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Oral history interview with Gary Griffin, 2004
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Gary Griffin on August 4, 2005. The interview took place in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and was conducted by Glenn Adamson for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Gary Griffin and Glenn Adamson 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

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay, this is Glenn Adamson interviewing Mr. Gary Griffin here at Cranbrook [Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan]. We are in the new studios building, and we are in the metalsmith shop – you might be able to hear the faint sound of drilling in the background for local color. And it is August 4th, 2004, and we are going to be talking about Gary's career and life here today. Gary, you want to say hi?

GARY GRIFFIN: Hi.

MR. ADAMSON: So I guess maybe the first thing I should ask is this building that we are sitting in – it's only a couple of years old, correct?

MR. GRIFFIN: We have been in the building for two years, and we planned for it for about two and a half or three years prior that.

MR. ADAMSON: And it's actually the first building that has been constructed as a new building on Cranbrook's campus for years and years, right?

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, not on the entire campus, but within the Art Academy. There have been a series of buildings that have been built on the grounds prior to this one. The Brookside School had an addition, the Institute of Science had an addition, and we built the school's Natatorium. So this is actually the fourth one.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: But in the Art Academy, this is an addition that is the earliest – well, the building that preceded it was the foundry in the sculpture studio, which was probably in the early '60s, I think. So it has been a good long time.

MR. ADAMSON: And your studio is here or you have a studio elsewhere?

MR. GRIFFIN: This is my studio.

MR. ADAMSON: We are sitting in it.

MR. GRIFFIN: Right, and I – part of our charge, or part of our contract, is that we teach and we maintain an artistic practice. So we are – our title is artist-in-residence. We are not called faculty or we don't have professorial rank. We are simply artists in residence and then head of a particular department, and in this case, metalsmithing. So I maintain a – actually, I maintain a business. I have my own business, which is Griffin Metal Works. It's a legal licensed corporation, and I do commission work regularly, and that is what you hear going on down the hall. So every summer I have students that work with me on commission-type projects, and then during the school year I spend at least two days a week in my own studio producing work and then three or so days with the students in a teaching capacity. So it's fused together, and it works well because it's a graduate-level education.

MR. ADAMSON: So you are able to get really good people, as a result, to work with you during the summers?

MR. GRIFFIN: Sure. I have really good help, and also, they benefit. It's really – I think of it as mentoring the way mentoring should be. In other words, those that work with me during the summer get to work on really good work, high-end projects, they get to see how I make things, they learn all the little subtleties about making things. I'm really open with them about discussing relationships with contractors or clients, ordering supplies – all of those kinds of things. So they get an on-the-job type of experience. And then during the school year of course it shifts to where the focus is their work, and then I'm working with them on that, but it's very different. It's a very different activity.

And then also during the school year I usually have one student – sometimes two – that are helping me with the projects. So probably next year – I have three people helping me now – next year I will have at least one, and a second one that will work periodically. There is a particular job that I'm working on now and he knows how to do a particular operation so he is going to do that, actually on his own time. So it will be totally flexible.

MR. ADAMSON: Great, great. Well, we probably don't want to get into too much detail there because we should start at the beginning.

MR. GRIFFIN: Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, you were born in 1945 –

MR. GRIFFIN: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: – with the close of the war, but maybe we should even start before that, talk about your family a little bit, where they came from, that kind of thing.

MR. GRIFFIN: Sure. My – I think it would be – well, my mother is a native Californian. Her parents, however, are from Coldwater, Michigan, which is about two hours from here, which is really – it amazes me. It's one of those things where you reconnect with place and history and family unexpectedly. My mother is – or was – she is still alive, but she is 95, and she was an interior designer and owned an antique store. And she was very accomplished. She is a fellow of ASID [American Society of Interior Designers], she was on the National Board and she was an accomplished person in her field, and that played a great role in my life, which we will probably discuss a little bit later.

Her parents grew up in Coldwater, Michigan, and my grandfather went to the University of Michigan, graduated with a law degree and moved to California very early on – early 20th century. And then they lived the remainder of their lives there. My father's side of the family – my father is a Texan, and after my mother and father were married they moved to Wichita Falls, Texas where I was born. And my father was a rancher and he died young, when I was young – he was young. He was 40 years old, and I was a very young child when he passed away.

My Grandmother Griffin lived in Wichita Falls all of her life. She is a real – a very important figure in my life, and she was, you know, basically a high school graduate that was self-educated. So she – I can remember that she would have probably four papers that would come to the post office box each day. The *New York Times* would come about three days late, four days late, and the *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* or *Chicago Tribune*. She would get various newspapers and they would just be piled up all over the place, and she would be reading them. She just read constantly.

Anyway, she is an important figure. After my father died my mother decided – and my Grandmother Griffin as well – that we should move to California where her parents were. So we moved to California when I was about five years old. So I started schooling there, and then during my summers I would go back to Texas to be with my grandmother, and she also had a summer home in Taos, New Mexico. So from the time I was one year old until I was 17, I spent every summer of my life in Taos, New Mexico. So this would have been, you know, in the '40s – mid-40's up through the early '60s. And so I'm very familiar with that country, and my wife and I have a home in Northern New Mexico today and we spend a lot of time there.

MR. ADAMSON: And were you aware of Taos as an art center when you were there?

MR. GRIFFIN: Oh, sure. My grandmother – absolutely. My grandmother was not only a reader and someone that was very aware, but she was very aware of art. She collected – she was an eclectic type of collector. So what is really curious is their daughter-in-law – my mother – was an antique dealer. So – [laughs] – needless to say, when those two got together it was shopping time. And they drove all over Texas and the Southwest and Colorado and, you know, going to stores and looking at things and pulling things out of old houses.

I remember the house – my grandmother's house in Taos – they moved there early enough where there were still a lot of abandoned buildings around. In fact, the home that she had was abandoned when she bought it. And so it was very easy to talk to someone and pull architectural components out of another adobe, and so all of the ceilings were remarkable, all of the beams and – you know, the trasteros were built in the wall. I mean, it was a great place, and that was easy to do at that period of time. There wasn't much interest – you know, it was pretty eccentric people that moved out to Northern New Mexico at that point in time.

So anyway, she had an interest in art, and in the broader sense decorative arts were a very important part of that. And so I grew up between the antique store and my grandmother's home where there were Santos and there were some Chinese pieces and some Japanese things and some Victorian stuff. And I mean, it was just all over the place, but really interesting things and remarkable things. So anyway, I guess I just marinated in that stuff.

We knew a lot of artists and she maintained her kind of ranch orientation – I supposed you could call it – where she was up at five every morning. She used to buy – [laughs] – she would buy an aluminum coffee pot – just the cheapest one you could get – and she would bring it home, throw all the percolation system out when she got home, she would dump coffee in the bottom and just boil it, and that was it. [They laugh.] And then, you know, read the newspaper, but then the big meal – her big dinner was always at one or two o'clock in the afternoon, and we always had a very light supper. It was something like a bowl of soup or something like that. So she would invite people over, and there were two activities – it was either the dinner where people would come, and there would usually always be, oh, maybe three guests. And then we might – in the morning she might visit. So basically we would just get in the car and then we would go to someone's house. And I supposed it was just common at that period of time where you could do that. You just drove up and people were glad to see you and everybody stopped doing what they were doing. And most of them were artists so we knew – I mean, as a young child I was in painters' studios probably three out of five days of the week.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: One painter or another. So we knew – Andrew Dasburg was a good friend, Nick [Nicolai] Fechin was a good friend. Fechin's home in Taos is a historic site. [Leon] Gaspard, Frieda Lawrence – D.H. Lawrence's wife – Angelo [Ravagli] her husband – or, I don't know if he was actually her husband, but they were together – Dorothy Brett – you know, the whole Taos contingency. And so at one time or another they would be either for dinner or we would go visiting.

So it was a pretty – it was a really unusual experience and I did like doing it, but at the time I was thinking, well, everybody else is doing different things – [laughs] – than I'm doing.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: You know what I mean? I'm thinking, man, these other – I used to go fishing on the weekends with Frank Chase, who was Gisela Loeffler's husband. Gisela was well-known for illustrating children's books and she was more of a folk artist – she was Hungarian – but she is well-known in Northern New Mexico. And so we would go over to Gisela's all the time. And Gisela lived in one of Mabel Dodge Luhan's homes. When Mabel moved to New Mexico she bought a large house, which was – she restored it and it was called – originally she called it the Tony House – that was the big house. Then she built a number of guest houses over a large section of property – I mean, I would say maybe 25, 30 acres. So as she got older, she sold off those guest houses so Frank and Gisela lived in one of them. And Mabel actually moved out of the Tony House at a certain point because it was large and then lived in one of the guest houses herself. And we would visit her occasionally also.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow. Interesting.

MR. GRIFFIN: But the Tony House at that point was pretty much not functional. She wasn't using it. I don't think it really became occupied again until Dennis Hopper bought it and, you know, all the easy-riders moved in. But anyway, I was keenly aware of art and decorative arts, but it was more of a – I think it was comparable to learning a language where you are just around it, and so I knew Louis XV or Louis XIV and these kinds of things, but I didn't necessarily think of it as being extraordinary, and I also – it wasn't a study type of experience. It was there and you are marinating in it.

MR. ADAMSON: Stuff that had names attached to it.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, yeah, or that it was coming in out of the shops. [Laughs.] You know, you get something and then you would sell it. So there were a number of pieces that were kind of prime that weren't going anywhere, but they were in the shop anyway. And then of course the things in my grandmother's home didn't really move. They were there.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Now, when you say shop you are talking about the one in New Mexico.

MR. GRIFFIN: No, I'm talking about the one in Southern California.

MR. ADAMSON: In California.

MR. GRIFFIN: My mother had a decorating business in Wichita Falls before we moved, but then when she moved to California, then she set up her antique business, and that was the store – the shop – from which she also ran her decorating business.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. GRIFFIN: So we had the antiques and then the decorating business. So she worked out of that. And we moved – let's see, that was probably about 1951 or so, and so it was a good time to build a business in Southern

California, and she rented a space that was right on Pacific Coast Highway, which has great traffic, and then later on bought it. I think it was a lease-to-buy type of contract, and then she bought it eventually. So she was there - my gosh, from '51 to - I think we - well, she actually moved the business to another location, but we might have closed it in the mid-'90s. So she kept working -

MR. ADAMSON: Long time.

MR. GRIFFIN: - a very long time. So it was probably close to 45 years. So she was well-known, and then she participated in her profession in terms of organizational structures and was president of the Los Angeles chapter of - at that time it was AID - now it's ASID.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: And then sat on the National Board for years and made trips to Chicago, and then she is a fellow - she was awarded a fellowship.

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of houses was she decorating?

MR. GRIFFIN: All residential, that it basically was - you know, the growth of that part of Southern California, which was pretty much all ranch-style homes - I mean, it was a big deal that it was split-level -

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: - you know, the drop down three stairs or something. For the most part they were all - well, they all were single story except for some of the older homes that were more of a Spanish style - a kind of, what I would call, a 1915 Spanish Colonial typical of the Hollywood crowd at that period of time. There was a lot of remarkable work done in Southern California, both in Long Beach, Hollywood, up in the hills areas, Palos Verdes - in the old section of Palos Verdes that were that Spanish Colonial stucco, Romanesque arches, red tile roofs - really fantastic beautiful homes. And the interiors took on that same characteristic, and they were eclectic where there would be some good ironwork on the sconces and interesting paneled doors, and just everything. It was nicely done.

And then there was the ranch style, and she did a little bit of contemporary, but not that much. So interesting enough - I mean, part of it - I was aware of Charles and Ray Eames and I knew who Jack Larsen was because my mother sold a lot of Jack Larsen's velvets when he came out with the printed velvets. I mean, I didn't know anything - I didn't really know anything about Cranbrook at that point in time - I did a little bit later - but I just knew these people's names because they were important designers for the goods that she sold. She didn't sell a lot of contemporary work, but she certainly was aware of Saarinen, and those people and occasionally would sell that kind of thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Depending on the house she was working with or depending on -

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. Depending on the clientele, depending on the clients. And she had some clients that would purchase contemporary things, but for the most part it wasn't. But she also did things like Baker, which is totally traditional work. So she ran the gamut, but she didn't do any commercial work, no contract work. She always used to say, though, "That is where the money is." [They laugh.] But she didn't like it, and it just took a different kind of mindset to work at that scale, which she wasn't prepared to do and she didn't have a staff. Occasionally, she would have an intern, that type of thing.

MR. ADAMSON: But some of the houses she was working on sound like they were fairly grand.

MR. GRIFFIN: Some of them were. Oh, yeah, there were some very nice ones. I would say that she worked for, as an average in her business, upper middle class. In other words, they were people that were - you know, the '50s and '60s were pretty optimistic times, and especially compared to today, but we won't get into that - [laughs] - and because the design was much more progressive in general, I think, and I call that optimistic. So these were people that were young engineers that were working for McDonald Douglas and L.A. was blowing up - you know, just with freeways being built, you know, one after another. So there was a lot going on there and there was money flowing. So people put money into their homes and they bought a lot of stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, one thing I'm curious about - when she is running an antique business and she is in California - you know, there aren't necessarily a lot of antiques in California, or at least I wouldn't expect there to be.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Was she doing her own picking?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, she picked a little bit, but she also had – there were pickers, you know? And in fact, one of the favorite memories was – there was this one guy, a picker – his name was Jim Anthony – and the pickers would always drive up, and of course they would either have a station wagon or a car with a very big trunk. And the only place in the car for an individual was the driver’s place.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: You know, there was no room for any passengers because it was just packed with stuff. And so Jim Anthony was one of those just charming, warm individuals, and I liked him immensely and he was always really nice to my mother. And so we would always go out to the car and then look at stuff. So I remember her saying, “Well, why don’t you go do this and take this in,” or whatever, and then they would go around to the trunk. And years later I asked her – I said, you know, “I remember Jim well and I remember you purchasing things from him, but I remember you always used to send me to the shop when you would go back to the trunk.” And she said, “Oh, well, there were always more things back there, but underneath all that stuff he was a major dealer in erotic art.” [Laughs.] So she didn’t want me – you know, in other words, he would have, like, candlesticks and everything and then underneath that in the trunk was all this erotic art, which could be objects, it could be drawings, whatever. And so she said, you know, “It’s just as well.”

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: So I thought that was so great because, you know, as a child or a young person you are seeing all these things coming through and of course I thought, well, of course there had to be somebody that was dealing with erotic art. So anyway, it turned out to be Jim Anthony.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: It was just great.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, back in Texas – you are going back there all the time. You had no – she had no business going there.

MR. GRIFFIN: No, no, she didn’t. My father was dead. My grandmother was really the only one left. My Grandfather Griffin had died years, years, earlier. He was young. He was 30 years old when he died.

So my grandmother basically spent September to June in Wichita Falls and then moved – would go to Taos during the summers. Let me think of how old she was – I think she probably died when she was about 70 – something like that. But anyway, that is the way she split her life, and she wouldn’t get on an airplane. I think she came to California maybe once and she hopped on a train. But very often when I would go to Texas, if we were going to meet her in – if I were going to come from L.A. to New Mexico and not go to Texas, then I would get on the train – and I did that as a young guy.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, on your own.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, on my own. Maybe – oh, maybe nine years old.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MR. GRIFFIN: And so I would get on the train at Union Station about – I think about four o’clock in the afternoon, and then by two o’clock the next day – afternoon – we would be in Lamy Station, which was the train station for Santa Fe – it’s about 25 miles south of Santa Fe. And so I would ride the Santa Fe rails across and, you know, all the stops and Winslow and Seligman and all of that type of thing. I remember well when the dome car first came on. That was a very big deal. [Laughs.] You could get up in the dome and look around. Other than that, it was like riding a train in the east or trains that we ride in Chicago.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: So that trip was a memorable one. Then she would drive down from Taos and then pick me up in Lamy and then we used to stay in Santa Fe – spend the night in Santa Fe and then go up. She had a lot of friends in Santa Fe, too, and artistic – some artists – you know, the same kind of mixing of individuals.

MR. ADAMSON: So it sounds like you were pretty strongly marked by Taos and obviously we will talk about how strongly marked you were by California. Do you feel like you also have a lot of Texan in you in some way?

MR. GRIFFIN: I think – I wouldn’t say – what I feel is that a strong part of that is – it’s more the people and the particular domestic environment I was in. I mean, I remember going out to the ranch and I remember some experiences going fishing and things like that, and I certainly remember the landscape. The landscape really was kind of branded in my brain. But Taos was far more powerful as New Mexico is a far more powerful

experience. But the thing I would say about that is that I can remember the floor plan of the house in Wichita Falls and the one in New Mexico, and I can remember objects and where they were, and I still have some of those objects. So I think it was probably the actual domestic environment and the individuals that was really the most powerful memory.

One of the things that I think is interesting, which – I mean, this is – my grandmother – it was very typical to have a house that had some kind of courtyard. So in other words, we think of having multiple roofs or multiple buildings as post-modern, but it's not unusual at all. And in fact, my grandmother's house in Taos was kind of a long-running house. They just kept building for years, and you couldn't get to one part from the other except by going outside through the courtyard. That is just how people lived. And even in the bedrooms, there was no hallway – you went through the bedroom, from one bedroom to another. And then if you wanted to go outside, there was also an outside entrance to the bedroom so you would go down the portico, which was outside, then you could go into the bedroom.

And in Wichita Falls it was very similar to that, you know, where it was just one thing after another, and there was a courtyard, which – you know, you have dinner parties or that type of thing out of there. And then the other thing that I will never forget – my grandmother basically was a ranch woman – and I don't mean by that that she was some kind of cowboy or something because she wasn't at all, but she grew up in those kinds of environments as a young girl in Kansas – and every house she had had interior plumbing and exterior. There was an outhouse in every house. So Taos had a male and female outhouse, and so did Wichita Falls. [Laughs.] We never used them, but they were always there, and in Taos there was a – I will never forget – both the Taos and Wichita Falls places had Chambers stoves, and then in Taos there was a wood fire stove next to it. Hey, some things can happen. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: You never know, right?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, and it's really interesting because it – you know, it changes your awareness. I will never forget that, and I still think about that a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, it's another way to being connected to the past, too.

MR. GRIFFIN: Exactly. Yeah, and it's also a way to support life with options. You know, so you have always got – you know, you are never going to get stuck because you have always got options.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Now, what was your house in California like? Was it a ranch?

MR. GRIFFIN: It was a ranch-style – well, actually, the first house my mother bought was this tiny, little, two-bedroom house, and that is actually kind of interesting. It was in an area in Palos Verdes and there were three homes, and ours is the one in the middle. The one that was adjacent to us in one direction was designed and built by an architect, and he designed our house. So these were homes that were low, they were [Frank Lloyd] Wrightian in their feel. They had shake roofs and they had very long eaves – maybe 24 inches, maybe 30-inch eaves that came out, and they were also – they were stuccoed so they had a little bit of a Spanish feel. So they were really nicely designed homes, and the one that we were in, she bought it because it was small. You know, it was just my mother and I, so it was it was a very, very small house.

And then the one on the other side was another architect who we remained friends with for years, and he had more of an Italian flair. I mean, this house was great – a lot of stone, a lot of rockwork, he had a little gazebo – I mean, all this cool, really neat stuff that he would build over years. So he would get a project and then he would build something. And so here again, just another reinforcement of a certain quality of life, you know what I mean? It seems that all those places, those early formative stages, were reinforced through this kind of marination. You know, it's just like, you are in it, and it's only when you go out of it you go, "Whoa – [laughs] – what is happening out here?"

MR. ADAMSON: And it's not like that for everybody.

MR. GRIFFIN: No, no, no. So I felt – I mean, I really feel fortunate and privileged that my mother and my Grandmother Griffin were so interested in these kinds of things and that they were involved – or my mother was involved – professionally in that type of thing. I mean, she would do any kind of work, but in terms of our own environment, there were just interesting things around.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, it sounds like she never remarried, your mother?

MR. GRIFFIN: She did remarry later, and she married a guy that she had gone to college with, and they were married for quite a long time and then he basically developed Alzheimer's and then he died. So my mom has – and my mother was married before she married my father. So she had a first husband, and I have a half brother.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. GRIFFIN: He is much older than I am. He is 15 years older than I am.

MR. ADAMSON: And was he an important figure for you growing up?

MR. GRIFFIN: No, we never lived in the same home. We had contact periodically, and of course we still do because we share our mother, but we are not – I wouldn't say we are close. I mean, we are friendly and we share our mother. In other words, we both care about her and are maintaining her life at this point in time, but we never hung out or anything. I was in a crib and he was driving a car, you know? [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: So it sounds like you were raised by a single mom.

MR. GRIFFIN: Basically three women – my mother, her mother, Grace Swaffield and then my Grandmother Griffin. And my mother's mother, after my Grandfather Swaffield died, she moved about four doors down from our house. So my mother was very attentive to her parents. My Grandfather Swaffield had a stroke in, I think, the late '50s, so he was really incapacitated for the last six or so years of his life. He died about – I think he died in '61 and then my Grandmother Griffin died in '62.

So the grandparents were pretty much out of the picture other than my Grandmother Swaffield, who lived to be 93, and she was just a really smart, intelligent, well-read woman. She didn't have the same interest in objects and that type of thing. I mean, she had a nice home, but it wasn't a place where I was just completely overwhelmed when I would go in there, whereas both my mom and my Grandmother Griffin – they were totally eclectic, in a way kind of over the top – a lot like my place, just stuff everywhere, and interesting – “Oh, what's that?” And, you know, the stuff would be moving through.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, it is interesting to me that you didn't have a kind of father figure –

MR. GRIFFIN: No, there was none.

MR. ADAMSON: – because, you know, you think of the '50s of the classic time of the nuclear family unit and you had this very different kind of upbringing.

MR. GRIFFIN: Exactly. Yeah, I feel really fortunate. I remember as a child that – I mean, I never went to a ballgame. I played some tennis, but I mean, none of that stuff – one thing I did a lot, though, is I used to ride horses. And my Grandfather Swaffield would – he had a couple of horses, and when he was alive and before his stroke we would go for rides. He thought that that would be a good thing for me on a Sunday to go with him because the rest of the time I was with all the women.

And so I did that, but for the rest of the time it was all activities, either of my own invention – and my mother always gave me a work area, too, in the garage. So I had a workbench, and I could do pretty much whatever I wanted down there so, you know, I built models and really pretty much activities that were focused in terms of my own interests, which usually had to do with building something. Or I would build – we had a ravine in back of our house and I would build little forts, or whatever you want to call them, down there. I would get a bunch of two by fours and hammer and that type of thing.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were an only child, so playing a lot by yourself.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, basically. Yeah, I think of myself as an only child.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: One of the activities that I distinctly remember as a real treat was on a Saturday, as a kind of treat we would go to L.A. and we would go to lunch, and then she would show me some things around L.A. So there was – I remember the Bradbury Building. You walk into the Bradbury Building and it's all iron going up so that – you know, late 19th-century building where access to all the offices were off a kind of mezzanine, but it was an iron railing so there was an atrium-like feeling. When you were in this building, it was wide open up to the top, but it was all cast-iron.

And then there was a great men's store, and we used to go there, I think, basically for one reason because we would never buy anything. [Laughs.] It was called Oviatt [Alexander & Oviatt clothing store], and the doors at the entrance were iron with Lalique glass.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh.

MR. GRIFFIN: And then you would go inside, and the elevator doors were like that. I mean Art Deco, man. It was unbelievable. So then we would have lunch and we would do that kind of thing, and then we would go over, I

think it was at 12:30 or 1:00 or 1:30, to where the musicals would be playing – I don't remember the theater. But we figured out that if the performance was at 2, if we arrived at about 1:20 or 1:15, that that is when people would turn their tickets in, and very often we could buy, I mean, extraordinary seats, like front row center, fourth row, fifth row center for a matinee. And so we would go to – and I remember those musicals. You know, I remember seeing Gwen Verdon in "Damn Yankees" and all that, which was – that was a treat.

And then the other thing about L.A. that I remember was the Atlantic Richfield Building was Art Deco and it was black – either black granite – probably black granite, as opposed to marble – but I mean, black, which is cool.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: And at the top there were gold nymphs – you know, like, some kind of gold nymph figures – four of them. And it might have been in the '60s – there was this large debate about tearing it down or remodeling it. Of course the developers were not interested in having that thing up, and I mean, they blew it up. They blew it up and my mom said, "We have got to get down there and get those nymphs."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: We have got to get some of those parts. And we never did, but there was no interest in picking it out, pulling the hardware off. It was before that. They just blew it up. I mean, unbelievable.

MR. ADAMSON: That is unbelievable. It's tragic.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, black granite, and if they would have saved that building it would have been a treasure. It would have been like the Chrysler Building in New York, but there was no foresight on that level. And anyway, it's gone.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, L.A. is sort of about the future, right?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, oh, yeah, absolutely. And also, that was just before they started Century City and that area to the west. So L.A. wanted to be progressive and have new things because they could see that the place was dying and sooner or later someone was going to start a satellite city. But in the long run, it would have benefited them to at least keep that one.

MR. ADAMSON: So what were your schools like growing up in L.A.?

MR. GRIFFIN: Let's see. This is actually interesting. I started public school in Palos Verdes where we live, and they – this is still hard for me to believe, but there were actually budget cuts at that period of time, and they went on to a half-day program, and we don't think of that in the early '50s, but it happened. And my mother was working and she said, "Oh, this isn't going to work to have you home every day," and she could also see that I really wasn't progressing. So my Grandmother Griffin, who was a converted Catholic – and I still believe to this day that it's really all about the stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: She liked all that stuff. She loved Santos and, you know, everything about it. So she had all that stuff and I – because she didn't go to church. [Laughs.] She would go when she felt like it.

MR. ADAMSON: So she was there for the trappings.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, she liked the stuff. She liked the pews, and then of course the church – I mean, that is what I want to believe – and the church we went to in Taos of course was the Ranchos Church [San Francisco de Asis, Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico, built 1815] – you know, the great one. And I remember being in there and we – I would go with her and I – of course I wasn't a Catholic – and it was a really local parish at that point in time. I mean, you are kneeling on a plywood board – or no, an old pine board at that point in time, but it had that – you know, the retablos were great and intense. You know, so cool, just so over the top in terms of the passion of it.

But anyway, my grandmother called her up and said, "You send him to Catholic school," so that is what she did. And so I went to Catholic school and had nuns, and as I think back about it, I'm really glad that it happened because it was a great education. So when the time came for high school my mother actually asked me where I want to go, and of course a lot of the kids were going on to Catholic high school. And I said, "Well, I think I want to do that," so I went to Loyola High School in L.A., and it was Jesuit, you know. So I have got to tell you, my high school education was amazing because it was pure classical academics.

And I worked within a group of people that were in the highest grouping and – so in other words, they had three different diplomas that they gave in high school – it wasn't one, there were three. [Laughs.] You know, there was honorary classical and whatever, but I got an honorary classical, and what that included – besides all the science

and math – was four years of Latin and two years of – [audio break, tape change] – Homeric Greek – ancient Greek. So anyway that is –

MR. ADAMSON: So strange.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, oh, yeah. It was another period of time. I mean, they – that is the way they wanted to educate people and that is –

MR. ADAMSON: In the middle of Los Angeles.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, yeah, Los Angeles.

MR. ADAMSON: So there was no vocational training then in the school.

MR. GRIFFIN: No, in fact – well, in high school we didn't even have P.E. There was no physical – even though there were kids that were – I was not into sports, but there were kids that were – really had great athletic teams – you know, Catholic schools always do. And also, no art at all. I had no art in high school. It was all academics – trigonometry, calculus, Latin, Greek, English, various histories – that type of thing, all five or six academic subjects – physics, chemistry.

And so what I did do in high school, though, was whenever they would have sports – especially in football in the season – they would put these banners in the hall, so I used to paint all the banners, but not with any art training. I would draw them and do lettering and I would basically look in books or look at other examples and try to make stuff – make the posters.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you gravitate towards doing that?

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, I wasn't really interested in the sports, you know? And they did have a rec room, though, and I liked to play pool and ping-pong and got pretty good at it, so that was fun. But, you know, basically that experience was – we would have recess and kids played volleyball and that type of thing, but it was an academic experience. And even if you got into trouble and you had to go to detention, which of course I did – I think every kid – you would write. You didn't just sit there. You were in detention for an hour and there was a subject and you had to write something – [laughs] – you know? It was all focused.

Oh, and the other thing that we had to do if we were misbehaving was if we didn't go to detention, one of the Jesuit priests might say, "Well, 50 lines." What that meant was that you had to memorize 50 lines of something. So it could be *The Merchant of Venice* or whatever. And so portions of speech, and then you just hope that they would give you the same one again. [Laughs.] But that is what it was, and it was not – I mean, you were upset when you had to do it, but you did it, and there was never any animosity about it. It wasn't mean-spirited or – you know, it wasn't mean at all. I never felt that way about it. I figured I had done something wrong, and I would just memorize the lines.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, what strikes me as curious about all this is it sounds like you worked with your hands very little growing up.

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, no, there is another part of that which I left out. My mother had an extra space on the end of her shop, so she – there was a guy that repaired furniture.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh.

MR. GRIFFIN: And even when she moved her shop, he moved with her. So they had a business relationship for 50 years. And his name was Al Klempan, and he was really good at restoring furniture, and he would also make some furniture. But he did a great deal of the repair work for the moving companies when they damaged things – you know, like replacing veneers, et cetera. And I remember his shop was just full of all this old wood. It was a tinderbox, man – but, you know, all these old fleches of Birdseye maple or these kinds of these.

So anyway, when I was a kid I would work for him, and that would include really nasty stuff like stripping furniture, or it also included – there was a period of time where he was making early American-style coffee tables and end tables. And so I learned to do wood leg turning, and I would make all of the legs. And at that period of time, there wasn't a template. You had to make the legs. In other words, it was all hand-eye stuff to get four legs that look the same. And then there was a kind of frame and panel mission-type style and, you know, I would do some work on those. So there was that work of building that, but I would say that other than my little workshop in the basement, which might be model airplanes that were the Balsa wood kind where you would build the whole thing. Yeah, there really wasn't all that much comparatively. There was no shop class, but it was more like being in Al's shop – that type of thing.

And then when I was in high school – I think I bought a car when I was 17. My mother said, "Well, if you ever get

enough money to buy a car you can have one." So I saved up \$150 bucks and I came home one day and said, "I got a car." [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: And of course, you know, got interested in that and always taking it apart and, you know, very mechanical and just interested in all that stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Was that because you had friends that were also doing car -

MR. GRIFFIN: I developed some friendships with people that were doing cars, but I think the reality was it was something that was within my understanding and I liked doing it, and it was also something that I could pretty much do by myself. I mean, for the most part, all of those kinds of activities I did by myself. So it was a form of entertainment. I delivered furniture for my mom in her station wagon, then I would go fool around with my car, and I didn't really socialize a lot at that point of my life. In other words, I wasn't out at night. I was home generally in the garage messing around with the car or, you know, something like that.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember what your first car was?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. It was a 1950 Ford. And I also remember that - I mean, I did a lot of work on the motor, and there was this cranky old guy that had a lot of used parts and so it was really - it was a hot rod basically.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: You know, it was a hot rod, and that was a big deal in L.A. always - California car culture - but at that period of time when they were building the freeways - I mean, there was wide open stretches of road that nobody was on, and that is where we would go at night, and go up there and drive these cars. So that is the 17-year-old phase.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: All of that academic orientation, I think, resulted in one of those places where you kind of lose the faith. And by that I mean, all through high school I remember, well, you study because you are supposed to and you do these things because that is what it means to be accomplished in some way. And so when the time came to go to college, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I mean, basically my program before that was prescribed. In other words, if you did well, these are the things you did. You did take two years of Greek. It doesn't matter whether you wanted to or not. And I remember that the kids that were in whatever the next degree down was - they got to take Spanish, and I thought, that is a hell of a lot better deal than Homeric Greek.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] "Where did I go wrong?"

MR. GRIFFIN: How come if you work hard you have got to take Homeric Greek?

So anyway, I started college.

MR. ADAMSON: This is Long Beach, right?

MR. GRIFFIN: No, actually I went to Loyola University [now Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles] for a year, and I didn't do well. I thought, well, I think maybe I would like to do architecture, but at these kinds of schools, there is no architecture - there is civil engineering.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: So the first year is the same routine as high school. I mean, it's like you are taking philosophy, calculus - just jammed on academics, and I just rebelled. I basically quit. I mean, quit in terms of working, so my grades were horrible. I mean, they just went down the tube. So they said, "Well, you don't really want to be doing this." So they said, "You're out of here. You can't stay performing like this."

So my mother, who I always appreciate as being supportive - she was always supportive even though she would say, "Well, this is not a good thing that is going on here." So she said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "I don't know, I think I just want to go to junior college and I just want to try stuff." And she said, "Fine, you do that."

So what I did, which, if you were a parent - I think about this - if I were my mother, I would be thinking, what the heck is this kid thinking, you know? So when I first started junior college, I said, "I don't want to take any academics - no academics." "All right, what are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to take welding." [Laughs.] So I went to junior college every day from eight to noon and took basically trade school welding. In other words,

I was in there with a bunch of guys who were going to weld freighters together or something. And there was a technical lecture in the morning and then we welded for three hours, and, you know, they would test the welds – it was vocational in the true sense where you were going to be a welder. I thought, I want to learn this and I want to learn how to do it really well.

MR. ADAMSON: Why welding? How did you settle on that? Was it just the furthest thing from academics that you could imagine?

MR. GRIFFIN: No, I think I just always wanted to learn how to do it. I didn't know how to do it, and I thought, I want to learn how to do that. That seems really challenging and interesting. So anyway, that is what I did. And I mean, basically, these guys were showing up with their lunch buckets. I mean it was that kind of environment.

So then as I was around there a little bit more, I realized that there were – that while I was in this kind of trade thing, I noticed that next door there was this other group of people and they were doing some woodworking and I thought well, maybe I would like to try that. So I did the welding thing for a year. I would go to work in the afternoon and then I would do welding in the morning.

MR. ADAMSON: What was work?

MR. GRIFFIN: Work was, I think, at the time probably McDonald's or something like that.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh.

MR. GRIFFIN: Just, you know, flipping burgers.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. GRIFFIN: But that was a really good cleanout period – really healthy, you know? A little welding, a little work.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: But I would still go to New Mexico and – no, excuse me. No, I was not going to New Mexico because my grandmother had passed away when I was a senior in high school, so this was after that.

And so anyway, the next year I said, "Well, I think I would like to take – I think I will take an academic class." So I took – I think it was a physics class, and I signed up for an art class that was more craft-orientated, and then I signed up for a woodworking class that was kind of a beginning woodworking. Even though I had done a lot I thought, well, I should know more about that. So anyway – this is really kind of remarkable – the teacher of the physics class was Mr. Wizard on television [Donald Herbert]. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Cool.

MR. GRIFFIN: He was the guy with the – [makes whooshing sound] – you know? And he was the first Mr. Wizard. He was the early one – you know, early on – and this guy was dynamic. That is all I can say. He was one of those great orators that could bring you into a subject. So I got turned on, and I just thought, wow, this is cool.

MR. ADAMSON: He just happened to be teaching at this junior college?

MR. GRIFFIN: I want to tell you something. My whole educational experience, I think in part, is based upon who you bump into.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: And I'm sure that most people aren't, but if you bump into a great teacher or you go someplace and they say, "Well, why don't you take this," and you do that it changes your life. It's so serendipitous, it's so fortunate, so lucky, it's just good fortune. How else can you say it? But I think it also – I mean this is a different thing – but I think that also affects your beliefs or politics because if you don't get the opportunity, it's like – it's because I simply had the opportunity to bump into somebody. So what happens to people that don't get the opportunity to bump into anything like that? All they bump into is ugly stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: You know. You can't – it doesn't work. So anyway, I started taking those classes, got turned on. Took the art class and loved it. And I'll never forget this teacher. His name was Oliver, Mr. Oliver. And he taught at El Camino Junior College forever. And he taught courses called "Crafts." And so we made a wood thing and we made this thing. And then the other class I took at that time was freehand drawing. So it was – I had never had a drawing class in my life and I loved it. And we started drawing on newsprint, but literally newspapers. You know,

we just rack them up and he'd put a basketball in there and we'd start drawing - [laughs] - or a hat and finally moving up to drapes. And I remember going home and just drawing and going wow, this is really good. I like all of this stuff. And I liked the wood. I liked that. And the physics - I just - I liked it, but I knew that I liked the other stuff a lot more.

So then I thought, well, I guess I better get together because I'm going to do some of this academic stuff. And so then I took a chemistry class. And anyway, we're up through El Camino and then transferred down to Long Beach State [California State University, Long Beach]. What I did was I transferred down thinking that I wanted to be in industrial arts, which is more - it really was of course a study that led you to be a high school or shop teacher. And so I went to Long Beach State and in enrolled in that course and was moving along through it and liked it. There was a course in that department that was only for art majors to come down and use the shop. And I think that they designed it primarily for industrial design people. So even though the course of study I was on - we built some furniture and even - I got to the point where I built a boat. I mean it's - I built two boats. And they worked.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR.GRIFFIN: The sailboats. And so it had all of that but what I started noticing was all these people from the art department, they really knew how to design stuff. So comparatively even - and so I had never had any of the experience. And felt, okay, I'm going to have a minor - I'm going up the hill. I'm going up to the fine arts department. So I talked to my counselor.

MR. ADAMSON: Sorry, did you - so did you think of it that way as the - you know, the industrial arts was like a lower echelon or lower on the hierarchy.

MR.GRIFFIN: No, actually, it was physically up the hill - at Long Beach State. No, I didn't. The industrial arts was on the lower campus and the fine arts were up the hill at Long Beach. No, I never did and I still don't.

So I - what I did was I talked to my counselor and he said, "Sure you can do that." And what I discovered was I could actually have a dual major. So that's what I actually did and the industrial arts credits I kept earning secured enough to where I would have that. And then I went up to the fine arts department and began at the beginning and took two-dimensional design, three-dimensional design. And I remember taking a general craft class that was mainly wood and then taking some ceramics. And at that point I knew about Cranbrook because my mother had talked about this place. And then what I realized that almost all my teachers and the ones that I really respected, they were all Cranbrook graduates. Ward Youry, ceramics, Al Pine and metalsmithing. Mary Jane Leland in textiles. I didn't take a textile class, but she taught two-dimensional design. And I mean, you talk about rigor. You know, a two-credit class and you're just killing yourself.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR.GRIFFIN: You know, oh, she was so - but remarkable, really remarkable. Structured, experienced. So anyway, the more I got up there, the more interested I was. So in California, in order to have a teaching credential, you have to spend a fifth year in school. So what I did was I used that fifth year to get the dual major. And so I got the teaching credential and the dual major and I remember that I had not taken a jewelry or metalsmithing class. And I was walking down the hall and I saw all this just remarkable stuff in the hall and people kept talking about how difficult it was and everything. And I just thought, oh, man, I like metalwork so I'm going to try. And I loved it. So I went through all those courses. And what I did was I graduated, got the credential and then started teaching junior high school in Long Beach and would go and take a class at night with the metalsmithing and just stayed on with it.

And then at certain point decided that I didn't want to teach junior high all my life. And so I thought, well, I'm going to go for an MFA and I was keenly aware Al Pine was kind of working nationally at the time. He knew a lot of people. And so he'd bring - he'd go to conferences and bring back photographs of the work, what's going on. And so I knew the kind of work that was going on at RISD [Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island], I knew what was - somewhat what was going on here, Tyler [Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania], Wisconsin [University of Wisconsin, Madison]. You know, the places where his generation had gone out and starting to work.

And he was the type of teacher that had books on reserve. And he'd say, "I think this would be a good idea for you to read these books." And, okay, I guess I better read those books. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR.GRIFFIN: You know, so I'd go up there and do it and just got really - kind of re-orientated in terms of academics but all in terms of decorative art.

MR. ADAMSON: And so was he having you read things about the history of metalwork.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, it was mainly – for the most part it was technical books. It was all the classic technical text. Bernard Cuzner [*A First Book of Metal-work*, Leicester: The Dryad Press, 1931], Hebert Maryon [*Metalwork and Enamelling*, London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1912] – all of these English, for the most part, text on silvermithing or metalworking in general. And of course, once you start doing that then you say, “Well, what else is there out there?” And so you just keep looking around. I mean libraries are just – they’re just the greatest things in the world and the as it – as resources, they’re just phenomenal. So if you are the type of person that understands that, then you get up to the library and you hang out there and go to the files.

I remember when I got to graduate school, I thought, you know, it would be possible to look through every *Craft Horizons*. That’s doable. And so I said, “Okay, I’m going to do that.” And I’d go to the library at a certain time and I’d give myself an hour. And I’d just, oh, okay, here’s 1949 or whatever. Pull it out and I’d just start thumbing through. And it was an education. I’d say oh, there’s Phil Fike work or here’s Robert von Neumann or all these people that were in my field. And at that point, I knew I was interested in metalwork.

MR. ADAMSON: So you had already decided that.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yes. Before I left California, I realized that I think if you want to do something well, you have to focus. And so in other words, at that point it was wood or metal and I made that decision. I’m going to go with the metal. It seemed a better fit. I liked the material. And liked the challenge of it. And so I just – I never did any wood after that. I just totally focused.

MR. ADAMSON: Can we talk a little bit more about Al Pine?

MR.GRIFFIN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Because I think he’s one of those people that I think everyone’s heard of, but you don’t necessarily have a sense of what his work was like. He seems like a figure in education.

MR.GRIFFIN: Oh, yeah. Well, first of all, I’ll talk about two people. I’ll talk about Al first, but the other teacher that came in was Dieter Muller-Stach. But Al was a very well established figure. And frankly, at that point in time, he was known as being very tough, very demanding. His curriculum was demanding. You had to make a lot of work – I mean a lot of work. And it was strenuous. So you had to be committed if you wanted to excel. And he was – he’s a quirky guy. He’s a very eccentric, very intelligent and very knowledgeable. You got to really kind of draw him out.

And so I remember that he was always interested in what are the options here. And he went to the first SNAG [Society of North American Goldsmiths] conference and brought back all this information and he would take photographs of work. So we saw a lot of work by people that were our peers. At that time there was a sterling silversmith competition. I can’t remember the name of the guild in America that put that competition on, but they would do photographs. And so we had those all over the walls in the shop of these remarkable silver pieces come out of Jack Prip’s program or out of RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology, New York] with Hans Christensen was there – just the highest levels of smithing. And of course, I remember looking at that and just thinking, wow. I mean this people can really make stuff. We’re just a bunch rookies out here. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel like Pine himself was not capable of doing that level of work?

MR.GRIFFIN: I felt that Pine was more interested in making jewelry at that point in time. This was silversmithing by the great silversmiths. I mean people who specialized and we realized that this was a level up from what we were capable of even though we had raised cups in sterling and we made chalices. We forged flatware and Al was really good at forging. But his aesthetic was radically different than that. I mean we were looking at – I didn’t really think of it at the time – but we were looking at really advanced Danish modern design. We were looking at a distillation of Danish. And there really is no comparison in terms of the refined aesthetic and the technical expertise of the Danes at that – [audio break.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. This is tape three of Glenn Adamson interviewing Gary Griffin. And we lost a little bit of tape, so I’m going to have Gary back up and just talk a little bit about his experiences in California just before heading out to Tyler. And I guess the first thing to talk about, Gary, would be that issue of being a little anxious about going to Tyler.

MR.GRIFFIN: Oh. Well, you have to remember that I was in Southern California. Al Pine was exposing us to work across the country. There was a lot of visual information coming out of the northeast and the eastern seaboard. Schools like RISD, RIT, Tyler, et cetera. So we were very aware and the – the work that was coming out of those schools was really remarkable. And the thing I remember about the work coming out of Tyler was that it was I thought very advanced within the framework of Jewelry. In other words, there was just interesting things to look

at, things that I hadn't seen before.

And so my impression was that the students at Tyler were very consistent and very remarkable. In other words, this was – of course you were seeing pictures. So now I would say, "Well, it's the lens of the camera and it's a selected view." But it was. It was a really remarkable program. And so of course I had thought that I would like to be a part of something like that. And at the same time, in terms of education, depending on where one is in their development. If you aspire to things, you're always going to go look ahead and say, "This is what I'd like to achieve."

And at that point, frankly, I think as a result of basically understanding that I had come from regional experiences in Texas, New Mexico, and California. And always kind of looking east in terms of it being almost a hub of American intellectualism and thought and that there's a certain level of intimidation perhaps or being overwhelmed of saying, "Well, I want to go do that so I'm going to take on that challenge."

So in going to Tyler, although I now think in retrospect that I was very, very well prepared to go, when I did leave, I certainly didn't feel inadequate, but I felt that it would be really challenging and that I was going to have work really hard to achieve things there. And of course I did work very hard. But I think that I just probably felt that I wouldn't be as well developed upon arrival as many of my colleagues. I underestimated things.

But I also think that that – I don't think that's unusual for me to do that. In other words, I find that I have that experience often when I get into an unfamiliar environment and new space. I'm really interested in all the things that are going on and I want to know about it. And so if you're in an atmosphere where there is expertise and people doing remarkable things, you've got a lot to learn. And I'm always up for that. I like to put myself in situations where I have to climb up, rung up.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, just thinking about the preparation that you got at Long Beach, I think we should go over Al Pine.

MR. GRIFFIN: Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: One thing actually we didn't talk about before was where Al Pine came from himself.

MR. GRIFFIN: Okay. Al is a New Yorker. I think he's from Brooklyn and so he grew up in New York and then went to I think City College of New York and two of his classmates were Bernie Bernstein and Fred Fenster. Eventually – and Al actually also started in industrial arts. And then at some point, he decided to go to Cranbrook. And I don't remember – I think he may have come to Cranbrook before Fred. I'm not sure. But anyway, he came to Cranbrook and then he subsequently went on a Fulbright to Germany and so on and so forth.

So he was – he's traveled the world. He knows about metalworking all over the world. And I remember when I was a student I think he went to Japan for a year and he's traveled all over India and Pakistan. So he's very knowledgeable about metal work.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, so the Fulbright is where he brought in Dieter, right?

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, no. He went back I think from – I think he may have met Dieter on that trip but I think he went again to Germany for a period of time and then Dieter – he went on a sabbatical and was there. And so that's when he decided that if the department expanded that someone like Dieter would be really valuable. And Dieter was unusual in that he had European training both as a silversmith and a blacksmith and he was interested in jewelry and gold work as well. And prior to coming to Long Beach, he lived in Ghana, I think, for six months or so and worked with Ashanti goldsmiths and blacksmiths in some kind of a program. It may have been areas where Germany was colonizing – still in the colonial period in terms of Africa.

So he was really an important asset to the department at Long Beach because he expanded the view of metalwork. And for me that was important because I think I'm a pluralist. So in other words, I understand industrial metalworking. Presently I'm as interested in computer type of work with CNC machines as I am in hand forging. So Dieter was able to help us with iron working. We developed a forge in probably about 1970, '71 at Long Beach. And he also would be able to help us with silversmithing assignments.

So between Al and Dieter, there was a really broad cross-section of information both technical and otherwise and for the most part, the undergraduate education was a series of technical exercises that moved up through a level of experience. And of course we had to design these things too. And we did talk about design. But I always felt that the thing I didn't – I felt inadequate in terms of my design experiences. And that was one of the primary motivators for going to graduate school. And I would also say that's a period time where we didn't use the word "concept." We weren't talking about concept and we were talking about – we may have called them ideas at that point in time.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. They were more like projects. That kind of idea rather than -

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, yeah. So anyway, as it turned out between the industrial process experience I had in metalwork and then the art metalwork, I had quite a remarkable and unusual set of skills and experiences compared to my classmates and Tyler. And so I was much better prepared than I thought I was.

MR. ADAMSON: You had mentioned Al Ching.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah. Al Ching taught at Fullerton [California State University, Fullerton] and I was aware of his work although I wasn't as interested in hollowware, but I certainly was aware of his work. And I did a lot of hollowware at Long Beach, but let's just put it this way, the progress in the field was taking place primarily in terms of jewelry and then we have the development in the '70s of the object. In other words, metalsmiths making things that are not really hollowware - they're fabricated for the most part and they are things like rattles, and maybe a hand mirror or things like that. But they were not practical things. The hollowware work before that would be something like a teapot, a creamer, a serving spoon, that the flatware work could be serving spoons, and cutlery possibly.

So they were more practical. And in the '70s in terms of people that might have been making hollowware, they moved into these other things and of course at another point it becomes, quote, "the vessel." And that I think is something that might take place maybe in the early '80s or late '70s - the vessel. But I had already taken place in ceramics because I - we basically inherited that term from the ceramics movement.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think that there - you had talked about some intimidation on the part of American metalsmiths looking at the Danish guys that were doing Hollowware.

MR.GRIFFIN: Oh, I think that for the most part that as an undergraduate, when I first saw the work from RISD of the school for American craftsmen, RIT -

MR. ADAMSON: John Prip, for instance.

MR.GRIFFIN: And we're talking about - or even work from Cranbrook that was done in the '50s, people - the teachers would have been Richard Thomas and Hans Christensen, and Jack Prip that, as a student, you would see that work and it was just so evolved and developed - really remarkable work in terms of hollowware and silversmithing. And I would say that our designs were not as evolved and our technique wasn't either although we could make stuff, but there stuff was much more evolved. And I attributed that to the kind level of the teaching and the experience of their teachers.

I mean Al was really not a silversmith. He knew how to raise things. He was more an inventor and I remember him at one point saying, "Well, I'm a maker of things." So he didn't even call himself a jeweler. And Dieter, in terms of his commission life, was doing architectural work. He was making things for churches and making them out of bronze or possibly out of iron - various materials, but it was mainly architectural type of application, which was something that none of us had even really thought about.

MR. ADAMSON: So in terms of pushing hollowware forward in the '70s, did you think there was - was it a lack of courage, lack of imagination that you see there?

MR.GRIFFIN: I would say - as a general thought I would say that it was - I think that there really wasn't a lot to be inspired by. In other words, the object seemed to hold more. It seemed to be more relevant and I mean, there was nothing really relevant in a teapot at that point in time. And so the only model were these other things and people were making those things. I wasn't; I was making jewelry. I don't remember precisely when Heikki Seppä developed his naming process for forms, but even he said, "You know, hollowware is dead. So we have to make these sculptures, these silver sculptures." And I think that that was an attempt to, number one, to add a vocabulary to the field, which was remarkable and indispensable, but the other thing was to find a new format to deal with it. My personal opinion is it was still Danish modern. You know, like, you look at all of that work and you go, well, man, it's still based in the same kind of - I would call it a kind of streamline organic. You know, it's where streamline design hits naturalism. It's a streamline naturalism. And so when you look at Heikki's sculptures, they still have that same quality.

And the person that I remember as being just so remarkable and unique would be John Marshall. I remember seeing his work. Al came home from a conference - this would probably be in maybe '70, '71, somewhere around there - and he had a brochure. I had never heard of John Marshall and he was in Cleveland and those huge punch bowls. And I had never seen silverwork like that. And I don't think anybody else had either. So it was so progressive and so remarkable. But that wasn't enough to inspire me to be interested in making it. I just was more interested in jewelry work.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, one word that you used a minute ago really caught my attention, which was

“objects.” People were making objects instead of making hollowware.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And I think a lot about the show “Objects USA” as being a watershed event at that time. I think it was '68, '69.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, it was.

MR. ADAMSON: And so it's right around the period in which you were at Long Beach. I wonder first of all, if you were – the level of your awareness of that show and whether you thought it was a watershed at the time.

MR.GRIFFIN: I remember it. I remember the catalogue. I never saw the exhibition but I saw the catalogue. And I remember looking through in it and being impressed. The Millers [Fred Miller and John Paul Miller] were in there. All the major people were in that show. And I never really – I think at that point in time, though, I was not intellectually motivated about these things. In other words, I was interested in the object. I was interested in what it was, who made it, what it was made out of – especially the metalwork – but I didn't think about what does it means when someone calls all this stuff objects as opposed to something else.

And I suppose it was a term to be able to group all these different things together, et cetera. And I certainly never thought about it as being influential in terms of the way we would look at that world, but I supposed it would be because I mean all of us were aware of that exhibition, at least in my class, in my group of friends and students, we knew about the exhibition “Objects USA.” And it was well publicized, and the catalogue. It was great.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you regard the issue of functionality at that point in your life?

MR.GRIFFIN: It wasn't paramount to my thinking. And I would say that even in the jewelry that – well, no. In the jewelry that I was making, a ring was the size of a ring. A necklace was the size of a necklace. We were concerned with things about how much it weighed, et cetera. So when we began to see some of the jewelry coming out of Tyler – that it was large. I mean, large comparatively. I mean, wow, what's that stuff? And I was just curious that it was one of things where you think, wow, there's people that think that way. That's pretty interesting. I mean maybe I should know more about that.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Like Arline Fisch for example.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, but Tyler had something – I remember seeing Arline's large pieces and I remember thinking, that is unusual. I've never thought about things that way. But for some reason, I wasn't as interested in it. And I think in part that may have been because the making didn't interest me as much as the making later on and that the – which I think is – you know, this brings out – would give you a good idea of how I – let's say how I list my priorities or the things that are really important.

One of the things that I really admire about someone like Myra [Mimlitsch-Gray] is she can think it at the highest levels and she can make it at the highest level. I have such respect for that. That's – that is the high water mark for me. That's what should be achieved. And it doesn't mean that I don't admire extraordinary thinkers or that I don't admire a virtuoso.

So there's a great – Jim Harrison is one of my favorite writers. Harrison said, “These are the authors that I admire because of the way they write, and these are the authors that I admire because of what they have to say, and it's a rare thing when these two things combine. And here's a list of the people that I admire because they do those two things.” So it's – it's not only what you have to say, but it's the way you say it. And that's what – that's what I would like to achieve. I mean, that's the mark, you know?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes, absolutely.

MR. GRIFFIN: So I mean, I've seen what I would call funky work – and I don't mean in terms of funk art, but just work – it might be a little crude, but it's got a soul to it and I can really admire that. But I would also point that out, you know, that in terms of the – in other words, today there is a school of thought that says as long as the making meets the conceptual framework, then everything's okay. I don't agree with that; in other words, I'm not willing to prejudice some kind of intellectual concept over this – what I would call the physical properties of the work.

The physical properties are the things that will endure. The intellectual part will remain as an idea forever, and even historically someone will say, “Well, this is what they were thinking at the time,” and later on people may not even – they will only be interested in that intellectually. They won't even come anywhere near believing that. Like if we look at Art Deco, we can take all the beliefs – so what about the femme fatale? You know, we can look

at Lalique and say, "Okay, this is what's going down in terms of thought, in terms of the culture, and this is how we can look at this jewelry as a cultural construct, how these women are positioned, the flowing hair, the murky pools, all of these kinds of things." And today when we admire it, okay, we're looking at material, the physicality of that object. But we may not believe in the femme fatale or we may not even be inclined to. But if we've studied the work intellectually, we're also saying, "Hey, man, there's a whole part of it that's real dark, you know, and I'm not going there."

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. But in other words, to go forward, in a sense it needs to have both.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: If those things are going to endure.

MR. GRIFFIN: Absolutely.

MR. ADAMSON: You may care about one, you may care about the other, and we don't know today what people are going to care about.

MR. GRIFFIN: Right. Well, I think you have to have both to be a part of the time that you're making things. And you know, it's back to that Harrison idea which I think is so important. But I mean, it's like, lousy writing, who wants to read lousy writing?

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: You know, like if you went into a writing seminar and said, "Well, all that matters is what you have to say, it doesn't matter how you say it," they'd throw you out.

So what are we supposed to do in metalworking? You can do whatever you want because it matches up to something you say? I don't - I'm not there man.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, one other thing I wanted to make sure we have is the story you told about doing the stone-setting exercises.

MR. GRIFFIN: Oh. As an undergraduate - in any situation I'm in, I'm always interested in hearing multiple points of view and getting input. So I'd get input from Al. I'd get input from Dieter. And it has nothing to do with - it has to do with gathering information because everybody has a slightly different way of doing things. I might ask Al how to solder something and I can go ask Dieter the same question. And it's just gathering information, and then from that you can form your own conclusions.

So we had very beginning stone setting experiences at Long Beach, and they were fairly limited. There was a woman who was teaching at L.A. State [California State University, Los Angeles] whose name was Caroline Rosser. And Caroline had gone to Tyler as a student, and I knew from her work that she had done a lot of stone setting, and they were doing a lot of stone setting at Tyler at that time. This would have been maybe late '60s. So I didn't know her but I knew of her, and I thought well, maybe I could talk her into coming down to Long Beach and doing - giving me a workshop. And so I called her, and she said sure.

So I think over two Saturday mornings or something, she went through all the stone setting exercises that they do at Tyler. And so I made all those things as an undergraduate, and I guess she was kind of a surrogate in that way. You know, they helped me learn those things so that I had that information when I ended up - I didn't know at that time I was going to Tyler - but I wanted that experience. And so that idea of soliciting information from other people, I think I've always done that. I did it in graduate school, and I continue doing it today - you know, call somebody, ask them how do you do this.

Actually, I've got to tell you this, because this is on the same lines. There was a point in time where I wanted to tin some cookware, which basically is a process of taking a copper pot and then you wipe tin on the inside. And I have a lot of friends that have done it. I had never done it. So I called up Phil Fike, who was in Detroit, Wayne State [University], and I said, "Phil, I want to tin a pot, and you know how to do this."

So he said, "Sure, I'll tell you how to do it."

And he went through this elaborate process and talked about getting - at Wayne State in the chemical department they have some very thin foil, and you get this and then you perforate it, and - I mean, all this stuff. And I thought, man, that seems like a lot of labor. And I said, "Well, I just talked to Dave Pimentel, and Dave said, you know, that I could do this," which was a very different method. And Phil's reply was, "Well, that will work if you do it right." [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: I thought, "Phil, anything will work if you do it right. Come on." You know? [Laughs.] And he said, "Well, now you have two methods, so go try them."

And of course I did. I went down to Wayne State, got the foil, went through all of that stuff that he did, and I decided that that was not the method that I wanted to use, and I used Dave's method and it worked great -

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: - and fast, and it was exactly what I wanted. But I loved that idea of well, that will work if you do it right. [Laughs.] You know? Which is the real trick. In the end, that's the real answer to craft. It will all work if you do it right, but it's in the doing it right that matters.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

[Audio break.]

Okay, go ahead. This is disc two of Glenn Adamson interviewing Gary Griffin.

You were saying.

MR. GRIFFIN: So I didn't - I don't - Tyler was everything I could have wanted, but I think we have to put that into historical place. Stanley was a great teacher for me and he was a remarkable mentor, and I realize now that I was really well prepared, but I didn't think of it at the time. And I felt in leaving undergraduate education that I was well prepared technically, but I didn't feel I was well prepared in terms of design. And by that I mean, when I look at the things we made versus the things that were coming out of graduate school, I thought, wow, they're just more inventive than we are. They're more inventive. But now I know that's what you're supposed to do in graduate school.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: It's like that's why you have graduate school! But at the time I'm just thinking, oh, man, you know, we've got a ways to go here. [Laughs.] I mean it was - it's a developmental process.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: You know, I know that now. I guess I knew that then, but it's just you're a little intimidated or overwhelmed or something - which, by the way, I think is a product of regionalism. I think when you're - maybe not in California today, but you know, when you're born in Texas and you grow up in Southern California and New Mexico and you think of New York, you're thinking, very sophisticated, evolved, et cetera. Well, now I know, hey, man, that's not the case. I've got a whole world of experience. I mean, "I've met Mabel Dodge Luhan; who have you met?" You know what I mean? It's like, okay, I'm teaching at Cranbrook Academy of Art. You know? It's real interesting. But I think that there is, at least in my case, this kind of notion of you're from Texas and, you know, you grew up in Southern California or wherever, and there's just something that's not very sophisticated about that or aware of that type of thing.

MR. ADAMSON: But you didn't really feel that way when you got to Tyler, it sounds like. You felt that you were part of it.

MR. GRIFFIN: No, when I got to Tyler, I would say I was feeling pretty intimidated and freaked out.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. GRIFFIN: But it was my own making, because I wanted to achieve something. I wanted to do well. It was nothing that was projected on me. It was totally coming out of my own making. And I think it's because I saw this great work, I saw these teachers, like Stanley [Lechtzin] and Olaf [Skoogfors] that were going to Europe and they knew these characters, and Jack Prip. And I'm just thinking, well, man, I've got a lot of work to do. I want to do well. And in order to do well, I'm going to have to work really hard, and I just don't have enough. I need more. And that's why I wanted to go to graduate school.

So the goal in graduate school was of course to evolve some more technical things, but really to get to be a better designer, more inventive. And I would have called it design at that point in time, not concepts, even though, you know, there was Minimalism and Conceptual Art and that type of thing, but I never thought of it as being conceptual. You know, that's a word that I think entered the, if you want to call it, craft mainstream at a later date.

MR. ADAMSON: How aware were you, by the way, of those larger art - fine art values?

MR. GRIFFIN: Somewhat. Somewhat. I would not say - I'm really interested in fine art intellectually. And by that I mean I'm interested in movements in painting or sculpture or the fine arts in general because of their intellectual interest, but I must also say - and this is in part, I think, because of the atmosphere I'm in here - I love to look at painting because I'm interested in how they achieve what they achieve in terms of, you know, when the painter uses the word "atmosphere," like how do you make atmosphere; or how they talk about color; or how they use value shifts. And what I admire about painting is that they're able to make a world within an eighth of an inch. You know, I mean it's a very prescribed place. And I'm talking about painting, I'm not talking about a greater view of fine art.

So I love to look at painting, but I'm not interested in making paintings. And I also like looking at sculpture for those same reasons, but I'm really not interested in making sculpture. I mean, I have made sculpture, objects in isolation, but I'm not really at all - I'm not at all interested in making that. I'm really interested in decorative art. That's what I really care about.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: So at Tyler, I remember the first semester as just being grueling, and it was nothing that anybody did except me. In other words, I just was feeling that I had to work really, really hard, and I would hardly even take a lunch break. I mean, all the other students would go over, and I didn't leave the shop. And I'd eat a sandwich and keep working.

And Pat and I even had a schedule where she was teaching - by the way, the move to Philadelphia was a really great thing for her career, too. She had taught elementary school for two years. And when we arrived in Philadelphia, there was a teachers' strike, a horrible teachers' strike where people were throwing things at each other and it was mean and really problematic. And so we thought we don't want any part of this.

So she looked for a teaching job in the suburbs, which was basically nonexistent, and what did happen was she found this school that was called the Ashbourne School. It was a private school, but what they did was they picked up all the special ed kids from the public school district. So in other words, the - the public schools were outsourcing their special education kids, and at that point it was very new. And so she took a job there at a minimal pay as an aide. So that was a big coming down for her. But what was interesting, the school was run by two Ph.D.s and they had seminars every morning for 45 minutes where they'd talk about issues in special ed, and then the teachers would go to work - remarkable atmosphere. She got so into the subject that she started taking classes at Penn [University of Pennsylvania] and then eventually got her master's degree in special ed. So she became a really unique teacher because of that for special education.

Anyway, so what we would do is we'd both go to work and then, when we'd meet for dinner and I had an - we had an apartment that was within walking distance of Tyler. It was practically across the street. And so we got - we'd have dinner and then I'd go back to the studio, and then at about 10:00 or 10:30 in the evening we'd both start walking toward each other and meet somewhere along the way and then walk home. And that's the way it was every night. [Laughs.] I mean, on the weekends I would work during the day and I wouldn't work at night, but I was in the studio all the time and I made a lot of work in my first semester. And most of it, as I look back on it now, was just work, but it wasn't good.

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of things were you making? Jewelry?

MR. GRIFFIN: Jewelry. Almost exclusively jewelry. Yeah, it was all jewelry. And the one thing I did do that first semester - Stanley had developed a way for making interlocking wedding rings which had - I'd seen pictures of them as an undergraduate and they were just amazing. So I thought, well, I'm - I want to learn how to do that. So I made a bunch of those, three of them, and learned how he did it and the system and set the stones. I still have the rings. And I made them in silver, just sort of like models. So - I can't remember, I think I made 15 pieces. I was just cranking them out.

And you know, then the end of the semester came and we - I did take a break for the winter or for the Christmas break, and then came back and we started in again. And he used to give these assignments once a month which I just hated, you know, and we were always looking for ways to not do them. And he was always agreeable to that; in other words, you had to do it, but he didn't mind if you did something really imaginative, too. And I remember one thing where he said, "I want you to raise a vessel with a 10-inch dimension," and this really surprised me 'cause Stan is a real smart guy. But he didn't realize - he thought it would be 10 inches tall or 10 inches wide. Well, we decided that circumference was a dimension. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: So I mean, I showed up with something about like this, and he said, well, this isn't 10 inches. And I said, "Well, you got to go around the outside," and I just -

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: And he was not happy about that. He was really upset about it. He -

MR. ADAMSON: What was he like as a teacher?

MR. GRIFFIN: He's kind of a - he's - I found him very inspiring, but Stanley's tough and he's a little cranky sometimes, too, you know? But he's very tough. And I think I had an unusual relationship with Stanley, and I'll talk more about that, maybe even a little bit of a privileged relationship.

But anyway, during that second semester he gave an assignment that was to do an homage and I'm thinking, oh, man, what am I going to do? So I basically thought, well, okay, I can do an homage. And I did a little pin that was an homage to Fernand Leger, the painter. And what it allowed me to do was to work with some acrylic and to put things in front of one another like on a Leger painting where he basically - if you were to take the painting apart, you'd see that it's a lamination structure. And anyway, I combined those kind of mechanical elements that Leger would use, and color, and shapes - and boom! - and it just changed the world. And I realized, wow, this is a really good piece - and then just kept kind of working that way.

And then the other thing that happened during that time as I was doing this, I began to get really interested in kind of combining all the mechanical stuff with the jewelry. And at that point, you know, I had this - because I had an industrial experience and more of a fine-art design experienced in undergraduate, I could run a lathe, I could run a milling machine. And, of course, Tyler - we were in the new building and Stanley was getting all this equipment; nobody knew how to run it, but I did. I mean, Stanley could run some of it, but I mean I really knew how to run the stuff. And so I started making all of my metalwork on these machines.

And then - I mean, you talk about stars aligning, then David Watkins and Wendy Ramshaw came to Tyler. So here I am doing all this work and they show up, and I'm thinking, "Wow! Look at that. That kind of looks like what I'm doing. You know, maybe this is a good idea. And they're really important people."

And then shortly after that, Claus Bury came, and boy, oh, boy, I'm just thinking, "Wow, I am on the right track. I mean, these people really are good, but I'm on the right track." So it just evolved from there.

The other thing in terms of Stanley was that he was making a transition from the resin work into the acrylic, and so he had to - he got an autoclave and got some grants and all these things. And so that summer he got the autoclave in, but he didn't have an oil tank and all these things that are necessary. And so I built the tank for the - not the autoclave, the pressure vessel, but for the oil reservoir. The part that I - I'd been a welder, not only the training, but the other thing I didn't mention was that when I was in undergraduate school, after I got the welding training, I got a job at StarKist Foods in the maintenance department as a welder. So I was welding commercially; I mean, I was welding all the flues that fish go through. And, I mean, I helped build the 9-Lives pet food line, and all that stuff. So I knew how to build stuff.

And by the way, I was earning union wages. So in other words, I went from - because of one year in El Camino Junior College, I went from earning McDonald's, which was about a dollar or a dollar-ten an hour, to \$4.50 an hour. I was making the same money that people were supporting families on. So, I mean, I had a lot of money, comparatively. And I got overtime on Saturdays. And so when I went to my job, I mean, I was making really good money. And I was fortunate in that I could split my college time and still work there.

So anyway, Stanley figured that out in a hurry, you know. And, of course, Pat and I were there for summer. We weren't going anywhere. And so I would work in the shop and do my own work and help, you know, Stanley with stuff. And the autoclave was part of it.

Mr. ADAMSON: And was that the basis of what you're calling your privileged relationship with him?

MR. GRIFFIN: No, no it wasn't. This is unimaginable to me now, but when we drove to Philadelphia, I communicated with him and said well, "We're going to be leaving town and we're going to" - I think we left in June or July - and we're going to get to town and we're going to look for apartments," and so on and so forth. And we thought we would just camp. And Stanley said, "Oh, you can just stay with us." So we arrived in Philadelphia. We had a van and a little trailer, and pulled up to Stanley's house. He was married to Edith at the time. And Edith and I are still really good friends. We communicate every year, you know, correspond every year. And we were just able to stay in one of the extra rooms. And so we looked for an apartment, found one in about three days, but we couldn't occupy it in a week. And so I said, you know, "I'd like to see a little bit of the area around here, so if you wouldn't mind, can we leave our trailer here, and Pat and I will just go camping and kind of see what's around this area." And also I just felt like I was overextending -

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: – hanging out in this house. Edith was – I mean, she's just a wonderful, wonderful woman.

And so anyway, we took off, and then we got back and picked up the trailer and moved into our little place. So in a way it started out that way.

And then the next thing was we were there and they'd invite us over for dinner on a Sunday night or something. So Pat and I would go over and, you know, there'd be dinner, and then all these people would come by. [Laughs] Olaf Skoogfors would come by, Fred Woell was going through town, Al Paley would be coming through town. So we're at the dinner table and here's all these characters – Bill Daley – I mean, just people – Doris Staffel. I mean, wow! And we're looking around and thinking, yeah, this is pretty great. And they were just so generous to us.

And we would house sit the house if Stan and Edith were going on a trip. Pat and I would stay in the house. So I mean, it was good. But I just will never forget going to those dinners, and it was very impressionable and a great experience. You know, what more could one want.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: So that's privileged I think. And so I realized that he was – I mean, he was mentoring me. You know, and they were – they didn't have to do that. And I know that other students didn't get to do that. So I was in a privileged position.

MR. ADAMSON: Being in Philadelphia, did you also come in to Helen Drutt [Gallery] – contact with Helen Drutt at an early point?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. I met Helen, went to her gallery, and got to know her. So whenever we were in Philadelphia, we would always go by the gallery and visit with Helen and were very aware of her activities, her collection, and her interests. And that was inspiring to go and see work. And she was very generous about that. In fact, when the time came for our graduate show at Tyler, we did talk to Helen about possibly having the show at her – there were three of us that had a – we did our brochure together. We had to have a solo show but we decided to combine it. And so we did talk with Helen, but we ended up having it at Tyler.

And the other thing I remember was I had met Olaf over a period of time and I thought well, you know, he's right here, I'm going to ask him if he'll give me a crit. So I called him up. He said, "Yeah, come to the studio at 10:00 Saturday morning."

So I threw all my work in a box, and went over and we talked about the work, and then we – you know, it just expanded. We were going to talk about this work, and then he'd say, "Oh, did you know about this show at the Museum of Modern Art? This kind of fits in." And you know, four hours later, after lunch – [laughs] – and you know, it was just great.

So you know, frankly – although I've had people who have come to talk to me, I don't know if people do this – that type of thing. But I think for the most part people are pretty generous about just seeing younger artists or other – I know I certainly would. And – but I still think it's unusual, as I look back on it.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, back then it must have seemed like anybody that was interested – it was less common, and you know –

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, I think – I just felt, well, gosh, you know, I've met him so many times and I've talked to him and he's always been so friendly and pleasant. I want to talk to him professionally. And it was great. So I did that a couple of times.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it in graduate school that you started to become involved in a more national, organized metalsmithing movement, would you say?

MR. GRIFFIN: I would say – well, in graduate school I participated in national competitions and in that type of thing and was well aware of showing, but I didn't – I was not – I didn't join anything. I was aware of the organizations, but I really wasn't involved in any way.

And the one thing I do remember is that in the summer between the first and second year, Pat and I took a period of time where we wanted to drive up to Vermont and New Hampshire. We'd never seen that country. So we left Philadelphia and we were driving north, and I knew that there was an exhibition of metalwork at the gallery at New Paltz. So I said, "Let's just stop in and I want to see that show."

So we stopped and we entered the gallery and there was an attendant at the desk. And so he said, "Well, where are you from?" And I said, "Well, I'm a graduate student at Tyler and I wanted to see the show because there's a lot of people's work in here that I know and I just want to see what they're up to." So he introduces himself, and it was Jamie Bennett, you know, which is just great. So – because we both knew each other. He says, "You're

Gary Griffin?"

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: I mean, and we – from those – that – those shows earlier on. And of course, I was aware of him that he was a graduate student up there because I'd seen his work. And I think that – I think at that point that he actually was more involved in SNAG. I wasn't. I was just down there working, you know what I mean? Just making sure that I was doing okay. And which still was a big mistake – there was a SNAG conference, I think it was in – well, it was in New York, and they took them into the arms and armor collection of the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City]. I'm down in the shop working. You know, like, that's not smart. You know what I mean?

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: Still trying to – okay, I got to work hard and not take advantage of an extraordinary opportunity that probably would never happen again in your life without a lot of credentials. So yeah, I just – I didn't come up for air, you know?

And you know, one thing I should probably divert to with regard to Al Pine is Al Pine would talk about experience he's had – he had had, and of course he brought all this information in, but he would also give some oral history. And one of the things that I remember was he went to City College of New York, and two of his classmates were Bernie Bernstein and Fred Fenster, both really great silversmiths. So I was keenly aware of that relationship, and then I knew that Fred Fenster was at Wisconsin [University of Wisconsin, Madison]. So anyway, these kinds – those kinds of hookups, where it's professional, it's personal, you know, that kind of thing. And I mean, that's one of the reasons I wanted to look at Wisconsin is because of Fred Fenster, you know. And then of course later on I met Bernie and we know each other and friendly and same thing with Fred.

But I think that all of that – I think that that's the kind of thing that's so important to the teacher as part of the mentoring process to indicate to a student that there's a bigger picture. If you want to get into the picture, you can. It's not – you just have to take the initiative. I think it's bigger now, it's more sophisticated, it requires different strategies, and maybe even we weren't even naming it strategy when I was doing it. I was just saying, "Oh, I should do this." But we would call that strategy today, and I would – I would say to a student, "Well, you know, strategically you ought to be doing this."

So it's a – our world is more sophisticated. We've all been infected by business attitude. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, exactly.

Do you – did you have people at Tyler who were your fellow students as well that you would want to talk about?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, I do. There were a number, but there were – there was one person that was not only at Tyler, but after Tyler and was extremely influential and inspiring. He was a second-year student when I was a first-year student. So when I came in, I saw his work and I thought, this is a guy that knows how to design things. And his name was Jem Freyaldenhoven. And he's dead now. He died of AIDS. He actually died here in Michigan. He was up for a guest artist trip. But he was a dear friend, really a dear friend. And when we were teaching at RIT he would come to Rochester in the summer and teach the summer classes and then stay with Pat and I in our home. But anyway, a dear friend. But Jem was a good metalsmith and a really good designer. And when he moved on professionally, he taught at Georgia State in Atlanta, but he was designing sets and he expanded. So he was really, really a remarkable guy.

But anyway, when we were in school, he wasn't one that gave up his secrets easily. And he had been to the Memphis Academy of Art. Really well trained in art and design, and I could tell from his work. And so I'd look at his work, and gradually it would unfold. And basically, he designed within a Golden Section, root-5 kind of system, which I was unaware of. I didn't know about that. So, you know, it's one of those things where you kind of draw it out of the guy. But it was very abstracted. I mean very abstracted. And he did this incredible chasing, very sensual, sexual type of work. I mean, it's just beautiful, beautiful work. Helen's got a couple pieces. Pat and I have one piece.

And anyway, he was very, very inspiring. And he was also a good friend in the sense that there were things that he would do that were unusual. Like we went to Longwood Gardens [Kennett Square, Pennsylvania], which is the Dupont Arboretum, and we went to different places, outings, and so he was really good about it. We'd all go together, friends.

The other two people that were good colleagues were Barbara Brodsky, who no longer works in metal. She was a grad student. And she was not much of a metalsmith, but she was also a really good designer and was keenly aware of fine art movements. So she was helpful to me. And then the other was Dick Posniak, who still lives in

Philadelphia. He was a Kurt Matzdorf student at [SUNY] New Paltz, more of a hammer kind of guy. And he hasn't really made that much work after graduate school. But we were colleagues and friends, and Dick and Barbara and I had our show together.

And then there were other people too, but those were the primary ones that were really where we were talking a lot and arguing about things, that type of thing. Stanley had a seminar for the graduate class, and we would look at work and there was a lot of discussion. Stanley, I think he's a polemic, basically. And he's very logical and very systematic. He's got a lot of information. He's a very sharp guy. He's sharp.

And basically, I never was afraid to argue with Stanley. I mean, even though I was kind of intimidated by the whole experience when I first came in, I was never afraid to argue with him. I mean, that was different, you know? It was just like, "Oh. Well, I don't agree with that," whatever it was. And then as we progressed, I think I got more confident than that and realized that I was actually making some good work. But early on, it just was overwhelming and, as I said, that whole regional notion of going to the East and what it represents.

But what I always liked about Stanley was that I never felt like he - he would always argue with you, but I never felt that he was overbearing with it. But I'm not intimidated by that. I mean, I think it maybe goes back to high school, you know what I mean? Like Latin and Greek, and you better say what you mean and that kind of thing.

In fact - this is going back to high school. In our senior year we had an English teacher who - we were reading Shakespeare and the classics, and of course that was the, quote, "subject," but it really wasn't the subject. The subject was communicating. So we had to recite - and we also had to comment on the text. So you can imagine a class of 30 young men, and he'd say, "Well, Mr. Griffin, what do you think about this?" And you'd have to stand up, you'd pick up your book, you'd read a few lines. And he'd say, "Well, what does that mean?" You know? And if you used incorrect English, if you said things - "Well, I think," he says, "Thinking is good," you know.

But he wasn't an intimidating guy, but what you learned was you better say what you mean and don't fiddle with it, you know, just move it out. And it was - we never knew who he was going to call on, so you'd better be prepared. And sometimes you weren't, and you'd fumble around. And he would just say, "Down." I mean, "Sit down." Go to the next person. But it was a - everybody would laugh about him, but man, what an education. It was so remarkable in terms of talking about something -

Mr. ADAMSON: So you were well prepared for Stanley?

MR. GRIFFIN: I think I was prepared for Stanley. And, you know, I was certainly extremely challenged, I was highly motivated, and didn't feel - I felt like I had a lot of work to do to be at the level that I wanted to be. And so that, I would say, that I was a little overwhelmed or intimidated by that, but not intimidated by him necessarily. But I think that he can be, and many people do think of him as an intimidating person. But I never felt that way. And he is a polemic. He loves that process. And that, for some people is very, very difficult.

So it's that whole thing of fit like anything else. And I don't feel like I'm anything like Stanley in that regard as a teacher or as an individual. But I didn't really have any trouble with it and actually found it kind of challenging and interesting. So I wasn't afraid to - you know, especially by the second year, you know, when you've been lifting the weights for a while, you're feeling a lot more confident. And we would really argue about things, and I think he loved it, actually; he really enjoyed all of that.

Anyway, what I found I really - what I really benefited from in that kind of open seminar discussion was the notion of arguing a point of view. In other words, Stanley is a very logical person. You make an error, and he's going to be in there surgically and just working on it, you know. And that was really helpful to where he would point out those problems, as he saw them, in thinking or logic. And we would talk about contemporary metalwork, we talked about individual student work, we talked about the design of it, et cetera.

So I felt that - when I left Tyler, I felt that I was - I had achieved the things that I wanted to achieve in terms of design. I felt that I had achieved something in terms of a point of view that I wanted to continue to explore and evolve. I felt that I had grown technically. I'd done a lot of work on my own in terms of reading all the *American Craft* and *Craft Horizons*.

Oh, the other thing that occurred in graduate school that was really an important experience, as a group of graduates, we had to take the graduate art history seminar. And those were taught by art historians, and for the most part they were, you know, painting and sculpture type people. And I can't remember the teacher's name, but he taught a class that was more - it was a seminar where we had to give a report, but it was pretty broad and would include dec arts. But it was also ancient; it wasn't contemporary.

So what I remember was reports by some of my colleagues, I think, such as Egyptian wirework in jewelry - really interesting things for me. And he was wide open to it. And as it turned out, I think that even though he had all the training in sculpture stuff, his real passion was that kind of stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MR. GRIFFIN: You know. So it was like the closet stuff - [laughs] -

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah the closet decorative arts enthusiast.

MR. GRIFFIN: [Laughs.] Yeah. But anyway, as students - we were complaining about the fact that there was nothing in craft history - [audio break, tape change] - and so in the second year - this is just remarkable that they got this guy - they brought him in down from Rutgers [Rutgers, State University of New Jersey] to teach dec arts undergraduate class. And of course, we were told as graduate students we can't take it because it's the wrong number; it's a 499 and you've got to - you know, typical institutional thinking. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: And so I said - we argued, of course, and we were able to argue our way into that class. So the guy that showed up was Martin Eidelberg -

MR. ADAMSON: Really.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. Yeah! And I didn't know who Martin Eidelberg was. So you can imagine a Rutgers professor rolls into Tyler School of Art, and let me tell you something, he didn't know what he was walking into. So he said, "I'm going to teach a class in 20th century dec arts, and we're going to go up to about 1950." And of course, his specialty is Art Nouveau and Art Nouveau ceramics, but he's so knowledgeable. And I'll never forget the first class. He's talking about papers and all this typed paper. And this kid raises his hand in back, and Martin Eidelberg says, "Yes?" "Well, we don't type papers at Tyler." [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: I thought, whoa, man. And of course, these were all the undergrads, and they're in art school, man. And most of the grad students that were in there, we'd all been to liberal arts schools, and all of us had written papers and typed papers. Okay, big deal.

MR. ADAMSON: Big deal, yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: And Martin required two papers of the grads. Which was fine because we just wanted the information. So anyway, we got it all worked out, and I can't - I still can't believe this to this day, but Martin actually let the undergrads hand their papers in handwritten because they didn't have typewriters.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: [Laughs.] He probably will never forget that whole thing.

But anyway I thought he was the greatest teacher. I mean, he was the real thing, man. And the way he talked about the decorative arts suddenly took me back to all those experiences - I thought, well, I know what Art Nouveau is; man, I know what - hey listen, I've seen Lalique glass.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: You know, I'm with you. I am with you. And he was passionate about it and caring. And he also exposed me to the side that I was unaware of, which is, I'd seen the stuff, I knew the period and all that, but what I didn't understand was the whole cultural-social history and surroundings of it. So he turned me on to that. And that was one of the - another one of those great moments where all the stars aligned. You meet this teacher that has this kind of experience, and he says, "Hey, look, you can look at this cup this way, you can look at the design, and you can look at this as a social occurrence, you know, and that there was all this other stuff going on. And there was the femme fatale or whatever it was, and this influenced people's thinking." So suddenly I thought, man, there's an even bigger picture than I knew of.

So anyway, that was great. And what was really interesting is I did my papers - I did one paper on Stanley and then I did - I don't know, the other one was on Deco or Art Nouveau or something like that. I typed mine. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: You typed yours.

MR. GRIFFIN: So anyway, years later I was with Toni Greenbaum, and Toni and I were talking about jewelry. And she came out because we had the "Messengers of Modernism" show here. And so, in talking to her - you know - I was telling her about this experience with Martin Eidelberg, and she said, "You know, I know Martin really well, and - in fact, I was with him last week and we were talking about this and that." And she said, "You know, he

told me about a student that was, you know, interested in the same things that he's interested in, and it was a student at Tyler." It was me.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow. That's something.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. It's - it's just so funny how - excuse me, but you don't expect those kinds of things to occur professionally; you know, where you're just anonymous at a certain point, but then there's this strange hookup where you're with Toni Greenbaum and you're at a show and then suddenly she goes, "Wow, you're the guy!" You know? So anyway, that was - it was great.

And with - Tyler was such a good experience. It was really hard work. You know, I was just completely dedicated to it. So there was really not much of an outside world, even though I was aware of it; in other words, I was aware of SNAG, I was aware of the the blacksmithing stuff.

Oh, the other thing that did occur at Tyler was at that time, Elliot Pujol was teaching at Tyler for one year.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, right. Oh.

MR. GRIFFIN: So Elliot is a very different personality than Stanley and more just kind of low key. And of course, in terms of work habits, they were totally different. You know, like Stanley is very precise, chemical and everything; Elliot's squirting stuff all over the place. [Laughs.] You know, it was - it was - and I'm thinking, oh, man, and this is something else.

But Stanley was in charge of the grads and Elliot was doing undergrads, and Stanley would do some undergraduate classes. So we became friendly, but we never had official classes with Elliot. But I was, you know - I'm just like always interested in information, so I'm thinking, well, what are you doing over here in this? And he was doing all those crimp pots, which were great. And then he would patina them. Well, you know, we talked about all that stuff with Stanley.

So I was real interested, and we became friendly with Elliot. And in the spring, Elliot is real connected with Penland [Penland School of Crafts, Penland, North Carolina] and a kind of - a different circuit for us at the time. So he said, "There's this blacksmithing conference that's never occurred before and it's in Lumpkin, Georgia. You want to go?" And I said, "Well, I mean, if you think it's worthwhile, let's go." And I didn't - of course he didn't tell us that it was, you know, over a thousand miles to drive down to southern Georgia. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: So we drove down and we stopped at Penland, spent the night there, and then drove down to Lumpkin, and it turned out that was the first ABANA [Artist Blacksmith's Association of North America]. In other words, there was no ABANA, and Brent Kington was there and Alex Bealer and a lot of the people that are considered old guard in ABANA. And so we went and, you know, there was a few demos and this and that, and it was okay. I mean, it wasn't a big deal, you know. I wasn't blown away by it.

MR. ADAMSON: And you weren't really keyed into blacksmithing yet for yourself.

MR. GRIFFIN: No, I wasn't, but I'd done all that blacksmithing at Long Beach. I mean, it was part of my portfolio, but I really wasn't keyed into it. Anyway, the organization started, but I didn't really - we had left a couple hours before all those people got together. I mean, if I'd waited an hour, I probably would have been a founding member or something.

So anyway, we headed back up north and so I was kind of aware - I was aware of that stuff, but I was mainly making jewelry, so it was an outside interest. And Elliot was, you know, helpful in that way, but he was only there for a year. And shortly after that, he went to Kansas [Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas]. And then the next year, Stanley had grad assistants teach the undergraduate course, and then -

Well, actually, that was a really interesting thing because in the second year - you know, our second year, my - I got a fellowship, so I basically got a Temple University fellowship, which was a free tuition and a stipend. And we were living high on the hog, believe me, comparatively. And so Stanley gave assistantships to the other grads and they taught the basic undergraduate program, and some of the great undergrads, too. That should be mentioned. Robin Quigley was an undergrad at that time and Gayle Saunders. So those two people were just fantastic, and both went on to achieve a lot; Robin at RISD and then Gayle in terms of her work in jewelry. So you know, it was just a good group to be around.

And the - probably the only thing that I - I think I should have done more of in graduate school - I was so focused on the metalwork that I didn't really hang out enough with other - in other areas. I mean, I knew some sculptors. We were really friendly with the fiber people; Adela Akers and John McQueen was in school at that

time.

MR. ADAMSON: Wow.

MR. GRIFFIN: I mean, here again, good fortune. The people – undergraduate and graduate – that I was in school with, there was just some remarkable – Lewis Knauss was in school then, Deborah Warner. They're all active in Philadelphia. And then Adela.

And then in photo, and I'm still friendly, Bea Nettles, was teaching photography. And her work was so unusual for that period. I mean, first of all, a woman. Number two, her whole take on it was so different from what anybody else was doing. And after graduate school, we moved to Rochester and Bea lived in Rochester, too. So we became really close. We lived a few blocks from one another. Our children were born, oh, you know, around the same time. And so we became really friendly with Lionel [Suntop] and Bea then.

But graduate school was – well, it was great.

MR. ADAMSON: It sounds like it was very intensive for you.

MR. GRIFFIN: Oh, it was incredible.

MR. ADAMSON: But that it wasn't the kind of experience where, apart from getting to know more about the broad metal skills and that sort of thing, doesn't sound like your world exploded in the same way that it had in Long Beach quite.

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, I wouldn't say that. I think that – oh, I think it was explosive in the sense that it's where you really lock down. I mean, suddenly the whole European thing became a reality. It was at that point that I became aware of, you know, Czech – some of the Italian jewelers, but mainly the Northern Europeans and the English. I think maybe the Italians were later. Yeah, that was later. But just the fact that it was more expanded. But maybe the way I'm hearing you say it is that I think what what happened at Long Beach was that's the point where I could say, "Oh, this is actually a career."

MR. ADAMSON: Exactly.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. That's a huge – I mean, that's a huge thing, where you could say, well, Tyler's part of that –

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, you were committed already.

MR. GRIFFIN: That's trajectory.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, I was already committed.

MR. ADAMSON: So when you came out of Tyler, you knew that you needed to somehow focus that career?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. Well, I knew – I'd already been a teacher, I mean, and I knew at Tyler that I was going to do metalwork. And in fact, my minor is ceramics. But I took ceramics because I just adored Rudy [Rudolf] Staffel. And after I met him, I just thought, oh, man, I got to hang around with this guy. Rudy was really great because he knew that I didn't have – really no interest in ceramics. I'd done some as an undergraduate, so I could throw a pot. And that I really wanted to be in metal, but that I was down there for other reasons, you know, and that it was a requirement. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: You know? So I would always go down on the elective days and I would be in there, and I'd throw some pots and glaze 'em and do that kind of thing. But it was more like I just wanted to throw the pots. I didn't want to deal with some kind of major invention. And I also wanted to be around him. Just wanted to listen to what he had to say and I wanted to look at his work, which I could do at Helen Drutt's. And Stanley had a lot of – some of Rudy's pieces, too.

And I remember – and I don't know whether this was when I was in graduate school, but I think it was – Rudy had a show at Helen's in the gallery that was on Spruce Street. And I remember going down. We got downtown early, so I said, "Well, let's just go over and see what's going on over there." So we got in there and all of his pieces were very sparingly put on these white shelves and they were lit. And I remember Rudi being in there looking, and then he went into another room and he brought out this colored tissue paper. And he'd wad it up and he'd drop it in those. And so what happened was the light would come down and it would go through the tissue paper, and then there would be this diffuse green or pink or rose color through the porcelain. I mean, it was just

incredible. He called them light gatherers. They weren't cups or anything.

And so yeah, he was like a Zen priest more than anything else. In fact, one of the things that was – Stanley had this seminar about business practices, and they had Barry Merritt come down from Rochester, who was kind of a wild and crazy jeweler but always made his living making stuff. He was the one that did those big body shields, Wonder Woman with the bullets and all that stuff all over it, painted with car paints. Pretty remarkable work for that period of time.

Anyway, the thing I'll never forget was Stanley went through this whole thing about business, and he had all these literally line items on paper. [Laughs.] But then everybody is going, "Oh man, this is just too much." And then Barry went through a more casual way of doing it. And then, when it came to Rudy, Rudy got up and he said, "Well," he says, "I have a box. And I get all the receipts and I put them in the box. And then my accountant comes, and he says – and I point to the box." [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: It was so great. It was so great. And –

MR. ADAMSON: That's priceless.

MR. GRIFFIN: You know, it is. And you know, just as a kind of total experience of having, you know, the Zen priest, the technocrat, all these characters, this cast of characters that allowed you to be educated.

MR. ADAMSON: Technocrat.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you say a little bit more in depth about the technical aspects of what you learned at Tyler?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, the main thing – well, what I realized – what I didn't realize when I applied to Tyler but I realized after I had been there for a semester was I somehow didn't think of myself as being technically proficient, or even technically advanced. I thought – now, if I would have gone to RIT, I wouldn't have been as technically advanced in silversmithing as an RIT undergrad. But I could basically do everything. I mean, I could raise, I could cast – you know, I'd had all those experiences.

So when I got to Tyler, I somehow thought of myself as being not necessarily as technically well versed, well informed. But after I was there for a short period of time, I realized I know more than anybody else here. I mean, I can weld, I can do all this stuff. So my – you know, it's like all that floating around and deciding that I wanted to learn to weld or turning an Early American table leg –

MR. ADAMSON: Helped.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. And then also, after Martin Eidelberg, where you realize hey man, all this stuff that you've been living with and been around is what this guy's talking about.

MR. ADAMSON: So you felt like you were further along than you thought maybe.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. That's when I realized, wow, I've had a pretty amazing experience.

MR. ADAMSON: Were there particular techniques though that Stanley –

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, then when I got to Tyler, in terms of the technical part, Stanley had – first of all, the electroforming, which I didn't have a clue about, and that was highly advanced. And Stanley is a very structured, thorough individual.

The other part that I didn't understand or know about were all the plastics. And at that period of time plastics were big. All the Europeans were using it. You know, it was going – it was really starting to be used in the jewelry. So thermal forming – work with plastic. I knew how to make a mold and cast stuff, so the plastic part, the resin part, that was new to me.

But for the most part, everything else was things that I knew about. But I must say, I also evolved, and in part, in terms of machine work in particular. I mean, I'd worked in a machine shop, too. When I wasn't welding, they'd send me over to the machine shop. So I knew how to run the machines.

But there was a sculptor whose name was Larry Hahn and we became very good friends. And he was into kinetic work. And he built these stainless steel pieces with all these elaborate bearings, and he was a skilled - highly skilled machinist. And most of the machining I learned at the advanced level I learned it all from Larry. There was nobody that was his equivalent at Tyler or, I mean, in my educational experience; really, really remarkable machinist. So my machine skills jumped because of Larry Hahn. And that, of course, was part of the Tyler experience.

And then there were a lot of things that, you know, you just pick up along the way as additional ways of doing things. There were things in stone-setting that - I don't set stones anymore, but even the other day - there's a technique about dressing a file on one side where you take the teeth off of it. And I still do that with my big file. And I was showing one of the students and the guy said, "I've never seen anything like that." He said, "That's worth a whole summer's wages." And he's worked for Scott Lankyon, and he's worked for professional blacksmiths. So the guy - he's good.

And so just, you know, like that's the kind of stuff that would be hard to delineate or define each one of these.

MR. ADAMSON: It's a whole world of -

MR. GRIFFIN: But it's that whole notion of marinating in something so important.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe what we should do is take a break.

MR. GRIFFIN: Okay.

MR. ADAMSON: This CD is almost done anyway.

[Audio break.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, this is disc 4 of interview between Glenn Adamson and Gary Griffin.

And Gary, we're just leaving Tyler and heading off to RIT. Do you want to talk about the transition between the two first?

MR. GRIFFIN: Sure. In the spring semester, my last semester at Tyler, we started the process - a number of us started the process of looking for work and deciding what we were going to do. And I basically had two plans. One was to apply for jobs in university-level teaching, and that was my primary interest. And I'd already had a couple of years of teaching experience, at least in secondary schools, so I thought I was qualified as a teacher.

But the other one was that if I was not able to secure that, that I would stay in Philadelphia and basically be a metalsmith. And the plan was - number one, Philadelphia has, I think, five or six major universities. So the first plan was I was just going to put ads in the college papers for wedding bands. I figured this is going to be fine. And then the other part of it was that I'd talked to Stanley, and Stanley would let me make some of his commission work. In other words, I would work - labor for him in terms of whenever he got a job. So he was very supportive in that way.

So I had two plans, which I generally always do have a backup - I always have a backup. Anyway, went through the whole thing of getting portfolios out. And at that period of time we just used to solicit, we'd just send out lots of letters inquiring if there were positions, putting your name on file, et cetera. And then jobs began to appear, and I think there were maybe 10 jobs that year, which is plentiful. And so, of course, I applied to all of them, and moved into a kind of finalist position in a couple. And this was fairly early on. I mean, it was probably - I had a job before school was out, which is unusual today.

But I remember at the time I walked into Stanley's office and I said, "RIT needs a jeweler." And he said, "I wouldn't bother applying for that." And I said, "Well why?" And he said, "Well, you know, that Albert Paley was there. He left two years before and there was a lot of friction with Albert and Hans Christensen." And he said, "Hans Christensen will never hire somebody from Tyler. I can tell you right now, it just isn't going to happen."

And I thought, well maybe so, but I've got to go for it. So anyway -

MR. ADAMSON: And so the logic there was that because Albert had been at Tyler -

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, I think that there was a rift with - I know there was a rift between Albert and Hans. And I think there may have been a little - there might have been a little bit of a rift between Hans and Stanley. Although -

MR. ADAMSON: By association almost.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, by association almost. And also, they're very different kinds of people. Hans is a

traditionalist. Stanley is a progressive. You know, it's kind of like the [Samuel] Yellin bronze deal.

So anyway, I thought, well, I'm going to apply anyway, what the heck. I mean, all he can do is send back my portfolio. So the next thing I knew I was a finalist and they wanted me to come for an interview. And I had to present a lecture and all that kind of thing. So I did so. And went up to the interview – and I think I was there two days – gave a lecture to the students, and met Hans, interviewed with people. And the dean – I met the dean, and then there was an assistant dean whose name was Neil Hoffman, and Neil and I hit it off really, really well.

Anyway, they offered me the job, which just – Stanley couldn't believe it! [Laughs.] And I was thrilled, of course. And then, of course, the next phase, which is kind of typical, I was freaking out because I thought, "Wait a minute, I'm going to RIT. This is the School for American Craftsmen, and I'm just out of graduate school."

So I went in to see Stanley and I said, "You know, Stanley, I'm not – I'm going to walk out of here today, and you're my graduate instructor, and tomorrow I'm going to be a graduate instructor. This is a bit much."

And he said, "You know more than they do," which was a great thing to say. So it put me at ease. But it's at a transition where, again, you're thinking, "Oh boy, you know, I'm going to really have to work hard," and et cetera.

So anyway, I got up to RIT and there really was a lot to be done in many ways, just in terms of deciding, well, what do I want to do, how am I going to teach. I'm now the head of the whole jewelry program; what's it going to be? And I'm really grateful that I had all of that experience of teaching secondary schools and having a teaching credential. I knew how to write a curriculum, I knew how to develop a program, et cetera. And the RIT program was very unique because the students major as a freshman, so they are in the studio three days a – or no – three full days a week. They have access to the studio all the time, but they're in class Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday all day just in metalwork. They are really well trained. They have a remarkable experience there.

MR. ADAMSON: And they're only 18 years old when they start.

MR. GRIFFIN: They're 18 years old, and whatever, whenever they get out. And so they're very exposed. And of course they have the hollowware teacher with Hans Christensen, and a jewelry teacher.

MR. ADAMSON: And there had been a two-year gap there where there was no jewelry being taught, is that –

MR. GRIFFIN: No, no. There was another person then, whose name was Kener Bond who moved up to an assistant dean position. And Kener became a very good friend of mine and really a guardian angel. He was so helpful to me in terms of teaching me the ropes around the place, you know, to avoid stepping in the wrong thing, all of that kind of thing. He was a really great guy, and we're still friends today and still talk occasionally. But he was just really helpful. And of course he had been a student of Hans's way back. He knew Prip and Ron Pearson, and he'd been around in the upstate area so he knows everybody. And he was a very important person, I think, in that program of the transition in the two years after Albert left and went to [SUNY] Brockport and I came, which was '74.

Anyway, you know, the first years were a tremendous amount of work in many ways because I had my career going, as well as the teaching and trying to develop a program. And the dean was extremely supportive. And I was really interested in machines and technology, and so they were supportive of that. I mean, they never refused a request in terms of equipment. I mean, I bought a lot of okay stuff. And then as the blacksmithing developed, they built a blacksmithing shop. And I was able to participate in the design and everything about that.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you get it into your head to start doing blacksmithing in earnest up there?

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, that occurred – well, let me talk about the development of the work and I'll hit that.

So when I went to RIT, I was still making jewelry and was really aggressively exhibiting nationally and internationally and was really participating in the international jewelry scene. So I think in '76 or so my wife and I went to England. So we were moving in that network.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were by now a member of SNAG.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. I got involved with SNAG, although I was still kind of working within the territory that I was working in, not really active in SNAG early at that point. I'd say I didn't really get active maybe until '78. So this was about '74, '75. And I had a show at Helen Drutt's in '76 of all the jewelry, and I think I had another show in '78 at Helen's. And so I was just so focused on the work, and it was evolving and it felt good. I developed a studio in my house with my own equipment.

And then I got involved with SNAG because I wrote a paper for their technical papers, all on machining. And so

RIT was great because it was an institute of technology. I mean, that's what it was all about, about technology. And the dean was very much for that. I was interested in any technology, so I got a spinning lathe in there. I mean, that was, like sacrilege you know? Hans wasn't happy about that.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: But he always – he was okay, you know what I mean? The one thing I'll say is I taught with him for 10 years and we had a good time. That's all I can say. We didn't bicker, we didn't fight, and it was a good time. And so it was workable.

MR. ADAMSON: So he would shake his head at certain things you were doing, but he wouldn't give you grief?

MR. GRIFFIN: No, he wouldn't give me grief about it. But I think earlier on when he was younger, he probably would have been all over it and it would have been curtains. Because really, no one was able to teach for him, teach with him for any length of time. I mean, Ron Pearson came and went, all of them came and went. And so I had the longest tenure.

MR. ADAMSON: That was even true of Jack Prip with him?

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, I think Jack Prip was at – or he was at the School for American Craftsmen when it was Alfred, New York. So he preceded Hans.

MR. ADAMSON: He would have preceded Hans, yes.

MR. GRIFFIN: He was the person who actually – as I understand it, he's the one that actually recommended Hans for the job.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. GRIFFIN: He said he's the best silversmith of Jensen [Georg Jensen Silver], he's raised the duck pitcher, all those things. Hans was the prototype silversmith, so he made all the newest designs.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you to some extent in awe of his facility as a raiser and silversmith?

MR. GRIFFIN: Oh, his skill was remarkable. And my office was next to his, and I remember I'd go in Saturday morning or even Sunday morning and you can hear Hans just planishing, just tapping away. And also the other thing, just to give you an idea of how he worked, when he would anneal – we had gassed air torches with compressed air. He used a bellows, a foot-operated bellows. And I'd see him in there pumping the bellows.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, my goodness.

MR. GRIFFIN: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And he didn't require the students to do that, but that's the way he annealed his work.

MR. ADAMSON: Because he felt he had more control that way?

MR. GRIFFIN: I think so, absolutely. He was very old school. And Hans could really work an area. I mean, he knew how to work a surface of a piece of silver. He was a master. Anyway –

MR. ADAMSON: It wasn't something that you particularly felt you needed to acquire from him?

MR. GRIFFIN: No. And he was – I wouldn't say he was secretive, but he wasn't really openly sharing that, you know, I mean. And I might go into his office and say, "Hi," and, "What are you working on?" and that kind of thing, but he wasn't real interested in talking about the work.

And I remember one time – [laughs] – I had an old motorcycle and I had a fender that was in pretty rough shape. And I remember going to him and saying, "Hans, can you give some help with this? Just tell me how I might be able to work some of these areas and everything." And I remember him saying, "Oh, I'll do that." So in other words, he – and he took that darn thing and he went in and, you know, completely at another period of time and he got those little dents out and gave it back to me. But in other words, he wasn't – we weren't going to work together, you know, and I thought, well, that's all right. But I didn't – anyway, it was just –

MR. ADAMSON: You had other things you were doing, so –

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah. So I mean, that's fine. You know, it's – so anyway, we had a working relationship and I was grateful for that.

The – after I had my second show with Helen, I was making jewelry. They would be large for the time, but certainly not on the scale of an Arline Fisch. But you know, they were maybe three inches square and then would have an appendage, so maybe three-by-six inches type pieces. They were all in aluminum, all machine. It was a very stark, a – some people would say anonymous kind of feel.

So there's no question that there's the influence of minimalism. I was aware of Don Judd's work, the minimalist, Dan Flavin, aware of all that work. And I certainly had read Judd's writings, although I didn't feel – they didn't relate to me in the sense that I realized they were really about the art world. They had to do with an argument that was taking place within a particular world, and I knew I wasn't a part of that. I don't know why, but I never believed – I always saw that as a separate world.

And I never bought the argument that people made: "Well, we have to become a part of that." I thought we'll never become a part of it; it's a different place. It is a different place. And I thought it was naive to believe that. So – but I was interested in the ideas of it, and I could sort out the difference between the ideas that had to do with the region of the fine art world that Judd was arguing about and how his work really didn't even fit into a museum, that it had to be conceptualized and seen like a Marfa kind of place, and his – so in other words, that – I was more interested in what it looked like and in the reductivist thinking of it.

But as I look back at that work, my work is still very ornamental comparatively and it wasn't broken down to a bar or something. Not at all; it was ornate, but it was machine. It was a different notion of ornamentation and a very evolved one from the work I started to do at Tyler. So in other words, rather than seeing a gear or something that made them more comparable to, let's say, the machine age, it evolved into something that was the representation of precision, the representation of materiality, aluminum, you know, that kind of thing. So these things were really representations of a more what I considered contemporary time.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you already thinking very actively about Art Deco and other earlier geometric styles at that point?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, back in graduate school because of the Leger piece and then that whole notion of the machine age. And actually, when I got out of graduate school, I realized, oh, I've just reviewed the machine age. Even though I liked the work and the mechanical quality, I just thought, well, I'm – I've been reviewing the machine age and I've got to do something that advances this work in terms of time and the precedence. And so I not only made the work through precise means, but it embodied that kind of precision. And I would say that that's – that that's really the beginning of what one would call concept if you would call it today. So this would be '75, '76, in that period of time.

MR. ADAMSON: So how did that lead you to blacksmithing?

MR. GRIFFIN: Oh, well, what happened was I had the show at Helen's and I realized that I was looking at this work as jewelry. I wanted it to be worn. It was lightweight. Pin systems worked beautifully – all of those kinds of things. And the work that was being purchased was purchased as objects. And I thought, well, this makes no sense. I mean, this is a real problem in my program. [Laughs.] And so I thought, well, you know, if people aren't going to really use this stuff, I should go do something else.

So I actually just left that and I made a small sculpture about this big that used all the same vocabulary, visual vocabulary, but a major change. The jewelry was schematically planned out and it was not intuitive. In other words, I drafted it, I worked on the proportions very carefully. I mean, I keep thinking, this goes back to – I wasn't using root-5 or Golden Section systems, but I was employing things – ideas that paralleled that. So in other words, Jem Freyaldenhoven's influence in terms of those systems and that kind of thinking about design was still there, but it was all plotted and carefully done. And I thought, you know, I've got to make something.

So I think it's comparable to the notion of shooting from the hip, or at what point is this stuff kind of part of your bone marrow, you know, where it's truly intuitive. And I do think that intuition is built, it's culturally developed, it's developed through study, and pretty soon you can just do it.

So I made this piece. It felt so awkward. And I sent it to an exhibition in Arizona, it was a "Copper, Brass, and Bronze Exhibition" [University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona]. And there were 10 prize winners. My piece was one of them, Bruce Metcalf was another one, and Jamie Bennett was another one. So it was like, you know, these characters keep reappearing. And it was all done anonymously. People didn't know who's work it was, and no one would have known that piece was mine at all. And I think the jurors were Gene Pijanowski and Fred Fenster, I believe. Anyway, that felt good, and that was a bit of encouragement saying, wow, I guess this thing isn't as awkward as I think it is.

So I kept working that way and it started to grow. And so the sculptures got to be six feet. They were very ornamental and I thought of them more as furniture than sculpture. And whenever I'd write something about them I called them "constructions." I never called them – I think – well, in fact, in one statement I said, "I

hesitate to call this work sculpture and I call them constructions.” And the writing is, I would say, conceptual or maybe pseudo – or not pseudo, but kind of intellectual in the way it’s approached.

Anyway, there came a point where my – oh, our son was born in '78, first child. So a couple of things: One was I found that when I was at home working in my studio and he was upstairs, I thought, I want to go upstairs and hang out with him. [Laughs.] You know, that’s a lot more fun than being down here.

And so in a way, it was kind of a distraction, and the work was getting larger and I couldn’t put it in my basement. So I decided I need to have another studio for larger things. So I did that, and I moved all the equipment out of my basement and got another studio in Rochester at a separate place. And it was also one of those things where – and my daughter was born in 1980, so we had two children. And there had to be something where daddy went to work, kind of thing. In other words, mom went to work, daddy went to work. And when I was downstairs, it wasn’t work, you know, in the same way, both on their part and mine. We were both easily distracted by one another.

Anyway, when I got down to that shop, I was making this work and I realized, you know, this stuff would be a whole lot better outside than it would be inside. And I was working with wood, and metal and all this stuff. And I thought well, I’m going to make some things that go outside. And so I naturally went back to welding and hammering and forging and all that stuff. I wasn’t thinking, well, I’m going to be a blacksmith.

So I just started making these constructions out of steel and did a whole series of them. And during that time I thought, well, Helen showed some of that work along with the jewelry early on. And I realized at a certain point that that wasn’t going to work out anymore. I was more interested in this other work, and I decided I wasn’t going to make new jewelry anymore – although I did make some, but it’s purely conceptual work. And I thought, well, I need a dealer.

So I went to Chicago the old-fashioned way and just hit the streets. And it was at that moment when the dealers were moving from Michigan Avenue over to the new gallery area over on Huron and up on Ontario and – [audio break, tape change] – Superior. And I mean that area was just – it was rough.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR.GRIFFIN: And so I went to all them and showed my ware and my portfolio. And two of them were interested and so I made another trip and actually took work out. And the two that were interested were Klein Gallery, who is still in business, and Frumkin-Struve – Allan Frumkin and Bill Struve. And Struve’s were just moving off of Michigan Avenue over there. So they were interested in having more sculptural kinds of works because they were handling mostly painters and flat artists.

Anyway, I had a show with Struve. They initially started me out where you’d do – become part of a group show, which was pretty cool because some of the other people I was showing with, Roy De Forest, you know it. I mean it was just like, boy there’s a good leg up. You get a good painter – William Wiley – they had a great stable painter. So I got to go for the ride and then later on I was able to get into a two-man show type of situation. I never had a solo show, but more than ample space.

MR. ADAMSON: Why did you have an interest in having a gallery in Chicago as opposed to New York, given that you are in Rochester?

MR.GRIFFIN: Well, I think that part of it was that I just – well, okay, I know how it happened. There was a SNAG conference in Chicago and I thought, well, I’m just going to go hit the galleries and see if anything can happen.

MR. ADAMSON: So it was happenstance really.

MR.GRIFFIN: It was happenstance. And as it turned out, it was a really good thing because something I didn’t know is that dealers from other part of the country go to Chicago to get artists. And so I got other galleries because of Bill Struve. And I suddenly had a guy – Tom Barry, who has recently gone back into business in Minneapolis. And so he was selling this work.

And anyway, I was making these pieces that were somewhere between furniture and so on, that could either go indoors or outdoors. And then here’s another very strange thing, I thought – I was in my own shop one day and said, you know, people make gates out of this stuff. Maybe I ought to just make a gate. And that’s what I did.

MR. ADAMSON: Just that simple, huh?

MR.GRIFFIN: [Laughs.] It was. You know, for all the kind of intellectual underpinning and all the – bottom line is I think a lot decisions are made with a kind of gut response.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, it must – it must have been also coming into your own as a blacksmith because when you

make a gate as a blacksmith, that's like, okay, now I'm a blacksmith in a certain way.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, maybe so. And I don't doubt - I mean Al Paley and I were really good friends. I was keenly aware of what he was doing in Rochester. I had seen a lot of his work and his gates. And I thought, wow, I mean this guy is making gates and fences. I'm going to make a gate. Just like that, I made a gate. But frankly, I really don't consider myself a blacksmith and the reason is that even though I forge things, I'm not a blacksmith in that kind of tradition. It's a much - I'm a metalsmith, broadly based, pluralistic, I machine stuff, I grind stuff, I forge stuff, I cast things. Like that railing is cast and that's the one for this commission job. So in other words, I'm broad.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR.GRIFFIN: Some things are laser cut. And I don't - and I use that aesthetic in a kind of pure way. I don't just laser cut them hammer on it.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's not purely expediency that guides what process you're using, but you do use a lot of different process depending on goals.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, I'm completely wide open. And it really has more to do with what I'm trying to achieve in terms of the quality of work. And so I remember distinctively at a certain point thinking, well, how wide can one reach? So in other words, if you have the model of your artistic identity coming from a particular style, that's one model. But what about breadth. You know, like, how big - what can you get your arms around? And that idea allows you, number one, to look at more things. And to say well, wait a minute, I don't have to be identified by a particular style.

And I remember when I made the transition to stop making jewelry, there was a certain point, where I said, you know, these machines - this machine aesthetic and no matter how evolved - I could continue to do this for the rest of my life, but I don't want to do that. So I just quit. It was like cold turkey. I'm not doing that anymore and then you go through a kind of struggling phase of trying to reform your identity and then something else evolves. So I've done that several times in my metalsmithing life and now I know I can do it tomorrow. So in other words, it doesn't have to be a long duration. I can make that one day, I can make a leaf one day that's representation, I can make another one that's a total abstract thought.

MR. ADAMSON: It's interesting because - thinking about Albert Paley as the ultimate guy with a signature style -

MR.GRIFFIN: Oh yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: - you're pretty far in the other direction from that.

MR.GRIFFIN: Absolutely.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that conscious on your part?

MR.GRIFFIN: To be -

MR. ADAMSON: To not have a signature style, I guess.

MR.GRIFFIN: Well, I think that, yeah, it is. But I also don't want to get bored. In other words, just my interests are broad and I'm interested in new ideas, new ways of thinking about things. So in other words, how does one feel comfortable within a representational language, but then what about abstraction? Like, how can you think about abstraction creatively? And that's what I'm interested in is just - I want to be expansive and I want to continue to expand where I'm just keep - one of the things - I can't remember who the critic is and I wish I could remember his name. Is there a major critic whose name is Jerry Saltz?

MR. ADAMSON: Jerry Saltz, yeah.

MR.GRIFFIN: He's the one that said it. I was in Vail [Colorado] and he gave a talk there. And what he said was, "Bruce Nauman is a great artist because he has more arrows in his quiver." And I thought that's what's important. I mean not comparing myself in any way to Bruce Nauman, but that notion of having more arrows in your quiver - so you get to define what those arrows are. You get to define what your quiver is. And my feeling is it's really about breadth.

And that's not to say that people don't achieve greatness through a very narrow focus. My narrow focus is metalwork and it's from there that the world unfolds. So I'm interested in Ottoman metalwork, I'm interested in great Pre-Columbian, I'm interested in African. I've got that - all that stuff is around in my studio. I've got a plumb bob that's Etruscan, and I've got one that's Ottoman, and I've got one that's German - [laughs] - modern German. So in other words, it's that - just that kind of breadth and it - I think it just reflects curiosity.

MR. ADAMSON: So in your teaching at RIT and subsequently here, have you tried to instill breadth into your students? How do you deal with that because it's always a breadth-depth issue when you're teaching?

MR.GRIFFIN: Well, RIT is a very different institution than Cranbrook so my approach at RIT was radically different than here. And I would say that that is symbolized. When I left RIT, I remember opening a file drawer and looking at everything that was in there in terms of curriculums, notes, all those kinds of things. And I took the drawer and went to a trashcan and I threw it in the trashcan. In other words, transition - I'm going to a different place, it's going to be different. I can't bring these along because these are tainted - [laughs] - these are tainted records for the future. I can't reinvent if I have all this baggage to deal with. So I just threw it all away.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR.GRIFFIN: And I had some empty file drawers. [Laughs.] And so at RIT - RIT, in my opinion, is a real strength place as an undergraduate institution. It is a kind of narrowcast - or at least it was; I don't know what it is today - but a narrowcast in terms of people that are committed to something such as metalworking, woodworking, et cetera, and then they pursue that as a major focus for four years. The curriculum is developmental where you move through - at least the curriculum I had - was developmental through process, experience, et cetera to an extremely developed individual within metalworking.

It's not a liberal arts school. In other words, they would take a liberal arts class on Friday afternoon or something. So that part of it is very limited, but that's what an institute of technology does. And it was a great place for me to be when I was into the things that I was. They were supportive of what I wanted to do and those ideas evolved in part because of this. Even the buildings - you know the buildings were severe. My aesthetic was - everything about it was - everything was in line and it was great. And so the curriculum was very different and the approach to students in the undergraduates is very different.

We did have a very good and strong graduate program in metalwork at RIT and a large one. And in that, I did work towards being - number one is you want the students to be very individualistic about what they're trying to do. You want to talk more about concept and art movements and that type of things. So we did those things for sure. But the difference is - one has to remember that you're within an institute of technology. So in other words, everything that surrounds you, the greater culture is a technical one whether it be imaging sciences.

One of the things that I will never forget, when I arrived at RIT in the printing school, which was - part of it was in the basement of the fine arts building - if you went down there, there were letter press machines. So there were students typing on a letterpress machine that - oh no, excuse me, a linotype machine. They would type and the machine would cast the type to be printed. Within three years, those were all in the dumpster and it was all computerized. I mean you talk about shock and change in terms of the way a book is made or a newspaper is printed - huge change.

So that's an institute of technology and they move on that edge. And so for me it was perfect, but in terms of what I would call the intellectual territory or the liberal arts territory, that definitely was not a strength - definitely not a strength.

MR. ADAMSON: It's also funny to think of craft fitting into an institution like that because someone like Hans - obviously if he's a traditionalist, then he's sort of holding the rearguard position.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. ADAMSON: And he's a misplace about progression.

MR.GRIFFIN: Well, the craft school for the most part was very technical, very - I wouldn't call it - not advanced, but work in the craft school is very well done. Very well done. But for me, the notion of progressive was always like a rub. In other words, no matter - at that time, the progressive part of it - and I think in part - I mean that's what I wanted to do when I was making jewelry. And so that was the part you just had to go outside and get.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR.GRIFFIN: You know what I mean? In other words, if you were interested in Fine Arts movements and also the Fine Art Department at RIT was not strong by any means. The craft school was really - within the Art Department - the Design Department was very, very strong - the graphic design. And at that time, Swiss Grid was powerful and they were good at it, I mean really good at it. So that department was really, really powerful. And that craft school was a major hitter. But I don't think - you know, if you went - let's say if you went to Alfred and started talking ceramics, RIT would not be considered a progressive place. But skillful, people that know what they're doing - yeah, absolutely. But you go some place else, you go outside. And I was really active nationally both in terms of exhibitions and also politically in terms of organizationally active. And so I was always - we were always talking about art, or jewelry, or what the Europeans were doing, or those kinds of things, and

that in large jewelry community is a very active one. I remember going to Vienna and in an exhibition in Vienna with people from all over the world who – and it was just a great period of time, but it was outside of the expectation.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you talk a little bit about the other faculty at RIT specifically?

MR.GRIFFIN: Sure. Let's see. Hans and I were in metalsmithing. Ceramics was Bob Schmitz and Hobart Cowles. And then in woodworking was Bill Keyser and Doug Sigler. And fiber was Max Lenderman and Don Bujnowski. And then we had glass and there were a couple people that were there – most recently Mike Taylor. I think he may still be there. I really haven't had any contact with people there for 20 years so I just don't know.

But the faculty was – the people that – Bill Keyser was real active. I mean a lot of commission work in his shop and somewhat active nationally. Not necessarily organizationally, but people knew who he was. And then Doug Sigler was very active in the craft fair, the early ACC [American Craft Council] stuff and then he was really hooked into Penland. So he was a champion of that.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you know Wendell Castle also?

MR.GRIFFIN: Oh, yeah. And I knew Albert also. And Albert and I were good friends. In other words we had dinner at each other's homes and they were around – Frances and Albert were around our kids when they were young. And so I was aware of his work and I could go to his studio pretty much any time and he'd loan me equipment. He was really generous with me. Yeah, I would say we were close friends during that period of time where we were at one another's houses.

And then Wendell would join occasionally. Might go to dinner and he'd be at Albert and Frances' home. But I didn't know Wendell well, but I mean if we saw each other, we'd know each other. And I certainly have been to his studio and know Nancy Jurs, his wife, and was the aware of the development of his work. You know, the trompe l'oeil work and then the – I guess you'd call it – the post-modern, more eclectic – the clocks – those things.

MR. ADAMSON: What was the response both for you and for the RIT faculty in general looking at Wendell and Albert with their huge operations because they have staffs of people that are working for them essentially.

MR.GRIFFIN: Well, when I was there, Albert – I don't remember. When did he make the Renwick gates [*Renwick Gallery Portal Gates*, 1974, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.]? In the mid-'70s? Okay. He basically was in a really funky little building with one helper, Richard Palmer, and they built those.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR.GRIFFIN: And then he did the Chattanooga fence [Hunter Museum American Art Sculpture Garden, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1975]. I believe was the next big project. And he might have had two helpers at that point in time. It wasn't till later, maybe in the late '70s. No, it probably would have been the early '80s where he moved downtown into big building. And that was just at that beginning and he might have had a couple of helpers, but he didn't have a huge crew. I think there was a period where he might have had 10 people working. And I don't really know what he has today, but it really wasn't at that scale.

MR. ADAMSON: So it didn't become an issue at RIT when you were there?

MR.GRIFFIN: Oh, we're all aware – oh, sure, we're all aware of them. You know, Rochester is a very small town not only in terms of its population but it, at least at that time, I would say that there was a very strong group of people that it wasn't as if they conspired or that they even met. But for example, Frans Wildenhain was still alive at that period of time – Albert – there were a lot people that were still hooked into the shop one concept. And that included Frans, Albert and Wendell, and then Ron Pearson was in Maine. So mainly them and they were kind of the major guys.

And then there were the whole painting scene and that was basically University of Rochester – Thomas Bang, "Whitney Biennial" [Whitney Museum of Art, New York City], I mean major guns. So that was a kind of upper echelon, I'd say. So there was always an awareness at what they were doing. I just thought that's the way it is. I mean it's like, okay, so here's the deal and I mean Albert and I were friendly and he was making extraordinary projects. I mean the Renwick gates are just – I remember those things; they're like icons. And in fact, when I went recently to Washington and I walked in, and to see those, I thought, golly, just a tiny little fence comparatively. But that was a remarkable commission and it really pushed his career in ways that were, you know, unimaginable for so many.

So I always thought, wow, that guy is doing it. He's out there really doing it. And I remember when I made my first gate and I look back now and it's like your first piece of jewelry or something. I mean it was this kind of

conglomeration of things and it accomplished a lot. But it also in the end, just wasn't a very good gate.

MR. ADAMSON: What was your first or where was the commission?

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, it wasn't a commission. I just made it. It was that one where I said, "Well, maybe I'll just make a gate."

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, you didn't find a client first. You just made it.

MR. GRIFFIN: No, I just made it.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. [Laughs.]

MR. GRIFFIN: But then the second and third one were really good and those didn't have clients either; I just made them. But it was more in the framework of I was working in a somewhat narrative sensibility. I was using representational subject matter in them. And so it was a radical shift. If you put a piece of jewelry next to one of those gates, you'd think, wow, man, this is schizophrenic.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, I was really curious about that in fact because you were highly, highly conscious of what you were doing obviously both in terms of decorative arts history and in terms of what was going on around in the fine arts.

MR. GRIFFIN: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: And it seems like you chose this very ostensibly conservative way of going at the imagery for those projects.

MR. GRIFFIN: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: And I think about the thing you were going to do for the zoo, for instance, with the animals.

MR. GRIFFIN: Okay, that wasn't me, that's Albert I think. With the, yeah, the zoo.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh yeah, I'm sorry.

MR. GRIFFIN: But the same thing.

MR. ADAMSON: But very natural imagery and that sort of thing. And it just seems like a kind of - almost a perverse choice in some ways. And I wonder how that -

MR. GRIFFIN: Well, I'll make it more perverse because after I had decided not to make jewelry, Arline Fisch had a workshop on platinum. There was a period of time where there were workshops on process or materials. So I went to this platinum workshop, which was very informative and very helpful in my teaching at RIT. And so anyway, we're working this material and I made a lot of work there. I mean but after I had done the kind of basic forging stuff and fooled with the material, I just thought, I'm just going to make stuff. And I'm going to be a little edgy with it and I'm going to do things you're not supposed to do.

So one day, I'm sitting at that bench and I'm, just with abrasive paper, sanding a piece of platinum. And I thought - I looked at that paper and there's all this scoring all over the paper - and I thought, you know, what I could do, I could take abrasive paper, make that the jewelry and scratch it or draw on it with platinum, and reverse the priorities here between that which is expendable and that which is precious. So it's kind of an interesting conceptual framework.

So I made these pins - they were squares with a piece of fine abrasive with a - or now, a piece of coarse abrasive - and then another square smaller that's a finer abrasive. So the coarse abrasive framed the other. And then put double-sided tape on it for a pin. And then scratched into it. Anyway, I mean it's like a total conceptual object. And for exhibitions - like one exhibition in Europe, I sent the thing over in a plastic bag with a tie wrap - a hundred of them - and said, by the way, just put this out. Untie the bag, dump it on the pedestal and then as people are leaving, they can take one and they'll just peel off the back and wear it. Well, I got the bag back and the photograph was with the bag. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: On the pedestal.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, on the pedestal. But what had happened was in a way, I thought, well, at least I can get them to wear it. They will actually wear this jewelry. And people did. But what I didn't realize would happen, because I went to some friends' houses that some of this stuff, and I saw these pins on the shelf. And I said, "Why haven't you worn it?" And they go, "Oh, yeah, we wear it all the time." And I said, "Well, how do you wear it all the time?"

It's double-sided tape, you wear it once." And they said, "Oh, man, look at this." So they have a box of those double-sided square - tape squares. They just replaced the squares. So I think in a way, that was like the real jewelry that I had ever made. They wanted it, they were preserving it, something that was basically ephemeral, and they were putting the pin backs on the back of them.

MR. ADAMSON: Yes. So that makes the question even more predominant in way.

MR.GRIFFIN: That's what I'm saying.

MR. ADAMSON: I mean if you're doing that kind of thing on one side, then how do you get away with, you know, plant imagery, in your own mind?

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, well, I think that that's where you just say, "Well, I'm a complicated person."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR.GRIFFIN: In other words, I began to think that, well, wait a minute, there's more to all of us than just one way of thinking. I mean are you - if you, like, take any individual, I guess it's typically post-modern. We're all a lot more complicated than that one point of view or whatever it is. And so the first sculptural pieces that I was making were more abstracted. And I thought, well, can't you throw a rose in there? So I'd put a plastic rose in. The next thing I made steel rose.

And you know I just kept going on. And I think that that work was - in a way was sentimental. It was very sentimental work in that it was sentimental about decorative arts; it was sentimental about eclecticism, you know, in every way. And I don't doubt that it had something to do with our children being born around that period of time. There was a lot going on. You're life is changing and you're thinking about things very differently, very differently.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you think of yourself at that point very consciously as being within the overall continuum of let's say 20th century metalworking? I mean because that's obviously one way to read the imagery as being related to earlier -

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah. I would say, when I was making jewelry, I was really conscious of being progressive. In other words, on the one hand I have always made metalwork for sale. When I was at RIT I was doing wedding commissions, setting stone - I've always done that in some capacity and then also making very progressive work. I think I became more historically, let's say, conscious. And by conscious I mean I was aware - I was always historically conscious in terms of progressive and I had studied jewelers from other periods - contemporary jewelers - being aware of what I thought progressive work was in my time at that time.

But in terms of when I was making that sculpture, I wasn't thinking about it progressively. In other words, if I had been, I probably would have been not making that work because it really had nothing to do with sculpture. It had to do more with an acute awareness off decorative arts about - and it could it be anything from a Renaissance revival chalice notion to Japanese flora objects, and just more and more aware of - but as formats. Not in terms of the actual form, but just formats.

Kener Bond was really into ornamental turning machines and guillochet, and all that stuff so of course I went a long for the ride. It was a wonderful thing that he developed an interest in. And so I became more and more aware of while that 18th century work was done on those machines - all the ornamental work.

But I think that probably what really captured my interest in terms of the representational part was the whole notion of narrative or poetics where you could establish these relationships through these images if you put them adjacent to one another. And what I've realized in time is the way that I basically put things together at that period of time was very intuitive with an awareness that if you put this next to this, you can build a relationship that takes you to another place in terms of a narrative.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you respond when the post-modern style became general now in moving into the early '80s? Well, the late 70s as well and architecture?

MR.GRIFFIN: Oh, I thought I thought it was very interesting and the provocative was the way. I remember some of my favorite pieces. I love the Venturi chairs and I like them because of the notion of form coming from flatness. There's a very flat sensibility and I never did anything about that in terms of my own work, but I liked the idea. And also loved the idea of the lamination of pattern-on. And so those objects impressed me. I wasn't as - I've always felt that the work that - I'm much more interested in Aldo Rossi than I am in Michael Graves.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR.GRIFFIN: I'm more interested in - like, Charles Jenks I know, not too interested in that.

MR. ADAMSON: Because the reason I was asking was talking about that one element, two element, three element – in a rebus kind of a thing.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: That's something that you think about a lot in post-modern architecture.

MR.GRIFFIN: Exactly.

MR. ADAMSON: You were alluding to that earlier.

MR.GRIFFIN: Exactly.

MR. ADAMSON: And I wonder how that impacted your view of your own work.

MR.GRIFFIN: Oh, I think it definitely was supportive. There's no question. It's not unlike that period where I was doing that machine work and then Wendy Ramshaw and David Watkins show up and you think, oh, okay.

MR. ADAMSON: I am on to something.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, and it's that whole thing of meeting a friend, let's say. Of somebody that – where somebody is inherently reinforcing. So I think that post-modernism was reinforcing in that way and that it was eclectic. But I also was aware that Art Deco was eclectic. I mean they were ripping off the Egyptians, the Assyrians, you know, Babylon, everything. And so post-modernism was radical because of what proceeds it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. But of course you had been grounded in eclecticism since you were a child so.

MR.GRIFFIN: [Laughs.] Yeah, that's right. I mean, I had sat on Herter Brothers Furniture and [John Henry] Belter chairs and all that stuff. And that's also just the nature of the homes there. There was always that stuff and in fact – can we just take a break for second?

MR. ADAMSON: Yes, please.

MR.GRIFFIN: Okay.

[Audio break.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, this is disk five. Glenn Adamson interviewing Gary Griffin.

MR.GRIFFIN: In the last years at RIT, probably beginning in '82, maybe late '81, I knew that I was getting to the point where the fit wasn't appropriate any more. In other words, my work was changing. There were things that I wanted and part of that was to be in an atmosphere that was somehow not as technically oriented and was more expansive intellectually, and liberal – in terms of the liberal arts, let's say.

So my wife and I were discussing that several years before we left. And we had a number of scenarios, which is typical of us to have a number of strategies or scenarios to go by. And so when the opportunity came to apply for Cranbrook, we were ready. In other words, it was just another serendipitous time where we – the stars aligned. We said, this is an opportunity; we really want to take advantage of this.

So when I made the application to Cranbrook, it was a full emphasis type of application. Pulled out all the stops because I really wanted the opportunity to compete for the job and to really inspect it. And I knew a little bit about Cranbrook in that I had visited here on several occasions and I knew that it was an academy of art and that as a structure, it was very different than an institute of technology.

Anyway, that was – in other words, we were ready to go. We were ready to leave. So the good fortune was we got the job here. But another one of the scenarios was to move to New Mexico.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MR.GRIFFIN: To run a shop, make metalwork, continue to allow the Chicago gallery, the Minneapolis gallery system to evolve and do the business.

MR. ADAMSON: So it was your plan B.

MR.GRIFFIN: That was plan B. The thing I remember about the interviewing at Cranbrook and actually the hiring process was that Royce Slade who was the director at the time – he was called the President at the Art Academy – we did a lot of our discussion and our talks walking around the grounds. So I had been on the grounds perhaps 10 – yeah, 10 years earlier – but I just remembered the woods, but I didn't remember a lot of the details. And he

would – we would be talking and we’d move through a building and he’d show me some details in the building.

And of course I don’t think he was aware of it, but he was just reeling me in because – [laughs] – you know, I’d see the Saarinen gate or I’d see a sculpture or whatever it was and I just realized that the setting was extraordinary. And it was more than just the name Cranbrook; it was more than just the buildings. It was a total concept of having all the arts – the visual arts – put together within architecture. And so I loved it.

And the other thing that was occurring at that time was the “Design in America” show [“Design in America: The Cranbrook Vision, 1925-1950,” 1983] was opening at that Met in May. So I was aware that the show had been at the Detroit Institute of Arts and so I think I was hired in very late April or mid-April. And so Roy said, “Well, you’ve got to come to New York for the opening of the exhibition.” And so I thought, oh yeah, I should. So I gave notice at RIT and I’ll never forget getting off – road the Lexington Avenue subway up, walked across town and down to the Met, and walking up the stairs to the Met, and here’s a banner hanging from the – [laughs] – pillars, and it says, “Design in America: The Cranbrook Vision.” And I thought that’s where I’m going. I mean it’s – that is just one of those great moments in time where you ascend the stairs at the Met and there’s a banner telling you about the place that you’re going to be. So there was a great deal of anticipation and again, another one of those great opportunities, good timing, everything worked out.

Anyway, when I got to Cranbrook, the metalsmithing department was located in the basement and it had been there for forever, basically. And I had a very different plan and view for what metalworking should be, which would reflect a very pluralistic – and not pluralistic in ideas alone, but pluralistic in terms of process and methods. So it meant a complete rearrangement of that shop. And so we tore a lot of things out, we added an area for welding and blacksmithing, and all of the things that we still do today, but in a very confined area.

And the other thing that was – which I came to realize after being here for a period of time – was that the departments are all autonomous and it’s expected, it’s part of the mortar in the place that each department has an identity and contributes to the well-being of the academy – the intellectual well-being, the visual well-being, every aspect of it. And they’re all on equal footing, which is a huge difference than a university structure. So the academy is an academy in the European sense and its structure has nothing in common with an American university structure.

Anyway, the other thing that’s unique about it is the place is defined as a working place for art. So it’s a studio-based program and there really are no permanent staff members that are art historians or liberal arts people. And what I came to realize is that all of the faculty come from very expanded backgrounds in terms of the visual arts, art in general, art history, et cetera. And that basically, they kind of go it alone in their own territories, and that was really challenging and interesting to me because in my former situation, I was a metalsmithing teachers who really wasn’t important if you knew anything about liberal arts or the history of metalsmithing, or art history in general. You know, you were kind of a specialist. But here, those other things become important because the people you’re conversing with have that kind of awareness of the world.

So the first order of business was I had to build a department and have that department take a place amidst all these other places that were incredibly powerful. I mean Gerhardt [Knodel] was heading fiber – well-established, nationally acclaimed program. Mike Hall’s sculpture program – powerful. Daniel Libeskind in architecture. Jun Kaneko. I mean, everywhere you look there was some significant individual heading a well-defined known program. And then here I was. So you walk into it. And you kind of up the ante basically.

So the first years were spent trying to establish whatever that program was. In other words, to give it an identity and it was challenging because there – Cranbrook is a very intellectual place even though it is a studio-based program. And all of that activity comes out of the intellectual interests and curiosities of these artists in residence and that I think is very unique, extremely unique.

So trying to define or redefine the identity of the department took some time and there were a couple leads. Number one was just my own interest of this kind of pluralistic metal approach so that metal wasn’t just hollowware, just jewelry, but it was expanded and it could be a car –

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR.GRIFFIN: Or a bicycle. Just metal.

MR. ADAMSON: Anything made of metal.

MR.GRIFFIN: And then the other thing was at that time I got – I realized that I could couple up the interest in social history or what was commonly called material culture. And I didn’t really know the term material culture until I got here in ‘84 and started taking this idea of the social history associated with metals or cultural history and realizing in time that there actually was an area called material culture. And that came in part from being around people like Mike Hall and Julie Hall, his wife. And she’s the one that wrote the book, *Tradition and*

Change: The New American Craftsman [New York: EP Dutton, 1977].

And then just listening to other faculty and it was at that point that I got interested in American Studies and I went to the conferences, and really began to realize there was an academic area for material culture. The other thing is, nationally about that time, there was the notion of revisionist history so there was a lot of work coming out of Duke and Yale and other places in terms of western history which interested me, and Great Plains history. In other words, prior to that I had read people like, Walter Prescott Webb, and some of the great historians from the '30s, about the great plains, but then it kind of took this other form in terms of revisionist - [audio break, tape change] - and that kind of fueled the whole thing because the revisionist work goes deeper into the artwork to talk about the social environment and some of the other conditions at the time. So that directly infected the program and we took a more comprehensive view towards what metalworking was.

And the other really important part of Cranbrook for me was the history of the place itself and the - not only the institution but the object here. And the more I walked, the more interested I got. And the early history of Cranbrook as an idyllic community, it's connection with Arts and Crafts movement, the position of the craftsmen in the kind of food chain, and there's such interesting things. For example, there's a baptismal font at Christ's Church that's called the Wooley Font. It was designed by the architect [Ralph Adams] Cram out of Boston, but it was made by Wooley, the silversmith, so it's called the Wooley Font. Or the Nichols's Gates that are out in front on Lone Pine, those are designed by Saarinen, but made by the blacksmith Walter Nichols.

So as a way of thinking, there was a priority system that noted the craftsmen in terms of the way the things are named, but also supported the notion of good design - very different than it is today; in fact, it's turned upside down. Where today the designer is heralded, but there's no even mention of who might have been instrumental in making the thing. So that interested me.

But also that the Booths [George and Ellen] collected remarkable works over many, many years and there's still a great number of those here because they're attached architecturally to the building. And so you just find evidence of it in the tapestries that he commissioned. We have [Edward] Burne-Jones tapestries; we've got Koralewsky candlesticks; we've got the Yellin gates; you know, it's just sitting here and it's also accessible.

So in other words, on the one hand, you can go and sit in a chair in the dining room that's a Saarinen chair and when you see that the chair is over here being used every day by high school children and then at the next moment, it's in the Metropolitan Museum of Art as an icon, you begin to sense something very different and not only in terms of how this thing can move in between these places, but the importance that it has both as an object that people sit on and as an object that is valued from a more intellectual point of view, and the idea that these ideas are actually compatible.

So even though my own experience would be broad in terms of decorative arts, it was coming to Cranbrook that made me realize that this notion that these objects could serve and also fulfill all these other things - that it really became grasped - I could grasp it. In other words, you walk around and see the fountains - it's all in service to this great - it's a big orchestra and all these things are in services - there's no one thing that's heroic; it's the combination of the building with the fountain, with the door handle, with the door, with the carpet - it's a great symphony. And it's a model; it's a great model.

So that was extremely inspiring and it complimented directly that kind of move I made to making utilitarian things or pragmatic things. So I thought, yeah, this is a real world; I can make this work. And so, I can say that point was when the work really became what I would call applied art. In other words, it fits within the decorative art, but what I make as an applied art. It takes all the information about design, it takes all the information about technique and materiality, and then it puts it into this object that is at once pragmatic and can be these other things as well.

So for me, when I look - when I look at these things, whether it has a representational leap or a very abstracted one, I see that as being such a limited - a narrow part of the story. In other words, if these objects are much bigger than that because they have kind of a multivalent approach into the world and it's not simply the stylistic part of it.

So back to that earlier question of, like, the progressive and the reactionary that I'm fully aware of those differences, but at the same time, they blur more because it really depends on what area of that thing you're talking about. There might be certain aspects of it in terms of floral that are more anachronistic, but for example - on the other hand, like, I just did a fire screen of grapes. But I made the distinction between an ornamental grape and a grape that's grown for juice. So I chose to make the ornamental grape in the ornamental setting - so in other words, a very precise choice that I think relates to meaning and difference between what one is trying to accompany, fitting into the notion of ornament, decorative arts, et cetera, as opposed to, for the most part, what we see in vine work, they are wine or juice grapes. Subtle, but a big difference.

Or the difference between an older rose and a younger rose - one that obviously you empathize with in a

different way. Those kinds of things are much more subtle and in my mind they still reflect those kinds of intellectual choices and distinctions, which I understand that many people wouldn't notice, but it's the way that it keeps the work fresh for me.

MR. ADAMSON: And it's in the work somehow.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: How do these ideas about material culture and the kind of totality of the environment here at Cranbrook – how do those affect your teaching? As opposed to your work.

MR. GRIFFIN: Oh, well, I – in our seminars – I think what it does is it gives us a very broad spread in terms of the way we look at work. And that the students obviously are coming from multiple points of view, but I try to point out things and relate it to material culture or associations in ways where they can at least consider that option.

There was a period of time where I would say that we went through a phase in the department or a period that was revisionist. There was a real impact of student interest and student work that took on that, whereas today, that's not what we see. So I think it shifts from time to time and also that even though the information may be there, the necessary motivation or interest by the students may not be there. The information is there, but the interest may not be. So it's going to shift with time. And I'm open to that.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Did the students themselves have a diversity in terms of their intentions that matches the diversity in terms of what you're trying to teach them?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, because the department can service – we can service work anywhere from small scale jewelry to architectural ironwork. So the groups that come in here – we have people that might do enameling, that have an enameling background – a woman coming from Cleveland last year. And at the same time, I have someone that was an architect who has done metalwork and is now in the program doing strictly metal work – radically different points of view. So the students make furniture, the students make more sculptural types of objects, and what we share is this material for the most part. That doesn't mean that people don't move from that in some way and I don't really discourage them from doing so, but I would say that our emphasis consistently has been metal work.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel like you have a theoretical engagement with metal as a medium – it's properties – not so much it's history of use, but it's actual –

MR. GRIFFIN: I would say that – well, I worked on a – I wrote a paper along with a colleague, Erika Stefanutti in the mid – we started the work probably in the early '90s and then the paper was produced in '94 or so. And basically it was – “Remaking Material” was the title of it [*Metalsmith*, Summer 1994]. And what our position was that metal is a very unique material in that it has always been a commodity. And for that reason, it's always been recycled – always. So one could say that because of that, that there is a physical relationship to its social history. So in other words, whether you're talking about gold or lead, or steel, what you pick up – much of it is historical. So it could have been something of another period of time, but it's the same material physically, not just as an idea, but physically there.

For example, every new piece of steel is at least 50 percent scrap. So in other words, when you're driving your new car, it's scrap. Most of the scrap that's being consumed today in the United States is going to China. All of the infrastructure that China is building today – not at all of it, but a good portion – is American iron. All the bridges, the Yangtze Dam, all of that stuff – all the steel in them is built from scrap from this country.

MR. ADAMSON: This is really interesting because we talked a little bit about commerce and the importance of being inside a commercial system for you. And this is probably a good place to mention Stanley's socialism, too. But how do you look at that whole picture of economics as it impacts your work.

MR. GRIFFIN: Basically, I think of commerce as the way to distribute your ideas. In other words, in the United States and most other places in the world, we deal with some kind of trade. Our system is based upon money. In fact, if somebody asked me today what the business of America – the business of America today is finance. We finance the world. So it's commercial.

And for me, the way that I can build projects and place them is to sell them. So in other words, you don't just go out and build a fence. You have to have a site; you have to respond to something. And you need a client unless you have a lot of money. So I look at commerce through which to make this work and to distribute it and to put it out in the world.

And the idea of basically having a warehouse of my own work is not at all alluring. So the way to do that is through commissioned work and I've been fortunate in that I'm able to make things that I'm really interested in.

And would I do something other than that if I didn't have a commission? Well, of course, but that's true of anything. But I don't know what that other thing would be. And I always have speculative things in progress that I'm working on slowly, but all the time. So the commerce part of that is very important.

I must also say that in terms of my own work, even though I wrote or co-authored this article and we gave the paper at SNAG, I'm interested in those ideas intellectually, but I don't necessarily put them to work in my own work. So in other words, I'm fully aware that a piece of iron that I own is 50 percent scrap, but I don't necessarily use that. I might need it for structural reasons. But I have made pieces that do that. I did a large installation at the DIA [Detroit Institute of Art] in the Rivera Court. Amidst the Rivera Murals where I took this idea and actually did it in harmony with the murals because the murals are about the Ford plant and it's about – it's a story of steel among other things.

MR. ADAMSON: So we were talking off tape about how Stanley is a socialist and that there's a sort of incommensurability with the fact that he makes these luxury goods for trade as it were.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, when I was in school at Tyler, Stanley, and Olaf were both active, I think, in the Socialist Party. And so I know that their political beliefs were socialist. And I asked him about that one point in time about these luxury goods and type of things he's working in, and he basically described it – my recollection is that he basically said, "This is the world I operate in and this is the world I live in, and this is the world for ideals, this is the world that is the utopia, that is what we would look forward to."

MR. ADAMSON: And if I'm reading you right, it seems to me like you're saying that you don't want to have that kind of division in your own life and work.

MR.GRIFFIN: No, I don't really – I'm not a socialist.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, but also that you're not a – you're not trying to make your work as a model for some ideal future or some ideal way of being.

MR.GRIFFIN: No, no. I'm really interested in the idea of – first of all, I want to have the opportunity to make remarkable things. And one of the ways to do that is to be able to have a budget that allows you to do that. So I know that inherently, the things I do are privileged. That's what it takes to do it. And I feel that the people that I work for are for the most part incredibly generous people. In other words, they own remarkable things, but they also do remarkable things in their lives in terms of other kinds of social. And it's a more complex situation.

So I don't see it as – it's not black and white, it's more subtle and it's more nuanced. And one of the people that I worked for was a woman named Karla Scherer – a very wealthy woman – and I made a coffee table for her and of course in having a client you get to know them. And what was great about her story was that she – I believe her father invented the capsule. He was a physician or a pharmacist, and – the pill capsule. So anyway, she had graduated from the University of Michigan I believe with an English degree or something and at a certain point she was a major stockholder in the corporation.

At that point the dividends were just kind of moving a long – nothing great. And she said, "Well, you know, I can put my money in the bank and make more money than I am with my dividends." And so she said, "I think I want to sell all my stock." Well, everybody freaked out because you can't just do that. Well, I guess you can. But she found that she didn't like the idea of somebody saying you can't do that. And she realized that she didn't know a lot about finance and that she wasn't the CEO or the head of the corporation, and got intensely interested in American corporation management, and decided that there should be more women CEOs.

So what she did was – she finally did, I think, sell her stock and she established a fund or a trust – a grant making organization where she supports women graduate students in economics – or no, in finance – in finance. And I asked her, "Well, why finance?" And she said, "That's the key to the CEO position." That you have to understand and be aware of finance, and that most women are placed in personnel or those kinds of places and that's not key." So she wanted that. So what I think is interesting – here's a person that's now devoted her life to this granting organization and she's doing these remarkable things. And I build her a table.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR.GRIFFIN: So people's lives are more complicated and it's too easy just to paint it in wrong – all of these people with these means are like this and they're not.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Could we review the sort of genres of your work maybe and you could also talk about particular examples that seem significant to you?

MR.GRIFFIN: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you do architectural projects, you do objects, you do furniture -

MR.GRIFFIN: Right and most all the commission work is residential. But that doesn't mean that it's small. So in other words, you can have a hundred-foot fence or you could have a lamp. I could have hardware. So it really varies. And I would say that it's simply a matter of scale. That the problems that one sets for themselves in any one of those territories can be equally demanding - not necessarily demanding physically or within the notion of duration, but they can be equally challenging either technically or visually, design-wise. So in other words, I don't really - I find it just as interesting to make a door handle as I do a hundred-foot fence. I don't see any difference between - among those things.

There are some pieces obviously that are far more complicated and have more layers in them, and I would say recently the project that has been the most important not only in terms of the scale of it and what it achieved, but what it exposed in terms of my thinking - what it required, are the Cranbrook gates on Lone Pine. And those pieces are layered and layered with thought in terms of - for example, the gate was going to go into a setting that - it's a historical landmark, for one thing. It has a history alone just in terms of ironwork. So the Cranbrook - ironwork at Cranbrook goes from arts and crafts, and gothic revival, art deco, a kind of modernist, and then now with these. So in other words, how does one on the one hand kind of acknowledge that but progress from it? So I'm very conscious of that in designing.

The other thing is the actual site itself. The gate has very particular moves in it that align with the sighting down academy way as well as the rise in elevation. So if one were at a certain distance from the gate, they could see it as a kind of perspective drawing. But yet it's abstract enough where it can flatten out and become literally like a globe, a map - flattened out globe. And at the same time, it is less dense in the center than at the edges, so there's kind of a value shift that does two things. One is it moves towards the center and it also is - like if you were going to walk into a cornfield, you'd walk in between the stalks. You'd walk in the area of least resistance. So that idea of least resistance has to do with the opening of it.

And then also it has a little bit of an organic feel to where it has something like a web, or something like a briar patch starting at the edges and kind of moving in - so a hint at the past. And the other thing that I think is the most unique part about it is it's very thick. Six-inches thick and it's built on three different layers. So what happens is when you're a distance away from it, it's almost transparent, and as you move towards it, it becomes more dense because the bars are flat. So they're wider in thickness than they are at the elevation view. And as you get closer, you become more aware of the thickness and therefore density. And that's something that was just a revelation.

MR. ADAMSON: So it goes from being a line drawing to being a metal object in space.

MR.GRIFFIN: Right, exactly. And I think that's the most important achievement about it as a move both conceptually and design-wise, and also challenging to make because it's less structural in a way.

The other thing - where the hinges - to have them be a transition between columns and the openness of the gate, and also just to get a kind of feeling of what opening was. So the hinges are complicated and then they are actually are more comparable to the hinge on a teapot. They're a silversmith hinge or a box maker's hinge. It's not an ironworker's hinge. The ironworker wouldn't make it that way. They would put a bearing at the bottom and a clasp at the top, and that would be it and that's all that's necessary, but this is far more complex with these trapezoids that move. So it has that feeling of - as you would open it - that you really feel the opening.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel - I noticed you talk about value a lot for instance. Do you feel like you've been influenced or interested in graphic design?

MR.GRIFFIN: Oh yeah. I'm really interested in graphic design and I'm interested in typography. And just the way a serif works and how - well to typographers, I mean, they argue about serifs. [Laughs.] And just that little moment on the edge of a line and how a typeface can change based upon shifting the density of the line. So in other words, as it become thicker. So that's part of it and the other part of it is just drawing. In other words, even if you're drafting, your line weights change.

So what really interests me is I was looking at some German ironwork from the '30s - international modernist type of work. And what I realized was that they were able to make shapes appear and disappear through line weights. So in other words, by taking something into more of a plane and then putting a light line next to it, I know that as I back away from that gate that pretty soon that shape - the dense shape is going to float, that I won't see the line. And that is the same thing as value shifts in a drawing; at least I equate it to that. So I've gotten really interested in that idea about how with this materially that is opaque that if I think of it as value, then I make it differently. So in other words, I'm not thinking about style, I'm thinking about a kind of program that's focused on value.

MR. ADAMSON: Sounds like Mary Jane Leland at north - Long Beach.

MR.GRIFFIN: [Laughs.] Oh, yeah, Mary Jane - oh yeah. And you know it's so interesting because you're so right about that. I mean I remember those assignments that she just drilled into this. And in fact, today - these days I find myself spending more time talking about things like design. What you have to remember is in education, we've gone through a period of time where once abstract expressionists train students, those students were abstract. And in a lot of cases, like, painters are trying to recover how to paint. They don't know how to paint.

And so these - it's so interesting to see them struggling with this in terms of value and all these fundamental terms. They've got concept, they've got meaning, they've got iconography, they've got all that stuff; but you've got to make it. And so I find myself today spending a lot of time with students talking about these things that they want and they need, and it has to do with those kinds of things that we're talking about.

So there's been a shift in mind from let's say material culture, even though we talk about that - a shift of emphasis from those kinds of ideas to reaffirming fundamentals in terms of design. Not reaffirming the metalsmithing techniques, but fundamentals of design - that there's less design skillfulness or awareness. So anyway, value is a new subject.

MR. ADAMSON: Are there other works of yours you would cite as being interesting?

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, I think that there's two gates that I made in the mid-'80s. One was in the "Poetry of the Physical" show ["Craft Today: Poetry of The Physical," 1986-1988] and then the other one was a gate that's called *Garden Gate* and basically it looks - it's very loose and it has the rocks from the garden and the rake and the hoe, and a potted fig plant, and garlic, and roses all through it. So it's - what I really like about that gate is it's sited as a garden gate. The subject is gardening and the whole structure, all the iconographies, supports gardening. So it's one of those objects where the site, the design, the placement, everything all lines up. And that to me is really - that's like the ultimate, when you can do that. And the Cranbrook gate does that too, but in a different way without the use of that kind of iconography.

So in my mind, the notion of style gets in the way because I'm not able to solve problems. I can't problem solve if I have to rely upon the same stylistic sensibility. And these new things that I'm just starting to work on, I have to start with drawings because I don't even understand how I'm going to make the transition from light to dark and so I'm using these rubber stamps.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you describe this project?

MR.GRIFFIN: The project that is in its infancy right now is going to be called acanthus. And it hopefully will be a body of work that begins with the acanthus leaf itself. And I got interested in it simply because it was floral and I've always been aware of classical images. And a friend of mine gave me a box of cast off, cast iron architectural components, bad castings. So I've been rummaging through those and I thought, well, if I can section these acanthus leaves, I'll get some kind of shape that I don't have a clue what it looks like and that I would probably never draw, ever.

So I've been slicing these leaves and then sanding them flat. Inking them and printing them, and I'm getting a positive shape from that that looks like a petroglyph or something. It's just unusual and certainly foreign to me. But yet, intellectually, it's tied to the acanthus. It's an abstraction, it's an evolution of the acanthus. And everything that I've learned about the acanthus or read about it is that in effect, the acanthus has no meaning. It can be morphed, it is used purely decoratively. And I like the idea of taking a term - the term decorative can be used very positively, but it's also a pejorative term. In other words, people say, "Well, that's merely decorative."

So I'm going to take this merely decorative thing and I'm going to completely abstract it through this system of sectioning and start to make things. And I really haven't done anything but make some isolated prints, but not really a drawing. But the next step will be to make drawings. But I already have a client that's interested.

So in other words, that happens to me fairly often where someone will come, they're interested in having me do a project, and some of them will know what pieces they've seen and would like something within that range. But others will say, "Well, what do you think we ought to do?" And I'll just say, "Well, this is what I want to do now. Do you want to go for a ride?" And so they say, "Yeah." [Laughs.] "Let's go." And so we're at this very early stage and we haven't even talked about budget - I know about what the site is and we may not build the project, I don't know, but so far it's just this great relationship with talking about these ideas. They look at some drawings and eventually they're very patient, and eventually we'll get to where there will be a gate designed and we'll decide whether they're going to build it or not and go from there.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR.GRIFFIN: So for whatever reason, I've been fortunate in that I can keep these other things going on the side and that very often I can introduce those to somebody. That's the way I built the *Perspective Gate*. I just said, "Well, hey, look at this idea," and they just went, "Aw, yeah, we've got to have one of those." [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR.GRIFFIN: And so get this great opportunity to build something new that's - and you get to sight it, you get to really see it whereas I would never build the gate otherwise; I would do the drawings.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you talk about the *Perspective Gate* a little bit? It's a great piece.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah, the *Perspective Gate*, I had seen some gates - I think they're 17th century European, and they were in cathedrals and they basically separated the congregation from the clergy. And they were in some cases perspectives, very simple ones. And what interested me about them was that they - on the one hand, they operated the way that gates do, but they basically - there is really no difference of one side to other. In other words, it was all about line quality and it was a very simple perceptive drawing.

And so I liked the idea of siting a gate that would somehow have *deja vu* where there was some relationship between where you were going and the gate, and maybe the opening. So this one that I designed - there's a walkway behind the gate so there's a walkway in the gate. And there's an opening in the gate, which is scaled to the opening you're going through. So there's this whole relationship and particularity about the site itself and this gate.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR.GRIFFIN: And it also has opaque areas that are more planer and sheet-like. And so there was a very different approach to it and it allowed me to do some things that I had never done before.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems like a more cerebral version of that feedback loop you were talking about with the gardening piece.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah. To me those are the best projects where you can combine the notion of the subject of the gate and the site of the gate. And whether that's done abstractly or whether it's done representationally doesn't make any difference.

MR. ADAMSON: Are you able to achieve the same sense of rightness with an object that's not grounded in space, you know, a movable object, ever?

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah. Like a table or something. I'd say the difference is that in something like a table or a floor lamp, the difference is those are really objects in isolation. And the bottom line is what a table does is it raises the flooring. That's what it does because there's a whole lot of people that sit on the floor and eat on the floor. So we just picked it up and that's what it does. And in fact, one might want to take that on as a subject within it, but what I find that I've done most commonly is to move into it in a narrative way or there might be a subject of grasses or a wheat field and let that run in there.

But there's always a kind of flip side to it. So in the tables that I've done that are like a wheat field or grasses, if you look at the frame of the table, it's basically a Mies [van der Rohe] frame. It's a modernist frame set up and the wheat field colonizes the modernist territory. That's the way I look at it.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's an internal dialectic of a kind.

MR.GRIFFIN: I love that. I mean I love the fact - I have such appreciation of the Miesian and his work - he was incredibly intellectual. I remember going to a lecture about the columns in the Barcelona Pavilion and basically he set them up where there was no center. So he removed intellectually the load-bearing relationship to the Greeks, basically. You know, I mean, with four pieces of ankle iron. [Laughs.] You know. Fantastic. So he could have made it out of an I-beam, but he chose to use the ankle iron to set that up.

And so I liked the idea that you can carry on this dialogue very subtly with these other moments in history and make your simple intervention. But I don't see it as - it's a dialectic, but it's not an angry one, it's not a - it's one that acknowledges it and at the same time says we're moving one and sets up these relationships.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Right. So maybe at this point we can broaden the conversation again. You mentioned "Poetry of the Physical" recently and I wonder - the talking about that show and other milestones along the past twenty years - how do you feel like the craft scene has changed say, since you got to RIT. You know, the recent history of the movement because there was a lot of change early in your career.

MR.GRIFFIN: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Have you been happy with what you've seen?

MR.GRIFFIN: Well, I would say - let me preface it. This is not a disclaimer by any means, but I think that as one

moves in their career – in other words, at this point, I feel as if I’m successful. In other words, I have a regular flow of work in my shop. I’m able to make a good bit of work and place it. I’m at a remarkable institution. I have great students. So in a curious sort of way, I’m very satisfied. I mean I feel real full. And so my interest in those things isn’t as – also maybe being in the mid-west, I’m not as close to it.

But I must say that there’s a couple things that I just don’t agree with and this is a personal position and not a position that I would take towards my students. But for example, I can’t understand why we don’t herald the applied and decorative arts as a term. The notion of craft is absolutely critical. And what I – I’m going to give you a definition of craft. It’s not – in other words, I understand that there’s been an Arts and Crafts movement, and I understand that the basic underpinnings were social and political. That’s what really drove it all. The craftsman was a symbol within that movement. And it was – basically it was an intellectual argument.

But to me, craft is a kind of management system. In other words, craft is what you pay attention to when you’re making something. Craft has to do with organizational structure, which includes content. You know, when you talk to a writer, they talk about crafting. They get in there and they’re really critical about the particular adjective that they use, or the particular adverb, or the way the thing flows, or how they’re going to make meaning out of this. That’s what craft is. As a verb, it is an active management of the whole thing, which includes your thinking. You’re crafting this thing in the broadest sense: intellectually, physically and materially, process-wise, everything. So that’s what I think craft is.

And that came – well that idea came from a review that I read of John Currin’s work. And I happen to like his work, but the article that I read was actually really good critique. It was in *Harper’s* and this guy said, “He’s a lousy draftsman.” And he was talking about craft in this bigger way. It wasn’t just manipulation of paint, but it was a greater intellectual and figurative notion, which I thought was incredibly interesting. So that’s where that’s coming from.

MR. ADAMSON: Back to this issue of relearning how to paint is a prime example.

MR. GRIFFIN: Yes. Exactly. So I like that notion of craft, but I also understand the notion of craft the noun and craft as the movement. And I’m not the least bit embarrassed. If somebody says, “Well, metalsmithing is a craft,” I’d say, “Yeah, sure. No problem.” But I would be much more comfortable with the term applied art or decorative arts, and I use that in a lecture – in my lectures where I just proclaim that’s what I do.

So I would say the first mistake or the thing that I – I am absolutely convinced – [audio break, tape change] – that the world of the fine arts is a different network, it has a different gallery base, it has a different institutional base than the world that I make things in. I’m not a part of that. It doesn’t mean that I don’t appreciate it, that I’m not intellectually inspired by it and that I don’t value it. I just know it’s a different place. I know that in part because Heather McGill, the head of sculpture, is in different magazines, she is in different galleries, she has different kinds of curators, she has – et cetera. And we both know that. We both have great respect for one another. I’m really good at what I do, and she is really good at what she does. In other words, if you are going to develop expertise, if you are going to work in a genre – this is Larry McMurtry – you have got to know something about it, and that is what expertise is. So whether you are a novelist or a poet or whatever it is – and I think that is one of the things where for whatever reason, there is just this morphing and mixing and everything is mashed together in some way that really doesn’t hold true in the long run.

MR. ADAMSON: Although you are also very tolerant of that kind of permissive attitude on your students’ part.

MR. GRIFFIN: Sure. I think people ought to do what they want to do, and if I can support their skill base or if I can help their thinking or whatever it is – their design sensibility – that is my job –

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: – you know? So it’s kind of full throttle in that regard, and it doesn’t matter whether it’s jewelry or architectural work. But I push them hard to go deeper into whatever area it is, and if I have a lot of knowledge I’m going to give it to them. But, for example, there is no question that design has become it’s own entity, you know, and it has very carefully reconstructed its history – you know, to push it back as early as they can get it, so, you know, Tiffany is a designer. And they did get a couple things wrong though because I think Christopher Dresser is actually an earlier industrial designer than Raymond Loewy.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: But to me – well, of course I design things, but I’m not a designer in that model. In other words, these are very definitive – I’m not a graphic designer, I’m not a painter, and I think that if one is going to occupy those territories, whatever they are, it doesn’t mean you can’t do other things. I mean, metalsmiths can make drawings, and those are legitimate, but they are still metalsmiths, and they are probably drawings of something that is related to that. You know, so I’m very comfortable, and I’m very comfortable with the fact that people buy

the work that I make to use it.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: You know, so it doesn't get any better than that.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, it doesn't sound to me like you are being particularly prescriptive here. In other words, you are saying, this is how I look at things -

MR. GRIFFIN: Sure.

MR. ADAMSON: - but I do get the sense that you feel that if the craft movement as a whole were to make peace with itself along these lines, that maybe there would be a lot more happy people out there. Is that a gut sense that you have?

MR. GRIFFIN: Oh, possibly. I don't know if they would necessarily be happier, but I just feel that there is - well, for one thing I think there are people that would like to make a lot of different things, and I think they should be able to do that. And so I have no problem with that, and I think it also is good for a field to have people like that because very often, even though an object may fall down in one way, it may be very helpful or instructive in another. So they make contributions. What I'm just saying is part of kind of an identity crisis that somehow to just find wherever home is and feel good about it, and, you know, it's proactive. In other words, if you look at early feminism, someone might say, "Well, I can drive a truck as well as a man." Well, that is immediately putting it in terms of men instead of saying, "I drive a truck well," period.

So my feeling is that the proactive position is much better, that a gate is not a sculpture, it's a gate. And so you look at this gate and you go, well, what are its performance characteristics? In other words, does it do what it is supposed to do? How does it perform in that regard, and what was the program that informed that performance? So it has to satisfy that, and then it also has a visual life - you know, it can also have an intellectual life. So it's trying to hit all those territories, and I actually think that is the challenge of pragmatic work. I think it's immensely challenging to hit all three targets. You know, that is a big deal. I mean, making a hinge that is an unusual hinge that actually works - it's a big deal, and what you are really trying to achieve when at work is to work seamless. That is when you know you are hitting it -

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. GRIFFIN: - and the same thing is true to give depth into work. Like with the Cranbrook gates - after you look at them for a while - first of all, you think they are symmetrical. And then you realize, well, no, they are not symmetrical, but you will get down to the point where you realize that every line in them is different - every line - and every negative shape is different. So I spent more time in the cartoon of the large gate - where we were drawing at full scale - working on the negative space than I did on the positive space. And to me, that is where you get depth. You know, you get that thing you can come back again, you find another moment, you go, oh, I never saw that.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: So that is part of the challenge as well of this kind of work.

MR. ADAMSON: So apart from this particular project that you are involved with right now, where do you see yourself going over the next 10-20 years?

MR. GRIFFIN: [Laughs.] Well, I'm going to keep making work, and I think I - you know, it's very hard to say, but I would say that this project - this is acanthus project - has a lot of life in it. I mean, this is just at the infancy, and I would say that I could be working on this for three or four years, or maybe five years in amidst commission work. It's the kind of project that I'm interested enough to try and assemble work for a show. I haven't had a solo show in a long time because I am doing commission work most of the time.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. GRIFFIN: So there is a lot of longevity in that, but I have got other - I have always got stuff that I want to make and am curious about. Oh, the other thing that I really want to do is - and I have begun a discussion - is I want to go to Kohler, and I want to go for a six-month stay and I want to work in a foundry. And the thing that I have noticed over time is that because it's a green sand molding process, that if you don't understand pattern-making, you are going to have a lot of trouble. It's a factory, and that is a - it's not obscure amount of working process, but most metalsmiths deal with investment casting and so do sculptors. So the green sand is pretty much formed, and you have to be able to deal with the sand-molding process.

So I'm - this has potential in there too, and I'm not ready to apply for that kind of residency now, and I just know

that it's a very finite period of time, and you better have a plan before you go there or you are not going to be able to take the full capacity of that factory to work for you. So that is another ambition, I would say. So that is in about 10 years, isn't it? [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, that is your plan C.

MR. GRIFFIN: [Laughs.] Yeah. So that is - you know, I guess in a kind of summation, I would say that I have been fortunate in terms of timing. In other words, for whatever reason it just seems that things have made sense, you know? Who would have known that taking welding would have made sense at that point in time? Or, you know, the move to RIT when I was doing very technical kind of work, and to make that alignment, coming to the academy - that's such a different kind of place in terms of art, and everything - the idealistic notion of it - you know, perfect. So it has been a pretty remarkable trip.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, would you accept the proposition that you make your own luck though to some extent?

MR. GRIFFIN: Yeah, I would.

MR. ADAMSON: I mean, you have put yourself in positions to be able to exploit the opportunities that come to you for sure.

MR. GRIFFIN: Oh, I think so, too. And I don't want to be unreasonably generous in terms of saying it's all luck. I mean, I work very hard at what I do, but I have a very optimistic attitude about things, and I also think - I firmly believe you can project that to people - I mean, if you are that way. It's just like this project. How a client becomes interested in this - I mean, obviously they are curious people to begin with. They are curious about the world and they like that kind of thinking, but I think that one has to be willing to share the kind of - what they are curious about, and then sometimes people will want to go for the ride. But I have always had the opportunity, and I'm very grateful. I like what I do.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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