a sculptor and he ended up leaving the school. I think it wasn't formal enough or something to go with everything that was going on in there. But he was – you know, the tough teachers, I think. And he just said that he just didn't give As, you know. And I didn't know that till later, you know, but it challenged me. Because I got straight As through art.

You know, I always felt like I could do anything. And so when I got this and didn't get a good grade, I said, I've got to take it again. And so I got into trying all the different arts, wood carving and casting and casting marble and concrete and, you know, everything, welding. And then I tried stone carving. I thought that was interesting.

And then I wanted to try some harder stones, so I rented a trailer and drove up to Oklahoma, you know, and brought back some big pieces of granite. And then my tools would break as soon as I carved on it, so I had to order new tools just for the granite, because you couldn't use any marble tools for granite. And so I had to order special tools and everything.

And so I started working on it. And as I was working on this granite, you know, you wear glasses and goggles and you wear a mask and you wear earplugs, because this thing is real loud. And if it gets real hot, you wear gloves. And you wear a scarf to keep it all out of your hair. And then you wear a coat and you wear steel-toed shoes, you know, because this thing could fall and just chop your toes off.

And so you're like in a cocoon, you know. And I was working on this thing and just, you know, working, working, working. And I remember one time I just finally – you know, you get so tired you have to just stop. You know, it's just so draining. And I stepped back and the dust settled, it was starting to go down, and I realized there were about 30 people around me, you know, within this close, and I never knew anybody was there. And they were all just around me in a circle, just watching me. It was like when I realized that I was totally taken by this stone, and there was a connection. Not a connection with the people but a connection with the stone, that I could not see anybody or what was going on around me.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. But you had found your own environment.

MR. MOROLES: Well, I had found that this thing was pushing me. It was more pushing me than me pushing it. It was relentless and it was a struggle. And I found that I liked it. I liked that it pushed back. Everything else that I went through, was kind of easy.

MS. CORDOVA: It seems to me that the stone was kind of disciplining you in a way.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. It was.

MS. CORDOVA: That you were seeking that discipline again maybe.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. It was teaching me a lesson. [Laughter.] It still is. It still is.

MS. CORDOVA: And you'll fight back. [Laughs.]

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. I was resisting. And it's still winning. I mean, look. This was at the quarry. This was really closed up, but this was just like if you took a really sharp scalpel and just – I mean, the skin, when that happened, it just opened up so big and poured blood like you wouldn't believe. I stopped it and I couldn't believe I did that. I went to touch the granite, I cut my finger too with the same stone. You know, I did it again right there at the same place. I couldn't believe it. Granite is so – it's like a razorblade. It's like a razorblade on edge like that. I mean, that's how sharp granite is.

And so like, you know, I finally found some tissue and I was hiding that I was bleeding because if they see me bleeding, they won't let me get back in the quarry, you know, because it's too dangerous. So I'm hiding that I'm bleeding, trying to – you know, holding my hand down because it's just pouring out. Everywhere I'm going I'm tracking blood, but lucky it's outside.

MS. CORDOVA: And this was just recently?

MR. MOROLES: It was last week. [Laughter.] But I heal pretty good. But that was really nasty looking, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: You must have, I mean, been in some very serious or precarious situations working with this kind of material.

MR. MOROLES: Well, I don't know about the granite, but I've almost died about five times. I've kind of stared it

down, gotten up. But I've fallen off my sculpture, 30 feet, and I've had some pretty serious accidents.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you ever sort of permanently injured yourself?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. Yeah. I mean -

MS. CORDOVA: Like what are your - here you've got your scar on your -

MR. MOROLES: Well, I fell and I came down 30 feet and I couldn't walk for a year. And my ankles are still purple from it, if you can see right there.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. When was that?

MR. MOROLES: That was early on, in the early '80s in Colorado. It was on top of a 30-foot fountain.

MS. CORDOVA: Was that at the Foothills [Foothills Art Center, Boulder, Colorado] place?

MR. MOROLES: No, this is at Sienna Square in downtown Boulder.

MS. CORDOVA: Sienna Square.

MR. MOROLES: And I fell down and just - yeah, I just saw my life kind of flash in front of me. And after I recovered, I just felt like I'd gotten another chance. So I came out like gangbusters. You know, it's like there's no tomorrow. Because I felt like I'd really gotten another chance to do stuff. So then I had another accident. Every time it happens I feel like I've got another chance, and so I come out - and the first time was when I was actually when I was an apprentice when I was working in Italy.

MS. CORDOVA: What happened there?

MR. MOROLES: When I was in Italy. Well, I'd gone over there to work in the quarries and figure out what direction my work was going to go after apprenticing with Luis Jimenez for a year. I went over there and was working. And my favorite artist in the world was Noguchi. And I didn't know, but my friends had arranged a dinner, to have dinner with him one night. A friend of ours had a quarry, had a beautiful studio on the side of a mountain where the granite - where the marble land was all quarried. He lived in a quarry, this artist. Fonseca. Famous artist. Gonzalo Fonseca. An incredible artist. And he was friends with Noguchi and Noguchi hung out in Pietra Santa. And I was waiting for Noguchi to leave so I could move into Noguchi's space at his studio.

MS. CORDOVA: At Fonseca's studio?

MR. MOROLES: No, no. In a private studio downtown. I was recommended to go work in the studio, but it was - I came into the summer when everybody comes in to do their commissions. And they get help with the stone and everything and they do their big things that they have to take back to America or wherever. And they were working on a piece. And so when they all leave, you know, I was going to be able to come back. So instead of going to a studio, I ended up in a private studio by myself.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you find out about Pietra Santa?

MR. MOROLES: When I was in - I can remember exactly when I found out. I was just starting out at El Centro. I wasn't really there, and I was just taking some art classes and didn't know anything about sculpture. And they showed - an artist came in, a resident, came in to do a lecture, and they were showing pictures. And they said the stone capital of the world is Pietra Santa, and if you're going to be a sculptor, you have to go to Pietra Santa.

I saw that and had no business in doing sculpture. I didn't - you know, just was there. And when I got into sculpture, I remember the person saying - and then, yeah, everybody else would say that this is where you go. But it was somebody - I went to a lecture. You know, someone that - and that was the good thing about El Centro, was they would bring Thomas Wolfe in. They brought all these fabulous people in. And so I realized later on that my theories and kind of the basis from my art was established mostly from these artists in residence. These people that would come in and do lectures. And just a short encounter, short, intense encounters with people, not really my teachers, but actually these different people that they would bring in.

In college, at North Texas State they brought in Paulo Solari. Paulo Solari was like - you know, he's the futuristic architect. The building Arcosanti over there north of Phoenix there, next to Sedona or someplace. And, you know, he came in and lectured, and I was just like, wow. And because of that little encounter, I ended up designing my first hardbound book and my first year of doing sculpture, you know. And it was designed after his talk and after his book. I mean, that's a direct relationship to that whole encounter.

MS. CORDOVA: What was your first hardbound book? What are you referring to?

MR. MOROLES: I have a book, Moroles Book, that is a limited edition book and was done in my first year when there was nothing to show hardly. And I thought, if I'm going to be a famous artist, I need to have a book. I was so naive. [Laughter.] But a book, that's no problem because I was yearbook editor. I know how to produce a book. I know things.

And, you know, it's a plan. You see it and you plan it out. I could see my whole – the problem was I could see where I am now, but I couldn't see the people accepting what I do now. So I had to kind of frame them to accept what I do. So that's how I saw it.

MS. CORDOVA: So you felt you would probably need some sort of translation for your work?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. But there wasn't anything to say. So my book came out and it had three words in it, *Moroles: Granite Sculpture*. And that's the name of my book, *Moroles: Granite Sculpture*.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. The book that's about to be released.

MR. MOROLES: And the first book was called *Moroles: Granite Sculpture*. And that's the only words in the book. And it's a picture book and it's four-color, black and white. There's like four different colors of black and white. And it's printed by Meriden Gravure Company that does artist collector books up in Meriden, Connecticut, and it's linen cover, just the whole thing. And it's a beautiful little book.

And you look at it and its like looking – everybody looks at it and it's just a very Japanese book. It's very simple and forward. It was expressing what I do without showing everything, you know. So that was like my first. And it was like a \$30,000 deal that – I didn't have \$30,000 but somehow I just had to do this.

MS. CORDOVA: I find it amazing you were already planning your book alongside the sculptures that you were outputting.

MR. MOROLES: Oh, yeah. It was only pictures of a few sculptures, because I only had a few sculptures to show.

MS. CORDOVA: But you –

MR. MOROLES: But there were no words in it because there was nothing to say about me yet, because I was just starting. And then I had my first museum show, and this kind of goes with that. And so I walked into the Amarillo Museum and I went, hi, do you remember me? I was hear with Luis Jimenez. I was his assistant. And I just want to leave you these slides.

This is – I'm now doing my own work and I walked off and left. And by the time I got home, they called and said, you know, you want to have a show? We're having the Texas Conference of Museums here in three months and we want you to have a show. I said, sure. I didn't have any work but I said, sure.

And so, you know, I'm like – you know, so I quickly make some work and get together what I do have, and I have a show there because all these museum people are going to be there. And so I think, well, I can't have this show without having something to remember it by, to mark the occasion. So I went to the museum, I said, what if we do a poster? Will you help me to produce a poster? And they said, okay, we'll help you.

And so they had a designer that they had worked with, so they put me in contact with her, and I worked with her and we designed this poster that won poster of the year of all museums, that design. And so we produced this poster and I went back and I said, okay, you said you were going to help me. So they gave me like \$100. It was like \$10,000 or something.

MS. CORDOVA: And that was your first museum show?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. And so like I just gulped and went on and did it. I didn't have \$10,000 but I did it somehow. And I was always like sticking my head out so I could get jobs. I've always done that. And I always felt like when the market's down, that's when you need to work harder and produce a lot more work, because everybody's sitting back and says, I can't do anything. I don't have money, I don't have whatever. I've always gone against kind of the grain of things.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. I mean, in looking at your records or your sort of résumé about that kind of work, I have to say I was contemplating how many shows you were having in 1981, 1982, 1983 when you'd just gotten out of college, when you'd just gotten your MFA. I mean, that's almost unheard of to see like the number of shows, like, I don't know, five or six in '81, five or six in '82, that kind of thing.

MR. MOROLES: And I didn't know anybody. I didn't know. But I knew that if I didn't go out and do something, that it wasn't going to happen. That if I stayed in my studio and worked, it didn't happen. And because I told you that I go by a lot of the things that I decided to do was because of these short encounters with people. I feel like I

give back that way. So I do – a lot of what I do is I’m on a lecture circuit where people invite me all over and I agree to do a lecture, because I feel like I’m giving back the way – you know, if you can turn one person on, you’ve done an incredible thing. Because I was turned on.

So I feel that I can do that more than I can by being a teacher, you know. Because being a teacher is so – I mean, I’ve done it a little bit in workshops and it’s just totally exhausting. I don’t know how you could really be a teacher without just burnout, total burnout. So my hat’s off to teachers because I don’t know how they can do it.

MS. CORDOVA: All right. With that I’m going to put in another tape, so we’ll break this right there.

[Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right. We are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Jesús Moroles on July 19th, 2004. This is session one and disc two. And Jesús I thought I would maybe begin this tape by asking how the Luis Jimenez apprenticeship happened.

MR. MOROLES: Moroles.

MS. CORDOVA: What did I say?

MR. MOROLES: Morales.

MS. CORDOVA: I’m sorry.

MR. MOROLES: That’s okay. But just – everybody wants to change it. We have a big problem with our name?

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, yeah?

MR. MOROLES: All the – they’re all Moraleses except for us. We’re Moroles.

MS. CORDOVA: I grew up with a Morales in high school [Laughter.].

MR. MOROLES: But I tell everybody, everybody used to be a Moroles but it’s just easier to say Morales, so you know how names get changed. So we’ve kind of held on to ours.

MS. CORDOVA: So your preference is –

MR. MOROLES: It’s not a preference. It’s the way it is. Moroles.

MS. CORDOVA: Moroles.

MR. MOROLES: Uh-huh. Instead of Morales with an A.

MS. CORDOVA: I knew that, so I’m sorry.

MR. MOROLES: No. It’s just a pronunciation thing. But people, they say, your name’s wrong.

MS. CORDOVA: Sure.

MR. MOROLES: They say that my name is wrong, that it should be an A.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, they correct you?

MR. MOROLES: Yes. They always change it. That’s why I was saying that everything written, it’s wrong. And so they always correct it to A.

MS. CORDOVA: So do you know the history of your name? Is there any sort of family history to it?

MR. MOROLES: Well, there’s not. We haven’t ran into hardly any Moroleses everywhere, and we did find another family. It turns out they come from the same little neighborhood in Monterrey as my father. But other than that, we’ve never researched our family history past that. In Spain there are a lot of Moroloses, M-o-r-o-l-o-s. So Morolos is – there are Moroloses but different spellings.

MS. CORDOVA: What’s your mother’s maiden name?

MR. MOROLES: Bautista.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh so, of course, that’s your –

MR. MOROLES: And I used to use that up till this last year. I took my mother's maiden name as my middle name just to give her credit. And now I got rid of it. You know, I think it's in enough places. But now I'm shortening it to Jesús Moroles. And then in a couple of years I'm going to change it, shorten it more, to just Moroles.

MS. CORDOVA: Why? Why are you moving on this?

MR. MOROLES: Well, you know, if people say Moore and Noguchi. I grew up in the service as Moroles. And if you were Smith, you were Smith. So, you know, it's just by your last name. So I'm used to that.

And in China, you know, they gave me a Chinese name. You know, La Mor. And in China – it doesn't mean love in China. It's different. La in China means old. And your last name – your first letters of your first name, Mor. La Mor is – that's my name. And they call me – they see me, they say – or if somebody's talking when I'm not there, they say, I wonder what La Mor is doing. You know, so it's – they respect me, because anything with old in the name is with respect.

MS. CORDOVA: So maybe that will be your final name.

[Laughter.]

MR. MOROLES: It already is. I'm already starting on our next book, which is an English and Chinese book.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. MOROLES: But I'm sorry, your question was – I'm sorry.

MS. CORDOVA: No. I'm glad you caught me, because I did it unconsciously, which just goes to show – because I'd thought about it before actually, so there you go. Old habits die hard.

MR. MOROLES: But it's – we have a big problem, yeah, with newspapers and everybody changing our name. We sent a letter explaining that it is Moroles and everything and they just say, it shouldn't be and they correct it.

MS. CORDOVA: But that does bring up this other issue that we sort of mentioned before, that you feel like you've often been misquoted in the press. What do you feel like has been most taken out of context or what would you most want to correct or what was most upsetting to you?

MR. MOROLES: I don't think there's any one thing. You know, I think that – I can't even remember what it might be. There are so many things, you know. You can't read anything without there being a misquote, you know. It's that bad. And how it all gets sorted out, I hope that my book will straighten some of that out since I'm publishing this book. And I tried to have it as correct as possible, so I hope – and, you know, a lot of people copy your work. You know, that's a problem too. And so we've never had anything really published before, so this in a way will give us some history to when things were conceived.

And when and how, when people compare me to Noguchi or whoever, I'd like them to take this book and show me which pieces are the ones that are – are the ones that look like Noguchi's work. There is nothing in there that does. But it echoes these feelings which I think is a compliment. But I can't say that you can look at a piece and say, okay, that was the next step that he was going to do, or that's a direct copy or anything like that. I don't think that that's going to happen, just to set the record straight, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Because I know you have mentioned him as an influence, so in that regard then you feel your work is read through him. Is that part of what –

MR. MOROLES: I think that's the closest they can come to connecting with someone, you know. And I always felt like I would have been – I think it's just as good that I didn't ever get to meet him. Actually I'd never finish that story.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. I was going to come back to that.

[Laughter.]

MR. MOROLES: Which was that – I was – it was a surprise. We were going to dinner, to Fonseca's home studio in the quarry, and while we were getting ready and getting wine and things in the next town, Viareggio, I was in the backseat of the car while we were running errands to go to this dinner. And Fonseca knew that – they'd told him that my favorite artist was Noguchi – had invited Noguchi – to meet Noguchi. So he was coming to dinner. And I was in a fatal car accident that afternoon that almost – it was one of my other seven lives that was exhausted there. But I had a car that ran a stop sign and hit the car where I was sitting. I was in the backseat and actually almost died.

MS. CORDOVA: So you were in a stopped car? In a parked car or –

MR. MOROLES: No. We were driving through an intersection and a car didn't stop at an intersection. The Italians are horrendous drivers. And the other horrendous thing is to never go to an Italian hospital. It's known worldwide that you don't do that.

MS. CORDOVA: What happened?

MR. MOROLES: Well, they took me in an ambulance to an Italian hospital, where I proceeded to bleed kind of internally, and finally I was carried out of the hospital and to an Air Force hospital after I couldn't walk anymore. And I had lost so much blood, and they were able to get me back on my feet.

MS. CORDOVA: What kind of injuries did you sustain?

MR. MOROLES: It was head injuries, I'd broken my nose and had broken something inside that they would put these like tampon things, you know, these things in your nose and after a few days they would pull them out and I would shoot blood across – every time my heart would beat it would shoot a stream of blood across the room. And so then they would put them back and then a few days later they would try it again. But the whole time they had put this in there I was bleeding internally so I'd lost all – to the point where I couldn't even get up any more. So literally the second time that happened they actually carried me out of the hospital and I was admitted. They didn't want to take me to the Air Force hospital because I already had been – I'd been to an Italian hospital and they didn't want to touch me, you know, and I'd been contaminated.

MS. CORDOVA: Was this a U.S. Air Force hospital?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, in Italy. Since I was a G.I. they took me and I was – and it really turned out to be a good thing because when I got out – when I got to Italy I just started working and I never got to see Italy. So when I got out they said you can't work because any kind of pressure would open this back up so I had to take it easy. I couldn't – if I'd lift something it could just open this wound up. And so I got to go traveling and see Rome and Florence and Venice and, you know, I hadn't traveled. I went straight there and was working and I had no time to look up and smell the roses.

MS. CORDOVA: So you were finally a tourist.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, I finally got to see Italy. I just went there directly and was working.

MS. CORDOVA: And what did that mean for you? What was that experience like?

MR. MOROLES: It was, you know, I hadn't been really other than to the town and seen artists working, and I didn't really like seeing artists working because I didn't want to be influenced by the others. And that's why I ended up getting a private studio where I was by myself. And so I didn't want to see what everybody was doing, I wanted to see what I was going to do.

And the way the factories over there worked – the art factories – is every 10 feet is another artist and on this side of the building is every 10 feet there's another artist. And the owner, if it's Sam or whoever, the famous guy who owns the place, he assists you to do your pieces, you know. If you need to turn it or advice get a big stone or, you know, they're there to help you facilitate whatever you're doing with your sculpture. And so I didn't need that. I needed a direction.

I didn't know whether – I'd just finished working for Luis Jimenez, a figurative artist, for a year and before that I had just taken my last piece in college which was abstract and sold it immediately, you know, for thousands of dollars. Here I am getting a big check and I'm apprenticing for \$3 an hour for Jimenez and I've thousands of dollars check that I've receive in the mail. And I just, you know, arrive and go, you know, I can do this but I'm going to work for you for a year.

MS. CORDOVA: What was that abstract piece?

MR. MOROLES: My school – one of the pieces that I'd done in school that people had come from Santa Fe and seen my graduate show, my undergraduate show and said we want to show your work in New Mexico. And I said well, I only feel good about my last piece which was this granite piece, and so I agreed to let them take that. So I went with them and installed it and they sold it right away. And so, I count that as student work because I made it when I was a student, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. Was that your first major sale of that kind?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And then you went off to work for Jimenez?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, and I was working for Luis when I received the check and that was for thousands of dollars. And I remember that, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So tell me about making that choice between sort of figurative and abstract work, because you really were in the middle of that –

MR. MOROLES: I didn't know what I was going to do and I remember one of the stories that I like to tell is I was – right across the street from me was a father and son that were stone quarrying, and he loved Mexican art. He did the reproduction of the *David* that's in the square. You know, the real one is in the academy, inside protected, but the reproduction is outside and he did that. And so he just – you know, he's a painter but he can do the stone carving but his love was Mexican – Tamayo, Siqueiros, you know, Orozco.

MS. CORDOVA: So this was in Italy?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, Italian loved Mexican, and so he related to me. And when I was over there I pushed the Mexican side of the family because Italians love Mexicans. They didn't like Americans. So me being a Mexican American I kind of leaned a little heavier on the Mexican part and it was – Italy was unbelievable.

The families would take you into their house, they'd take you into their restaurants, the restaurants would take you into their back room and you wouldn't even order, they'd just give you food. Then they'd bring over the watermelon that everybody had picked at, the family had picked at, you know. You know, like part of the family. It was just incredible.

But this guy, we got a good rapport going and everything, so one day when I was looking over the gate, you know, it's like one of those horse gates that has a bottom and a top, and they kept the bottom closed because everybody wanted to come in there. And so you could kind of look in but you couldn't come in, you know, because they just wouldn't get anything done. And so I was looking over the top, watching them. There's not so many kids that were doing stone carving. They didn't want to get dirty, it's hard work. There are no more Italian carvers in Italy.

All those guys died and all the kids, they don't want to do any hard work and they don't want to get dirty. They all wanted to be in their Vespas and their Ferraris and so there are no Italian carvers any more. It's a tradition that's dead. The only carvers now, stone carvers, are all the foreigners that came down to learn from these guys and took it back to their countries. So it's a dead art in Italy.

MS. CORDOVA: But living elsewhere.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. The foreigners that have brought it, taken it. And I'm self-taught, by the way. No one was teaching stone carving in school. When I got there I had no teachers, I didn't go to a big studio, I was in a private studio by myself. And so if there's anything about my work that's different it's because I don't know any better, you know, because I had to figure it out myself and it's not from anybody showing me the correct way of doing it.

It's just that I figured out – you know, it comes off easier this way, you know. And so that's – if it looks different that's what I kind of attribute it to because I don't know any better. But – I forget what we were talking about.

MS. CORDOVA: The Italian sculptor that was across the way and –

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. And so he one day just walked over to me and had a stone, pure white stone because David's made out of white stone, and he opened the gate and said this is a chip that when we tear off, get down to – that we took off the David, you know, and I'd like for you to have it. And I was just like whoa, you know, this is fabulous, because it's hard to find this white marble. And so I took it across the street and I brought it back that night and showed it to them, I finished it.

I just like got it and carved it and I carved a hole in it – a vessel and made a little hole at the bottom of the vessel. And this vessel had like – it was like a stone like this and I carved into it like this. And then at the front of it where it was still the wall of the torn slice of marble was all torn, I actually carved these fingers like these, and I carved it so thin, the back side of this hole, that you could see –

MS. CORDOVA: Did the hole go all the way through?

MR. MOROLES: No, it was just a hole in the –

MS. CORDOVA: Just the shallow –

MR. MOROLES: It was a vessel. It was a hole about this deep, but on this side was the wall of the stone. And so I carved the front of this with kind of lips on it and so when this vessel filled up with water and it would go over the edge and these fingers, and it was carved so thin that you could see light through these – it was so thin and smooth.

MS. CORDOVA: Like a waterfall.

MR. MOROLES: It was a waterfall. And then when you wet it, it became even more translucent. And so, you know, I just made this perfect little thing that ended up – because when I didn't have enough money to bring my art that I made there back, I took all my art pieces and took them in the mountains and put them like under waterfalls, and just put them out in nature and left them there and paid to bring back tools instead of bringing back the pieces. And so water goes into this thing and it fills up and then runs over the edge and makes this beautiful see-through thing. And then at the bottom of this vessel is a little hole, so it's like peeing water out of the bottom and then has this water running over the front of it. So it's just this juicy, crisp thing that I had carved just a part of it and made it this thing.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you ever been back to see if your pieces are still there?

MR. MOROLES: I'm sure they're not there.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you ever think about selling them or were you just – or there wasn't even that opportunity?

MR. MOROLES: No, it was just beginning and we were just studying, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean it's a lovely gesture actually, to just take these –

MR. MOROLES: I took pictures of it and I hope to find the pictures. I saw the contact sheet somewhere and maybe the negatives are somewhere too. I've seen it, I just have to – I keep thinking that when I have my next accident that I'll be in bed, I can look through all this stuff and read my books and, you know, do print making and stuff like that.

MS. CORDOVA: I think you'll just be much more driven to do your next project, so I don't know.

MR. MOROLES: But not when I'm recovering. I'm like scheduling my recovering time already.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. So sort of maybe back to that aspect of being self-taught, maybe University of Texas. I guess I said you had got an MFA but it was actually a BFA that you got.

MR. MOROLES: BFA.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, so just to be clear. And what was that because you were there, you were having –

MR. MOROLES: Oh, you were asking about teachers and then Mike Cunningham was a good teacher. He left shortly after my class. And there was another fellow whose name escapes me right now, he was the metalsmithing teacher, and it almost came to me again here – but he was very hard. I may have gotten a B in metalsmithing. That might be the only other B I ever got in art.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, yeah, but you didn't become the metalsmith.

MR. MOROLES: Kind of. We are working with metal out here, stainless and things, and we do use metal in all of our armatures and, you know, everything needs a support, an armature. But he was one of those very hard teachers that – I think the hard ones are the good ones. You know, the easy ones are the worst ones, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And it seems to me you respond to – [END TAPE 1, SIDE B] – having a little bit of your own control, right, or a little bit of your own ability to be creative in a situation, but I mean I'm just thinking of these teachers that are being very disciplinarian, or disciplined with you, but also in a situation where you have the opportunity to create all these things of your own imagination?

MR. MOROLES: In the beginning you have to do exactly what they want you to do, and the way they want you to do, and my minor was Industrial Arts. Industrial Arts was again very traditional old timer teachers that were very set in their ways, and you had to do it this way. I think I actually got my only other B in Math too, from these old guys that – they were tough, you know. They wouldn't let you get away – I just thought it was so easy for me that I just skated and then I – oh, a B, oh my God, you know. And I thought I could do anything, and come out, it wasn't like as good as they wanted it, you know, so that's good experience, you know, to be sent back there once in a while and put in place, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, and how about your colleagues – the other students there, were you interacting much with

them?

MR. MOROLES: Oh yes, I had a friend in my sculpture department, Bill Pochil, who was a German – very big guy, figurative – totally figurative Michelangelo type of, you know, wanted to do all the figures with all the veins showing and you know, very Germanesque kind of strong. He wanted to do big things, also like I wanted to do big things. And you know, we were kind of soul mates there and got a studio together there for a while after college, shared, you know, actually lived together, in Waxahachie, Texas.

What happened was when I – when I was in college, we had one of our last shows at Mayfest in Fort Worth, and the Mayfair out in the park. And the university had a booth where we could show things, and Bill and I, we had our – some big outdoor things, we showed them out in the park. And this fellow walked up and he said, you know – and I had one of my grad pieces there, and he said, you know, I have – I’m a bit of an artist myself and I make drawings and sandblast them, you know, do tombstones. My family has an old shop, 100 year old shop in Waxahachie, Texas. And so I said, yeah, great, and so I went off and apprenticed then for a year, and I went to Italy for a year, and then I came back, and I said okay, I’m ready to start.

And the reason I left Italy, because I could have stayed there and started my art career there, but then Italy I found out, that when they say mañana in Italian, I thought that it meant the same in Spanish, but in Italian, mañana means ‘never’, you know. In Spanish, it means “tomorrow”, you know, we’ll do it tomorrow or something. But when they say mañana, it’s like “forget it”, you know.

And so you couldn’t get anything done that way because I mean the banks wouldn’t work. The trains wouldn’t work. The mail wouldn’t work. You know, they get behind in the mail and they burn all the mail and start all over again.

And I mean it was just trying to get a career started, and I was so Americanized by then, I mean I was FedEx, and you know, I liked the phones to work and everything. And so I decided to come back and when I got back here, I was like “What do I do now?” I’ve got to start something.

And so I remembered this guy that had said, “I have a –” so I went to go visit this guy in Waxahachie. And he had an old factory that used to have, you know, like 30 or 40 employees for big blocks of stone and cranes just like here, but old, old factory. He had just himself and one helper, and all the machines were not working. And he just worked on the very front of the – would get all the stones all cut out and polished. And he would just put names on them, sandblast the name on them, draw the pictures on them, you know, flowers or something. And so I told him what if I come and rent a space from you, and I can buy some stone from you, and I can fix up these machines? And so I actually moved into the factory building, and I – I don’t know if you ever saw the movie, Sally Fields in that movie about the cotton with the black guy that was her helper and her husband had died or gone off or something, and she had to raise the crops, it was –

MS. CORDOVA: Something of the Heart [*Places in the Heart*], or something –

MR. MOROLES: Yes, exactly. Well, that was really Waxahachie, about Waxahachie, and it was about discrimination and everything, and it’s still today kind of like that way. Because when I moved in there, I couldn’t – didn’t know what to do because it was whites only bathroom, and whites only water fountain.

MS. CORDOVA: In 1980?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, in this building, and so I moved into what used to be the colored only bathroom, which was a hole in the floor, pretty much. So I ripped that all out, and built a studio. And bricked it out and put a whole new bathroom, not new but old equipment, and put windows in and cleared out a spot where I lived in this old dusty factory, and made us a place. And then Bill moved in with me and we both lived in this, like Michelangelo-type, I mean, space. Really, you know *Agony and Ecstasy*, we were living that deal.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you ever felt that discrimination has held you back professionally in the things that you want to accomplish? Have you ever felt that that has been a problem for you?

MR. MOROLES: I don’t look or think that way, I don’t – I think that – to back up a little bit, I kind of discriminated the other way, because I don’t think of myself as – and want to be a Chicano artist. I don’t want to be Mexican, a Latino artist. I don’t like the branding of how people pigeonhole you, you know. I – you know, my style, they say, oh, you look like you’re doing Aztec things or Mayan things. And excuse me, the pyramids are on the other side of the world, and as a matter of fact the biggest pyramids in the world are in China. And you know, how can you say, you know – it’s just they want to put you there, you know? I mean they’re going to put you there anyway, you know, but I always see my things, I mean, I can’t see how this is Hispanic, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: This coffee table that we’re looking at with the raised –

MR. MOROLES: With the fish, but I always think of myself as international, you know, more modern and international style than anything else. And I try to stay away from all of those pigeon-holing and things. I think that's why I do more things outside the country now, in China and India, Egypt, because I – because I always say, when people try to put my pieces in those arenas, is that to me, older than my history, you know. They say that my father is from Monterey, and I was born and raised in Texas, you know. And if I'm anything I'm kind of a Dallas artist, you know, because that's where all my education was. And so I'm a product of Dallas, and – but to me a stone has a much older history than my history.

Stone has always been wanting, and used, throughout history for certain things, and if you see something in it, it's because you're seeing the history of the stone. The stone has always been used for post, and lintel and doors, you know, always. And here it is again, you know, through history, and through all civilizations, and not through one civilization but all. And so I think that the history of the stone keeps coming out more than my history, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I definitely – I see your struggle, what I would guess is that you've come to artistic maturation at the same time as there has been a lot of opportunities to sort of create a space for a Latino artist, and that you are then constructed, or brought into that space just because of your upbringing or your ethnic heritage, right. I guess then what my next question would be is has that given you any opportunities, any professional opportunities that you're glad to have had, or has it really just been a – too much of a pigeonholing to be worthwhile?

MR. MOROLES: I probably have gotten – stayed away from it so much and detached myself from it that I probably denied myself some opportunities, but I don't regret any of that because I do not want to be anywhere close to that scene. You know, I like more the name *Americano* than *Chicano*, or any of those, you know, terms that are more for action, you know, or for change or for, you know. We're *Americanos*, you know, all the way from Canada to the tip of South America, you know. But we're here, we kind of stole the name *Americans*, and so anyway.

But no, I think – and I have had some opportunities. I was in the first Peter Marzio – getting back to the Peter Marzio who when he was in the Corcoran [Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.] envisioned this Hispanic exhibition. And finally when he was at the Houston Fine Arts [Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas] was able to exhibit an exhibition called "Thirty Hispanic Artists of the United States," which was the first of all those exhibitions, that because of it created such an uproar, because all the people who were denied in that exhibition, you know, it was actually the match that got everybody else off their butt to do something and do some other exhibitions.

And so I was you know, lucky enough to be in that exhibition which was totally very different, you know. My work was kind of different than a lot of the flavor of that, but I think that it was a good balance.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, I mean I think one of the ways that your work has been described as being different even when you're being put into that category of Latino art or Hispanic art, or whatever you want to call it, is that it's abstract often in cases where a lot of the other work is more figurative. And so maybe even going back to that, working with Luis Jimenez who does a lot of figurative work, and what were you taking away or what was he bringing to you, or what were you rejecting, even?

MR. MOROLES: I mean one of the shows in Dallas is "Moroles Figurative["Moroles Figurative." McKinney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas, Texas]," the last 25 years – 24 years of figurative work. So, you know, people don't realize that I have been doing a figure, and you saw the self portrait there. You know, I mean there is a history there, people just don't get to see it, and they don't get to group it together and see that there has been a continuity.

But if you're not at that one exhibition when I show these things, you know, which is impossible to do, you know, that you don't know that side of me. But you know, I have that part that's been coming out and some pieces that I wasn't even – that people wouldn't even let me borrow back to show some of the form figurative things, you know, because people get so attached to them, and they don't want to lose their piece. They don't want anything to happen to it, I mean they really get attached to it.

MS. CORDOVA: What was a piece you wish could have been included in that?

MR. MOROLES: Well, there was one called *Home on the Range*, you know. It had a cow and a horse trough and a sunset. I mean, is that figurative? I mean, you know I mean, it's home on the range, you know. And that was one.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you do that?

MR. MOROLES: I don't remember, probably in the late 80s. But Eckhard Pfeiffer owned that, who was the president of – what's that other computer company, Houston-based company, not Microsoft, but – not Dell, but –

MS. CORDOVA: Not sure.

MR. MOROLES: Compaq –

MS. CORDOVA: Compaq?

MR. MOROLES: Compaq, is that a computer –

MS. CORDOVA: Um-hm [Affirmative].

MR. MOROLES: Probably that one. But anyway, so you know, I do have that figurative side, and I love figurative things, you know Marino Marini, you know, that's – Lucas Johnson, [Jose Luis] Cuevas. I have these things to remind me of stuff, you know, that's why I collect, you know, to remind me of these things that I like.

MS. CORDOVA: So is this maybe a flaw in curating that you see a lot of your work represented but it's only a certain type of work, and this other work is –

MR. MOROLES: You know, I curate all my shows. I don't know if people know, but I'm very – I'm a control freak. And I come in and when you say you want to do a show with me or something, you want to show me or something, you're literally giving up all your rights as a gallery or as a whatever, curator or whatever. Because I'm going to come in there with what I want to come in with. Because at the end of the day, it's my reputation that's at stake, it's not the curators, it's not whatever, it's mine. And so I end up getting what I want to do, and I have nobody to blame but myself, you know.

And so I finally had a figurative show, and I just had it, to go with all the different shows, because the problem with having a show, a lot of shows in the same town at the same time, is that each show has to be better than the last show, and it has to be different. You can't do the same thing at all the places. And so to have five or six shows in one place, major shows, big shows, not just a few pieces – I'm talking about major shows – you really have to do, you know, you really have to do something different, every time.

MS. CORDOVA: So this is why we're finally seeing a figurative show from you because you're finally allowing that side of your work –

MR. MOROLES: I finally had enough exhibitions to show the full range of a lot of different things that I do. I mean I do a lot of different things. I work in a series but I work in a lot of different directions, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: So I – and I keep going back in time a little bit, and first of all, again, because I keep getting swayed away from this.

MR. MOROLES: Oh, sorry.

MS. CORDOVA: No, how did you start working with Luis Jimenez? How did you meet him and how did that happen?

MR. MOROLES: Well again, I told you that all my influences are really from short encounters. He came to North Texas State, the first time I met him, and did a workshop. And I was volunteered to help him because he asked for the best student to go help him install at the Fort Worth museum, and he was having a show there.

MS. CORDOVA: That was a big show of his, wasn't it?

MR. MOROLES: Yes, he was showing a big – some big pieces there, and so I was able to help him, and spend a little bit of time with him. And by the end he liked the way I helped him, and asked me when I got out of school to come up and help him, and work with him. And I said well, I've got plans, I'm going to Italy, and work. And he said okay.

And so when I finished college and I got ready to go to Italy, I realized that I didn't have any money to stay in Italy for any amount of time. And so I packed up my bags and I jumped in my – I lived in a bus in college, I bought an old 1949 – looks like the Bluebird. I don't know if you know the Bluebird bus, the motor homes? They look like a bus, you know. But I bought this old bus and I converted it into a living quarters and everything and lived in it while I was in college, and fixed it up, and took the engine out and completely overhauled it and put it back, and stripped all the paint off it. It looked like an air stream trailer, you know, those aluminum things.

And when I finished school I just jumped in it and drove down to El Paso and showed up at his doorstep and said, "Here I am." And his wife answered the door and said, "Oh, he found you." And I said "What?" And she said, "Oh, you don't know anything about it? He's in Dallas looking for you."

And so we decided that I would help him for a year, work with him for a year, and then I would go to Italy,

because I needed money. And as soon as I got there, I got this check for my piece that sold, you know. So if I would have gotten that a little earlier I might not have shown up at his place.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. But you – what about that experience?

MR. MOROLES: What I like to say about that experience is that, you know, I was working there, and I recommend that for a lot of people because I don't think college is the right thing, or a Masters program I don't think is the right thing for a lot of people. I think a lot of people, a hands on experience is sometimes better. But some people need all that structure and everything, you know, especially with all the art that is going on now. It's made out of trash and that needs a lot of words to back it up. I think they do need the MA if they hope to be able to come up with enough bullshit to back up the junk that they're doing. That's how I feel about what's happening in art, but – if you don't get the sense.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes.

MR. MOROLES: So – but I went to – when I worked for him, I worked for, I think, \$2.75 or \$3.00 or \$3.25 or something like that an hour, with all the overtime. But there was still \$3.00 – it wasn't double time, it wasn't like time and a half or anything, it was still \$3.00, you know. But you know, if you didn't do anything but do that and you didn't have any time to go spend it, you know, it still added up to a lot of money, because we would work two or three days straight without sleeping and, you know, it adds up.

MS. CORDOVA: With those hours, yeah, sure.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, and so it was the best experience, because I got to live the life of an artist without ever being an artist. I got to eat, sleep – eat art with him and go to lectures and load shows and go to museums and do workshops and prepare for commissions, everything except, you know, be accountable for it. And so when I came out and started to do my own things, in one year I was ahead of anybody that would start with me, I was five years ahead of them in one year, and in two years I was 10 years ahead.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, that does make sense to me, I can see how – so yes, in 1978 you graduated, right, and then you did this one year apprentice with Luis and then you went off to Italy, right?

MR. MOROLES: Yes, for a year.

MS. CORDOVA: For a year, and you came back and you just got all these things done.

MR. MOROLES: Because otherwise you're just kind of like doing it and waiting for things to happen, and it doesn't happen that way. You know, you have to make things happen. I mean, I went down and went to Brownsville to the local art fair, and carried my things in the back of the truck and stood them up, and won first place down there and got you know, \$100 so I could go to Ingram to enter their show, and won first place there and got \$250, you know. And it wasn't from sitting in my studio, it's from getting my butt up and showing the stuff.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you find out about these opportunities, what steps were you taking to –

MR. MOROLES: I just read about them in a magazine or heard about them, you know. I acted. I wasn't like, you know, I acted on stuff. I took my stuff to Houston and stood it up in the back of the truck and Betty Mooney come out here and take a look at this, you know. I mean that's what I did.

MS. CORDOVA: And then – I sort of asked you about this off the tape, but I'd like to put it in there, because what I've noticed is you've had so many exhibits in New Mexico and of course later we'll talk about the cultural center that you opened there, but maybe just discuss this relationship you've had with New Mexico?

MR. MOROLES: Well, when I had my undergraduate show when finishing college, someone saw, Andy Jenkins from Santa Fe, from Shidoni Gallery, was having an exhibition, the yearly exhibition that they did at Lambert Landscape Company in Dallas, a big landscaping company that would do these outdoor shows. And Shidoni was primarily a bronze casting, you know, place in Santa Fe, and had an outdoor gallery which was really good because it was the only place you could take a big piece and not have to like take it away after a month of showing it. You know, you'd have to come back and move it. You know, most galleries don't have an outdoor space so you'd have to – so handling, dealing with big work, so my first piece when I came back from Italy was a 12 foot piece. So, you know, you don't want to be moving that around too much, so you know, it was a good place to come back to.

And when I was there and showing with them, Luis Jimenez was there, Fritz Scholder was there, John Henry had just showed "ConStruct" was there with all these big names. And so you know, it was a decent place to show, and so I thought it was good. And so I happened to it because someone saw my work and took my – and invited

me to show over there. And so actually I got known and got into the museums in New Mexico before I ever got into the museums in Texas.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, am I correct in thinking that your first big museum commission was for the Albuquerque museum or was there something before that?

MR. MOROLES: Well, actually maybe Bill Bomar might have been a small commission for his museum in Albany, and I don't know what year that was. I'll have to check the date on the Moonscape that I did for him, that was at the White House exhibition.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MR. MOROLES: But the year of that will tell you when I was commissioned, and to see if that was before, but the piece at the Santa Fe museum - back up a little bit - was made for an exhibition at Laguna Gloria [Austin Museum of Art: Laguna Gloria, Austin, Texas].

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, so -

MR. MOROLES: And there was an exhibition where I did three outdoor pieces for Laguna Gloria, and it was *Mountain - Granite Mountain, Pyramid Mountain and Concave Mountain*. And I turned *Mountain* into *Fountain - Mountain Fountain*, when I got it installed into the Santa Fe museum. And then *Concave Mountain* turned into a fountain when they got bought by the Corpus Christi museum [South Texas Institute for the Arts, Corpus Christi, Texas]. I've got some information on Corpus here. You can see it there. And I still own *Pyramid Mountain*, but those were the three pieces at a different outdoor exhibition at Laguna Gloria, in the early 80s, probably '83, maybe.

MS. CORDOVA: So you would consider either the Laguna Gloria commission or perhaps the - is it Bill Boman?

MR. MOROLES: Bill Bomar.

MS. CORDOVA: Bomar?

MR. MOROLES: Bomar.

MS. CORDOVA: His commission is probably your first?

MR. MOROLES: Those weren't commissions for Laguna Gloria, that was just an exhibition.

MS. CORDOVA: Right, no, but your sort of first major work with a museum or -

MR. MOROLES: My - I have to think about that. But my first - I think my first museum exhibition was Amarillo, where I did the - when all the museum people came out for that.

MS. CORDOVA: That was at the Amarillo Art Center?

MR. MOROLES: Art Center, yes.

MS. CORDOVA: And I have that as 1982.

MR. MOROLES: Yes, I think it could be.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. MOROLES: And so I was just trying to think if there were any other museums that were before that. Maybe it was either the Old Jail [Old Jail Art Center, Albany, Texas] or it was Santa Fe, could have been it.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay -

MR. MOROLES: But that's a good question, I'd like to research that and see - have the staff look at it and see when was my first real museum opportunity for something.

MS. CORDOVA: Right, for a public commission of that kind. Well maybe just to talk about it because I -

MR. MOROLES: Start with Santa Fe and see if there was something before Santa Fe or before that - see what the chronology is on those two.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, the Old Jail, what did you do for them?

MR. MOROLES: The piece that went to the traveling show at the White House?

MS. CORDOVA: Um-hm [Affirmative].

MR. MOROLES: I did that -

MS. CORDOVA: That was the Moonscape?

MR. MOROLES: Right, *Moonscape 3*.

MS. CORDOVA: *Moonscape 3*?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MR. MOROLES: And later I did a big commission for them, for their new addition for their building.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. MOROLES: But it's just the checking of the dates on those, I'm not sure. I've got a feeling that maybe Bill Bomar was the first. I tell you, he was like my patron saint, in the beginning.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I think I have *Moonring* as created in 1982, though I didn't necessarily have a show for it -

MR. MOROLES: Well, that's the year. That was created for his commission, so that's the first one so far.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, and what about the creating of the *Moonring*, it's a lovely piece.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, I have a black and white picture in my studio when I was creating that, a nice little black and white that I'll have to dig up. It would be a nice one.

MS. CORDOVA: Now you don't draw, right, or you -

MR. MOROLES: No, I didn't draw anything, he said make me something. Yeah, those are the nice commissions, make me something.

MS. CORDOVA: And so how did you start?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I had some stone and I started cutting it up and - yeah started cutting it up and playing with it.

MS. CORDOVA: And the circle shape just evolved naturally, or -

MR. MOROLES: One of the things about my work is that I use the saw like a chisel, very unorthodoxly because the saws are meant to go across wood, or across anything, just like you saw out there. And what I do, and what is unusual about that piece, is that I push the saw into stone, which is very dangerous for one thing, you're not supposed to do that. So I push it into the stone, and - which is very unorthodox, you know. And so I use that action of actually pushing into the stone and then bringing it up, and bringing it out. And it created - and carving that out made the dome, and then turned around and did the same thing again, and they - where the two circles came together it made that hole.

MS. CORDOVA: Now -

MR. MOROLES: So it was just the action of doing something that wasn't regular.

MS. CORDOVA: What made you think that was a good idea? [Laughter].

MR. MOROLES: Well, I had to invent ways of - because I didn't know how to carve. I never - even when I was in Italy with all the famous carvers, you know, of history, the Italians, I never looked at anybody carve. I never studied it. I never asked anybody any questions. So I just learned how to remove stone the only way that I came up with, and one way was to use the saw. And so that was, you know, it was carving but I was carving with a blade.

And the thing about it is that when you're carving you can feel where you are when you're carving, but when I cut with the saw, I can feel where that blade is. And so I know where the bottom of that is, when it's in the stone. I know, I can feel where it is. And I can go to the next one, I can feel and sense, you know, so I could see, I can envision what it's doing inside the stone. And that's how I felt real comfortable with doing that, because I knew

the tool, and I knew I was playing with the tool.

MS. CORDOVA: I guess, yeah, growing up with your father, you had that comfort, sense, with tools, right, that ability?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. I just invented my own – I never saw it done before, but I mean I knew it was possible.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you seen people act out your technique now, after you? Does anyone try to sort of follow in your footsteps in that?

MR. MOROLES: I don't know if they're echoing my techniques, they just – they can do the same things. You know everybody always asks me, you know, how long does it take you to do that? And I always tell them 53 years, you know, because to copy something it doesn't take any time at all. You know, but I'm not copying anything, so it takes all the experience I have of my 53 years to come up with that idea, you know. So it's a combination of all my experiences that drive me to that one piece. And so it's – it's not how long it takes to copy something, but that's not the question because I'm not making copies unless I'm doing those duplicates that are out there that were the first time they were done in addition. But even those are not the same, if you look at them. They are unique pieces. We're calling them addition, but there's no two alike, you know, so –

MS. CORDOVA: Right, these are the pieces for your book?

MR. MOROLES: Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. MOROLES: And so, you know –

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I mean I just wondered if you –

MR. MOROLES: I hope you know now.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean it is fascinating that you've sort of, you know, taken on this technique that is fairly dangerous, but that has, you know, given you so much. It really has given all of us so much. Your work is out there and I was just curious if you had seen other sort of younger people, or the next generation using this technique. I know you have your own intern out there working with you.

MR. MOROLES: You know, there are people that are copying the work, you know, directly copying. I mean taking the photographs and sending it to the factories to have the same things made, in different parts of the world. I found that – you know, I have done five projects in China. China, you know, you do anything in China you know it's going to be copied, you know. I mean you could just – you know, and that's the reason they invite you, is because they want to learn from you. They're open to it, you know. We, in turn, we don't invite people over, you know. We, the richest country in the world, you know, and all these other countries are bringing people over because they know the benefits of having – we are so closed-minded about everything, and we think we're the end of the world, you know, and they do a lot more than we do.

And I think we're the ones that are backward, that's the whole reason for my art center, my cultural center, is it's for promoting artists from other countries, and promoting other countries, because we're not doing it.

MS. CORDOVA: That's a great opening for my next question, which is really about in the early '80s I see that you had got these visual arts fellowships, I'm not really sure what those were?

MR. MOROLES: That was a big help, you were asking what was one of the big boosts. I think one day when I was in New Mexico and somebody said, "You won an ABA award." What is that? I didn't apply for anything. He says, "No, you don't apply for it, you just – somebody put your name in or something, and you get \$15,000 to do whatever you want, and you get a traveling exhibition that's going to the Chicago Contemporary Art Museum, it's going to the Brooklyn Museum, it's going to the DeCordova [DeCordova and Dana Museum and Park, Lincoln, Massachusetts]," it's going to New York."

And I'm going like what did I do? And he says "Well, we just think you're doing good stuff," you know. Thank you, wow, that's cool. So that was a big break, so I went and paid my bills, that's what I do, I pay my bills, I had bills, I had that book, I had my poster, I mean I had bills.

I didn't do anything exciting except pay bills, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: But –

MR. MOROLES: It was a big boost.

MS. CORDOVA: So it enabled you financially at least to pay those bills, and also –

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, taking the financial burden off for a little breather of a time, you know, which is what artists need, you know. They need that breathing time. They need the creative time, you know, not to think about the laundry and the bills and whatever, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: So what about – what was the show that you created to tour on that?

MR. MOROLES: Actually I think somebody curated it, you know, they asked –

MS. CORDOVA: You relinquished control?

MR. MOROLES: Well, there wasn't that many pieces to pick from, so they didn't have a lot of curating to do, it was in the beginning, '82?

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, exactly.

MR. MOROLES: And there was, you know, it's the pieces that are in my book that I'd love to show you, that hard-bound book that I did, and you know, so there wasn't that much to pick from, you know. And you know, what was movable, what could travel and what couldn't travel, so –

MS. CORDOVA: Do you feel like there's a story behind each piece that you create?

MR. MOROLES: I would guess so, I mean I don't – I don't put any verbal stuff to my pieces. I don't want to inhibit the viewer, you know. You limit them by putting these parameters on it. And I think that if you – the less said, to me, the better. But you know –

MS. CORDOVA: I hear that, I guess maybe it's my schooling speaking. I hear minimalism talking to me or, you know, that sort of idea that you don't want to label your work.

MR. MOROLES: I hear better ideas coming from other people about my work than I do for myself. So why should I impose my thinking on them, you know. I think a kid can see it and come up with much better stuff, or someone very educated sees their own stuff, you know, and so I don't –

MS. CORDOVA: I was –

MR. MOROLES: – put a lot of – a lot into it, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I was just going to ask you, do you – again, maybe you reject all kinds of labels, all kinds of categories, or maybe do you think you fall into that language of minimalism, or is that not at all what you're doing either?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I'm not just putting a number on it, I do – I named the pieces because I need to identify them years later. And so, you know, *Play Scales*, you know, that's a fish, and I know what that is. Someone said "I have one of your *Play Scales*," you know. Or I have one of your hanging discs, I think it's probably black and it has a sun – it's a *Sun Disc*. It's probably a sun design on the back. And so they're very descriptive names so I can put them in a category, and you know. And they usually, because I work in a series, they fall into a very broad series, you know. If it's a *Moonscape* that means its round and it's rocks. That's very general. So –

MS. CORDOVA: So you're willing to give them just that name –

MR. MOROLES: For my purposes, it's really not –and some people look at it and come up with the same name. So you know, I mean, go figure. I don't – you know, so I think there's some universal images that just remind people of certain things, and for me it's just a reminder, for my identification purposes. I don't like labels on the walls, I mean museums hate me because I don't want to identify – I don't want people to look at a label, because it makes a spot on the wall. You know, I guess I'm a minimalist, I guess.

MS. CORDOVA: Maybe. [Laughter].

MR. MOROLES: I don't know.

MS. CORDOVA: Or just very sensitive to what you want, and not want.

MR. MOROLES: Well, look, after I put everything up, and then I stand back and I look, you know, and I see a show of pedestals, and I see a show of labels, and an exhibition of lights, and I really don't want people to look at the lights or the labels or the pedestals. So if you notice, I don't have any pedestals in my show. I don't have labels and I try to cover up and hide the lights.

MS. CORDOVA: And again, maybe that's a very specific sense of design, that you have a very set idea of what you want to see as part of your larger environment.

MR. MOROLES: Or don't want people to see.

MS. CORDOVA: You don't want people to see, right.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, I want them to focus and not be distracted. I want them to see what I want them to see, the way I want them to see it, yeah, definitely.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I have a lot more questions for you but I don't know if we should - I see I'm getting to the end of this tape. Should I break it for today or should we go a little bit longer?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I'm free, so if you want to -

MS. CORDOVA: Shall we maybe -

MR. MOROLES: - break - do you have dinner plans or anything, or -

MS. CORDOVA: I don't - well I mean -

MR. MOROLES: If you want to keep going, do another tape, or - I'm fine.

MS. CORDOVA: Let me stop this tape and me ask you a few more questions and we'll see. Okay, let me stop it.

[END TAPE 2, SIDE A]

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, we are recording. This is Carrie Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Today is July 19, 2004, interviewing Jesús Moroles, and this is Session one and disc three. And Jesús, you brought a book, and this was your sort of idea, your original hardback book that you had generated in - when was it again?

MR. MOROLES: An early age, a very early age.

MS. CORDOVA: Early age.

MR. MOROLES: And it has also a dust cover that goes on it, too.

MS. CORDOVA: And you created this book from scratch, or how did -

MR. MOROLES: It's actually a photographer, a minimalist photographer that I saw in Houston. I fell in love with his work because it was just totally minimal. And I was lucky enough to get designers to design the book, who were pretty good - very good designers, and that he had worked with before, and so put together this book of works from my first year or two.

MS. CORDOVA: I have to say it has that feel of like a Phaidon art book, one of those beautiful sort of - the publisher is Phaidon, I think it's British.

MR. MOROLES: Oh, Phaidon, yes, right.

MS. CORDOVA: It sort of had that blocky feel to it. And so yeah, beautiful photographs, and so this is what your work was looking at, like, early on.

MR. MOROLES: The beginning, the first, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So how would you say your work has changed over time, like what are the obvious things.

MR. MOROLES: It's the same. I've digressed, I think I wish I could go back to the early days, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Really?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I kind of am going back, I'm getting a lot more cruder. I kind of forgot what my mission statement was, you know. My mission statement was kind of - to kind of ease people into accepting myself as almost like being a Zen artist where I could pick up a stone and just by putting it down, and with the way I put it down, that that would be the art. I mean that would be, in a minimal way that that - that I could take a stone and I could break it in half and I could put it there and because I put it there, and because I broke it the way I did, and the way I put it there, and so in a way, is that minimal?

Yeah, that's very minimal, but I didn't think that I could convince people in the beginning to do that, but I felt that way in the beginning. And I went to an exhibition when I was just in Waxahachie, and I went to the Fort Worth Modern Museum and I saw all the pieces that I had in my studio sitting in the museum. And a famous German, [Ulrich] Ruckriem, had had a show there, and he had gone to the quarry where I get my stuff, and he had the same – picked up the same pieces and had them in the museum. And I had the same pieces lying in my studio. And his pieces were very, very minimal and I already felt that I could do that, but I couldn't do it because I didn't have the name and I didn't have the reputation.

So I had to kind of – I knew what I wanted to do but I had to work backwards at it and kind of create these little kind of designy kind of pretty kind of things.

MS. CORDOVA: Pretty kind of – pretty kind of –

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, architectural and you know, and kind of ease people into accepting kind of what I'm doing right now, is kind of a little bit more minimal, very rough, tough kind of stuff, that people I think are getting used to. I don't know if you saw my latest Broken Earth series, but –

MS. CORDOVA: I didn't see that.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, it's an ad in *Art News* this month, and it shows that, that it's kind of gutsy and going back to where I think that I wanted to be.

MS. CORDOVA: So a lot more of the rough surfaces that you were using at the very beginning of your sculpting, where –

MR. MOROLES: Yes.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, I did notice that that had shifted over time, that you had a lot more polish as you progressed, or – not literally, but the stones became much more polished. And that must have I mean served a purpose too, as you were developing your work, I mean that must have been sort of rewarding as you were doing it.

MR. MOROLES: It – you know, to me it's just something that you have to kind of go through to get to where you want to be. So it was just – I was just going through these steps and these kind of creating more of a base, more of a collector base and more of a critical mass.

MS. CORDOVA: Now, I know something that is often mentioned in terms of your technique is that you listen to the stone or the stone speaks to you. I think I read that in multiple articles. When did you feel you were – is that, one, an accurate quote? Am I reading a misquote? And two, what – is that still true? When did you find that?

MR. MOROLES: Well, there's a couple of different ways to look at that, because I often say that, you know, when I – my journey always begins at the quarry, when I pick out the stones, because I could bring any stone back. I don't just get them to send me stone. I actually go and pick it out, and I always say it's like going to the beach. And it's like when you go to the beach you don't bring all the shells back. You pick out which ones you want, for what reason you know, it's because something about that shell. And so I do the same when I go to the quarry. Something about it is saying take me home, and so right there, they're speaking to me to begin with.

Now when I'm working with them, again, we don't play any music in the shop, you know. Any time – I'm listening all the time. When we're in here, I'm going what's going on now? You heard that boom, boom, boom. I mean they're speaking to us, they're always speaking to us.

MS. CORDOVA: I even felt the house vibrating a little bit.

MR. MOROLES: Oh, yeah, definitely. And so we don't play music out there, and we listen to the saw when it's cutting. You can hear when you're doing something bad, and something bad is going to happen. You have to be on your toes, you know, to react and counter react. And so yeah, I'm always listening to the stone, you know, when you're cutting it, tearing it, burning it, whatever.

MS. CORDOVA: And was that just a natural impulse from the start, or did it take a while to learn that skill?

MR. MOROLES: You know, whether you're listening to the stone or just feeling the stone, communicating with the stone, somehow you're communicating with the stone, you know, either by feeling or touching. You know, you're somehow communicating with it, the texture, the weight of it, the counterbalance of it. You're listening to where it wants to be, where it doesn't want to be, how it wants to be, you know, so –

MS. CORDOVA: I have no idea what this is, but have any sort of new technologies helped you change your work?

MR. MOROLES: I'm using the same tools that I used that first year. I have not gotten any new tools. And that's why - and maybe I pride myself on the fact that I have not figured out what it is or how much more I could do, because I am still using the same one or two tools, and able to keep doing new stuff with the same old tools. So why go and buy a laser cutter and a water jet cutter and all these fancy tools, and wire saws that do all this stuff for you when I haven't figured out all the things that I could do with this just one tool? You know, so - and my tools are not European tools. They're not German, French and whatever. These are American made tools, American saws, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I think I read you got your first diamond saw in - was it 1981 or '82, somewhere in there?

MR. MOROLES: Early, yeah, in the early '80s.

MS. CORDOVA: And that must have been a big -

MR. MOROLES: I didn't even use it, you know, I bought it but I couldn't even - I didn't have a place to put it. You know, because I was in the factory.

MS. CORDOVA: Right, with your -

MR. MOROLES: I bought it because I knew I could use it but I couldn't put it up, because the one thing I didn't have was a studio. And the most important thing for an artist is a studio. Without a space, without a space that you feel comfortable in and without a space that someone is not walking in and saying "Hey, you left the water dripping," or "You left the light on," and all of a sudden you're in the middle of thinking of your final step of your big opera, and then all of a sudden it's gone, because somebody came in and said some stupid little thing, you know. You know, you just get rid of all the distractions, and have your space where you can create.

And so I didn't have that space, so I bought that equipment because I knew I needed it and I knew I would get the chance, but finally I moved down here and moved out of that kind of racist kind of space.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, freeing in multiple ways.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, and I mean the people were very, very nice, but you could just feel that it was there, you know. The ghosts were there, you know, and I was living in the black quarters, you know. I was living and showering in the black bathrooms, blacks, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: So how did you finally - did you come straight from Waxahachie to -

MR. MOROLES: To Rockport.

MS. CORDOVA: To Rockport? You did.

MR. MOROLES: I cleared this land here. It was just like across the street, solid trees, you can't walk through the yard there. That lot over there you can't walk through the land because it's so - so many brush and things, that you know, we cleared it. And I'd like to leave my things to the Smithsonian, eventually, and I have some great archives of videos, of the first - where we started. We were working just on a slab of granite with the saw sitting out with no roof on it or anything, and an old crane that was lifting everything, and I'm running the crane. And that's - I've got probably 20 videos, you know, that just need to be, you know, upgraded and downloaded onto something more modern and preserved. And if they were ever put in sequence, it would probably make a nice little thing.

MS. CORDOVA: So that was about 1983 then, that you came here to Rockport, is that correct?

MR. MOROLES: Yes. Actually out there on the ground, is written - inscribed on that first slab of granite, January 28, 1983. And then every year we poured another slab of 30 feet by 30 feet, and you can count the number of years we've been here by that, the number of slabs we've poured.

MS. CORDOVA: That's very poetic. Why Rockport?

MR. MOROLES: I moved here to be close to my parents, so they could keep an eye on me. You know, I grew up leaving home when I was drafted, and then gone for four years, then went to college for four years, and then was an apprentice, and was gone for - and then I went to Italy. So I was gone for 10 years, and so it was the first chance that I could kind of get back, and at least I get to see them when I'm changing suitcases when I come home, because I tell everybody that I live in an airplane.

MS. CORDOVA: I've actually read that.

[Laughter].

MR. MOROLES: No, no.

MS. CORDOVA: And how did your parents end up back here, because -

MR. MOROLES: They built a summer home here.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. MOROLES: While they were still living in Dallas, they wanted to retire here, and they built a little house here, and so when they did - my father finally did retire, and he moved here.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And did they - so was that -

MR. MOROLES: So I moved next door to them and brought the land, you know, here and then started buying the lots and more lots and more lots.

MS. CORDOVA: That was my question, if they had moved - if they had picked that land that is right next door to you right now?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, that's where they were and I moved here next door to them.

MS. CORDOVA: I see, and then you just kept sort of buying the area around here?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, my father said you need to have some space around you, you know, so you can kind of control your environment.

MS. CORDOVA: He said that?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: It seems like a working principle for you.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, and he's right, you know. I like having that buffer, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And you - I had mentioned this but you had spent some time here in Rockport before as you were growing up, is that correct?

MR. MOROLES: Right, when I was 13 years old, as I reached 13 years old, when I was this tall. I haven't grown any height-wise, but I've widened, width-wise. But I was this tall when I was like in fifth grade, and so you know, I was - would come down here and work for my uncle who lived across the street here.

And my other uncle lived right over here where I'm building that building. And I bought that property when he passed away, but - and I would come and work for my uncle who was a master mason from Mexico. And so he would build concrete block homes like this. My parents - he built my parents' home.

He would build a whole house, put all the walls up in one day himself, you know. He could lay all the blocks, each block he would put himself in one day. He was a madman. He was just incredible.

MS. CORDOVA: It runs in the family.

MR. MOROLES: But somebody would have to be mixing the concrete and that would be me, you know. And so to keep up with him, he was a rough taskmaster, you know. We'd be out in Holiday Beach over here down the road, digging out ditches in the clay, in the water, in the clay, you know, just sinking in and everything, you know, trying to dig that stuff out to do sea walls, and boat ramps, anything concrete, you know. And so that was very hard work, but I liked it because it was like hard and permanent, semi-permanent.

And I think that's why I like the granite, because of my working here and building - he built some hurricane homes. They will withstand hurricanes, and I like the idea of that long lasting permanence, and so I gravitated to that. All the desks in our office, you know, are granite, not countertops, I'm talking about three inch granite slabs, you know, blocks, and so I like that hardness.

MS. CORDOVA: You know, I think I recall it was maybe something about Italy, how you said that it was also the reason you wanted to leave Italy was because you wanted to get back to granite, that Italy had been mostly about marble?

MR. MOROLES: It was, I don't remember - I don't know that that's true, that might be one of those made up things. I don't ever think - no, I didn't think of granite at all when I was in Italy. I never worked on any granite while I was there, and when I came back I didn't know where I was going.

So that wasn't - I don't think, now that I think about it, no, I wasn't being drawn back to granite. I was drawn back to work, and I still didn't know what I was going to do. But it's funny, when I came back the first piece I did was a fountain, and that piece I made with that guy was a fountain. You know, thinking back. And I had no desire to make a fountain, it just came out to be a fountain.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you keep working with water after that?

MR. MOROLES: No, I got scared. I got scared because everybody loved that piece and it was just a beautiful piece, and I decided to keep it. So I doubled the price of it after the opening, and someone who had saw it at the opening went home and got their architect to design a house around that piece. And then she flew him and her back up to Santa Fe to go buy the piece and to go look at it before they purchased it. And they liked it and everything, and then they noticed that the price was double, and they bought it anyway. And that was the beginning of my sculpture career.

MS. CORDOVA: You couldn't keep it for yourself. But actually that's another great quote to ask you, maybe. How do you feel about sort of giving up your pieces or how attached do you get to your pieces?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I didn't finish that one story about the fountain, you know, it was so popular and it was so - you know, maybe I should keep my first piece, you know. And that - everybody loved it so much that I resisted making another fountain because I didn't want to be known as a water feature artist. Even though I knew that I could make another fountain and sell it and make big bucks, I didn't do it. You know, I think it was very easy, again, to be pigeonholed and put into a thing, "Oh, he's the guy that does fountains," you know.

And I do, I have the Santa Fe Museum, the Albuquerque Museum, the Corpus Museum, I mean I have all these museums that have fountains, you know, it would have been very easy if I would have done that in the beginning. You go to him for fountains, you don't buy - you really don't get sculptures. Where does it say sculpture in the fountain? It doesn't, it's a fountain. I want them to look at sculpture, not a fountain. So I made a conscious decision to stay away from fountains.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you finally allow yourself to go back to the fountains?

MR. MOROLES: I can't remember when I went back, but you know, it was not in a big way, it was like I kind of crept back into it, you know. And I made a lot of smaller pieces, made a lot of smaller pieces, decided that I couldn't be making these big things that people couldn't move around, because I was going to have leave them there. You know, what are they going to do? They'd have to call me back when they wanted to move. So I came up with all these pieces, you know, that are semi - you know, three feet or less or more.

MS. CORDOVA: So how movable is a three foot granite sculpture?

MR. MOROLES: Well, if it's the one in the corner, that corner column, you could pick it up, you know. So they could be, you know, four feet tall and still be very light, it just depends. And it could be four feet tall and 10 guys couldn't pick it up, so it really depends. So now back to your question before, I forget, what was your question, I'm sorry?

MS. CORDOVA: Actually, what was my question?

MR. MOROLES: I didn't mean to interrupt you, but as I said, my train of thought is -

MS. CORDOVA: That's okay, we both got on the train. So - but I can take us back to -

MR. MOROLES: I don't know where - I'm sorry.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, the whole train started at Rockport and how you got here, and talking about your uncle. And then let's see, we sort of delved into concrete and then granite and then Italy, marble, granite -

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And how you came back and you created the fountain, you didn't want to be the fountain guy.

MR. MOROLES: And I ended up at that quarry, at the back of Waxahachie by coincidence, and it was only granite there.

MS. CORDOVA: So was granite just kind of by accident, by happenstance?

MR. MOROLES: No, I mean I had a love of it before.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, okay.

MR. MOROLES: But I finally got back to it, but they didn't have granite in Italy, so it wasn't an option where I was working over there.

MS. CORDOVA: And then you must have learned so much about the different kinds of granite that are available?

MR. MOROLES: When I was in Waxahachie?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, even just in starting to sculpt with granite, with going to the quarry, realizing there are other granite quarries -

MR. MOROLES: You know, now I - I went to different quarries and things, but you know, really thinking about it, you know, really only like a handful of quarries, maybe six quarries at the most. And so - but there's granite everywhere, in China, all the countries have granite and -

MS. CORDOVA: Except Italy?

MR. MOROLES: Italy has granite, Sardinia has granite.

MS. CORDOVA: I'm kidding.

MR. MOROLES: Sardinia, but they really stayed away from it at all the places because they didn't like working it at all. It was really rare to see anybody working in granite for art, because marble was the choice: thin, soft, cut it like butter, and you know. So granite was - very few people that were doing granite. I mean that's the thing about granite, I went into a field where there was little competition. I don't know how it happened, but -

MS. CORDOVA: That's your business sense.

MR. MOROLES: I mean there was no competition, you know, nobody liked it. It was too hard, too expensive to do.

MS. CORDOVA: And why, I mean why did you decide granite was for you? Why has it kept your interest?

MR. MOROLES: I was lucky, I was lucky because I ended up back at that factory, and you know, I ended up renting that trailer and going to go get it. I mean I had to make conscious decisions to go and do that. I mean I had to go spend money to go do that, rent a trailer. You know, I didn't borrow a trailer, I rented a trailer. And then having to buy tools for it, I mean I outlaid money that I didn't - I mean a whole paycheck I think of my GI bill went to one tool that I bought. So I mean without ever knowing anything about it, I went into it. I was open. I was always - like I said, I always stuck my head out, you know, for it to be chopped, you know, just waiting for it. What's out there, you know? I was always looking.

MS. CORDOVA: And so - I'm no expert in granite, certainly, but I understand that there are different kinds of granite, that there's like the blue granite that you use, the red granite. What about the process of learning about - do they respond differently for one?

MR. MOROLES: I haven't found any soft granite, you know, they're all hard. And I don't know much about the geology other than it's pushed up from the center of the earth by heat and pressure, and that you can use those two things to take it back apart, and that's what I do. I mean that's as much as I know about it, and that's what I base everything on. I keep it really simple.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, that's simple but helpful.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you - I guess I'm suddenly struck by this image of -

MR. MOROLES: *Lapstrake*?

MS. CORDOVA: Yes.

MR. MOROLES: *Lapstrake* is - and the fellow who - that saw me at Mayfair and invited me and everything, he named that piece *Lapstrake*, you know. He said, "That's *Lapstrake*. It reminds me of *Lapstrake*." I said, "What the hell is *Lapstrake*?" Everybody says, "What is *Lapstrake*."

MS. CORDOVA: Well that's good, because I just learned when coming to meet you what *Lapstrake* was.

MR. MOROLES: What is it?

MS. CORDOVA: Actually I looked it up in the dictionary, and it had something about a clinker boat or something. So this was one of my questions for you, because I know that it became a repeated motif in -

MR. MOROLES: Because of that first piece right there, that was my first discovery and that piece, if you back up one more page.

MS. CORDOVA: Back up?

MR. MOROLES: And see that there, those pieces all right there. The top one, if you can see those – see the white splotches in it, that’s actually a white vein running through the granite. So you see that top piece there, see it’s – it’s spiked, and this was gray, and that was gray. See that one?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MR. MOROLES: And so what I did is I just took a vein, this is white and that’s gray, and this was all gray. And so I just took that one vein running through the stone and I saw – I was looking and following the stone. And I took all the gray away from the sides of it, you know, just like if this were right through here, I took this away and this away, and made it stand out. But it didn’t mean anything unless I put it against the gray, to show it, so I came down here and made another strike to show that this is white and this is gray. And then I made another one and another one and ran out of granite and that was *Lapstrake*.

MS. CORDOVA: So it was really about the positioning?

MR. MOROLES: It was reacting to the stone, reacting to the stone, had this going on in it, so I followed the stone and I invented *Lapstrake*. And because of it, I have now a very prominent piece across from the Museum of Modern Art called *Lapstrake*, 64 tons because I followed this vein in this stone.

MS. CORDOVA: Was it the same process of creating –

MR. MOROLES: No, that – this discovered a series.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. MOROLES: And then I investigate the series. I do it in black. I do it in other granites, and I make it bigger and thinner and fatter, and I start exploring, looking for the perfect proportions to create a masterpiece; you know, trying hopefully that somewhere in there it will culminate in something new.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you get that commission that’s right across from – that was – and when, I guess –

MR. MOROLES: Oh, I got – I have a story to tell you for the record.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh please.

MR. MOROLES: That will hopefully give someone just – a very justified black eye, and show how naïve and stupid we are when we are starting. But a fellow, and I’m trying to remember his name, and we can find it. I want to say Henry. He was a designer, not a designer but he was a sculptor and an art consultant. And Bob Foman, the owner of – the president of – what was it then? It was CBS – E.F. Hutton, a very big powerhouse, you know. Bob Foman was the head of that, and he would get this guy to take him out once a week, and he would scout all week for artists to go look at, and they would go out and buy art for the collection of E.F. Hutton.

MS. CORDOVA: Right, so a corporate collector?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, he was a very savvy collector. Excuse me, he you know – and I can’t – Vasquez. And there was a – in one of the art magazines they had an obituary for Vasquez, or whatever his name was, and we have it written down somewhere, you know that he – you know, he had passed away. He died early, I think fairly young. It might have been AIDS, I don’t know. I don’t think I really knew him, or had really met him.

But he, knowing sculpture said, you know, “We need a sculpture for this plaza.” Bob said, “Yes, we need a sculpture for this plaza,” you know. But that space is owned by E.F. Hutton and CBS. Underneath the block runs this way, the block runs this way and here’s 53rd Street and here’s 52nd Street.

Well, between the two buildings is two separate parking garages: CBS and E.F. Hutton. But between the two there are two walls, that could hold a sculpture. And so I picked that spot, you know, right in the middle of the plaza to put something.

And they went there and they looked at the space, and they said “You know, I know a young guy,” this guy said. “He doesn’t know me, but I know this guy that is – he’s doing great stuff and he’s young and he’s just starting out, but he’s really doing some good stuff, we should consider him and look at.” So they flew me up.

I looked at the space, immediately came up with an idea. They wanted a fountain. Again, somebody saw my

fountain and he said – and I went there and I looked at it, and I said, “I don’t want to do a fountain.” New York is such a dirty place, you’re going to have, you know, the thing, and you’re going to be cleaning it and it’s just going to look bad, you know.

I said I want to design something that you can semi-see through, kind of like a fountain, maybe see trees through it, have the same illusion like a fountain, possibly, but something more vertical. And the big columns of CBS were these huge, huge columns and so – you know, I mean the buildings were, you know, 70 stories high. So it’s like how can you compete with this building?

And then you have the beautiful Saarinen building, black granite, you know, just an absolutely gorgeous building next door to it. So I mean how are you going to compete with the granite of Saarinen, the most famous – who I’m working with his daughter right now on a project, who is a landscape architect in Colorado, Susie Saarinen – but how can you compete with that? So I decided to go this way, instead of this way.

MS. CORDOVA: You decided to go horizontal instead of vertical?

MR. MOROLES: Instead – you’ve got two 70 story buildings, you know, and these massive columns, and so I said, “You can’t go that way, go this way.” And so it brought me back to the Lapstrake. And so I did a model. We had a whole model of the building and set the model in and that’s it. Henry Vasquez I think is the name, the art consultant. And my art dealer in New York was Phyllis Weil, W-e-i-l, and she was the go between. I never met the art consultant. I never met the art consultant. I did get to meet Bob Foman, because I had to show him the model.

And in between the commission, we were installing the commission, we were in the plaza, people come up to see me install this because it’s my biggest thing ever.

MS. CORDOVA: Sixty-four tons.

MR. MOROLES: I had some collectors that came, you know. I had some – my first museum – one of my early museum exhibitions was a lady who saw my work and invited me to do an exhibition at the New Orleans – the Contemporary Museum in New Orleans, contemporary something or other. And her name was – or is – Alexandra Monett, and so there were a few people that were there.

And my dealer comes very uppity woman that was just, you know, just terrible person, and I was introduced by other people and had had a small show with her. And she had gotten this commission for me, saw these other people there and got jealous that other people were there watching this go up, and didn’t pay me for the rest of my commission. So I lost, you know, maybe \$75,000.

MS. CORDOVA: How could she not pay you for the rest of your commission?

MR. MOROLES: She just – she just made up some stuff and just totally did it.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, you set your record straight.

MR. MOROLES: But she just – totally just jealous, jealousy, that somebody else would be there and used that as an excuse to start coming up with all this stuff that was – that had nothing to do with the project and totally kept all the money, which is the end of the money is where you make the profit. You use all the first money to make it happen, and so I never saw any money for the end of the project.

MS. CORDOVA: Was that maybe the most serious problem you’ve ever had with a gallery?

MR. MOROLES: That’s probably the only problem I’ve had with a gallery, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, that’s good.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, because you’ve certainly had a lot of relationships with a lot of galleries.

MR. MOROLES: Oh yeah, and most of the galleries, if you noticed, I don’t leave galleries. I don’t gallery hop, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I did notice.

MR. MOROLES: The reason that I don’t show with those galleries is because they went out of business.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MR. MOROLES: The people die. Hedyt/Bair [Santa Fe, New Mexico] went out of business. I had the last show at Hills Gallery [Santa Fe, New Mexico] when they closed. I had the last show at Janus [Santa Fe, New Mexico]. I had numerous last shows at galleries.

MS. CORDOVA: And you stayed with Davis/McClain [Houston, Texas] through everything?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, and I'm still with them.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MR. MOROLES: And I just – and they both split and I stayed with both of them.

MS. CORDOVA: Right, I noticed that.

MR. MOROLES: And then last year I left McClain – Davis, one of them.

MS. CORDOVA: Why was that?

MR. MOROLES: Well, they have no gallery. They went and they're showing in a hotel room now. They're at the Warwick, showing in the hotel for the last two years, or year and a half. And so I'm not a hotel artist, you know. So I can't go backwards, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MR. MOROLES: So yeah, I'm still with McClain.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, I mean what was noticeable on sort of the number of shows you've had is that there was this continuity with multiple galleries.

MR. MOROLES: The Janus Gallery, the Hills Gallery – Hills Gallery and then Janus Gallery, and then Horwitch LewAllen [Santa Fe, New Mexico], and then LewAllen Gallery, was all the same person that was in charge of all of those. So you can put those all into one category, because there was Arlene LewAllen that was at all of those galleries. So that's really only one gallery.

MS. CORDOVA: I didn't realize that.

MR. MOROLES: So wherever she'd land is like – she took me with her, you know. I would end up there. And I'm still with the gallery and she's already passed away, so I have a hard time divorcing myself, you know, even though it's changed hands.

I'm still having a show, you know I have a show right now there in Santa Fe. And the owners – and I said, well, I always wanted to – the shows are too short, you know. I'd like it to be up for the opening of the Opera, and site Santa Fe and the Spanish market and the Indian market, and they said okay. So now it's up like for months, you know, usually you get two weeks in Santa Fe. It's like New York.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you had any problems in showing at all of these multiple galleries at once? I mean, are there any jealousies or any you know, sort of concerns that –

MR. MOROLES: There were jealousies when I was showing at both of the galleries that had split, you know. There were jealousies, and nobody can believe that I made it work for so many years. I mean I was together with them 10 years probably after the split. Nobody could figure out how can you make that work?

MS. CORDOVA: How did you make that work?

MR. MOROLES: I would have a show one year with one, and the next year with the other. And, I mean, it was confusing, but if you – you know, I was kind of the in between thing. And it's like really I was kind of meat for both of the galleries.

And for me, the reason I didn't pick one of them is because the only person I was going to hurt was going to be the collectors. Her collectors, if I left her, his collectors if I left him, wouldn't want to go to the other. And so I wasn't hurting them, I would be hurting the collectors, you know, and –

MS. CORDOVA: So that's why it was workable for them as well, right?

MR. MOROLES: Well, it's the money, it's about money for them. For me it's about showing work. It's always been – money, you know, I don't have a car. I don't – material things, to me, material things – there's art. You know, if I have any money – I don't have a dime – but you know, I have art, other peoples art. You know, to me money

only allows you to do more things, that's all. The money, that's the only thing it's good for, for me. It just allows me to do better projects, bigger and better and more.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, I mean you've definitely moved over the course of your career into very high end art – the kind of art that is you know, often not even affordable by a single individual. But, you know, it's sort of larger landscaping project or a museum project, or a major corporate project. Maybe I'm – I don't think if I can think of one like that, actually, now that I say it. But I guess the ante goes up in terms of your art, that you've become a very expensive artist perhaps at the same time as not particularly caring about the money, not –

MR. MOROLES: Not as expensive as it's going to be in a couple of months. In a couple of months we're doubling our prices. Absolutely doubling our prices.

MS. CORDOVA: How does that work, how do you make that decision?

MR. MOROLES: It's easy, you just multiply by two.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, clearly.

MR. MOROLES: Just kidding, but I –

MS. CORDOVA: When do you decide to do something like that, or how do you determine your pricing?

MR. MOROLES: It's, you know, up to a point, you know, you do the work, and you make it, and you sell it, and you keep selling it and keep selling it, and it comes a point to where you can't keep up with what's going on. You know, something has to – you're going to either fall apart because you can't keep up with it, so something has to give. And so it's for my sanity I decided that I have to slow down.

Now how can I do that, tell people I'm not making any more work or raise the price and sell the same amount of work, in more time – over time? It's just a survival thing that I – for my – I have to, you know, I don't care if I sell any more work, you know. But I have to slow down, and I have my book coming out, so people will know what I've done. They've never had a chance to see what I've done. Nobody knows what I've done.

[END TAPE 2, SIDE B]

MS. CORDOVA: Do you think that's true? I mean –

MR. MOROLES: I know that's true. I know that if you look at this thing, you'll see things that you've never imagined, you know. And you know, like this figurative show, I just, you know, I think that people are going to go, you know, they go, well, I didn't know that, you know. But these are old pieces, you know, from 15, 20 years ago, you know. So, you know, I just don't think that people know what I do, you know. They don't know the breadth of what I do, and when I did it, you know. And they see these other people doing it and as you start to look back and you start investigating, you see that. We were doing it early on.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, why would that be? Why do you think your work – well, it's not ignored, right? It's not –

MR. MOROLES: I'm not saying it's ignored.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MR. MOROLES: It's just that I've never put anything out, except for catalogues, that have no lifespan. You know, people put them in their collection, they don't get distributed.

MS. CORDOVA: There's no major published work?

MR. MOROLES: There's no publication that has – and this is the first one that's coming out. And so it's the first chance that people will get to see what I do. And I think that we're going to have a lot of work after that. We're going to get shows, we're going to get exhibitions. We're going, you know, have more opportunities. And we can pick and choose, and then we don't have to take everything, you know, and anything.

And my thing was to take anything and everything, and it's worn me out, you know. And if I spend more time on the projects that I want to do, I don't think that's a bad thing. So it's just a survival kind of thing, you know, that I'm thinking of.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. So the prices will double at the same time as the book comes out, kind of, you know, sort of making that –

MR. MOROLES: At the latest, at the beginning of the year.

MS. CORDOVA: Got it.

MR. MOROLES: We'll start at New Year. And I'm taking off for two years.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, you are?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. And so if there's no work around, what are you going to do? I mean, the work becomes more valuable, all of a sudden, even then

MS. CORDOVA: And what are you going to be doing for the next two years?

MR. MOROLES: I'm going to take my parents around the world and take them to China, to live in China and different places that I like to be, before they can't do it, you know, while they can still get around and while - you know, I don't want to be one of those people - everybody says, I wanted to, but I never got around to it.

MS. CORDOVA: That's wonderful. Your parents got lucky, didn't they? [Laughs.]

MR. MOROLES: Well, we haven't gone yet. We're still here. [Laughter.] We're still here.

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: But, even as we just toured their home, which is right next door - or not their home but their sort of yard area that is so beautiful, with all of those beautiful plants that you planted - which is also, I mean, sort of symbolic of your artistry, right? that you've sought out all these different tropical plants and fruits. What did you have? You have papayas, you have limes, you have -

MR. MOROLES: Lemons.

MS. CORDOVA: - lemons.

MR. MOROLES: Grapefruits and bananas and grapes and habaneros.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes. A complete orchard out there. And peacocks.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, yeah. Peacocks.

MS. CORDOVA: So you've really sort of established a special home there with them in mind.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. Yeah. I mean -

MS. CORDOVA: And the pool that you've created for your mother because she wants to swim.

MR. MOROLES: I've never been in there, but one time my mother said, "You have to get in there so I can say you've been in there." [Laughter.] But I, you know, I would love there and do laps. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: So, yeah, this is going to be a much-needed respite for you.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. I mean - but I will be still going and doing fun things. You know, going to other countries and working and doing things that are not so, you know, "you don't have to work" type of things. And I think there'll be enough work to keep all the staff and everybody here. I mean, I'm not closing shop or anything, but, you know, you're not going to see, you know, all the exhibition schedule like you have. I mean, it's been crazy. There's not so many people, that I know of, that keep up that kind of pace for that long.

MS. CORDOVA: I would tend to agree - [laughter] - having looked at all the work that you've done.

MR. MOROLES: And it's not paintings and it's not drawings. We're talking about heavy sculptures. We're talking about environments at these places. You know, we're talking about semi loads of stuff that, you know - I wouldn't call it nerve-wracking, but it is, you know, it's on the edge all the time - [laughs] - you know?

MS. CORDOVA: All right. Well, I think, you know, I don't want to wear you out all in one session, and so I'd really like to sort of, maybe, come back to this -

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. If, you want to save some stuff for tomorrow -

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, let's do that. Let's take a break, and then we'll come back to our new session.

MR. MOROLES: Okay.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. We'll stop the tape here.

MR. MOROLES: All right.

[Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right. We are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Jesús Moroles on July 20th, 2004. This is session two and disc one. And, Jesús, one of the things I didn't ask you about in your earlier life was did you grow up practicing any religion?

MR. MOROLES: My parents - my mother's maiden name is Bautista, and so we're kind of - not really, but - it is Bautista. [Laughs.] But I think that my mother was raised Baptist. And so I think she carries that on in Dallas. And so her grandmother was very - her mother was very religious. And I think my father's mother, also. And I always grew up kind of thinking that Hispanics were Baptists, and everyone would say, oh, you're Catholic. And I'd go, no, I've never been to Catholic church or catechism or anything, so I don't know what you're talking about. And so I think people just assumed. You know, it's one of those things. You know, you're Hispanic, you're Catholic.

And where we grew up, we understood that Baptists were invading Mexico, and everywhere else, and had missions all over South America, Central America, and everyone we knew was Baptist. And so we thought that was predominant religion.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. The Catholic stereotype did not make sense to you.

MR. MOROLES: No. [Laughter.] So still everyone says, you're Catholic. No.

MS. CORDOVA: And did you go to church regularly?

MR. MOROLES: Well, when we were kids, my parents would take us to church, and actually when we were moved up to Oak Cliff, actually, I helped to start its church.

MS. CORDOVA: You did?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. And the - you know, we moved away from the Hispanic part of the projects and away from the church that we were going to, and so we started going to the church across the street in our neighborhood, and it was a Baptist church. But it was all Anglos. And so I started getting my friends to go, and before we knew it, we had a little group together, and they actually got someone to come to speak to us in Spanish. So we started having Spanish church in the other church.

MS. CORDOVA: Which church was that?

MR. MOROLES: That was the Baptist church. I don't know. It was - I'm not sure what the - what was it, First Baptist? I'm not sure, it's probably still there. But it was directly across from Solin la Nia [ph]. It was just in front, so it was all very - and we were about two blocks away from there.

But, yeah, I would go, and instead of the Boy Scouts, the church had their own Boy Scouts. It was called Royal Ambassadors for Christ, RAs. And we did the same things that they did, you know, camping, you know, and tying knots and all that kind of stuff, and camps. But as a kid, yeah, I was brought up in a Baptist church.

And then what happened was we got so big - we got to be as much as the membership, we were outgrowing the place and -

MS. CORDOVA: The Anglo membership?

MR. MOROLES: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Ended up getting our own building, office building. And then ended up getting a church, and then ended up getting a church with a basketball stadium, and everything, and became quite big. [Laughs.] We became one of the bigger churches.

MS. CORDOVA: Out of curiosity, how did the Anglo membership respond to this growing group?

MR. MOROLES: I had no idea what they were, you know, because I was a kid, you know. So it was just happening and this happened, boom! It was just like a - it happened pretty fast.

MS. CORDOVA: And that was sort of changing throughout Oak Cliff, right? Or not?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. And Oak Cliff, you know, turned into little Mexico. You know, it was pretty Anglo and then just got really taken over, pretty much. So now it's a big - like when Miami, Calle Ocho, you know, 8th Street. They have their 12th Street over there and they have their, you know, it's probably one of the most Hispanic

places in Dallas.

MS. CORDOVA: But why did it happen right there in Oak Cliff, do you think?

MR. MOROLES: I think that Oak Cliff was a little bit – it was real close to town, I mean, just across the bridge. There was no room for new development there, so there wasn't a big transition of the high-rise, you know. So it was a lot of old places and apartments that had had its heyday, and so it was affordable housing, I think. But really nice neighborhoods, old, big homes, you know, two-to-three-story homes that were just gorgeous old homes.

And so it had a lot of shop areas, a lot of places that they could – the Hispanics could go in and do stores and record shops. And so I think it was a prime area to reinvigorate with their own culture. I think it was a little bit dying, and all the people were getting old and the kids didn't want to come back into that area. You know, they wanted to be downtown where it was happening, kind of the shift was downtown and that kind of got left out there.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you – you must have grown up speaking Spanish?

MR. MOROLES: You know, we were encouraged not to speak Spanish.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. MOROLES: It was not allowed by the teachers and by the parents. You know, my mother encouraged us to speak English because we needed to learn English. And we did speak some Spanish, but I think we were really – as a matter of fact, when I go a lot of places, people wonder where I'm from because I – it wasn't like a southern, South Texas accent that I had. It wasn't really a Dallas accent, except my Texas would come out every once in a while in a few words – in a word or two – but mainly it was more, again, they couldn't really place me, you know, because of – and then I'd say, y'all come down, – [laughs] – or something like that, and they would know that I was from Texas. But there was – I've had a lot of people say, they can't tell.

I think it was my mother that encouraged us to not – to try to do real good in school and speak English. But we did speak Spanish. I mean, it wasn't like – at home we didn't just totally – we didn't totally forget about it. Although my sister didn't know how to speak Spanish, so since she came to work for me, she had to learn Spanish.

MS. CORDOVA: That's Suzanna?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. So it died, every generation it got less and less.

MS. CORDOVA: Each child?

MR. MOROLES: Each kid. Each one it just dwindled to nothing. And so when she came down here, half of my employees were Hispanic, so that she had to get back into it. Or get into it for the first time actually.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. Because she falls where in the line?

MR. MOROLES: She's last.

MS. CORDOVA: She's the very last? Baby. [Laughs.]

MR. MOROLES: And she was like total Texas accent. It was like, no mistake, you're from Dallas. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: And so at home it was even mostly English?

MR. MOROLES: I think it was a mix. But I think probably more though the English side.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. How about you? Did you sort of retain your Spanish throughout or did you go through a process of not speaking it?

MR. MOROLES: They didn't teach Spanish in elementary school, but I took it in high school. And I didn't take it college, but I did take it in high school, which was kind of funny because I'd never studied. I'd just go in and take the test and I did great, you know, because I had enough of it, but it came very easy for me. I did it all from what I used to hear.

MS. CORDOVA: And did you continue practicing as a Baptist?

MR. MOROLES: Let's see. That ended – I don't know that I really – when I got into – I think that was in

elementary school, when I was living in - they call it the La Loma, the hill there. That's where Dallas becomes Oak Cliff. It's the beginning of Oak Cliff. And I think it really dwindled and actually even completely stopped when I was in the service, and stopped when I was in high school, when I was too busy to kind of go to stuff, and I think I would go occasionally to a Sunday service.

But I remember one time, we had the same pastor throughout almost from the beginning of the little church, Brother Maestas, José Maestas. And he - I came home from the service, on leave, and then I came to a service at the church. And, you know, I was almost like a founder of this church, of his little church, which became the biggest church around. And so I came by and he saw me. He hadn't seen me in a few years. And instead of coming up and saying, it's great to see you, he said, "Why didn't you wear your uniform?" [Laughs.] And I was like taken back that he was really upset that I didn't wear my uniform so he could show me off at the church.

And to me the church had gotten a little bit too big for its pants and was more about show. And so it really bothered him, you know. But my real thing was that I didn't like the service. I always was taking off my uniform, even when I was supposed to wear it, I took it off. So I totally was rejecting the service. But for him it was a big deal, you know, and it was just another kind of thing that I didn't like about the whole thing.

But I tried different things. You know, I would go, and when I was in the service, I went to like Latter Day Saints and I'd go to listen to some of the preaching's. So I tried a few different things.

MS. CORDOVA: What else did you try?

MR. MOROLES: Well, that one I went to probably for about a year while I was up in Omaha.

MS. CORDOVA: Was that just a lack of Baptist services or -

MR. MOROLES: No. I just was searching, kind of looking around, seeing what else other people were doing. You know, when you're brought up in the same religion, you know, you get very narrow minded, and I was just seeing what else was out there, wanted to hear more.

MS. CORDOVA: What appealed to you about the Latter Day Saints?

MR. MOROLES: Nothing.

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right.

MR. MOROLES: I thought they were very - they were kind of a very educated group, I think. But I just - I didn't - felt like I fit in.

MS. CORDOVA: So was that also just moving away from the Baptist church?

MR. MOROLES: Could have been. Could have been. Also just being alone. You know, being somewhere and looking for some connection with some people. And you know, it's that time when my brother passed away.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. Which we mentioned off the tape, but we didn't put it on the tape. But that was while you were in the service, right?

MR. MOROLES: Uh-huh. Yeah, right.

MS. CORDOVA: And it must have been a violent and traumatic episode that he was murdered.

MR. MOROLES: Right. Yeah. So, you know, they say you should never see your children, pass away before you, so it was a very traumatic thing for my parents. But, you know, and then I felt like I needed to, you know, have - fill in for him, you know, somehow. I didn't know how, but I felt like I needed to do something. Wasn't sure what.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you consider - or did you try other faith as well, or what happened in terms of that direction?

MR. MOROLES: Other than just talking with fellows, you know, there were a lot of other religions that my Air Force buddies had. But there were Presbyterian and Methodist and, you know, so there were a lot of that. The majority was that. And then there were some of the Catholics. And so my view of the Catholics were, you know, they would go out and have a good time and go back on Sunday and say, forgive me. [Laugh.] I'll be seeing you next week to ask forgiveness again, you know. And so I didn't have a very good example for the Catholics.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] You weren't going to convert.

MR. MOROLES: No. I didn't have very good examples.

MS. CORDOVA: Was your brother's death maybe your first major encounter with death or had there been other people close to you in your life?

MR. MOROLES: I don't - it might have been the first. I think maybe my grandmother passed away before that, my mother's - my dad's mother passed away before that. But those were a little distant, you know. And I think I may have been away. But I kind of got into the habit of not being around when people died, and not showing up sometimes. Made it almost a policy not to go. It was kind of - I did go to my brother's. But I really - it's not - you know, I very seldom go to funerals.

MS. CORDOVA: I guess maybe the reason why I been asking you these questions is because I think in one way your work has been described as sacred. That there is a sort of sacred or religious element, and maybe we can talk about that a little more. And then also that you've ended up doing a lot of work for memorials, and sort of places of mourning. And I guess I'm looking at the sort of roots of these ideas, or if there's any more complexity that we could bring into that discussion. Like where has the direction of your faith taken you, or have you moved away from that entirely?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I remember my mother always trying to drag my dad to church - I think he was brought up Catholic. I don't think he was home very often because he was, you know, he left home very early. So I don't know how much he could have had. And my mother was Baptist, and I was 17 years old. So, I don't know how much - I don't think he was influenced that much by it. So I think he was resistant to changing, and so I remember him always saying, if I want to talk to him, I kneel down right here, do it right here. I don't have to go to church. That kind of maybe stayed with me - [laughs] - and I kind of felt the same way, you know, that why do you have to go to church to do this?

And I see a lot of people go to church and they get all fancied up and everything, and it's like a fashion show. It's almost like the risqué fashion shows sometimes, you know, and it's like, you know, really, they wear that to church? You know, so I don't know. I just feel that it's a more personal thing. And I think that I feel like people - I keep going back to the general, you know, we have church. You know, South Africans and Chinese. That people all over, there's some things that's universal. I can't believe it's just for us or just for the Catholics or just for the Baptists, right? I think it's more - covers more in general about people. I'm trying to think of the common things that tie us together.

And, you know, people in Africa and places, they don't have churches. That means they're lost or do they have some other way of communicating, you know? That they don't need that, that they can just be somewhere and they can communicate? And so I try to think of it more globally and more encompassing than just - and I think with my work I'm doing these spaces. In a way, I'm looking for my own, you know, find your own path. And I don't like the idea of making a tombstone. I think of a memorial. I think of living memorials where we can celebrate the life that they had or that we had. And so I always try to think of a memorial as a living memorial.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, maybe I should take this opportunity to ask you about the Houston Memorial, because that is probably, I mean, it's a tremendously large site. And then you can talk about how the project evolved, how maybe it changed over time or what you hoped for it and what you do now.

MR. MOROLES: Well, the beginning of that was that they were doing a national search for someone to do this. And the search, they decided that there was a Texas guy that maybe they should give a chance to. And so the committee was comprised of Peter Marzio and Mrs. De Menil were on the committee. Mrs. De Menil who was just an incredible lady who, you know, built an empire of museums in Houston for the world. And Peter, who's one of the best known directors of museums in the United States.

And so together they said, well, let's give Jesús a chance. They had seen some of my early things and I was relatively beginning my career. I remember going out and standing on the hill and looking down on the space and saying, you know, we want to put something here, but we don't want it to be a policeman holding a little kid's hand saying, we protect. We want something that's more timeless. And that was the criteria. And I said, this is great, you know, I like the space. And so I said, I'll get back with you. Well, a year later I hadn't done anything.

MS. CORDOVA: Really?

MR. MOROLES: Hadn't called them, hadn't talked to them. I had been thinking about it. I went to Europe and investigated what makes places - what makes a place - you know, what do you need in the place to make it a successful space. And one of them was at [Eduardo] Chillida when we saw that plaza. I was really intrigued with that plaza. The difference is that that wasn't a memorial. You know, that's a center of town, and a town where people walk and stroll. And you already have the people there.

MS. CORDOVA: That's a town in Italy?

MR. MOROLES: In Spain.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, in Spain.

MR. MOROLES: Uh-huh, a Basque town. And so Chillida had done this wonderful thing, but it was because, you know, it was in a fantastic space. So the space had to be a fantastic space, for one. And so I, you know, later came back to the space and looked at it and called them up after a year of not communicating. I don't know if they had already found somebody else or what. And I went back up to the space and looked at it and I decided that I didn't want to bring anything to the space, that I wanted to create a space from the space.

And so I acted like I was the Jolly Green Giant and dug my hands into the ground. And what I took out of the ground, I made into a mound. And then I wanted to climb up on this mound, so I made the terraces going up. And then I wanted to go into these holes that I created, by displacing the earth, so I made the terraces going down. And that's how the design developed. I actually, you know, the ground being the earth, clay. And so I just displaced the earth and created that design.

MS. CORDOVA: And how did - I mean, did you have any response from the families of the police officers or any interaction with them?

MR. MOROLES: No.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. MOROLES: No, I didn't. The people, after it was built, came up to me at the opening ceremony and said, this is my - because we put all the names on the top, and you could touch them. Oh, and there's a fountain at the top and it reflects the names and everything. And people would tell me, oh, this is my father, this is my husband, this is, you know, and thank you for doing this. And the overall design ended up - when you look down at it, bird's eye view, it's a cross. And it has water at the top. And it's kind of something that, you know, you come from the ground and you rise up from the ground. So it had a lot of meanings that I had nothing to do with that.

MS. CORDOVA: Really?

MR. MOROLES: [Laughs.] These are all things that people wrote afterwards, and put all this significance to it. But I had nothing like that in mind at all.

MS. CORDOVA: So you weren't thinking about creating a cross form?

MR. MOROLES: Absolutely not.

MS. CORDOVA: Or creating an altar.

MR. MOROLES: Altar, nothing. I was creating a space. I was creating a sculpture.

MS. CORDOVA: But maybe with the consciousness of other spaces that you'd seen before? I mean, I think about all of your travels, all of your globetrotting, that it's not as if you'd come uneducated into this space. You've seen multiple spaces, so maybe that's somehow feeding into what you're creating, even if you're not thinking about the larger thematics that have been applied to those spaces.

MR. MOROLES: Well, yeah. You have that. You carry that. And that's why I don't like to go to museums. I don't go to museums to go look at - I don't go to galleries and see other artists' work, because I don't want to hurt my eyes and my brain, because it's awful. It's just too painful, you know. It's like going to see a bad movie, you know, I just don't need that kind of input, you know. And so I limit what I see and I don't want to be influenced by a lot of things. But you have all this recorded things. But what I created there was a totally new invention, because all pyramids in the world - because this is a step pyramid - all pyramids in the world sit on top of the ground. You know, this was growing out of the ground.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. With the reverse or the inverse.

MR. MOROLES: It's actually growing out of the ground. So the pyramid starts below ground and is rising. And if you look at it in the model, or whatever, you'll see that it's ascending and it's growing out of the ground. And I don't think you do those things, come up with new ideas, by studying and copying things. The whole premise was that I wasn't going to bring anything to that place, I was going to displace the earth that was there. And that's where the whole concept of the new idea came from. I didn't think I was making a new idea, but after you look back at it, you say, this hasn't been done anywhere before.

And that's where, you know, creativity – that's where it just happens, because you're looking for something – you're doing something because you feel that that's necessary to make a sculpture. And that's how you make a sculpture, you push things around and then you put premises on it. I want to go up there and I want to go down here.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, you've done a lot of sort of pyramid-type shapes. What is it that attracts you to that shape?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. Way before, early on, the first year, I think, in this book, I think there's a pyramid in my first book. But, again, it doesn't go below ground, you know. So, you know, and it's the pyramid just like the police memorial, but it stops on the base. It stops just like all the others in the world.

What was the question?

MS. CORDOVA: Well, what is it about the pyramid shape that –

MR. MOROLES: Oh, what is it?

MS. CORDOVA: – attracts you to it?

MR. MOROLES: That wasn't – I wasn't making a pyramid, I was tearing granite. And it just happens that I tore it all the way around and the I went all the way around again, went down, and so it kept getting bigger. So you don't start out making a pyramid, you just start doing the process. All these things happen because of a process, not because I ever wanted to make a pyramid.

MS. CORDOVA: I guess, which leads me to go, again, something maybe we sort of touched on on the tape yesterday, but not entirely. It is that there does tend to be this reading of your pyramid as Mayan or pre-Columbian. As I understand it from you, that's not your intent at all, or that's not what goes into your thinking. It's maybe more about what the granite wants to do.

MR. MOROLES: Yes. I think that the history of the stone has always been wanted to be used post and lintel for architectural, for thresholds, for posts. And so they tend to want to fall into these architectural things that – to me, Egypt was the first step pyramids. And I've spent more time in Egypt than I have in Mexico. Now, I created these pyramids before I ever went to Egypt, you know, but I certainly saw them in the history books and studied them in school before I ever created these. But they're just natural evolutions of carving stone. So I don't think that they really go to any, you know, to my Mexico – I think that they're common throughout the world. And when I think of step pyramids now, I think of Egypt. I don't think of South America or Mexico pyramids.

MS. CORDOVA: And when you first began on that sort of stone carving process or when you were first starting to work with granite, were you thinking about Egypt or were you thinking about that long history or not?

MR. MOROLES: I'm sure that I looked at the history books to see what stone carving had brought about, and you can't help but look at the Egyptian things and the Mayan things. But I can't – you know, Mayan, Aztec, I can't see where I've done anything like those things. And I can't, you know, I think my things are more, you know, maybe – it's hard to say. Maybe more Pompeii-ish or something, you know, than more of the bathhouses. Or you know, I'm doing a lot of figures now and self-portrait. You know, my hand has a self-portrait. And what I tell people is that I play with stone. You know, that's what I do. I play with it and that leads me in different directions.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, how did your time in Egypt influence you at all, or did it?

MR. MOROLES: Well, when I was there, everything I looked at was, you know, I wanted to make into a mummy, I wanted to carve into a mummy. I was fascinated by the mummies and the wrappings of the alligators and the people. But I never got to do anything while I was there. But actually the piece that I made there, the first thing they did was take us down the Nile in the felucca, you know, the Ancient Egyptian sailboat. And I just love that, no motor. You know, just going down the Nile, the Jewel of the Nile in Aswan.

And being able to work in the original quarries where all these monuments came from, all these big sculptures, and the largest obelisks came from there and there was one there still intact that they got almost out, and then it cracked and so they left it. That's the only reason we know how they did it. And it's huge. A 100-and-some-foot obelisk. And to work in the same quarry was just amazing, you know. [END TAPE 3, SIDE A] And you could almost feel the energy. And so I went to the quarry and found the biggest blocks, 45-ton blocks, and starting carving it. I had to carve it in the quarry. And it was so hot. You know, 120 degrees over there.

And luckily I found a crack in the stone so I was able to split the piece into two pieces. And so I started working on one of the pieces and said, well, great, I can marry these two pieces together, you know, and have – and I started working, but it was just not enough times. A couple of months was just not enough time to do the two

pieces. So I worked on the one and finally dwindled it small enough so we would be able to take it to where everybody else was working. You know, we were able to load it on trucks and take it up there.

And I was working on it and working on it and just cutting – not knowing what I was doing – just cutting and carving and tearing. And one day I looked back at it and saw that it was the shape of a sail, as the sail on the felucca that first trip on the first day that they took us down the river. And so I ended up making this 18-foot granite sail. And all my lines were just like the old linen tapestries that the sail was made out of, with all the patterns of the fabric, you know. And so that was all the lines in my – and with all the waves of the furling of the sail. And so that made a big impression.

And so I came back and I kept seeing these mummies and all these lines were the lines I ended up making on my mummies. So my ladies make it look like wrap-like that they were wearing gauze or some kind of fabric like a Greek goddess-like wrappings.

MS. CORDOVA: What is a piece that you see as mummy-like?

MR. MOROLES: The figures. They're called figures. You saw one out in the shop, you know, with the lines across it, that was on the wall that we needed deliver back.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, right. Okay. So the figurative work?

MR. MOROLES: It is a figure, but it's made of lines, almost like a wrapped mummy.

MS. CORDOVA: I understand.

MR. MOROLES: And some of them have, you know, actually, so it almost feels like there's a shape underneath the wrappings.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. Very human body-like.

MR. MOROLES: Right.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. What happened to the sail?

MR. MOROLES: It's in a sculpture garden, volcanic outcropping on the edge of the mouth in Aswan.

MS. CORDOVA: That must be quite a site, there on the shore.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. And I don't know how it's going, but it's something that I always saw myself going back to. At one point they asked me, what would I do if I could design the sculpture garden, because they needed help. Because it's a beautiful site on the Nile, but I felt it was too open, and I wanted to come in and make these walls and create a sculpture garden out of this place. And right after that, UNESCO came in and said that they wanted to do that. And they had a meeting with them and they said, you know, they want to do what you want to do. But I like you better – [laughs] – you know.

So there was always that kind of thought that that would be a great project to go back and work on every year. It's just a life-long project to come in and add on to it, and make the sculpture garden a sculpture to display sculpture.

MS. CORDOVA: And so that's really fascinating to hear how your trip to Egypt sort of generated this whole new series for you.

MR. MOROLES: It did. It did.

MS. CORDOVA: And I understand that's also what happened when you went to China, right? You created a new series, this sort of disk-like coin. Is that true or is that a misreading?

MR. MOROLES: No. I think I came back from China – well, I went to China first, and then I went to Egypt the next year. And then I went back to China every year since then. And so somewhere in there I did come out with the hanging disc that had the lines that were in the Egyptian mummies, mummy figures. And so it's a combination. It's kind of a combination of trips and living places.

MS. CORDOVA: How did your trip to China come about?

MR. MOROLES: I was doing a lecture in Rhode Island. I was one of the featured artists. And the Chinese were also doing the presentation before mine. And they stayed and saw my presentation, and afterwards they said, we want to do something with you in China. And I said, sure, right. And so they got home and called me the next

month and said, okay, come on over for a couple of months. And I said, you're crazy. [Laughter.] You know, I can't find a day to go somewhere and they want me to go over there for a couple of months, you know, two or three months. And I was going like, no, that's impossible. But I liked the idea. Why don't you invite me now for next year. And they did. And so that's how I went over there.

MS. CORDOVA: And so you were there for about a three-month period a time?

MR. MOROLES: Two months. I think it was two months.

MS. CORDOVA: And what did you do on that first trip?

MR. MOROLES: I created a piece called - it was a *Spirit Fountain*, like at Birmingham, Alabama. They saw this in my lecture and couldn't get it out of their mind and wanted me to do something similar to this, which was not a problem, because I work in a series. And I thought what I could do was incorporate different colors of granite from China, which they gathered for me, some blocks, and so I was able to carve these pieces and make a plaza out there.

MS. CORDOVA: And so that was - which plaza was that? Which work was that?

MR. MOROLES: That was *Spirit Fountains* and it's in the book. I don't know if we got to that page or not.

MS. CORDOVA: But maybe you should take me back a little bit, because it did come out of your Birmingham project.

MR. MOROLES: Uh-huh. Right.

MS. CORDOVA: And so maybe just to elaborate on that.

MR. MOROLES: Birmingham, I was invited, probably around 1986, to come out and look at this new Birmingham Botanical Gardens. The Birmingham Botanical Gardens was, old but they were building a new building for it and a whole new entry fountain to the gardens - a whole new renovation. And so they received a National Endowment grant to get someone, and they chose me. And I came out and I looked at it, and I decided that I wanted to have granite all the way from when people drive in to be greeted by granite.

So I designed these bollards that you'd drive between, and they would direct traffic. Kept the pedestrians separate from the vehicles. And then as you park, you walk through these ballerts and then you see that these ballerts all of a sudden have broken away. You have three that have become a little taller and shorter and have different cuts on them. And so they are almost like they are people walking through the plaza. And then you look down the plaza and you see a grouping of these big circles where - of these columns where they can sit the children down and kind of lecture them about pulling the flowers of the plants and things.

And then you look through into the garden, under a bridge, and you see a granite garden. Because, you know, the botanic gardens have the Japanese garden and the rose garden. I decided to make a granite garden. So at the end was these granite pieces that come up, some 6 feet high, some 10 feet high, that were like these spirit pieces that were almost like plants growing, you know, wiggling their way up towards the sun with water coming out of them. And with the landscape, the granite landscape on the bottom, so this rough granite on the bottom, so you could walk through between them and not get wet because the water was in the creases of the granite. And so you could actually walk right through the middle of these pieces because the water clung to the granite. And so it was kind of an interactive piece.

MS. CORDOVA: And one of your first large projects. Is that true?

MR. MOROLES: It could have been. Could have been. We did a lot of things that year. It was '86. Eighty-five we had a very productive -

MS. CORDOVA: It was 1985 through '87 is what I have.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. And we were very productive. A lot of work.

MS. CORDOVA: I had it - I'm curious what you would say. I had it described as a sculpture of red granite in three parts, symbolizing human relationships, the natural environment, and human nature interaction. Is that another just posted reading onto your work or -

MR. MOROLES: Definitely.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, okay. [Laughter.] I think I'm getting the idea here.

MR. MOROLES: I think people are just trying to make sense of it. And they make up stuff, and it's fine, you know. I think people can interject whatever they want to. I don't - I'm not opposed to that. Just don't put quotes around it. That's what I'm saying.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. There are maybe some readings of your work that I'm curious, that we were talking about yesterday. And you have your spirit shape versus your zigzag shape. And the way you spoke about them, they have spirit heads of female quality to her and the zigzag has a male quality. How did that reading evolve for you, or how did you start applying that?

MR. MOROLES: Well, the spirits, you know, which starts with the letter S, you know, and the spirits are all curves. So it's made of curves, which I think is soft and round like effeminate. And then the zigzag, which starts with the letter Z, it goes just like a Z. It zigs one way and zags back the other way again. So to me it's more angular and like a male. More sculpted muscles. And so that's where I got my kind of male/female version of these feminine/non-feminine pieces.

MS. CORDOVA: And then you sort of - I was fascinated as we were talking about these different labels that you've come up with, and I wanted to document those. So you have *Las Mesas* versus *The Column*, and what's the difference between those two?

MR. MOROLES: A column, it could be inner column, could be fountain column, could be a lot of different columns. But I just use them as identifying tools, you know, so I can jog my memory to get - these are all like my kids, you know. And so I have too many kids and it's hard to keep them all straight. [Laughs.] Even my mother calls me - goes through all the names and then gets to Jesús. [Laughs.] You know, it's a thing that people do, and finally you hit on the right one.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] You mean she keeps calling you kids' names or -

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. One of my other brothers and then says Suzanna, then Jesús, you know. Kind of run through the names and then, oh, yeah, that's the one. But I use them as descriptive - like you were saying the tree, you know, granite tree.

MS. CORDOVA: But that does have a very specific definition now that I understand it. It's a tree - let's see, that there is a single portion that's connected that's flat, that does resemble a tree-like shape.

MR. MOROLES: Like branches going out. And the spirit tree, which has a trunk that goes back like an S shape.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. So it's -

MR. MOROLES: So it's a feminine kind of tree.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. The spirit S shape runs in the center or somewhere, and then you have the tree branches. And so therefore versus what is a *Texas Shield*.

MR. MOROLES: Texas shield. And a lot of times if it's a *Texas Tree* or a *Georgian Tree*, if it has a state, that's usually the state - the kind of granite. Georgia means gray granite and Texas means pink granite. And *Swedish Tree* means it's a tree made out of Swedish granite. So to me it gets me real close to what the piece is. And usually there's only one *Swedish Tree*, so I could draw you a picture of it right away.

MS. CORDOVA: And then *Las Mesas* simply means - what does it mean?

MR. MOROLES: *Las Mesas* - because my first exhibitions were in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and when you drive out there, the first striking thing you realize, as soon as you cross the border, is that you're on the top of these flat mountains as soon as you cross the border, and you see all the mountains have flat tops. And so that was very in my mind. And so when I had an opportunity to create some sculptures that had flat tops or had many flat tops, I called them, you know, they're like tables. The *Las Mesas*, they're table pieces. And so there's a New Mexico kind of phenomena from discovering New Mexico.

And maybe also from discovering art history and seeing Walter de Maria's piece there in Amarillo, where he did *Floating Mesa*, where he had actually painted a billboard around the mountain top, just a short distance, maybe 50 feet from the top, and painted it all blue, this color of the sky. So when you looked at the mountain, it looked like the top of the mountain was floating because there was a blue strip underneath the piece.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. And that's part of the gesturing that you sought to do with the piece of the Albuquerque Museum, right, that you had posts -

MR. MOROLES: Stainless steel posts.

MS. CORDOVA: – stainless steel posts that, if one were to look at a distance, might disappear and therefore all you would see would be your floating –

MR. MOROLES: Very polished posts that are angled towards the sky, so when you look at them, they reflect the sky, and essentially do the same as Walter Maria's piece and make the piece float. And another thing was that the stone that was on top actually was cut and had a slit all the way around it. So it also had that floating top on it, and that's where the water came out of. So it didn't come from the top of the stone, it came out from this floating line that was around it also. So it had a couple of different floating parts to it. The floating rock and the floating top.

MS. CORDOVA: So multiple floatation. [Laughter.] So the "Floating Mesas" became kind of a series then, as well?

MR. MOROLES: That was made as a set of three that two or three of them were shown in Allen Parkway, as an outdoor Bayou show ["Drawings and Marquettes: Bayou Show," Center for Art and Performance, Houston, Texas] in the early '80s, maybe '82. And later I was asked to do something for the Albuquerque Museum and they wanted a fountain. And I said, well, I always wanted to make these – they are suppose to be fountains but I never got to it, and so they commissioned me to make. I like it when people say, you know, what would you like to do? [Laughs.] You know, what have you always wanted to do? Those are kind of the fun commissions.

MS. CORDOVA: So what would you like to do right now? [Laughter.] What's your future fun commission?

MR. MOROLES: My future commission is to create sculptural homes to live in in nature. That you actually – for a group of nature lovers that want to be kind of together in a wetlands where you don't disturb the land, you actually make walkways that float above the land, and so the alligators don't get you. You know, and you use that as your sidewalk, floating above the undisturbed wetlands where the sculpture is the home, and it connects with nature at many different levels, but are very minimal homes, almost like a convent.

MS. CORDOVA: That sounds like a dream project, definitely.

[Laughter.]

MR. MOROLES: I'm a dreamer.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

[Laughter.]

MR. MOROLES: I don't know if you noticed, but I have a lot of projects, a lot of – constantly – my mind never stops, and I wish I had a lot of clones so I could do a lot more than I do. I feel held back and restricted by funds. Mainly funds. I think I could make the time, I just really – I think I have a lot to offer at this time, and I'm held back. Money, that's the only good thing about money, that it allows you to realize your dreams.

MS. CORDOVA: And in part, maybe, I can see some of the foregrounding for that kind of project with your Cerillo Cultural Center, now the Moroles Cultural Center, that you took an old school and reformed it into a new kind of landscape. Is that fair?

MR. MOROLES: No. No, it had its own landscape and has its own landscape. I do want to create a landscape around it. I have created an amphitheater in one of the old burned-out buildings, but no, I'm trying to keep it intact and creating a multipurpose space which is very utilitarian, where anything can happen. Many different outdoor, large areas and indoor large areas for dancing and stage, little intimate amphitheater, performance areas. So I'm really trying to create a place like the Renaissance times, which always intrigued me, as how the Medicis had, where anything was possible.

MS. CORDOVA: When did the idea for that place come to you?

MR. MOROLES: I always dreamed about it, before I ever got the place, about people getting together and having great conversations and performances. You know, I always had that type of dream.

MS. CORDOVA: It's interesting to hear you talking about coming together and having these places where you can have conversations, because you're also someone that, I see, has sought to avoid looking at other artists' work or looking at how you might be influenced. How can you join these two issues together?

MR. MOROLES: Because usually when we're talking about in the Renaissance, we're talking about different people coming together, not a lot of sculptors. We're talking about musicians and dancers and actors and poets, you know, scientists, you know, a mix of people. So I don't think we learn from our own. I think we learn from things that are not our own. That's why I think when Noguchi was friends with Buckminster Fuller, Martha Graham, you know, it opens up new worlds.

MS. CORDOVA: So cross-pollination among various genres.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, I.M. Pei, you know, and –

MS. CORDOVA: Rather than setting yourself up in a group of other sculptors.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. Feeling comfortable.

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: Good to know. [Laughter.] All right.

Well, I see that this tape is running out so I'm going to stop it and take a break.

MR. MOROLES: How can you tell?

MS. CORDOVA: We're on the minute there.

[Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right. We are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Jesús Moroles on July 20th, 2004. This is session two and disc two.

And, Jesús, I thought I would start this recording off with asking you about the opening of the studio here, how it happened, how your family has been a major part of this studio, as well.

MR. MOROLES: Always in the back of my mind, when I was in Waxahachie, was thinking that I have to have my own space. And so I actually bought my saws way before I ever moved down here and had them in storage, at Shidoni, actually. And I just knew that I needed that kind of freedom. And so I was actually considering doing my studio up in Dallas, and Dallas had not been very kind to me. Never really had any really big breaks or anything happen in Dallas. I don't think that they were that supportive.

And so, knowing that, I decided that I wasn't going to do what everybody says you have to do an artist, is you go to New York and put your dues in, because everybody that I knew that went to New York and did that, ended up working for someone and never got around to doing their own work, because they had to support themselves, and then you never had a space and you had to worry about parking, you couldn't have a car. You know, it was just one thing after another. It was just too restrictive, and I wasn't that fond about seeing other people's work. I just wanted to create my own work. And I didn't need to see other people's work to create my own work.

And so I decided that I could be anywhere and create work and take it to show it and take it somewhere else to deliver it. So it didn't matter if I was in New York. I'd still have to take it somewhere to show it and take it somewhere to deliver it. So knowing that I could do that anywhere, I decided that I would go down and move next door to my parents, where I would at least see them when I was coming back through town to do work or to change suitcases or whatever.

So I moved back to Rockport, and on the way, driving down here, actually passed a little museum in Victoria, the Nave Museum, N-a-v-e, and saw, oh, there's this museum. And so I pulled up to the front of it and they were closed. Happened to be a Monday or something. So I rolled up one of my posters. I just won the Best Poster of the Year Competition for Museums. And rolled it up and left it in the door handle. And the next day I got a call and it said, oh, yeah, we'd love to do something with you. And so I ended up getting an exhibition there, a one-person show, in early '80s.

MS. CORDOVA: Nineteen eighty-three.

MR. MOROLES: Nineteen eighty-three, when I moved down here. And it just happened because I stopped by and left a poster on their door handle. And so that's the kind of tells you, you know, I wasn't waiting for things to happen, I was just kind of making them happen. So I came down here and cleared the property, cleared the land, cleared a lot of trees, and starting pouring concrete. And we actually had someone, a friend of mine, from Santa Fe, come to be the first artist in residence about that time, John Massey. And he was here for a year, at least a year. And so early on I was supporting artists.

He was an artist that needed for his work to get larger in scale and have the room and ability. And I think he came down and created all these big pieces in my studio and then was able to go back and start circulating them around and bought some land and built a studio. And then the interesting thing about that was I was invited to China many times after the first time, and the last time I went, he was invited also.

And so here I had – I was in China with this fellow who was the first artist-in- residence at my thing, and here we

are in Beijing doing sculpture. And he's getting paid for doing his sculpture, and he's trying to give me money that he says he knows he owes me from back 20-years-ago.

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: Well, that's good fortune.

MR. MOROLES: And of course, you know, I'm telling him to keep his money, but it was really nice to have. And also in that symposium was also my last artists who were artist-in-residence. The first artist and last artist, who was this Chinese artist that were in New Mexico at my cultural center. So I was together with the artist who I invited, the artist invited from China, and the first artist-in-residence. So we were all doing the same symposium in Beijing. So it was really a great kind of coming together.

MS. CORDOVA: So, I mean, you do have these interactions with other sculptors.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. Oh, yeah. No, I know I'm not totally sheltered. No, I see him once every 10 years.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] Once every 10 years. That's frequent.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: But you're, of course -

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, seriously.

MS. CORDOVA: - a person of short interactions, right. Those are significant for you.

MR. MOROLES: No, we worked together for two months. But it had been 10 years before that. And that was enough. [Laughs.] So it is brief, you know what I'm saying, it's not a constant thing. It's like for me, an encounter with someone continues to happen whether you see them or not. And when you see them again, it's like you never stopped seeing them. It's an ongoing thing. It's not - they're never out of mind. I have his sculptures on my wall in the shop. You see these little figures that are in my windows over there -

MS. CORDOVA: I did see those.

MR. MOROLES: - and those are from when he was working here. So I have him with me every day when I'm here. And in my book, he's in my book, on the walls with the little figures.

MS. CORDOVA: Good to know for people hunting through your book. [Laughter.]

Now, did your sister and brother start helping you with the studio immediately?

MR. MOROLES: No.

MS. CORDOVA: How did their help begin?

MR. MOROLES: I realized I needed help, and I think my brother came down first.

MS. CORDOVA: And that's Hilario?

MR. MOROLES: Hilario, uh-huh. He came down first and started helping me. And then we got a few employees, and a couple, and then a couple more, and a couple more. And we got up to about 20, 24 people full-time.

MS. CORDOVA: Right now?

MR. MOROLES: It varies, you know, up to about 20.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you hire your first employee.

MR. MOROLES: Probably as soon as I got down here. Probably secretary, Shirley Goforth. She was a very sweet lady. Stuck with me for many years.

MS. CORDOVA: And so she helped you with the schedule and any other sort of exhibition?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, correspondence. You know, I wasn't very good at that. I wanted someone to work out sending the letters and keeping the records all straight.

MS. CORDOVA: And what about in the shop? Who was the first employee?

MR. MOROLES: Probably my brother.

MS. CORDOVA: Your brother, okay.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And when did Suzanna start to work here?

MR. MOROLES: Suzanna came maybe, gosh, I don't know what her anniversary is. I'd say maybe 15 years or something.

MS. CORDOVA: She'll be telling you. [Laughs.]

MR. MOROLES: She tells me. You know, holidays, birthdays are not high on my list. They're usually an inconvenience because a lot of times on the holidays, the banks are closed, and stores and things. That's where I can't do normally what I want to do. And so I'm not a big one for those kind of dates.

MS. CORDOVA: All right. Well, we won't count on you for those days. [Laughs.]

MR. MOROLES: No. You can ask my sister. But I think she was here probably in the late '80s, or '87 or something. But I'm just guessing. I'm sure it's in that Jan Adlmann addition to the essay.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, in the essay.

MR. MOROLES: Everything in there is just pretty much right.

MS. CORDOVA: Pretty much?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. You know, we've had to change a few things, but I can live with whatever's in there because it is his writing, you know. It is someone else's writing. And, you know, their use of words and things, it's their use of words. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: So you haven't been much of a writer yourself?

MR. MOROLES: No.

MS. CORDOVA: It's not an activity you enjoy?

MR. MOROLES: No. No. I write - no, you know, no, it's something I have to do.

MS. CORDOVA: And I think I'll go back to something you mentioned. You had referred to Dallas as not being a very welcoming place for you as an artist, but I think I also recall you saying, maybe it was yesterday, something about how you are a Dallas artist in some way.

MR. MOROLES: I'm a product of Dallas.

MS. CORDOVA: You are a product of Dallas. And do you see that visible in your work, or how do you see that coming out?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I see it as in my language, you know. Dallas is the biggest town in Texas, maybe up there with Houston, right after Houston, I believe. But it had a certain amount of culture to it. And because I'm having all these rediscovering of my work in Dallas right now, it's unfair to say that, you know, but it was fair to say that I didn't have any support in Dallas that kept me there. And so I've had thousands percent more in Houston, which I've never lived in, you know, with the museums asking me to do things. And collectors, you know, hundreds of collectors. So I think, getting back to that whole thing, that where you're from, you're never thought of very highly.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, one thing I've heard from Texas artists, and I think some would agree and some would disagree, is that to be successful here in Texas, you often must leave the state or you must make your success elsewhere. What do you think of that?

MR. MOROLES: I think that's true. And I never have left, you know - so -

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: Ah-ha. Well, now we find the route, that's good

MR. MOROLES: So I've always been a Texan.

MS. CORDOVA: But, you know, maybe you've worked enough outside the state. You've certainly traveled enough outside the state to enable you to do work here in Texas.

MR. MOROLES: All my work has been done in Texas except for my pieces that I do – and I choose to do them there. You know, I could do them in Texas and ship them over there, but that's not how I want to experience those places. So I've consciously chosen to be in other places, now, kind of late in my career. But it's probably because I'm now able to a little more. Before I probably couldn't very well leave for that long.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, let me take us in another direction, perhaps. And that's one of the things that I think was apparent early-on in your work with this effort to have human interaction with your work, such as the "Playscapes." And how did that evolve, or where did you see that starting in your work and maybe how has it changed over time?

MR. MOROLES: You know, just looking at this first book, I think there are pieces in here that are – you have, like the *Grinding Stone*, which is, in itself, a moveable – and not only does the grinding stone move, but the base also rocks, so there's two different actions going on there. And so –

MS. CORDOVA: And just for sake of visual descriptions, there's a base and then there's a curved grinding stone that sort of would rock back-and-forth, and then a large circular disc that also can rock, up above. And so from a very early point you were playing with this ability for granite to rock back-and-forth.

MR. MOROLES: Right. And also in here is another piece. And I'm not sure what the name of this is, but if all the pieces that were carved out are also pieces of that, are moveable and these pieces came out of here, can go back in here. These came out of here and are flipped over. So there was always that, this is the same piece and this is the same piece here, without any pieces in it. And so able to turn the piece over to different directions and just being able to not just look at it in one dimension was another thing. And I remember having some sculpture, this piece here, which is I think *Interlocking Piece*, was one that it's a great interlocking probably from my first year. And it was, again, another moving piece because it actually was something that you could move and turn and have it – look at a different side of it.

So, again, I think, now that I look back at this, that I liked the idea of having the option of not having it be a static piece, but it actually having different views and the person to interact with it differently and see it differently. And then the pieces you're talking about are the Playscapes, which to me allowed people to create their own almost like ruin, their own Stonehenge or their own Machu Picchu, their own scared space. Almost even then you would end up making these little kind of circular little habitats that you could go in, almost like labyrinths.

And I almost feel like – and if the people walked off with a piece, you know, they were just taking – even though they were stealing a piece, that they wanted to be part of it. They wanted to remember it. And I would have the clients call back and say, send me another box of pieces because they're all gone. And almost all, you know, and they didn't say to take one either.

[END TAPE 3, SIDE B]

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MR. MOROLES: And so I thought it was – I liked that, not that they were stealing pieces, but they wanted to feel a part of it.

MS. CORDOVA: And that seems to be a running objective in your work, to have – as opposed to – I mean, I think – I've been very trained by museums not to touch, not to, you know, oh, that's a very precious piece, you shouldn't touch that. But as I see it, with your work, you would actually invite human contact to your work? Is that fair?

MR. MOROLES: I was hurt if someone wasn't drawn to touch it, then I did something wrong, that I didn't draw you to cop a feel off of it – [laughter] – you know, when the guard wasn't looking or something. But I really felt that way, that I didn't do something right.

MS. CORDOVA: And how do you – do museums facilitate that? Or do they still create that security?

MR. MOROLES: They try, they try. I have a show right now in Dallas, "Rock, Roll, and Play [2004, Dallas Museum of Fine Art, Dallas, Texas]" – and it's a struggle, you know, because you give people an inch and they take a mile.

MS. CORDOVA: And they'll take a piece.

MR. MOROLES: Well, that too. We had someone call in and say, yes, one of my students took a piece. And then the next thing you know, I said, well, okay, great, return it, and nobody ever shows back up, you know? But it's

lack of respect, and I think, kind of, kids now-a-days have been – you know, they’ve been brought up and they don’t know the word “no” and manners and respect. It’s unbelievable. I just think they’ve really taken kind of a turn backwards.

Which brings me to kind of – I don’t know if we’ve talked about it – but the performance pieces.

MS. CORDOVA: We haven’t, and I’d like to.

MR. MOROLES: The performance pieces, and also my mountain, mountains in Oklahoma.

MS. CORDOVA: In Oklahoma, right.

MR. MOROLES: Which is also a participatory piece.

MS. CORDOVA: So those are two subjects, I guess, and let’s – shall we start with performances, or how these performances have started to evolve?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. Well, my first performance, I was asked by the University of North Texas, my alma mater, when I was having an exhibition and going to have an exhibition in Houston, if they could bring their alumni to Houston, their Houston alumni, to kind of promote the school and come to my exhibition. And I said, sure, no problem. I mean, you know, that’s not a problem. And I said, what’s the purpose of this? Well, we want to get money from these alumni, you know, some of them are doing well and can donate and help support their school.

And I thought about that, and I said, well, they’re showing me off because of my work, and I said, why not show the school off instead of showing me off? By showing me they were going to be showing the school. And so I said – I told them, why not show the school off instead of showing me off? And I said, why don’t I come up with an exhibition that involves the school, that we can bring down musicians, and they can play on my granite, and dancers from your dance department, and they can dance on my granite and compose something, and bring along your lighting people and we can light the exhibition with smoke machines and everything, and get your film people and film it. And create an event with my work.

And this was right before my show, so I came up with this whole idea and actually thought about it when I was flying to Chicago and had to fly around a thunderstorm. So the plane did take off, but it went all the way around like this, a big thunderhead, so I could look out there and all on the side of this plane you could see this tremendous storm and you could see the lightning, and you could just feel it. And it was almost like a concert, you know, it was beautiful, you know.

And I thought, wow, how violent is this, you know, but beautiful. And then I thought of my work, and I thought, well, you know, what I’m doing is very violent, tearing the stone. But how can I do this? And so I decided that as a centerpiece of the show would be me tearing the stone. And so that’s how we came up with the idea of this “Thunder in the Stone: Tearing Granite.”

MS. CORDOVA: Interesting. I didn’t – I love the idea that the storm is kind of what inspired that show.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And how did you tear the granite within the show?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I was very shy, so I actually had the dean of music from North Texas State actually tear it. And after I saw him tear it and was cringing at how badly he was doing it, I haven’t let anybody else do it since. And I could show you a video and show how he messed up, but he’s a good friend of mine, he’ll be here this week, we’ll be working on the next performance for Austin. But –

MS. CORDOVA: Who was that?

MR. MOROLES: David Shrader.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MR. MOROLES: And I also worked with Larry Austin, who was also a dean there, and he composed a piece, came down here and recorded the saws cutting and tearing the granite and playing the granite musically in the shop, and went back and composed all these sounds only from the studio, and combined it with a live improv to do the performance. And he’s composed pieces for Robert Rauschenberg, and he’s quite famous. And so he composed a piece that’s called “Rompido, Torn.”

MS. CORDOVA: And so after having watched David Shrader tear the granite and not – did you get in there right away, or did you wait till the next performance?

MR. MOROLES: The next performance.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And then what was the process?

MR. MOROLES: – every 20 subsequent performances.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you tear the granite?

MR. MOROLES: I actually make a sculpture, and part of the process of tearing the granite is just one step of making a sculpture. So I'm actually in that – either making the last step of a sculpture or the beginning step of a sculpture or the middle step of a sculpture. And so we drill holes in it and put wedges in it and play them like tuning forks and create pressure, and then all of a sudden it explodes open and falls apart.

MS. CORDOVA: That must be quite dramatic.

MR. MOROLES: Sometimes it can be very dramatic, especially when it doesn't want to open. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, a definite unknown quality to the performance, I guess.

MR. MOROLES: I was the first non-Indian to show at the Native American Museum [Institute of American Indian Arts Museum] in Santa Fe, and I was doing a performance in the Allan Houser Sculpture Garden, and I decided to do a very big stone. And I was hitting on it and everything and my arm was ready to fall off, I was hitting it for so long, and I was just already preparing my speech to say, and sometimes it just takes longer, and about that time it just came apart and broke open, and the dust from the thing came up in a cloud of smoke, and it was very magical.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you always know which way the granite is going to break open? Can you sort of envision?

MR. MOROLES: If I'm hitting it. If somebody else is hitting it, no.

[Laughs.]

You have to build up the pressure evenly.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And, now, what I had taken to be part of the performance, and maybe this was a misreading on my part, was that you also have created sort of musical instrument out of granite? Or not traditional instruments, but sort of the idea of playing sort of mesa sculptures or something like that. Is that fair? Is that part of it at all?

MR. MOROLES: Yes. I discovered the musical pieces when I was working on a piece at one time, and I was carving it and I had it up on the table, and I was carving it, and I was hitting the top of it and I didn't have an assistant holding the piece at the time, I probably was working after hours or something. And I hit the piece too hard and I tipped it off the table. But at a certain point the weight goes past the point-of-no-return, and so I pulled back and had to let it go, and that's when I got the scar on the top of my hand to remind me of that moment.

MS. CORDOVA: One of your many scars.

[Laughter.]

MR. MOROLES: And the piece, as it hit another table that was next to it, a bench, it had these tangs that were kind of sticking out of it, and as it hit them, it broke them off. It went, "b-bri-ing," and rung. And I heard this sound, and ever since then I've been looking for sounds out of the granite.

MS. CORDOVA: And is it to be played with the human hand? Or do you –

MR. MOROLES: It can be played with your finger, with mallets, with granite, or different things. You can play it like drums, you can play it many different ways.

MS. CORDOVA: And even sort of flute-like instruments?

MR. MOROLES: Yes, actually we blow into some musical holes, we blow into it sometimes in some performances, we have blowers. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: And so this seems to be another direction you're taking in –

MR. MOROLES: Well, back to the first year of those grinding stones. So part of the exhibition of that show was a big moonscape, which is a grinding stone without the bottom grinding stone. And so it's back to the original

pieces, just bigger, where you can crawl in them and jump on them and rock on them. And we had the dancers from the dance department dancing on these pieces. Again, interactive, but back to the first pieces, you know.

And so we had a high chair in that exhibition, a 14-foot highchair, and later at the Indian Museum that was done with Indian dancers and an Indian poet and an Indian musician, a famous Indian musician, Ed Wapp, and he and they played, and we had a poet do original poetry and sit on the highchair and read the poetry.

MS. CORDOVA: I've seen some of these highchairs, how did the person get up?

MR. MOROLES: It has a ladder on the front.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, it does have a ladder.

MR. MOROLES: – carved into the front, and there's a ladder, where it's very easy to go up. And it's a great playground piece, where kids can climb up and jump off into the grass or sand around it. It's a pretty nice play-piece.

MS. CORDOVA: And, I mean, highchair brings up the idea of a child.

MR. MOROLES: It's like a Lily Tomlin chair, I tell everyone.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, that's right. But it also has a throne-like quality to it, a very king or queen-like.

MR. MOROLES: You feel very big and very small at the same time.

MS. CORDOVA: And when did you start making those?

MR. MOROLES: The chairs? You know, were probably, the window was a chair for my first year. You could sit in the window. And so I've always had functional pieces as far as sitting. My bench, that's down in front of my house, you didn't get to see it, but it was in that first Connemara exhibition and it was intended to be a bench that you tripped over as you were running up to see the window at the top of the hill. And along the way you saw these landscape pieces that were gem-like, catching the light, and that were like the "Playscapes." And so it's still – I'm still doing the same thing I was the first year.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, but it has changed, but you can see a lot of themes that continue. And your window was a nice work that I don't think we put on tape, and maybe you'd like to explain that.

MR. MOROLES: I was invited to the first Connemara exhibition ["Connemara Sculpture on the Green." Connemara, Dallas, Texas, 1982] in Dallas, at Montgomery Farms in northern Dallas, out in the countryside. And these pieces were made specifically for this exhibition. And I decided that I would put this altar, this top to this hill, this window at the top of this hill.

And so as you went up the hill it framed the sky. And when you got up there it framed the landscape, and you ended up having a bench. It now belongs to Jesuit High School in Dallas, which also has a Dallas Jesuit Museum in it. The fellow who started that museum and donated that piece is my current patron saint, Frank Ribelin, who was also the person who probably got me on the board of the Smithsonian, he was also a Smithsonian board member, before I was there, and when I was there.

MS. CORDOVA: And he continues to be a patron?

MR. MOROLES: And he continues to buy something all the time – [laughs] – in twos or threes.

[Laughter.]

He might have about 45 pieces of mine.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, my goodness.

MR. MOROLES: He's been very generous in giving pieces to the Smithsonian and to many museums.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, it certainly is fortunate you found someone like that. How did you encounter him?

MR. MOROLES: I think he encountered me. He was looking for art, he was just an art-lover.

MS. CORDOVA: And going back a little bit, because I – well, actually, one thing that I just wanted to pay attention with the window was – and something that I'm gradually picking up on in listening to you is your consciousness of perspective in a certain site. That you in describing various works you'll actually note how the light is going to play off of a piece, or, you know, with the window you were very conscious that people walking up would see it

one way versus when they got to the piece they would see a different vision.

And so I find it fairly natural that you would be paying attention to perspective, but of course you don't always know where your pieces are going to end up. Is that something you can only pay attention to when you have a site-specific piece?

MR. MOROLES: I usually go and install it after they're sold, also. And so I do have input pretty much to the end. Only when it's a smaller piece, when people take them out and, you know, when I'm not there. Even the smaller pieces, I like to tell them where to put the light and where's the best place in their home for it. And so I'm very control freak. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: I've heard that a lot from you, actually. That seems to be a description of yourself. When did that become obvious to you?

MR. MOROLES: I think when I was - maybe when I was in Waxahachie, I remember, you know, wanting to control my environment and not having control. You know, so, having to decide to leave that space and fill my own space. And even before that, you know. But I do remember I needed to have my own space.

So many other examples, but I can't recall right now, but I know that I've always kind of - just the nature of the work, that it's heavy and everything, that I was able to enforce a lot of, you know, because a lot of times I would leave the piece there and it was too heavy for them to move, so I'd pretty much pick up which way it was going to be and which way to turn it and would end up doing the lighting, and a lot of times the photography and everything.

So I want to do everything, but I realized early on that I couldn't do everything, that I had to let go of some of the things. And I want to be the cameraman and I want to be - you know.

MS. CORDOVA: It must have been difficult, actually, for you to relinquish little bits and pieces.

MR. MOROLES: It might have, it has been, but now I'm getting back to being my own cameraman again and you know, shooting my own pictures, and, you know, I hope to buy a movie camera and start shooting movies again, documenting the things myself, because with all the ownership of tapes and all this kind of stuff, it really - I don't like not being able to do what I want to do with material that's recorded on myself and that I've hired people to. And so it's - you can hire somebody to film for you and supply the camera and the film and everything, but if their eye is on the thing, looking through there and recording where you told them to record and how to do it, they're still the owner. And that's ridiculous.

And so I have to have complete control, I have to buy my own cameras and I just have to bite the bullet and do it myself, because I don't like not having control.

[Laughter.]

You know, I don't think it's right. It's just - they wouldn't be there if I wasn't paying them, they're doing it for me. It's a very strange thing.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, one thing that I would find strange or maybe difficult about the position is when you're engaging in these public commissions, and a lot of people want to have a voice on what happens on public grounds. Have you encountered any troubles like that?

MR. MOROLES: There was a question at the police memorial whether to put rails, handrails on everything. It could ruin the whole thing. And we said, this is an art project, this is not a building. And we didn't put the rails. You know, so we do encounter some things, and we do want it to be safe, so -

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, that's something to bring up, maybe, is that you are, of course, dealing with these incredibly heavy pieces and what precautions must you take to make them safe to the public, especially a public that may be tempted to do things that aren't necessarily the wisest?

MR. MOROLES: Well, first you have to pick the right thing to go out there so it's not that precarious and inviting for disaster. I think we were talking about Fort Worth the other day.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, the Fort Worth sculpture garden.

MR. MOROLES: The unfortunate people who died. And in a way I think the artist, I.M. Pei - Philip Johnson, actually, Philip Johnson I think did that.

MS. CORDOVA: Was it him?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, I think it was Philip Johnson. That he intended to create something that was dangerous, a canyon-like feeling. But he was taking you through this whole experience in the whole water garden, of experiencing different types of water and meditation spaces. And in a way that was also a meditation space, where you could go and feel the awesome power of water. You know, all around you, and down out the city and everything.

Unfortunately that was a mixture of, you know, mixed in there that there was some danger involved for anybody stepping down, anybody that takes a step on this step or any step, you know, it's a matter of danger, that they could fall. Anyone walking on the street. I mean, any number of streets have upheaval. You know, roofs that are pushing up sidewalks and, you know, it's like there is danger when you wake up in the morning, every morning, just stepping off the side of your bed. So there's danger in everything we do.

MS. CORDOVA: But did he have any obligation to consider that people might jump into the water and then - I mean, what happened, I guess to explain, is that the suction of the fountain was so strong that it pulled one body and then the next body and I guess a whole family drowned in the fountain.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, I don't know how it works. But I can't imagine how you can get sucked into something that shouldn't have a hole in it.

MS. CORDOVA: I'm not sure if I'm following you.

MR. MOROLES: You have a pool of water, and there's water all coming down. And it all goes to that one place. And then it gets sucked into another place. Now, does it get sucked in through a hole like this? Or like this, where a person can go through?

MS. CORDOVA: Large or small.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. It doesn't matter what it is, there's a grate that should be over that space. Now, if there's a grate over that space there's no way that anybody can go through that space, unless they become spaghetti or something. So how can somebody, you know, so the design might have been flawed. But I can't imagine how anybody could go through a space when there shouldn't be a space.

There's a pool, and water can still go through a hole when there's a grate over it. So maybe there was no grate, maybe the grate was taken out. Who knows what the deal is, you know, but I can't imagine that there would not be a grate over something, that there would just be a hole that people could disappear into.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I think that's actually what happened.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, that sounds like a flaw, that somebody left something off, or -

MS. CORDOVA: Right. So, I mean - and does that give you -

MR. MOROLES: I don't think we've heard the end of that.

MS. CORDOVA: No, I'm sure we haven't.

MR. MOROLES: I heard him talk about it, Philip Johnson -

MS. CORDOVA: Well - and not to veer too much over to that other sculpture, but I guess I - you know, really the reason for even bringing it up is to ask you, like, what kinds of precautions must you be thinking about with these very large granite pieces? Do you find yourself having to take account of what kinds of human interaction you'll be facilitating with your work or what people might try to do with your work?

MR. MOROLES: You know, I walk down the street all the time like everybody else, and I see much more hazardous things that cities do, with just visual pollution that they do with all the signs that they put up. And they put a sign up with a piece of sheet metal on it, very rigid sheet metal, which is only this thick, which is like a 16th-of-an-inch, you know, with a knife edge all the way around it, right at head height, or 5 feet, and they don't even put them above 6 feet. Anywhere, I can take you down any street, and someone could just turn and walk into these things.

And why they don't put them above 6 feet or 6-foot-6 or something is beyond me. How can they put these - you know, and they're worried about other people? It's everywhere, every town and every city, you know, has this. And so I don't think that people are actually considerate. I really don't think that they really have like a concern. The cities should look at themselves, because it really is not safe for people.

And all we can do, and I can do, is take care of mine, my part.

MS. CORDOVA: That's what I'm asking you, is -

MR. MOROLES: But I'm saying that we - we're lacking this, in the United States, especially, it's particularly bad. And all the way to the very core of the city government and the government. I think America is really backwards in a lot of things.

MS. CORDOVA: Have you ever thought about living abroad? And permanently making yourself an expatriate?

[Laughter.]

MR. MOROLES: I often wish that someone would hire me as an advisor, you know, to the Olympics coming up in China, the Olympics coming up in America or something, because there's a lot of things that could be - I just see things when I look, I see things immediately that are not right, that can be fixed, in business and everywhere. It's just - you know, there are visual people who can see these blaring things that are problems and that are not aesthetic and that are not kosher.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you consider yourself political?

MR. MOROLES: You know, I was at the White House, I took my daughter for a White House exhibition, which I was invited to, of sculpture at the White House when the Clintons were there, and got to meet Hillary and Colin Powell and those people, and I was just there a couple of times again with the Bushes. And I got to meet Colin Powell and also Mrs. Fox from Mexico, the president's wife.

And I - no, to answer your question. I decided to try and make a difference with my art, not with the politics. I've stayed out of politics.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, some would argue that art is often political. Do you consider your art political at all?

MR. MOROLES: I would try to - I'm sure they could write anything about anything, but I guess a pyramid symbolizes something to somebody, or a grinding stone symbolizes crushing of humanity or something, I'm sure. But, no, I can't imagine, but I'm sure someone could put a slant on anything. But I don't think it's ever - I wouldn't put it past someone to try to make something out of something that it's not.

MS. CORDOVA: In creating your art, do you have any hopes of changing the world?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah. My whole premise is that you can make a difference with art. You know, I often feel like an ambassador when I'm out in these other countries. And, you know, it's -

MS. CORDOVA: So that would be political?

MR. MOROLES: Ambassador -

MS. CORDOVA: Or sort of in seeking to change -

MR. MOROLES: - or example. I'm not seeking change - where, in another country? I'm just representing our country, not politically as a Democrat or a Republican, I'm representing as an American citizen, you know. And so I don't know if that's political, just being an American citizen. I'm not out there advocating a war or not for war or what's wrong with their country. Now, I will go to places and say, what's wrong with your country is that they're not giving you the opportunity of young architects to have a greater opportunity, because China is the most - there's so much construction going on here, you could be creating something totally new instead of copying the old. You know, I've done that.

And I'm being political because I feel that they're missing an opportunity to do something that's never been done before, and to give young people a chance to create something new instead of copying that old architecture that doesn't even work back where it came from. So, yeah, I am political in that. I'm always pushing for the rights of better art and better architecture and better aesthetics.

MS. CORDOVA: Better opportunities, in a sense?

MR. MOROLES: I don't know if it's an opportunity, but the end result is that they could create something new that's better than what they have.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. And maybe I'm just sort of thinking of your role. You've been on numerous juries, I think, and you've been working with the Smithsonian on the board, and you've opened the Cultural Center. You know, from your studio first opening you've sought to have someone else here, as an artist, to give that person an opportunity. So I guess I'm speaking along those ways, that that's been a running theme through your life, it seems.

MR. MOROLES: I like helping people and encouraging people. I mean, I like to promote the arts.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, let me take us backwards, because we have said we were going to talk about these mountains that you have in Oklahoma, and I haven't asked you about them, but they've been quite prominent, really.

MR. MOROLES: Well, that kind of fits with art promotion and teaching., you know, which I think is a very honorable field, but I can't do it because it's just so - it's just so draining in just the short amounts of time that I've done. I mean, I've done like a week of teaching, and I thought that felt like a lifetime of draining your energy. Because if you're really giving, you're just totally exhausting yourself. And you feel every person, you know, is just taking away so much. And you want to give them all you can, and you feel bad if you're not giving them, you know, not paying attention to some person, you feel like you've not done your job if you feel really committed to it.

And so I've only been able to teach two or three days, and that's about it. But I feel that in doing workshops and lectures, lectures, we were talking about that earlier, I feel like I base all my kind of theories on lectures and short encounters with people. So I can give back the same way.

And in doing that and in saying that, in Oklahoma, I was invited to do a workshop up there. And I considered it because Fritz Scholder had been going up there for years and was one of the people who had frequented this place, and I wondered why he would go into the boonies to do this thing, and other people I respect had been there, Luis Jimenez, who I'd studied with. And so I agreed to do this one year, and I drove up there. And as soon as I drove around the corner of this hillside and I encountered a lake around these mountains, these granite mountains. I just literally had to pull over and stop, and I never do this. Pulled over and stopped and sat there and looked at this place, and went, wow, I have to figure out how to come back here because it's just so beautiful here. And it had a wonderful energy to it.

And I went on and drove around that mountain, and on the other side was the Oklahoma Art Institute, where I ended up doing the workshop, and then got invited to do the next year's workshop and the next year's and the next year's, and so I've been there five times or more doing this thing.

And one of the last times I was there I lectured about my creating sacred spaces around the world. And at the end of the lecture they went raising their hands up and said, we want to be one of these places. So by the end of, you know, by the next morning they had some Congressmen there and people they'd called up to come and have breakfast and say, we'd like to offer you these mountains, you know, can you do something with these granite mountains here? And I looked at them, and they're sacred mountains already, they're called Lone Mountains, they're Indian sacred ground already.

And I decided that instead of bringing something to the mountain what I would do, would love to do, would be to carve these steps, just to take a journey through the mountain. To enable you, because it's quite a height, to go climbing up this thing. And to actually meet every year and decide which way the path will go and why it should go that way, and then you can carve a step in this mountain. And your kids can carve a step, you know. So it's an ongoing project that I feel - what I feel is that we've kind of lost the respect and stewardship, mainly, that we don't feel like we belong to anything.

And so that's why we don't pick up anything when we're just walking down the street, we don't feel like we belong, like we're part of anything. And so if you can instill this ownership, that this is your mountain, these are your steps, you're part of actually the design of this thing, that you have places to sit and view out and water running down to connect with the lake and steps disappearing into the water. And so when you look at it from afar, you know, they would be lit at night, and you could see this filigree of these steps that go through the mountain, and it would be like an Escher kind of painting.

MS. CORDOVA: And where does that project stand right now?

MR. MOROLES: We're supposed to be starting on it. We're in the process of getting donors to build the buildings where we can house our tools and compressors and things that we'll need to use as a home base at the bottom of it.

MS. CORDOVA: And let me ask you, what do you feel, are you creating sacred spaces? Is that -

MR. MOROLES: Well, it's already, it's like I said, it's already a sacred space, you know. And I feel that any place can be a sacred space, it's just you deciding to draw attention to this place by you honoring this space. You know, I think the fact that we're here and walking on this earth is a testament to - that we should honor this and we can honor it anyway are. Like my father said, you know, you can drop down anywhere and pray and wish and hope for -

MS. CORDOVA: Do you want the spaces that you create to be a place where people might drop down and pray?

MR. MOROLES: I hope that people can use them any way they want. I'm not going to tell people that prayer is the way to go or meditation, some people use meditation, some people use – I think to limit a place, I think is not a good thing. I think that just people to come and experience the place, to be part of the space, creating the space, to be part of the space. Just being there they become a part of it. In a way they're honoring it by being there.

I think people put too many limitations on things. You know, on the other hand, we're not creating a playground. You know, it's not a playground to come and play football and throw the Frisbee, something like that. You know, hopefully it's not that kind of space.

MS. CORDOVA: What is your project for the Olympics?

MR. MOROLES: In the Olympics we've already created a granite weaving, one of those big weavings. And it's in Beijing now, and it'll go to one of the sites that they're building for the Olympics.

MS. CORDOVA: Was granite weaving a sort of natural step from your interlocking granite? Was that – or how did it come about?

MR. MOROLES: Actually, it came about because of the piece I gave to the Smithsonian, which was donated by Frank Ribelin. Everyone would ask me, why do you call that "granite weaving?" [END TAPE 4, SIDE A] And I would say, well, when I conceived of this piece I actually would do it in rows and do this mosaic, fit every piece in a row, and then do another row. And it was like threading a loom. And then after I finished, you look at it and it has a tapestry feeling to it, you know, it has a pattern, it has a feeling almost like fabric to it.

And so I called it a "weaving" because of the process and the tapestry feeling to it. But I hadn't done my granite weaving yet, and I was always being asked, why do you call that granite weaving? I decided to finally just make a granite weaving and weave granite. You know, I remember the Celtic emblems that are always carved to look like they were woven, you know, it was just a relief carving that seemed to go in and out, and I started looking at that and wondering, you know, how can I make that really be – come true in stone?

And so I just figured it out, looked at it, and then made it and came up with the weave.

MS. CORDOVA: Was it difficult?

MR. MOROLES: No. No, it was just deciding to do something.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I know that I'm coming to the end of this tape, I think I still have a few questions for you if you'll keep going with me for a little bit?

MR. MOROLES: Oh, no. I'm just kidding.

[Laughter.]

No, it's good, that's fine.

MS. CORDOVA: – and we'll take a break.

We are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution on July 20th, 2004, interviewing Jesús Moroles. This is session two and disc three.

And we were just sort of talking about spaces where, you know, you've found a certain stability here in Rockport, but you could be doing the studio anywhere, I guess. And in fact you're opening a studio in Barcelona, is that correct?

MR. MOROLES: No, never have.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh.

MR. MOROLES: No, that's one of those – [laughs].

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, that's one of those misleads.

MR. MOROLES: Yes. It never happened, it never, you know. It was a possibility, I was looking for a studio there, and about that time I started getting invited to China, and it would do me no good to have a place in Spain and to be spending time in different countries every year, which I've already committed to. And so I gave that up to

become kind of a journeyman sculptor, almost, almost without a studio, without a home, and using the world as my home, you know.

We were talking about, you know, there's nothing in here in my studio or in my house or in my other house that I couldn't do without. You know, I don't think I need anything. I need my parents that are across the road there. I'm here as long as they're here. And then other than that, there's nothing that ties me to this place, this building, or nothing. I keep saying, you know, if a hurricane came up and washed us away it would be nothing, I put it up, I can put it up somewhere else. I can put it, you know - I'm not attached.

MS. CORDOVA: It's kind of a funny thing to hear you say because you spend so much time creating spaces, right?

MR. MOROLES: What I hope to do is to create spaces all around the world, so I can go visit these places and keep them up, keep adding to them. And so those will be my home. Do you know what I'm saying? And so I create a network of places where people, if they like one, they might want to go to the next one. And then go from that one to the next one and do this pilgrimage, kind of, around the world, and in the process get to see these places they never thought of before.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you ever have visions that something you create could be the Stonehenge of the future?

MR. MOROLES: It's possible, because, you know, we're dealing with something that's going to be around for a long time. Unfortunately the police memorial is not one of those things that are going to be around.

MS. CORDOVA: Why is that?

MR. MOROLES: It's not one of those pieces that's made for timelessness. You know, I think, like any building, probably, in downtown Houston or New York or anything, it has a life span. You know, it is built like a building, and it's not built like Stonehenge. And Stonehenge is made out of solid rock, and buildings are not made out of solid rock, they're made out of veneer, like paper rock, in the scheme of things, in time and everything. And so I don't see it as being one of those lasting things.

It can be restored, it can be kept up, it can be redone, but it cannot last through catastrophes and through things, you know, like Stonehenge.

MS. CORDOVA: What would you imagine that all of your work could have this very long life?

MR. MOROLES: I think a lot of my sculptures in themselves, you know, will get buried and covered up by civilization and then it's rediscovered and they'll still be totally intact. But I'm saying that the police memorial is a veneer, it's not made out of solid blocks of stones, except the steps are solid blocks. You know what I mean? So I think that this may be, in some form, may be destroyed, and remnants of it may still - like the rocking benches and things - will still be in tact because you can't destroy them except for possibly putting them in a volcano or something.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. I guess one thing that occurred to me is, you know, so many people have tried to understand what Stonehenge was originally, right? You know, whether it was a ceremonial site or what could have happened there, why were those rocks all lined up together like that? And I mean, if someone were to try to make sense of your work in the future, what are the questions, I guess, that would be asked? Similar questions, similar -

MR. MOROLES: Well, I just talked to someone who visited Stonehenge and was enlightened and reawakened, life changing experience, and I think it's baloney.

[Laughs.]

But I think if that's what she wants to envision and do, then that's fine, that's all good and well for her. I think she goes in, she may have been going in there with a lot of her own, you know, feelings of meaning something from other things and - but I just, you know, that's nice. I think it's nice, you know, she's not hurting anybody. But, like mine, I've created a space. You create spaces and you hope things can happen there, and that's, that's in a space-maker, a place-maker - trying to create a place.

I think it was Thomas Edison that said something about he had a dream place, and that's where he would go, out into around Walden Pond, or I forget where it was that he would come to think about his inventions and things. And everybody needs a dream place, and that's his phrase, "dream place," I think. I call them "dreamscapes." But I think Thomas Edison coined the dream place.

MS. CORDOVA: And in creating these dreamscapes, you're trying to encompass, not just your own dreams, but other people's dreams?

MR. MOROLES: No, I'm not incorporating my dreams. I'm creating a place where you can imagine, you can dream about things that you want to dream about. I'm not creating my dream, I'm trying to create a place where you are freed enough to dream about your own dreams, your own desires, your own hopes, your own aspirations.

MS. CORDOVA: For me, maybe switch you, because it's something I realize I wanted to ask you about, and that is working in other mediums besides granite. Like what you showed me when I first came here yesterday were those works on paper, which were actually sculptures onto themselves, but maybe talking about your work on paper or other mediums that you've played with?

MR. MOROLES: Well, in school, you know, I was a painter before and a sculptor last. And I was proficient in all those other things, photography, printmaking, metalsmithing and ceramics. So I always fancied myself as a multifaceted kind of artist who could – a Renaissance type – that believed that anything you did was art, you know. And so that a well-grounded artist could do anything. A little bit like Noguchi.

You know, he worked with theatre; he did public pieces; he did jewelry; he did portraits; he did playgrounds; you know. He did functional things: lamps, chairs, tables, chess sets. You know, you name it, he wasn't afraid to do anything. He built spaces, his room to live in, very humble spaces. And so he's kind of like a person that – kind of a good person to follow.

But I had to kind of concentrate, I had to stop doing all those other things, because I wanted to focus and not waste a lot of time in getting known and get an image out there and a reputation. And I thought I would be diluting it if I did all those things at one time. And so it was a conscious – I had a conscious plan, a five-year-plan, a 10-year-plan, and that included coming back to doing metalsmithing, wearable sculpture, you know, and all that stuff. It's just happening, just starting to happen right now.

So I'm getting back to all those fun things I used to love to do.

MS. CORDOVA: So what are you creating out of metal?

MR. MOROLES: I'm designing wearable sculpture, little granite weavings, bracelets, puzzle pieces, you know, little weavings out of gold and silver and kind of parquet-kind-of-looking, heavy gold things, disc, you know the disk – Ming disk? I'm doing small sculpture. I've been asked to do an exhibition in portable sculpture. And I've been asked by several places to get back to my printmaking.

And so in this time that I'll be off, I can go around and do some of these things, some of the fun things. And now I'm established, I don't have to start at the beginning, I don't have to sell my metalsmithing pieces at the bottom. I can demand a reasonable price for them. I don't have to give them away.

MS. CORDOVA: So you really did come back to your metal shop? Your other bee, right?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I had a conscious plan.

MS. CORDOVA: And you – as I think we said off tape, but you've always kept metal running through your sculpture, it's appeared in various instances?

MR. MOROLES: That first piece, my fountain, when I came back, I bought that stainless steel at a salvage yard and then went to Santa Fe, and I actually was polishing and sanding the stainless, because it was full of scratches, and I remember going down to the butcher shop and getting a big side of ham, of bacon, and running my grinder into that bacon and putting it on my sandpaper so it would sand finer and polish the stainless. And remember all the dogs sniffing around me and trying to take my bacon.

[Laughter.]

And that was my first piece, you know, I almost finished creating it at the foundry, at the art show. That's kind of memorable. But I was working the metal, I wasn't buying a piece of stainless that was polished, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, about those sort of works on paper, that's handmade paper that you are creating, right?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, from blue jeans, from taking blue jeans and cutting them up and turning them into pulp and pressing them into – dying them and pressing them into moulds and presses, you know, 30,000 pound presses that press out the water out of the pulp.

MS. CORDOVA: And they would be different colors according to, how?

MR. MOROLES: Actually bleaching all of it white and then doing some white and then adding colors to it, whatever color, gray. I stayed with neutral colors, very earthy tones, brown and black and white.

MS. CORDOVA: And so each layer is a different set of paper, or –

MR. MOROLES: Usually it was all one paper, and then I did do some where the solid part was one color, and then when the backing was poured on, it was actually a different color, so it actually had a backing that was a different color.

MS. CORDOVA: And you had mentioned the chess sets. And I guess I'd feel incomplete if I didn't ask you about when you started making chess sets?

MR. MOROLES: Oh, probably in the '90s. Early '90s I did a chess set for myself. And I collect chess sets. And I had an exhibition where I didn't have enough pieces for the show, so I decided I'd better fill in with my chess set. And sure enough, a chess master bought it from the show, and I'd put it a very high price on it because I didn't want to part with it. And so he bought it, and so it's taken me about 15 years later to actually come up with a second version of that, which is the more worked out, you know, after you do the first you can always improve. So I actually just come out last year and made my number two series. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: Your second set?

MR. MOROLES: My second version.

MS. CORDOVA: Are you going to keep doing them?

MR. MOROLES: What, do you want one?

[Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: Yes – [laughing] – sure.

MR. MOROLES: You know, I found an interesting book that had a listing of an exhibition that was done in New York with Duchamp and Noguchi, and all these famous – Magritte. All these artists who was in this chess exhibition, where they had an invisible chess game going on as a part of the kind of opening performance piece and everything. It was incredible to me at that time and have all these famous, people come up and do these fabulous things – and taking a functional, traditional thing and having artists put their minds to it and put their slant on it.

MS. CORDOVA: So you were sort of also inspired by that kind of work?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, actually I found that out later, I just found that out, was that Noguchi actually made one too. And then I researched and found literature and the invitation for the show and all this information, so it was very – I found the book and it gave me more information on it. It was very exciting for me.

MS. CORDOVA: Would you have done the chess set, had you known that Noguchi had done a chess set before you?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, I'm not afraid to do something like that because mine had nothing to do with his, other than that we're talking about the same name. But if you look, there's no similarity in anything. His was out of wood and mine was granite, mine are big pieces you can barely pick up and his were little tiny pieces. So, you know, it's just – and mine is more, almost, you know, it's very sculptural, and those were very tabletop little things, and this is more back to my Playscapes, you know, where you're actually creating – it's almost like looking at a plaza, a piazza .

And these pieces are big pieces of sculpture that are in the piazza. So looking at a miniature table or piazza.

MS. CORDOVA: And what kind of a chess player are you?

MR. MOROLES: I've stalemated my computer on the beginning – the beginner –

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, yeah, on the beginner chess you've done stalemate?

[Laughter.]

MR. MOROLES: But I don't know how to play, so, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: You're self-taught?

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, I've never read anything about it or anything. And so the computer doesn't know what the heck I'm doing so it doesn't know what to do, and so it's an element of surprise, that's what I use.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, that's maybe a good theme for you. [Laughter.] Element of surprise.

Let's see, there are maybe -

MR. MOROLES: And that's how I approach my exhibitions, you know, I kind of - people come and they come because they don't know what to expect unless they've seen something on an invitation, because I tend to change it up so much that they don't know where I'm coming from.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, now I don't even remember if this was on tape or not, because we've been talking so much, I think that you had mentioned how creating all these different exhibits in Dallas, the requirement is that you must give each one something newer and more exciting or -

MR. MOROLES: And better.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, make each one better. That's your plan.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, that was my own criteria, was that. The galleries just wanted, the museums just wanted an exhibition, you know. I have to put my own kind of parameters on it.

MS. CORDOVA: How did you get selected as one of the initial artists for the Latino Cultural Center?

MR. MOROLES: They were looking for - doing like a search, they wanted to make it very - have the best - open with their best foot forward. And they wanted a classy show. They were looking internationally, and then saw that I was doing international things, and I happened to be from there, but hadn't been there for 20-some years. And so the curator from the Dallas museum was on the selection committee and some other people, and they all just came to the conclusion, there was not even much of a choice. They just said this would be perfect, so.

MS. CORDOVA: And what does it mean to be selected for the Latino Cultural Center?

MR. MOROLES: Well, I thought about it.

[Laughter.]

I thought about it, but I respect [Ricardo] Legorreta's work, and, you know, he just happened to be not making a library, but was making the Latino Cultural Center. He doesn't only make Latino Cultural Centers. He does happen to be Hispanic, but he does other buildings, it just happened to be a Latino Cultural Center. He did do the Art Institute in Santa Fe, which I was at the opening of, and truly admiring and working with the same clients that he is.

And so it was a matter of respecting that I knew that he was a good architect and a good person, and it was kind of an honor to be chosen as the first artist to open the space. And so with that in mind, I took the burden of carrying the Latino Cultural Center, that part of it. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: Right. Because when you're - I mean, I guess when you participate in these works and you encounter the likelihood that you will then, of course, be identified as a Latino artist, and then what does that labeling mean? And I guess we talked about that.

MR. MOROLES: Well, and also I wanted to show that there was nothing in it, that was Latino about it, about my work. And so there's nothing in there that resembled any kind of Latino, except that maybe the pieces could rock, some of them.

[Laughs.]

That's as close as an association that they could make, I think.

MS. CORDOVA: And how would the rocking be Latino?

MR. MOROLES: Who knows, but I imagine they could come up with something. But I hope that I showed them that it wasn't about that. I mean, the next show was kind of a well-known muralist from LA, Judy Baca. And, you know, very political, talk about political, and, you know, you have no question about where she's coming from or where she's going, and it definitely fits in with maybe what they want to do. I was hoping that they weren't going to go that route, you know, and I was hoping that they would take a higher road with the quality of things that they were going to put in there. But they kind of - they're not going to do that.

And the person just resigned that was running that space, and left, and now it's all in the controversy, and I'll probably expect some phone calls this week about all that stuff. But I'll just have to say, "I told you so."

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I mean, one of the things that I found interesting in going to that space, and I did see your work up there, was that you were also there with Celia Munoz, who had created the mural in there. And you're both graduates of the University of North Texas, Denton. And you're both sort of Dallas artists there, finally being given an opportunity to interact in that space or in a city that hasn't actually fostered you in the past, or in sort of mixed ways, but that University of North Texas education must have paid off too?

MR. MOROLES: The education at North Texas State, it was a good school because they allowed you the freedom to do things. And they did also bring in people, that's where I met Paolo Solari, that's where I connected with Luis Jimenez. Again, they brought people in. You know, the teachers there were relatively mediocre. But some were extraordinary, and you know, you're going to have that any place, I think. But, you know - the thing is to go for the tough teachers, the ones that they're bad mouthing because they're too hard and they're too - those are the ones that were the fantastic ones.

The ones that were testing you on things they never showed you on, the art history. Testing you on the back door, because you should know from the style what the back door should look like if you'd really looked into it. You know, of the cathedral or something. You know, that's the interesting teachers that made it worthwhile. They make you think and go deeper, and use your head.

MS. CORDOVA: And I think we're sort of coming to a close in terms of this interview, but I feel like I still have these loose ends that I'd like to ask you about. And one is this idea of suspending your work from great heights, right, that you've started - I don't know if they're great heights - [laughs] - you can fix my language. But that you have come up with this idea of holding your sculptures from rafters or ceilings, and when did that first start? And what is your idea behind that?

MR. MOROLES: Well, you know, once I realized that I could kind of transport people to a different place, kind of meditation space, create an environment where people's mind would free them up from different things, and I realized that I wanted people to go in there and just sit there, go in and actually sit on the sculpture and just be there without saying a word. And usually the amount of time people spend on art is like a flash, you know, nanoseconds per piece.

And to actually capture people and keep them was a new kind of concept for the art observer. So once I thought I had found this, discovered this, I started looking, like you know, that was by creating a landscape in the gallery and an environment, and controlling the ceilings and the walls and the floor. And then I started deciding, well, I didn't like pedestals, so I started having everything just come off the floor, and then I didn't want to have anything on the floor, so I floated everything.

And so I keep - it came as a result of not wanting pedestals and not wanting anything on the floor. So I - and it also results from my first hanging pieces, were from my experience at Notre Dame, when I lived in Paris I would go to the free concerts there, and I would - I don't know, did I say this earlier?

MS. CORDOVA: You didn't say it to the tape.

MR. MOROLES: Well, I was sitting there on the altar at the free concerts, looking up at the ceiling and saw this huge, round, hand-forged chandelier, forged iron. And I had to figure that weighed thousands of pounds, maybe 3,000 pounds, I'm guessing. And if they could hang this from an old church that didn't have any steel structure or anything, then I could certainly hang heavy granite.

And so I came back and did an exhibition where I actually suspended 2,000 pound pieces in the gallery. And that started kind of the hanging series of pieces.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you consider yourself an installation artist?

MR. MOROLES: An installation artist? I've done installations. I like to do installations. I'm asked more and more to do installations. Installations are more expensive, and a lot of times they're a one of a kind, they fit only one place. And so that makes them a little difficult, but I like doing that. I like doing site-specific things for a space, even though it's a temporary exhibition. But installations, you know -

MS. CORDOVA: It's one of your hats, maybe.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, installation, site-specific.

MS. CORDOVA: How did the *Moonscape* benches evolve? I don't think we talked about it on the tape.

MR. MOROLES: The *Moonscape*? I did my first *Moonscape* for an exhibition in what was in the *Dreamscape*, about 1988, '89 was the exhibition, at Davis/McClain in Houston. And in the right hand corner of that exhibition, in the back, I had this round, totally round disc that was about 5 foot diameter, Texas pink granite, that I would stand

on the very bottom tip of it and I'd hold on to the top and I would rock on it, standing there. And with my tippy-toes on the bottom of it, and I would go, like, wouldn't it be great if I could sit on this?

And that started the *Moonscape* bench series, where I actually started cutting holes in them and sitting in them and started getting the more interactive benches, started that whole *Moonscape* bench series.

MS. CORDOVA: Why did you pick the title *Moonscapes*?

MR. MOROLES: Well, the first piece was a total circle. And to me the texture of the piece, when it's torn, you know, when granite is torn, just like when you look at the moon at night and you see that landscape on the moon, it's like a mountainous kind of, you know, irregular surface. And so it's like looking at the moon, kind of. And so I just came up with that name.

It's kind of an abstract thing. You don't know what it is, but you know its texture and Swiss cheese or whatever, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And maybe just – also going back, but I've seen your work described as Zen-like, or echoing Zen-like ideas. What do you – is that, again, another sort of mythology, or how accurate is that idea?

MR. MOROLES: I haven't heard that, I haven't seen that – I guess I have seen that in articles and things. I don't know what Zen is, you know. But I think they're trying to say that it has almost some kind of a – could be used almost as a meditation kind of – it's almost monk-like created, that it has an austere simplicity to it, that it doesn't need much to put importance to a piece.

I think that Zen-like is almost like what I was talking about the other day, it's almost like a scholar rock. And it goes back to the beginning where – I don't know if I told you on tape, but, you know, I could see where the beginning was because I had the pieces in my studio when I went to the Fort Worth Museum and saw Ruckriem Ulrich's work at the Fort Worth. I had the same pieces in my studio. And they were so minimal that I know I couldn't show my minimal pieces and get anybody to look at them, because they were too minimal and someone was already doing this minimal stuff, just like it, exactly like it, because they were using the same material.

He came and invaded my territory. He's from Germany and came into my quarry that I was using and used the same pieces, so he ended up with the same look as mine because he was using the same stone that I was using, exactly the same stone, torn from the same hillside. And so our pieces were exactly the same, except I was a beginner in my first year and he was an old man and already, you know, established, a famous artist.

And so I knew that that's what I wanted to do, and I really connected with that, but I knew that I had to do other things. But I could see that just by picking the stone and the way I set it up or turned it, if I picked the right stone, that that would be enough. Almost like that piece that Stanley Marcus gave me. I mean, that lady, she picked those stones up, she didn't carve those stones or anything. It's just the way she put them in that box, and she made this neat piece. Almost like Louise Nevelson

MS. CORDOVA: – cabinet of curiosities, rock.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, it's almost like all scholar rocks, because they're hand-picked stones, out of all the stones in the world she picked those, and turned them that way.

MS. CORDOVA: And one question I do have for you, it is sort of relating to maybe the next generation or your daughter, and how you see her interacting with your work. She's 15 now?

MR. MOROLES: Just turned 16 last week.

MS. CORDOVA: Just turned 16 last week. How has she responded to your work? Do you see her as taking it on? Is she artistic?

MR. MOROLES: I remember when she was just a little bitty thing, couldn't even speak or anything, and we walked into a collector's home, and she'd never been in that home or ever seen my work, the particular piece that was in their home, and as soon as we walked in we walked over to the mantle and she went like that, and there was my piece, it was there, before she could even speak. And so she was always familiar, very early on, of the work.

But I've never pushed her on to the art side of things. She's a musician, a percussionist, she's a horse person, cowgirl, and, you know, does all kinds of things, great volleyball player, sports and things, she has a sportsman, kind of, in her. And so I haven't really, like, pushed her. And just the other day she's started to take some art classes, and the other kids have been taking art for quite a longer period, so she asked if I could help her in her drawing. And so it was the first time she's asked for help, so I feel like now I can help, because she's asked for help.

And so I've been working with her and showing her different things. But she's gone to my workshops and done sculptures in my workshops, when she was a little girl, and created tin sculptures, collages that she glued together and did very well when she was maybe 10-years-old. So she's been around it, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, we'll see where life takes her.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, yeah, she's a great kid, I'm really lucky.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, good, I'm glad we got that on tape.

[Laughter.]

So, you remember that.

MR. MOROLES: That's a daughter.

MS. CORDOVA: And, I mean, I think with that - you know, I could probably keep firing questions at you, but I think we've covered a lot of ground. And what I'd like to do is sort of open up the recorder to you. If there's anything in particular that you think maybe should be included on this tape that goes into the archives, or if there's any sort of last thoughts that you would like to include on the tape, let me allow you to speak. If you like.

MR. MOROLES: I think we've covered quite a bit. I can't think of anything else right now.

MS. CORDOVA: You'll think of it 10 minutes from now.

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Well -

MR. MOROLES: Yeah, and you'll think of something 10 minutes from now, on the road or something.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, it happens all the time.

[Laughter.]

MR. MOROLES: You just call me and record it on the phone or something.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, then just sort of - I guess we've talked about the sort of ultimate dream project, your new environment.

MR. MOROLES: Oh, that's not a dream project, that's just a reality. My dream projects are much bigger than that.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, let's end on a dream project.

MR. MOROLES: My dream project? My dream project is more the spaces around the world - and making a difference with the art. You know, trying to - by connecting these dots, that we actually bring the world closer together. That's kind of a, my dream, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: How about that, I like ending there. So with that I'll just say thank you very much.

MR. MOROLES: Well, you're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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