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Oral history interview with Patti Warashina,
2005 September 8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Patti Warashina on September 8, 2005. The interview took place at the artist's home and studio in Seattle, Washington, and was conducted by Doug Jeck 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.

Patti Warashina and Doug Jeck have reviewed the transcript. Patti Warashina has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Bracketed text was included post-interview.

Interview

DOUG JECK: This is Doug Jeck interviewing Patti Warashina at her home and studio in Seattle, Washington, on Thursday, September 8. This is disc number one, the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

So, Patti - and I'm here with Patti and her little doggie, Mikey -

PATTI WARASHINA: Micro.

MR. JECK: Micro - [laughs.] What kind of dog is that?

MS. WARASHINA: It's a six-pound, brown poodle. He is six pounds.

MR. JECK: He looks bigger than that to me.

MS. WARASHINA: He's my son. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: He's your watchdog.

MS. WARASHINA: My watchdog. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: I know, okay. So let's start. When and where were you born?

MS. WARASHINA: Born in Spokane, Washington, which is about - all the way across the state of Washington and - when? Nineteen forty.

MR. JECK: Nineteen forty?

MS. WARASHINA: [Laughs] I know. You weren't even thought about then. Your parents weren't even born.

MR. JECK: My dad was born in 1940, but that's okay. So, Spokane?

MS. WARASHINA: Yes.

MR. JECK: And what was that like?

MS. WARASHINA: Living in Spokane? Growing up in Spokane was - it was a very quiet, family-oriented city, but for me, I think, looking back, I mean, it was the kind of town that gave you a lot to think about during your spare time, because there wasn't much to do there, especially in terms of art and music. It was just kind of a cultural desert at that point, so I think - I just remember, when I was growing up, I'd lie in the lawn, and we had great skies and beautiful clouds. My mother had a huge yard, like three lots of yard, and I used to lie on this grass looking up at the clouds, and I used to fantasize a lot about what it would be like to - you know, at that time, people didn't travel like they do now. And to get across the state of Washington - Seattle - it took two days, because there's only this narrow road - two-lane highway going across the state of Washington.

And I remember, as a little kid, I used to think about the seashore, because I was trying to imagine what it would be like, and I had these coloring books, and I'd be coloring away and there would be shells and little kids sitting on the beach or something with a sand pail - and I used to try and fantasize what that was about.

MR. JECK: Because that's like - eastern Washington is pretty much like -

MS. WARASHINA: Desert.

MR. JECK: Desert.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, it's right at the foothills of the Rockies [Rocky Mountains], but it's very dry and a lot of grasshoppers and these spindly old pine trees that were gnarled and very stunted and extremely dry, really dry. So the ocean was, like, really - you know, like a paradise - thinking about paradise and what that would be like to even see a shell on the beach, was just really my fantasies.

MR. JECK: Did you - when was the first time that you got to the beach?

MS. WARASHINA: I was about - I remember the first time my dad took us - we went on a big trip, and the trip was to go to Yellowstone [National] Park. And then I remember my dad driving, and we drove to Tacoma, because my mother's family is from there. And then we went down to Portland and then back up to Seattle and then back home, so that was - I think I was - God, I was really small then. I must have been about - Dad died when I was 10. I must have been about six or five or six.

MR. JECK: Did you have brothers and sisters, too?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, one older brother and one older sister, who are much smarter than I am - [laughs] - by far.

MR. JECK: So when you were a kid, did you take art, or how did you find your way into making art?

MS. WARASHINA: I didn't - actually I just took the same, you know, like kindergarten and grade school and - I was always given this project to work on murals. You know, we used to have these murals in the back of our classrooms when I was a little kid, like Thanksgiving, pilgrims coming, and all this stuff.

MR. JECK: Bulletin board kind of thing.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, and I used to be able to - see, I always got selected to do the drawings for them. But it was - being in Spokane was just kind of a cultural vacuum. To be an artist was totally out of the question. I mean, you wouldn't even think about being an artist, since you didn't know what it was.

And so even when I got to high school - when I got to high school, you never took art. I mean, my parents programmed me to take science and math, and you know, academics, and English, and they always drilled into me that I was going to go to college from the time I was a little kid. You are going to go to college and you've got to have all these preparatory classes. And so art was not even a consideration.

But I remember taking this French class and - [laughs] - I was so bad. I'm so bad at languages. It's terrible. But I had to take two years of French - you wouldn't know it. And I remember one of the extra credit projects, and I remember doing fashion design. I thought - you know, doing these clothes and stuff - I thought that was so cool that I could do that.

MR. JECK: That was in French class?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, for a French project, I did fashion - French fashion. [Laughs.] So that wasn't even - I didn't even think about it. And my closest recollection to seeing an artist was I was going out with this fellow - I mean, you know, it was like when I was a junior in high school or something - and I remember double dating with my girlfriend, who was dating Ed Huneke. They lived up on the south hill and his father was a lawyer, and we used to go up to his place before going out on our date, and his mother had an easel in the living room. And she used to paint these oil paintings and, you know, kind of a traditional housewife, Sunday painter type thing. And I used to think that was so cool, because here was a real artist's easel. So that was my first inkling about what an artist could be.

And my mother was great - my father was, I think, also very much interested in art when he was growing up in Japan. And he had an art teacher, and so right after the war they allowed Japanese-Americans to go back. He was born in Japan, but they allowed -

MR. JECK: Your father was born in Japan?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah.

MR. JECK: And your mother?

MS. WARASHINA: My mother was second generation here in the United States. In other words, her mother came, and my grandmother would be first generation, and my mother would be second generation, and that would make me third generation. [Laughs.] Oh, God, I'm losing my train of thought.

MR. JECK: What did your father do here?

MS. WARASHINA: My father came as an immigrant, about when he was 18. And he worked in this lumber mill to make money, and then what happened, he finally worked - wanted to go to college, so he took a year of high school, learned English, and then he saved his money and then he went to college and went to dental school in Portland. And then, from there, my mother - and his marriage was arranged by family friends.

And my mother's family came over - my grandmother on my mother's side, she came over in the early 1800s, and they had a kind of interesting family. The great-grandmother, my great-grandma who lived in Japan, was a broker for rice and ceramics, and she had these quote, warehouses - this is early, before 1900 - wooden warehouses, and it's in the Yamaguchi-ken, which is a province facing Korea, I believe, or China. My grandmother used to say when she was a little girl, she could see the coastline on a clear day.

But anyway, great-grandmother was this - I saw pictures of her and she's really, really stern. You know, she's in a kimono and she's like this stern - and they used to run her in a palanquin [covered litter], where they carried her from town to town selling pottery and rice.

MR. JECK: Really?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, and they never talk about the great-grandfather, but this woman was extremely strong. So it's kind of like all of a sudden later, when I realized that I would do ceramics, I would keep thinking about my grandmother who was peddling ceramics.

MR. JECK: Whoa.

MS. WARASHINA: Isn't that weird?

MR. JECK: Yeah.

MS. WARASHINA: And then my grandmother came over to join her husband that she'd married in Japan. And he was like third or fourth in a line in his family, and so all the money - people were at that time very poor in Japan - and so the son would never inherit - being the third son - would never inherit any land or anything, so he was sent over here to seek his own fortune. And so my grandmother had lived in Japan while her husband was making his fortune over here, and then my great-grandmother said, this is no way to have a marriage. You've got to join him. So she sent my grandmother, and a younger brother to accompany her, over the United States and join him.

So he was working for the railroads and trying to make money, and - I think in Montana - and somebody told me that the Chinese were very - it's the Northern Pacific Railroad, I believe - and the Chinese were hired to work on the railroad, but for some reason, they started hiring Japanese, too. Now I could be wrong on this, but the Japanese started being replaced in the scheme of things.

MR. JECK: Probably in this region.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah.

MR. JECK: So when you think about that and you think about that part of your heritage, does that - are you conscious of any way that makes its way into your work? Or have you -

MS. WARASHINA: Well, what happened -

MR. JECK: I mean, do you consciously access that part of your heritage?

MS. WARASHINA: Not really, because I'll tell you - well, what happened. Then, the war hit - you know, 1940, the war hit. And you know, Japanese were very much discriminated against. And so my dad was living in Spokane. He was a dentist, and Spokane had a Japanese Methodist church and they also had a Buddhist church, and the two churches - their congregations didn't get along with each other, which is really odd when you think back upon it, because it was such a small group of Japanese over there. My father was pretty progressive, you know, when you think about being an immigrant. My father and my mother spoke Japanese within the family to each other, but the kids, they must learn English right away. I mean, they spoke English all the time with the children, and part of it was they wanted to "Americanize" us really fast.

And so my mother - like, my dad had this Japanese flag - you know, this is like a little souvenir Japanese flag that he had in the trunks. At that time during the war, my dad was investigated by the FBI, not only in the house - one day, my brother said, "Mama, somebody is upstairs," and the FBI were going through the trunks. My mother said that, had they found it, my dad might have gone to prison. Went through everything in the house, and at the same time, the FBI were also investigating my dad's office downtown. And I was really small at the time. I could barely remember this.

MR. JECK: Were they relocated?

MS. WARASHINA: No, see, what happened was we were off the coast. My mother's family who was in the Tacoma area - [dog barks] - Micro, it's okay - who were in Tacoma at the time - no, Mikey, no.

MR. JECK: He's fine. Okay, we're going to stop for a second here.

[Audio break.]

[MS. WARASHINA: My aunt Yoshi and my grandmother [Granny] were separated from their friends in Tacoma, and sent to Arkansas [Rhorer Relocation Center] because my aunt was a dietitian. The government dispersed those who had practical skills that could be used in various relocation camps. She used to talk about going out of the camp compound and seeing green snakes hanging in the trees, and eating a lot of shrimplike creatures [possibly crayfish] which came out of the ground, to replace the tiresome Spam, which was the allocated protein.

After the war she went to St. Louis and worked as a dietitian in an orphanage, and my grandmother went to live with my Uncle Bud [Konzo], who was a professor in the mechanical engineering department at the University of Illinois, Urbana. They also were not required to go to camp because of living off the coast and living in a part of the U.S. devoid of Japanese. I've been told he had bodyguards during the war, when he did consulting work for Boeing in Seattle. His specialty was air-conditioning. I remember their visit one summer on their way to Seattle. It was the first time meeting them, after years of letter writing.

When I was young, the Japanese in Spokane were not relocated to the camps, perhaps because of our local Caucasian minister, Reverend Cobb, who was our minister at the Japanese Methodist Church. Mom thought he must have had some influence in the regional community.

In terms of my own immediate and other Japanese families, it was a difficult time, even though we did not go to camp and stayed in Spokane. My mother used to become teary-eyed when you broached the subject of the war. She told me that the bank accounts were frozen, and my immigrant dad was stopped from collecting dental fees for a period of time from his patients. My parents became friends of the Angeloffs, a German immigrant family, who also helped my parents by paying cash for my dad's dental work. I suppose they were also experiencing prejudice because of their German accents. I remember as a child going to their house on the South Hill at Christmastime after the war and admiring all the handcrafted German crèches, decorations, and cookies that we were offered by this very sweet, elderly German woman.

During the war Japanese Americans were confined to the city proper with a curfew. My folks started to sell some of their belongings, since they anticipated being sent to camps, as those on the coast were allowed two bags per person. I don't have any photos of my dad's early life in Japan, as my parents burned any photos of boys in school uniforms, which looked military but were just school uniforms. They destroyed anything that might look suspicious to the government or misinterpreted as having allegiance to Japan. During the search, I was told they were looking into medicine cabinets for drugs, as well as guns, and shortwave radios. I'm not sure how they and their friends were able to survive that time, but what amazes me was how nonconfrontational the Japanese community was during and after the war.

I also remember my parents sending used clothing and care packages to our family in Japan, since the war had pretty much decimated their economy. About eight years after the war, they also let Japanese Americans return back to Japan for visits to their families in Japan. It was a big deal, and I remember driving two days from Spokane to Seattle to reach the new Sea-Tac Airport [Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, WA] to pick up my dad when he returned. My father brought many reminders of my Japanese heritage, such as scrolls, artwork from his art teacher, colorful kimonos, jewelry, ceramics, and recent photos of my grandfather and grandmother outside the front gate of their farm, which my dad later helped them buy.

It made a big impression on me, since before that time I felt a repression of my culture in public because of political circumstances and the lack of its availability in Spokane. I remember feeling an innate connection to these articles and somehow that I was part of it, although I was living in eastern Washington, away from the large Japanese community on the coast. Even as a child, I have always been aware of my Japanese heritage because of my parent's mantra, "to study hard," and "to not bring shame to your family name," words I have always found very hard to live by.

So, in answer to your question, I do subliminally access that portion of my Japanese background in my art from time to time, when it seems pertinent for the moment.]

[Audio break.]

MR. JECK: So Patti, talking about the shift from high-fire glaze and stoneware, and dealing with decoration and color, and then moving from there to low-fire, how did that happen for you?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, you know what, I was talking about how all the glazes would come apart and fade out and drip all over the stoneware kiln. I started to develop these glazes and play by - using porcelain where I could get a white canvas. And then I could achieve my color easier. And then I started using straight chrome and for lines, so I could get a hard line. And so that was kind of where I started realizing I could start drawing on stoneware. I started getting kind of frustrated with just throwing, because I felt like I had thrown a billion pots and I always hand-built on the side, even when I was doing a lot of throwing. And I did a bunch of machine sculptures in my senior thesis. And, you know, they got pretty high. They got over my head.

MR. JECK: Machine sculptures?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, I used to throw these spoollike forms. I was very much influenced by Louise Nevelson. And so I could see by throwing these spools and whatever, and putting slabs across them and building upward, I would build these machine sculptures. And those didn't have any glaze, but then I - then I also was doing these chairs. That was in my senior thesis. And you could sit on them.

MR. JECK: Ceramic chairs?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, ceramic chairs. They were life-size. And they were using these spools and things, and they were, like, kind of Gothic-looking. They were really bad. But then after I left grad school, then I started getting frustrated, because I kind of had this hankering to get into color, because all my paintings that I had done in class were always bright colors straight out of the tube and then I was trying to achieve this in my stoneware glazes. So I started finding out about - Bob [Sperry] was doing in his own work; he was doing these lusters. And so I started playing around with lusters. That was my first inkling toward low-fire, and using it on top of my store-bought glazes and on porcelain.

And then, later on, I started building these pots. I call them floor vases. They were about three feet high and they look like bags. They look like leather bags, so it was a challenge in order to build large, using these three-foot slabs and putting them together like a box. But I'd start smashing in the sides so that they looked smooth, and that gave me a big surface to paint on. And I started bisque firing them, and then I'd paint them with latex, and I'd just start painting them. I'd start in the evening after the kids went to bed - everything was after the kids went to bed, after 8:00, and I'd just keep painting all night. And it was pretty much a stream of consciousness, not editing anything that was coming to my head, and I would start painting on these surfaces, and I'd use acrylic paint. And I really felt free, you know, to put down what was in my head in color, and so I really thought that was the answer, not glazing!

And then I realized later, it's all a progression, but I was still doing stoneware pots and all that stuff, and I was really getting my kicks out of these painted pots. And then later on I was doing a show. I started making these hand-built pots that were based on, like, a bread loaf form and basket form that was influenced by seeing Cherokee Indian Reservation baskets from Tennessee, eastern Tennessee. And there was a piece - one basket - it was a beautiful basket. It was round on the bottom and then it came up four sides, and as it came to the top, as it started closing itself, it started becoming round, and I was really challenged by that form, so I tried to do it in clay, and that was what was the beginning of what I call a basket form. And that was really great, because all of a sudden I started getting control of the material. I mean, the first time I really felt like, when I was hand building, all of a sudden I started having control over the form. And these were really - I did these sketches on paper, like really fast sketches.

Then they required - they required a glaze - and what happened was these things started cracking on me in greenware stage, and I started repairing them, and I knew that if I took them up to stoneware, they'd open up more, so I did them all low-fire. I went down to the glaze store and bought up all of the colors I could, all the primary colors, and then I started glazing with just colored glazes. And then I felt, all of a sudden I got these great colors, and I just felt really free. And it has changed my whole life, that time and place. And then I just never left. And then I started playing around with underglazes, because I didn't know anything about them.

And about that time was about the time that [Peter] Voukos was making his big pots, and he started using low-fire glazes, down in California, on parts of his pots.

MR. JECK: And that would have been when?

MS. WARASHINA: God, that was like early '70 -

MR. JECK: Early '60s?

MS. WARASHINA: No, no, no. Gee. It would be 19 - I think early '70s.

MR. JECK: Probably, yeah.

MS. WARASHINA: No, no. I'm sorry. It was - yeah, maybe mid-'60s.

MR. JECK: So you were aware of what was going on down there.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah.

MR. JECK: This was when Voulkos was at Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley].

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. And [Robert] Arneson wasn't really around much. I mean, you really - I didn't know that much about Arneson because I don't think he had emerged at that time. He was working, I'm sure. But Voulkos was the one I remember, and Bob's lusters, when he was working on his pottery. And so that was a really big transition stage for me. It was when I was starting to work on those - all those hand-built pieces. And then learning also how to control the material. I mean, just building large like that in a very - not a loose way at all. It was like all of these pieces were conceived totally on paper. And then I just wanted to see if I could build it. And it became - then I realized what it was about - how to build in clay.

MR. JECK: So at this point were those things still pots?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, they were still kind of these - they were pots, right.

MR. JECK: How did you think of - I mean, were they functional pots?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, you know, because I came from a functional tradition, right.

MR. JECK: So you still imagine them to be functional?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, they were lidded pots. And even those floor vases were all - you know, they all had opening inside of it, even though I painted these kind of weird, surreal drawings on them with acrylic. The imagery on the outside on the surface was - they were kind of like my paintings - the things that I had looked at, you know, like the Surrealist - that is where that imagery came from. Then I learned I could control the form. It was a big, huge turning point for me, in terms of learning how to hand build. Everything just kind of fell into place for me. And then after that I felt, like, pretty free. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: So in that time or in that - do I use the word "era"?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah.

MR. JECK: I'll use that word, "era."

MS. WARASHINA: [Laughs] Prehistoric?

MR. JECK: No - because we talked about Voulkos, but were there other women who were working in the same way that you were? Were you aware of them, because -

MS. WARASHINA: You know, there was this *Design Quarterly* magazine that used to come out when I was student.

MR. JECK: I mean, within ceramics.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. And Toshiko Takaezu was very prominent and - I didn't know anything about Viola Frey then. And then Anne Stockton was in California. But, you know, I kind of worked in a vacuum because I was pretty much - you know, I was a housewife, teaching, and I had two little kids. And all of my spare minutes were spent down, whenever I could run down to the studio. So I always had my studio at home in the basement. So I was pretty much - you know, I was so busy - my schedule was so busy that I just worked pretty much in a vacuum.

MR. JECK: Yeah, but when I think about -

MS. WARASHINA: So I didn't really - you know, there wasn't a lot - I wasn't traveling at all, because I had my kids to worry about.

MR. JECK: So when I think about that time with Voulkos and Arneson and everything -

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, Takemoto was a huge -

MR. JECK: Henry Takemoto.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, God, his work was so great. He was one of the most inspirational to me, and that was when

he was doing those great big Shamoji [rice paddles] and the big jars. And I remember this one jar he made, which was - it was called *Hawaiian Dream*. I think that was the name of it. And it was his thoughts that were written on the outside of this pot. And it was done very loosely, kind of almost Miró-ish [referring to Joan Miró, the French painter], with stars and dripping glazes. He was my favorite at that time.

MR. JECK: And he was at Berkeley with -

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, I think he was at Berkeley, yeah.

MR. JECK: - with Voulkos and all the cowboys, because there was - you know, I think of that movement and, you know, not to denigrate the work in any way, but considering the work that you were making when ceramics at that point kind of hit its stride, I can't think of too many other women who were active there. I was curious if you were -

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, well, I was doing this hand -

MR. JECK: - if you were aware of that.

MS. WARASHINA: I'm sure I was. You know, you're always aware of everybody that is working around you. But another person that I really admire, too, is Kenny Price, and Kenny Price because he was doing those - the orbs with the little worms coming out of them, those large worms. You know, because it was shoved down my throat when I was in school to be "loose," expressionistic. And Kenny Price kind of broke that mold. You know, he did these things that were really slick and hard-edge, and he was working just the opposite. Because many people would say, "Well, why don't you make clay look like clay?" Well, I mean, what is clay supposed to look like? [They laugh.] I mean, you can make clay look like anything. You can make it look like liquid or sand or whatever.

And he was one person that I really remember working outside what was the status quo - you know, this expressionism. You have got to make it look loose; you have got to do this; you have got to do that. And so I was always looking for people - not looking for people, but I remember looking at these English porcelains, because when I was in school, you always looked to the Orient or to the Asia - excuse me - to Asia because of the pottery there, just because it was loose and, like, earthy, and all of this, you know, brown stuff, and the calligraphy. And so I started to look at English stuff, which nobody ever talked about at that time.

And I remember these guys named Speight & Baxter who were doing porcelain paintings that were really tight. And I thought, God, these are great. I mean, they were doing them in China paint, and I thought that was just so cool. So I looked at painters such as [René] Magritte, people who were doing very hard-edge painting-and so that kind of gave me reassurance, though you're told you're not "with it."

MR. JECK: If you're working tight?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, like, loosen up, you know. And I just thought, that is not true. There are all of these other people I'm looking at and they are great. You know, fantastic work. So I always kind of had these people that I admired, whether they-and sure, when you're looking at all of this stuff, it all kind of sinks into your head. It comes out through your hand, not consciously, but it just kind of filters in.

MR. JECK: Yeah, I know, because-

MS. WARASHINA: And especially the Funk movement, too, was going pretty heavy duty down there in California.

MR. JECK: Yeah, how-what did you make of that? Was that an influence on you? I'm sure you were aware of it.

MS. WARASHINA: Very much. Oh, yeah, being in Seattle and the Bay Area-you know, all of this stuff that was happening in the Bay Area. There are guys named, like, Jerry Bellaine, Robert Hudson, Jeremy Anderson, and people that were doing very hard-edged stuff - very organic but hard-edge. And I just thought that work was pretty, pretty great. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: Were you aware at the time that - we can call it, I think, safely, the revolution for American ceramics. But were you aware that that was happening?

MS. WARASHINA: Not really. I mean, you're just in it.

MR. JECK: You're making it work.

MS. WARASHINA: You're just so in it, and you're not even conscious of - I was aware later of the Funk movement - you know, when that was starting to be recognized as an art form. And I think Arneson was really great because Arneson started - and also - well, Arneson started using visual imagery - I mean, realistic people. And also [David] Gilhooly. I remember Gilhooly, too, because he started - I recall he was doing these hippos in lily

pads. And it was a giant piece; it was a floor piece. And he also did this elephant footstool. So he was using not abstract imagery, but he was using representational images, you know, like an elephant foot or a hippopotamus. And then Arneson, too, was - I think he was working pretty loose at that time. But I think Gilhooly was the one that I remember using the literal imagery.

MR. JECK: It's interesting because I have always sort of related - I wonder if you have - some of the Funk strategies to Surrealism. And Surrealism is something that seems like it plays a pretty big part in your work.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah. Very definitely. And maybe this is wrong on my part, but I put a lot of people into Surrealism, whether they are categorized historically that way, because a lot of that is just from the mind. And like [H.C.] Westermann, people like that that had - I think had a big influence on the Funk movement, I was aware of those people and especially the Chicago School later on.

MR. JECK: Jim Nutt.

MS. WARASHINA: The Chicago School is one of my favorite - all-time favorite -

MR. JECK: Yeah, the images.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, God, I love that work. And I think they called it the Chicago Hairy Who at that time.

MR. JECK: The Hairy Who, yeah. And that was simultaneous.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, all of this stuff was kind of - I can't remember the time sequence, but I remember that was a big influence on me. Just the fact that these people were taking liberties with the figure and putting them in this kind of surreal quality - using the colors they used. And so I think that had a tremendous effect on me looking at that kind of thing. I didn't really look that much at ceramics.

MR. JECK: Yeah, well, that makes sense because I have never - which I think is ironic in some way.

MS. WARASHINA: I mean, I came from a ceramics tradition, but the ideas - I always felt that ideas were the hardest part for me. You know, just coming up with an idea, a great idea, and just being able to start on it and jump into it and just go for it. But my influence was more from painting, I think painting and other movements, more than looking at ceramics per se.

MR. JECK: Yeah. Well, that makes sense. What is interesting is that the Hairy Who and the Chicago images - of course, that was a painting movement. And then, of course, they are linked to -

MS. WARASHINA: The Funk.

MR. JECK: Surrealism also, and then Funk is also linked to Surrealism in some way.

MS. WARASHINA: To me it is all together.

MR. JECK: What I have always wondered about is how it is, because they were painters.

MS. WARASHINA: Right.

MR. JECK: So what changes in terms of that aesthetic, if you're working 2-D versus making an object that holds Surrealist intent? You know, how is an object that embodies Surrealist strategies different than a painting that does?

MS. WARASHINA: You mean, for clay?

MR. JECK: Yeah, what changes? Like, if you're looking at a Surrealist tableau - three-dimensional tableau - versus a painting, you know?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I think, for me, it was the form. Looking at the forms, the rounded forms, and the - like Jeremy Anderson and Jerry Belaine's work. I remember the work that he did that is kind of very organic, but they are very solid forms, so that it had - I could see a relationship between that and the Chicago Hairy Who. So he was working wood. But, you know, it was something that was very possible to do in clay. So that is where I made the connection, was probably through the three-dimensional form that I saw in the paintings.

MR. JECK: So does somehow making it - making that vision three-dimensional, is that somehow a way to make it more believable, in a way?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I don't think for me it was that. It was more or less because I liked clay. I mean, I just

liked the feel of clay. And I never got bored with clay. It still creates a challenge for me because there are so many technical things that can go wrong in clay. And as I became more proficient at building, I could control it. So there is always this challenge of the material. And always felt that if I ever got bored with clay, I would get out.

MR. JECK: Have you ever worked with any other materials, in terms of sculpture?

MS. WARASHINA: You know, just a little bit in college. But the other thing I worked with was metal. I was introduced to jewelry because I was forced to take a class my senior year. And so I started using silver and gold, and it came really easy for me. It was like clay, except slower and smaller. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: And more expensive.

MS. WARASHINA: And so I took a double master's. I took one in jewelry and one in ceramics. So I got a double master's, one in jewelry. But after I got out - you know, you can't do both. It's too hard. And so I dropped the jewelry. And also, one thing about jewelry is that it's too small of a format for me.

MR. JECK: Yeah.

MS. WARASHINA: I mean, it's not that it's impossible to do this kind of imagery. I'm sure if I had continued that, I probably would have gone on some kind of Surrealist binge with jewelry.

MR. JECK: I can imagine that. [They laugh.]

MS. WARASHINA: So I often wonder what I would have done, you know.

MR. JECK: Well, you know, you're finding your thing and clay does it.

MS. WARASHINA: But clay is - it just responds to your touch. And once you start to understand how the material works, then it's just a matter of putting the imagery out. And that is how I got into these other forms - nobody did casting when I was in school, and so I had to learn how to cast, because the images I saw in my head -

MR. JECK: You mean, casting in clay.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, casting plaster - you know, cast molds. And it wasn't because I liked the technique; I hate it, because I hate building molds. But the only way I could arrive at some of these images that I saw in my head was only through use of a plaster mold. And so the ideas kind of told me that I had to learn how to do this. It's like learning how to use a tape recorder. You know, you're forced to learn. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: That is a good point.

MS. WARASHINA: Even though you hate doing it. How are you going to arrive at these images that you see in your head?

MR. JECK: Well, yeah, I know. So there is tedium and there is a lot of - people think that clay is just this fun thing. You stick your finger in it. But, like what you said about things blowing up, and making molds and - there is a lot to it.

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I think it's one of the most difficult materials to work with.

MR. JECK: But it's also the easiest.

MS. WARASHINA: I don't think it is.

MR. JECK: Well, we pretend that it's the easiest.

MS. WARASHINA: I don't think it is, because you have to not only learn how to build with it; you have to glaze it; and you put in some magic box, and you open the magic box and it's either terrible or it's exactly the way you want it. There is no two way - I mean, at any point along the way, it can become a pile of crap. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: Or rubble.

MS. WARASHINA: I mean, what you see in front of you is not necessarily what the end product is going to be. And it's very difficult. Ceramics is one of the most difficult media. Whereas, like, if you're painting - I'm not saying painting is easy. Don't get me wrong. But at least when you put a mark down, you know it is what you see. In ceramics you can put the mark down, hope it stays that way, and when you put it in the magic box, it either cracks or it changes colors, or it runs. It's a terrible material to work in. And I always told the students that you

have to be a masochist. You have to be a born masochist to stay in this material.

MR. JECK: A masochist?

MS. WARASHINA: Yes. You have to hate yourself. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: That is interesting. You know why?

MS. WARASHINA: Why?

MR. JECK: Because I remember, I read this thing that you said. I think it might have been in -

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, God, don't believe it. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: Garth Clark's *Century* book [*Century of Ceramics in the United States: 1879-1979*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1979]. And I remember I read this thing early on where you said -

MS. WARASHINA: I don't think I read it.

MR. JECK: - that clay is a sexy material.

MS. WARASHINA: It is.

MR. JECK: So now you're using the word "masochist"? [Laughs.]

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I told you, it's one and the same. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: Okay. [They laugh.]

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I mean, when you're throwing -

MR. JECK: No, I remember reading that. I remember you said that.

MS. WARASHINA: You remember when you're throwing on a wheel, everything is phallic. And, you know, the softness of it. I mean, no wonder I never left clay. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: It's rigid, it's vertical.

Okay, so beyond all of that, there is a question here that says, is there an element of play in your process or finished work of art, which I think we both have discussed prior to this. So because it's really tedious and because it really is hard, but there is something about it that is fun, something about it that is -

MS. WARASHINA: Challenging.

MR. JECK: Intuitive.

MS. WARASHINA: Intuitive and challenging.

MR. JECK: So how do you - because we all deal with those parts of it where it's like, oh, okay, it's not dry enough; can't do this to it yet because it's not hard enough; going to wait to do this and do that. But in addition to all of those things, there is a part of it that really is intuitive and pretty automatic.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, and that's - and I think it takes a long time - when you're in ceramics, it takes a long time to develop these skills. It takes a lifetime to develop - I mean, I still don't know a lot of things that you can do with ceramics because it's too wide open. It's too open-ended, and there are so many facets of ceramics, like temperature, types of clay. There are all these different variables. And clay kilns - I mean, it's a very difficult media.

MR. JECK: Yeah, which is very interesting to me, because the way that I think about - and I suspect that this may be true with the way that you work. Because you can hand a kid a piece of clay, right, and then can make something great out of it, and make a thing.

MS. WARASHINA: Right.

MR. JECK: And, yeah, again, it's different than, like, having finger paint. But they can make a thing out of it. And there is no technical proficiency if you hand a kid a piece of clay, but they make something and it's charming and it's wonderful.

MS. WARASHINA: Right.

MR. JECK: But the way that you work with it, it involves - it is almost like architecture.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, but I think it stems from the images that you see in your head. And it's - now that I have gone through a certain point - you know, maturity and learning how to control the material - it's like somebody in wood, you know, that can bend wood, make it do three-dimensional loops. It is the same thing. It just takes time to build those skills up. And it's not an immediate - it's not an immediate development. I mean, unless you're - I mean, I'm trying to think of something that didn't have to go through that. But there is a skill that you have to attain in order to really see the images you want to build. You just don't go in there and build a 10-foot figure all of the sudden, you know; it's not that kind of material. And then fire it and see it explode.

MR. JECK: Are there things that you still are figuring out about it?

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah.

MR. JECK: All of the time?

MS. WARASHINA: All of the time. I mean, that's - it's a curse. [Laughs.] I wish I were - I wish I were in painting, you know, where it is something that you immediately put down. But, like I say, the clay keeps drawing you back. Just the feel of it - I don't know what it is - the curse keeps drawing me back. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: Yeah, but you work with clay in a really different way than I think it is conventional. It's not the grab it, squeeze it, fire it. It's a lot more - again, architecture is kind of a relevant -

MS. WARASHINA: You think?

MR. JECK: Well, it seems like it.

MS. WARASHINA: I think what it is - mainly it's seeing the images and then trying to find a way of doing it, of building it.

MR. JECK: Well, how would it matter to you, or would it matter, if the things that you made could be conceived in something like bronze or stone or something? Would that matter all?

MS. WARASHINA: No, but it would give you a kind of - well, you know, somebody asked me one time what I thought. You know, they always put clay in a certain class of art. But when you think about it, a lot of sculptors start directly from clay, and they work it up and then they mold it and then they put it in bronze. And then it's acceptable art.

MR. JECK: Why is that?

MS. WARASHINA: It's a tradition that kind of comes from the Western civilization that, you know, it's - if it's done in clay, there is something wrong with it. And they don't think as highly of it as a piece of art. But a lot of bronzes come directly from clay. They're made in clay and then they take it through several stages to get to bronze. So, to me, this whole argument about whether clay is a valid material kind of is, to me, absurd. [Laughs.] It's the end product.

MR. JECK: Yeah, I wonder why that is. I have never been able to get my head around it.

MS. WARASHINA: Well, because I think it came from a utilitarian history. You know, people equate it with dishes, which is fine. In Japan, they make wonderful ceramics, and it was highly valued as much as painting and sculpture. But I think it's that Western tradition of coming out of Europe, that people gravitate towards this idea that it is a less of a material for making art.

MR. JECK: So do you make a distinction in your mind between pots and sculpture that is made out of clay?

MS. WARASHINA: No. I think maybe one of the reasons I left throwing was because it was so hard to do. To make a really fantastic pot, and when you walk in a room - that jerks your head around, that, to me, is one of the hardest things to do.

MR. JECK: Well, what makes a good pot into a work of art instead of just a pot?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, you know.

MR. JECK: This is an age-old question.

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I think my idea - [laughs] - of art, any kind of art, whether it's a tea bowl or a piece of jewelry - it's when it raises your blood pressure. [Laughs.] When I come in and I see something that raises my blood pressure, then I know that there is something more than just a bowl or a sculpture or a painting. It makes me react to the painting chemically in my body. And that's when I know - or music, you know. It makes my body react. And that is my way of judging whether - I guess, quote, whether it's art or not.

[Audio break, tape change.]

And this is a very personal, a very personal way of looking at visual work.

MR. JECK: I don't know that I have ever heard a better explanation than that.

MS. WARASHINA: Really?

MR. JECK: Yeah, that is great.

MS. WARASHINA: When you see something really great, it just, like, raises your blood pressure.

You don't have to look at it. I mean, you look at it, but it just makes you feel different. It alters your being.

MR. JECK: That is pretty perfect.

MS. WARASHINA: And it could be minimal. You know, I like all kinds of art. I don't have any preference. I just know when I like it. It could be jewelry, too.

MR. JECK: Yeah, raises your blood pressure.

MS. WARASHINA: Makes you want to have it. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: Makes you want to eat it. [They laugh.]

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. Food.

MR. JECK: Do you recognize a difference between your early work and the work that you're making now?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, do you mean, is there a continuum?

MR. JECK: Yeah, or how do you - are there things that are continuous or things that really different, things that you have discarded or that you hang onto?

MS. WARASHINA: I think it's a cumulative process for your life. So when you start out - and I can see myself almost returning back to earlier work right now. You know, like I started out with my early glazes, where I started using elements of the figure, like a hand or a finger - one finger coming out of a pot - things like that - so that the human element seems to keep coming back.

And then later on, I started working with the figure. I got brave enough - I started painting the figure on my ceramics, doing portraits like on the shrine pieces - women's heads - because I was afraid to do it three-dimensionally. And it was easier for me to approach it two-dimensionally. And then I got brave enough that I have the arms coming out. That allowed me to continue exploring the figure. And then for various reasons - like, I got into a car. I could see a car; I could build a car. And then I had to have figures to go in it. So it forced me to confront making a three-dimensional figure that I-and during that time I was in school, I avoided taking, like, life sculpture. A student at that time wouldn't be caught dead in that class. You know, it just wasn't cool. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: Right. Stale.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, I mean, it was like old art. You just don't do that. You don't take a class like that. And it wasn't until after school, when I started looking at paintings and stuff, I saw the figure. And I started realizing that this figure thing was pretty powerful. So once I got brave enough to do the first figure on a car, I wanted to explore it further. It was really - I was looking for ways of expressing the car. But then I got so enamored with making my first figure, I started doing multitudes of figures. I wanted to see how far I could take these figures.

And so I wanted them not just standing still; I wanted to see if I could make them running, because when you're doing ceramics, your limitation is gravity. And when you have a figure running in space, that is kind of the opposite of what you're supposed to do. So I always kind of buck - I always did things I wasn't supposed to do. [Laughs.] That is why I went through this divorce. [Laughs.] No, just kidding.

So I think I always kind of worked against the material. When I was doing stoneware, I tried to get all of these bright colors at cone 10 - 2300 degrees. And it was stupid. I mean, I shouldn't have worked against the material. Later on, when I started getting the figure, I wanted to make figures run as fast as they could, and getting as much expression that way. And then seeing how many people I could build, you know, like running around a fire, toward the end of that series.

MR. JECK: The commission that you did.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah - 72 figures just running. I dealt with people I knew because it was easier for me to use real people than to try to make their faces from my imagination.

MR. JECK: Are you talking about the commission that you did for the -

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, yeah.

MR. JECK: Is that at the opera house?

MS. WARASHINA: No, it's at the convention center [Washington State Convention & Trade Center, Seattle].

MR. JECK: And that has how many figures in it?

MS. WARASHINA: Seventy-two. And I found that if I work from the real figure - and that was kind of influenced by going to Mexico, and also looking at the tomb figures in China. They were doing people or soldiers that people actually knew, and they all were individual - well, it's 5,000 of them, right?

MR. JECK: It's, like, 8,000 now.

MS. WARASHINA: But also when I went down to Mexico City, I was looking at [Diego] Rivera's work. I never really liked his work that well until I got down there. I liked Frida Kahlo's work because she had that surreal bent in that work. So when I got down there, there weren't any Kahlos that were available to look at in public because they are all in private collections. I was sitting at the Hotel Prado where they have the cocktail lounge. This mural is sitting there [Diego Rivera, *A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park*, 1947-48], and I was just sitting there with Bob drinking these martinis - [laughs] - and that was the basis of that piece I did.

MR. JECK: This was Rivera?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. Diego Rivera. It was all of his friends that were in this park. And they had Surrealist figures. He had the skeleton in there. And so that was kind of where my initial idea started, because I knew I wanted to do a large piece, and so that is how that happened.

MR. JECK: So that commission was - I mean, what is the difference between that and something that you would just do on your own? Were there parameters for it? Did they tell you how -

MS. WARASHINA: No, no, I could do anything I want. It was actually an award that I got through the Seattle Arts Commission. It was for a Northwest artist, and they said, you can do whatever you want, and you can place it wherever you want. It was in the Portable Arts Collection.

MR. JECK: Beautiful.

MS. WARASHINA: So I just decided, well, I can just make it. [Laughs.] I will never do anything like that again. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: But you got to do whatever you wanted.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. That was great.

MR. JECK: Well, that is not bad. It's better than -

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah, that was what was so -

MR. JECK: - make a portrait of Uncle Bird.

MS. WARASHINA: No, that was what was so great, because they gave you total freedom to do what I wanted.

And then now as I - you're asking about how it's come around, the thread that is going to go through it. So that was kind of a surrealist feeling. And later on I got bored, totally bored. I mean, my eyes were going on me, and it took me a year and a half to do that piece. And then I decided that I had to jump scale, because I needed a challenge. I was all of a sudden bored.

MR. JECK: Yeah, I was curious about that.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. And so I started doing these four-foot figures. And then that was not much of a challenge for me.

MR. JECK: The four-foot figures.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, that was not a challenge.

MR. JECK: So now you make them, like, 12 feet.

MS. WARASHINA: So then I decided to jump scale again. So I started doing these heads. And the heads were about two feet tall. I knew that once I started painting on these heads - you know, I knocked out about 12 of them - that once I did the heads, I could see the body, and then I could design the body - quote, design - and figure out the body. And then it was just a matter of building it. Now I am kind of going back down in scale, which, you know. But I - now, with these latest pieces - you know, the sake sets.

MR. JECK: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. WARASHINA: I see those kind of like going back to the original small figures, these tableaux.

MR. JECK: And those came after - or did they come simultaneously, like, when you were making the Mile Post Queens?

MS. WARASHINA: No, they came after.

MR. JECK: Because those were fairly large pieces.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. The Mile Post Queens actually was caused through going to Rome with Jamie [Walker]. And we were there for three months with Bob. In fact, you should go there. You would love it.

MR. JECK: I'm dying to.

MS. WARASHINA: And being there three months, you're bombarded by these incredible figures and heads and going to museums. And the Etruscan stuff was great. So when I got back, this thing is hovering around in your head, right? It was kind of a natural thing. And then I had gone to another trip to Egypt and went up the Nile. And looking at all of those tomb figures, those standing figures - and I was thinking, when I did these Mile Post Queens figures, that I would - that is why they took on the kind of stretched-out, linear quality, because I was thinking of columns, like the caryatids, especially in Hadrian's Castle. And then also when I took that trip to Egypt, all of these standing figures are outside of these temples.

MR. JECK: Yeah, I look at those things -

MS. WARASHINA: Holding up lintels.

MR. JECK: Yeah, there is a lot of - there is a lot of historical reference in those things. I look at them and I think of that. I think of - yeah, definitely - there is definitely, like, Egyptian. But I also think of Cycladic dolls.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, but the Etruscan stuff.

MR. JECK: The way that they are elongated.

MS. WARASHINA: The Etruscan pieces, too. Those bronzes.

MR. JECK: And Etruscan.

MS. WARASHINA: They were only, like, five inches, three inches tall. Just amazing pieces. And so I was thinking of them as getting kind of monumental with them, only as columns that would be holding up doorways.

MR. JECK: And it's a real different body of work, actually, with those -

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, it was. It was after that.

MR. JECK: Yeah, and I'm curious about that because -

MS. WARASHINA: Because the earlier large figures were running. You know, they are kind of big and bulky, but that was, again, a challenge to see what I could do - to see if I could make the figures look like they are running, even though they are big.

MR. JECK: How do you think about that shift, though, in terms of different bodies of work? Because people will look at your earlier work and go, "Okay, that is Patti Warashina," and you know, all of these different shifts in the way that you work. So to go from - in the way that you're talking about - making that shift from figurine to heads to large figures. Over the course of time, how are you aware of the change in perception about what it is that you do?

MS. WARASHINA: I don't know. I don't care. [Laughs.] It's my life.

MR. JECK: I was going to say, or do you care?

MS. WARASHINA: It's my work. I can do whatever I want.

MR. JECK: I know, but is that something that you - "Oh, you're Patti Warashina; you make this or you make these?"

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I mean, I -

MR. JECK: But then, and you can say, "Well, no, I don't; I make this now."

MS. WARASHINA: I mean, I could have stayed with the little figures for the rest of my life, but it just lost momentum for me. I mean, I just grew out of it. It was no longer a challenge. So the big heads really are from those Mile Post Queen series. It was a matter of taking those heads and making them larger. And that is where that comes from. So it's all kind of coming off of that trip to Italy and Egypt - taking a segment. I could take - head, like I did in the earlier large figures, doing the heads and then you could figure out the body.

So it is a matter of taking the portion of the figure and playing around with it to see what expression you can get out of it. So it is a matter of just compiling more information. So you can - I don't know, just learning how to build, and a lot of it is learning how to build. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: Yeah, that never goes away, right?

MS. WARASHINA: Right. Building a little head that is one inch, compared to building a head that is over life-size, is quite a different problem. And when you're doing the Mile Post Queen series that got 12 feet tall, I wanted to see how those heads were going to look. So doing the busts was a way of me exploring the head and seeing what I could do with it.

MR. JECK: And so in terms of how it is that you work in the studio, is there a different kind of energy or a different kind of - if you're building something that is really large versus building something that is really small, you know that building the thing that is really large is going to take a lot more time.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah.

MR. JECK: And then building the thing that is really small -

MS. WARASHINA: It's more like my maquettes.

MR. JECK: Your maquettes.

MS. WARASHINA: So these figures that are three feet tall, they are not that hard for me to build. But it allows me to see - I mean, before I start the big ones, I have to see what they are going to look like on a smaller scale and figure out the problems involved in it at three feet.

MR. JECK: So making something small, though, say, that is about eight inches or something -

MS. WARASHINA: Those are really hard.

MR. JECK: And they can almost take you as long.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, and in fact that bridge piece was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life.

MR. JECK: So there is a difference -

MS. WARASHINA: Because if - when you're building with clay, you start at the bottom with the foot and the toes. And by the time you get up to the hair or head or hands or fingers, all of the other stuff is broken off from being - from drying out, because I'm not working with plasticine; I'm working with wet clay. So working on a three-foot scale is much easier than building those little figures, much easier.

MR. JECK: If you start off with an idea for something - like you were saying, maybe you're making a figure that is

based on Egyptian statuary or Etruscan statuary, so you have an idea for the thing, for what it is going to be.

MS. WARASHINA: Right.

MR. JECK: And then, of course, it takes time to get there. And so is there room in the process of building a thing for your idea to change? Does that ever happen? Or it is like, I thought it's going to be this, but now it's going to be -

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah, there are a lot of changes.

MR. JECK: That happens a lot?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, especially in the three-foot figures. Those I think of as kind of maquettes, because they are not that hard for me to build. And then I want to figure out how it's going to stand. I got to see if it's going to physically work. If, say, you're going to build it at, say, 10 feet or 12 feet. So you work out all of your problems on a three-foot scale, the hand gestures, the ideas. If you start working on a 12-foot figure, for me, and you start out, and all of the sudden - oh, well, maybe I should change this arm here in case - [laughs] - the thing is starting to dry out on you. So it's better to figure it out while it's small.

MR. JECK: And most people conventionally who work with clay would think that a three-foot figure is a big one.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah.

MR. JECK: No. [They laugh.] So what do you do in the studio? I mean, what's -

MS. WARASHINA: What do I do?

MR. JECK: No, I mean, when you get up in the morning or whenever it is that you go to the studio, you go open the door, turn the lights on -

MS. WARASHINA: Turn it back off. [Laughs.] Go eat. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: Do you listen to music? Do you watch TV? What is your studio environment like?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I'll tell you. I'm kind of a news junkie. I'm a terrible news junkie. And a lot of my ideas, I think, are based around my personal life, what is happening in my life. And it's not because I consciously do that. It's just that that is what I see in my head. And also I'm a news junkie. I love reading the paper. Right now I'm reading three newspapers in the morning. And it just - and I turn the tube on - CNN or - I mean, it's -

MR. JECK: You have a TV in your studio?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, oh yeah.

MR. JECK: You have it going?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, it's kind of like background noise. It's not like I'm watching it. But it's just like - since I'm in there with just my dog - [laughs]. And it's terrible. Yeah, I watch news all of the time.

MR. JECK: How could that be terrible?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I don't know. I'm just fascinated. I think it comes from my dad. My dad, when I was a kid, was a clipper. You will find clippings over there by the - see over there. I have got piles of clippings. And I used to - usually, after I start clipping the newspaper, I'll put it down in a pile. And my dad used to put them in albums. He used to glue them in. And my sister is like that. So I know there is something genetically impressed in my psyche that I have to clip these clippings, and I think that might be from my dad.

You know what it is? I mean, you know, you try to look for an idea. You don't have to make up any kind of Surrealist idea. It's out there. And so all you have to do is read the paper and you just - oh, this is so bizarre. You don't have to make it up; it's just sitting there. These ideas are just there. I'm fascinated with it. But I find life is surreal. I mean, look what is happening right now, you know.

MR. JECK: Yeah, you don't really have to invent anything bizarre. It's all out there.

MS. WARASHINA: No. It's there sitting there.

MR. JECK: It's all just a question of editing.

MS. WARASHINA: Right. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: But do you listen to music in the studio?

MS. WARASHINA: I do. No, not so much. Usually listening to music up here - I like female jazz vocalists.

MR. JECK: Yeah, I know you do.

MS. WARASHINA: I love jazz, you know, just because it was part of my era. I used to love to go to the cocktail lounge and sit there and smoke cigarettes and have a drink. You know, it's that cocktail thing.

MR. JECK: Well, jazz isn't dead yet, Patti. [They laugh.]

MS. WARASHINA: But I think that is where it comes from. It comes from that early era, because I loved that - anyway.

MR. JECK: Like who?

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, like early.

MR. JECK: I know you like June Christy.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah. I like a lot of those early -

MR. JECK: And Ella [Fitzgerald].

MS. WARASHINA: And there are some new ones that I have been buying. So I - yeah, still - the female thing is really strong in my head. I think it's something because jazz is so emotional. You know, it's very emotional - all music is. It's very good when you're in your solitude.

MR. JECK: Well, there is a thing about jazz. It's structured, but it's also immediate, you know?

MS. WARASHINA: And it also allows for a lot of improvisation. I guess you could say all music is that way.

MR. JECK: No, not all music is.

MS. WARASHINA: But it allows for moving back and forth. It's very, very emotional in terms of how that person is playing it at that time. I mean, you can hear different versions of people like Billie Holiday and they are all a little bit different. That is how they seem to be reacting at that particular moment with their feelings.

MR. JECK: Well, it's invention. It's different every time, which I think is kind of interesting. I listen to a lot of jazz in my studio. And it always - just knowing that it's different every time, it sort of makes me make different decisions every time, too. But I mean, are you real prolific? I think you're really prolific.

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I used to be.

MR. JECK: I mean, I go to your studio and there is tons of work there.

MS. WARASHINA: Well, not really. But, I mean, I just do what you do. When I got my divorce, my kids were, like, three and four, and I just remembered after 8:00 was my time. I am able to work late at night. I used to be able to work from 8:00 at night to 3:00 in the morning and then go to school the next morning. I used to have that kind of energy. And I'm not a sleeper. I don't like - I get bored sleeping. [Laughs.] I don't like sleeping. And I like mornings. I like nights. I like it all of the time.

One time I was in this hotel with Sue Whitmore and Curt Heffron. We were down in Davis. And they were staying with me in my hotel room because they didn't have a place to stay. So Sue is sitting there snoring away, and Curt is in the other bed and he is snoring away. Anyway, early in the morning I was just laying there looking into space, this dark vacuum. And I went, "Hey, you guys, I'm bored." [They laugh.] So anyway, yeah, I'm a little neurotic.

MR. JECK: You don't like sleeping? I love sleeping.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, I'm not real big on it.

MR. JECK: I have always been really curious about this, because you taught for a long time.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, right. Thirty years.

MR. JECK: Thirty years at the University of Washington?

MS. WARASHINA: Mm-hmm [in disagreement]. I taught in the Midwest when Fred and I got out of school. We shared a half-time position each at Wisconsin State University at Platteville. That was our very first job. And then the following year, Fred Bauer was asked to apply for a job at the University of Michigan [Ann Arbor], which was a really step up. And so I followed him to there, and he taught with John Stephenson. And then there was an opening at Eastern Michigan University [Ypsilanti], which is right next door. So I applied for that job and I got that. And I taught with Suzie Stephenson back there. And then we came back to Seattle. And I taught 25 years in Seattle.

MR. JECK: So you have been pretty linked with academia for most of your career. How has that been?

MS. WARASHINA: [Laughs] Well, you know, I was -

MR. JECK: Did you enjoy teaching?

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah. I always think of it this way - I used to tell students, if you're an artist, trained as an artist, you have got to find a way of supporting your art. And the university allowed me to teach, to make money to live on so I could make any kind of work I wanted. That was the whole thing about the teaching job. It allowed me not to have to make certain things to sell. I could just - it allowed me to explore my head. And I have always thought of my job as being - it was great. It was a great thing to have. Either that or I had to go out and find an eight-hour job to support it. So, yeah, I'm really grateful that I was able to do that.

MR. JECK: But did you like teaching, though?

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. The students were great.

MR. JECK: What was the best part of it?

MS. WARASHINA: The best part of it was getting really great students and working with faculty I really liked working with. And in our particular program, it was pretty crazy - [laughs]. We had some - they weren't the regular faculty, I don't think, like most faculties. And I respected the people I worked with, the artists that I worked with. And the students were always - we seemed to be able to get really great students. And that was always a challenge, because you also had to keep up with what they were thinking. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: I know. Sometimes -

MS. WARASHINA: I mean, they know more than you do.

MR. JECK: Sometimes. I was going to say that. They keep you sharp.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, they do. You know, you're always kind of thinking on your feet. But I think that is one of the reasons probably, too - why I am able to like a lot of different things - because students are not - you don't make clones out of your own - you are not cloning them. What they do - they come in, they have different backgrounds; they have different families. So they have a totally different way of seeing their work. It's their life. You are writing about your own life when you do art. It's just a visual language.

And so I think when you're teaching, you have to keep your mind wide open to see how they think about themselves. Trying to draw students - whatever is inside of them, to be able to pull it out of them and to be able to feel comfortable doing that. In other words, they should feel comfortable exploring their inner psyche in order to do something that is pretty profound. And everybody is different. No two people are alike.

And so that was what was interesting to watch, was to see all of these different ways of working. And to respect that, totally respect it, whether you're a minimalist or whether you're a hard-edge or soft, or whatever - but it really makes you confront everybody's personality and see art differently. I mean, I'm really against people that say you have to do it this way or this style. I don't think style has anything to do with it. It's more than style.

MR. JECK: Do you feel that students need to have a lot of technical information before they can go about making their own work?

MS. WARASHINA: No, I don't. I think if you have a problem that you have set for yourself, it doesn't matter if it's drawing or whatever. It could be building a kiln. You really don't need that information until you're ready to start it. You know, when you have that - once you get the idea, all you have to do is ask somebody and they can show you how to build it.

MR. JECK: Or read a book.

MS. WARASHINA: Well, yeah. But that is one thing nice about the university or in a school situation is that you don't have to flounder by yourself, because there are so many different ways of attacking a problem that it

allows the student to learn faster, I think. Although there are people, like print artists, that work by themselves, and they do some profound work. That is great. But I think, by and large, when you go into a pool of very brilliant students, they are all thinking, and everybody's ideas are floating around, and they kind of buffer each other. And all you are is the person who is kind of telling them the technical stuff that you have to - how to go about achieving that.

MR. JECK: Yeah, or maybe -

MS. WARASHINA: Because you're faculty and you have been around - or an artist and you've been around a long time; you have seen a lot more. So you can maybe give them bad information or good information. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: Right. Sometimes the bad information.

MS. WARASHINA: But I never felt like I was ever a, like, a guru, or anything like that.

MR. JECK: Well, you give them all you can. I don't know if you agree with this or not, but I was like, all you do is give them your information.

MS. WARASHINA: Right, what you know. And it's your point of view. And if that is not the point of view they want, they will find it elsewhere. They will go to somebody else that they feel more - that is more in keeping with their ideas. And it's perfectly legitimate.

MR. JECK: I think so, too.

Okay, so Patti, talking about influences on your work, who were the most powerful influences as artists for you?

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, artists?

MR. JECK: Or otherwise.

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I mean, just in general in my career? I'll start with my mother, who was a very - she was a widow when I was 10. And my mother, she cried for three years straight in her bed. In the morning or night I could hear her sobbing. This went on for three years. And that made a profound impression on me as a child, and so, as a result, I was deathly afraid of death, totally afraid of death, subconsciously. And, you know, as you're a child, it makes you feel kind of abandoned. You know, like you're the only person that doesn't have a father.

And so my mother, though, after three years, got up and went to a lawyer and the lawyer said - she says, well, you know, I think I better find a job. And he says, well, it's about time. And so finally she went out and she got a job. She only had a high school education and yet she was very - she had a real curious mind. I mean, she - and my dad left her some money and left her a little bit of money, but she was able to - I think this also had an effect on me - where she would - you know, she started getting into stocks and things like that, you know, just because she had to.

And her first job was with [J.C.] Penney's [department store]. And she worked in the display department. So she had a really close friendship there with the people that she worked with. But watching my mother going through this - trying to get three kids through college - was really a big influence on my being a pretty independent person. I mean, I just watched her struggle. And I knew that through my mother - you know, she just kind of picked up herself by the bootstraps and just went for it.

And she had a pretty successful life, I think, under the circumstances. But she also was very gifted with her hands. My father also, because he was a dentist. And she -

MR. JECK: Did she make art?

MS. WARASHINA: She, in her - she used to crochet and did all kinds of needlework. And also, she loved beautiful things. And she didn't - you know, she was interested in fantasy. She used to think about King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable, and she used to read all of these stories. And she liked to read. So she had a pretty vivid imagination for somebody that was not in college and living in Spokane. But also in our house, she always had things around her that she really cherished, you know, like some scrolls and things from the family. And she just set up a very beautiful environment for me to live in. So that in itself had a big influence on the way I saw the world.

And also just her strength. She is just a very strong person - very quiet, a very quiet woman. And she kept three lots in Spokane manicured. That is where I get the gardening thing, is from my mother, because my mother kept that place. She did it herself, and she used to mow lawns. It would take - my brother did it later on - but it would take two or three hours to mow the lawn. And she would not only mow it one way; she would mow it the other way. [They laugh.] And then everything - she had topiary around her house. And it was clipped to - it was

beautiful. I mean, everything - and she had this huge vegetable garden and these flowerbeds that went around this quarter lot. And she was just really - she just worked hard. But she loved having a beautiful environment. And so that is where the flower things comes with me; it's through my mother.

MR. JECK: And I would also guess just objects of importance.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. She didn't have anything extremely profound but her aesthetics - I think if she were - I used to encourage her to go to college after a while of teaching. I said, why don't you go back to college? And she would take jewelry and things like at the YWCA. In fact, my early memory of her was going to the YWCA and making these ceramic pieces. They were roses. In fact, that is where I started - I was doing some roses like the one that is called the *American Beauty Rose*. It is a piece that I made a long time ago. And it was really from my mother.

My mother used to make these rose earrings. And she used to make these - let's see - it was a brush and mirror set that was all ceramic. And she would make these great - she made some chess men that were little knights that were maybe not more than two and a half inches high. And they would be kneeling with a cape going back, and they would be holding a sword. And her fantasy was to take all of my dad's gold scraps that would fall on the floor at the office and sweep them up and make a gold chess set. She had this - I mean, she was just bizarre.

MR. JECK: That is bizarre.

MS. WARASHINA: But anyway.

MR. JECK: What did she make of your work? How did she respond to it?

MS. WARASHINA: She liked it. It's really funny because she's a very broadminded person. In a lot of ways she is very conservative, especially in her politics, but that is another story. But she was very broadminded, especially about art. She just knew she didn't know anything about visual arts. But whatever I did, she really accepted it with a very open mind. She never ever said to me, ooh, that is awful, which it was. It was pretty bad.

MR. JECK: Or, "You're weird."

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, she would never say that, because she was really a very supportive woman. She was at, I think - probably in my formative age she had a terrific influence on the way I thought. She wasn't a censoring kind of person. She was very open-minded, especially when I got married. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: Was there any one thing that she ever said to you about anything that you had made that stuck in your head?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, she was - you know, it's really funny, my mother being Japanese and raised very traditionally - you never bragged about your children ever - never, ever bragged about your children. And as a result, she would never tell me - I knew she approved, because she wouldn't condemn what I was doing. But she would never say, I'm really proud of you, or I really think that you're doing well or anything. Never in my entire life. It was just approval through just the way she accepted me. And it wasn't until her deathbed that she ever said, gee, I'm really proud of you. Isn't that touching?

MR. JECK: Well, of course.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, that was really touching. So anyway, getting along with the story, I guess the other influences - of course, Bob was a huge influence on me.

MR. JECK: Bob Sperry.

MS. WARASHINA: And Fred - I mean, people that I work closely with.

MR. JECK: And Fred Bauer.

MS. WARASHINA: Fred was definitely an influence on me. And Fred was a really very gifted person. I mean, especially in early clay. You know, he was very well known at that time. And so he had a big influence. And Bob, obviously, and Howard [Kottler]. And, of course, the students. And then I talked to Bob before about my things that I liked - the artists that I liked. But I think people that were immediately around me, you know, students, they are all big influences on me.

MR. JECK: What kind of energy did you get from Bob?

MS. WARASHINA: Bob? [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: Yeah.

MS. WARASHINA: Well, by the time Bob and I got together, you know, we built this studio and stuff. And I always said to Bob, I said, well, would you ever - you know, we're building this studio and I said, well, do you think we should work together or in the same studio? And he said, no! [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: Smart man.

MS. WARASHINA: Because I thought it would be nice that you're sharing a studio and stuff. He says, no. So we both had private areas that we worked in. And my studio, of course, is above Bob's big space, overlooking his space. But mine - it's all closed off with walls. And I remember when we were building this thing, there was a door going out on this landing overlooking Bob's big area down below me. And he and me - there was also a window - a glass window that was supposed to be in there. And he says, Pat, we're getting rid of that window. [They laugh.] And the door didn't have a doorknob on it. It was just left - you know, this hole, round hole in the door. And so one day I was in there and I was looking through this hole and I said, Bob, I'm watching you.

MR. JECK: Oh, God. [They laugh.]

MS. WARASHINA: Immediately he had handles put in the hole. [They laugh.]

So I can't remember where we left off.

MR. JECK: Well, but earlier than that, I mean, he was your teacher, too, right?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, yeah. But, you know, in the ceramics lab at school, at the university, and even with Howard, mainly - Bob worked quite differently than I did. I mean, he was Abstract Expressionist in clay, and I was doing this kind of realism, and we never really had a conflict. There was never a conflict in our marriage about styles. And I think he - I mean, I think both of us were that way because we both worked with students, and you know how varied people are. And to give an example, one time when we first got married, I said, well, you know, I don't think I should change my name to yours because in my first marriage I did. I changed my name to Fred's. And he says, well, Pat, you know, I don't want you to change your name. I don't want you to ruin my family name. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: I don't want you to ruin my family name?

MS. WARASHINA: Right, right, right, right. [They laugh.] So, stylistically, I think the influences are really in terms of being around people that were really dedicated to their art, whether it was Howard and myself and Bob. We all had our different ways of talking or visually speaking. And we were really comfortable with each other's integrity about our own work. And I think that is kind of the main thing about being an artist, is that you're able to say whatever you need to say without this friction in your marriage. And so I think that was - I think that kind of added to - kind of permeated the studio - about students, the way they worked, et cetera.

MR. JECK: What about influences - we talked a little bit about this earlier - but influences on your work who are people that you didn't really know ever. You mentioned [René] Magritte earlier, right, and [Fernand] Léger.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah.

MR. JECK: But those kinds of artists. You look at the work that these people make and you kind of just feel like you know them somehow?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, it's how they saw the world in a way. And a great one for me was [Hieronymous] Bosch. I mean, to me he was the ultimate in Surrealism. And that is really funny because I forgot to mention that. His mind was just totally as wonderful kind of imagery, and yet it was a totally different time. It was medieval times.

MR. JECK: Long before Surrealism. Or least before there was a word for it.

MS. WARASHINA: Right, right. Before the art historians got hold of it. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: No, I know in some of your prints I see a lot of Bosch, and this whole absurdity about life in general. I mean, when you think about - when you read in the paper about twins talking simultaneously - talking simultaneously within a fraction of an inch of each other, or sounds of each other, that kind of aberration of human nature is something that really - I find it very amusing. And amusing, but also really strange, and yet it's very human.

MS. WARASHINA: But it's kind of an aberration of life. And I love those kind of things where there is kind of this surprise element - you know, things aren't as they seem. And there is always this quirk in human nature. And so I really love that kind of - where you approach something and it looks okay, and then when you look again, there

is something wrong. I love that quality. [Laughs.]

MR. JECK: Because it's all still there. In its form.

MS. WARASHINA: It's kind of a surprise element. And I think I like this whole idea - this quality where you get sucked into, because maybe you see something really beautiful, but then when you get drawn into it closer and you look at it, it changes.

MR. JECK: Into something -

MS. WARASHINA: Something else.

MR. JECK: Horrific.

MS. WARASHINA: Could be. Or it could be something funny. You know, I love humor. And think humor and tragedy, they are so close.

MR. JECK: Do you ever try to -

MS. WARASHINA: I mean, it's like looking at life with all of its faux pas and tragedies, and yet you have to come up bouncing up ahead by maybe some humor. That is why I love comedy. I love comedians.

MR. JECK: Do you ever try to do anything that is deliberately humorous anywhere?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, it's not like I deliberately do it, but I see it. And I - you just kind of want to do it to see what happens.

MR. JECK: What are some elements of the work that you think might be funny or humorous? Like, what moves have you made in the work?

MS. WARASHINA: What do you mean, moves?

MR. JECK: Have you ever done anything in the work where you thought, oh, this is funny?

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, yeah. [They laugh.] Yeah. I use my dog. But also I can think of a critic that I use. We won't say who, but it was a critic. And I did this realistic version of him. And it's the strangest thing. And Howard also was another one where I did his likeness.

MR. JECK: You did Kottler?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, Howard. I mean, I did 72 figures of people I knew. Yeah, this is on the commission for the Seattle Arts Commission.

[Audio break, tape change.]

MS. WARASHINA: One was Matthew [Kangas], actually. And the other one was Howard. And Howard - you know, Howard being the little devil he was.

MR. JECK: That would be Matthew Kangas and Howard Kottler.

MS. WARASHINA: [Laughs] And they are both really bizarre people. But after I made their image, and it was like eight inches high, I had both of them in my hand. And it was the strangest feeling. It was like holding their body in my hand. It just makes you laugh. But I guess those kinds of instances where I can use them in my work.

MR. JECK: Are they like voodoo dolls?

MS. WARASHINA: [Laughs] Could be. [They laugh.] I always tell Matthew that. He says when I die, nail my closets up. There you are.

MR. JECK: That is why you have this constant headache.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, right. [They laugh.] I do find things very humorous when I'm working. Nobody else gets it, but I do.

MR. JECK: Okay, so we were going to talk a little bit about how it is that the field of ceramics has changed over time and how you feel about that.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, I don't have any feeling about it. But, you know, when I was first starting out as an

undergraduate, as a beginning ceramics student, the field of clay really changed dramatically. I think it affected the kind of work that was being done. So the dissemination of technical information was distributed by people doing workshops that would travel the country. And a good example would be, like, Warren McKenzie, or Nan McKinnell and her husband [James Franklin McKinnell]. The McKinnells were from Iowa.

And he was a ceramic engineer. And he came around the country with soft brick [insulated brick]. And at that time that was a revolution in kiln building. Before that time we were using just hard brick for kilns. So that kind of revolution kind of happened in saving energy, et cetera, and the way kilns were built. I mean, there was hardly much that people knew technically at that time, because for some reason the "studio" ceramics started around the universities.

And so when people came, like Voulkos, and people came through to do a workshop, it was a big deal. And to see people throw a large - like I remember Paul Soldner coming when I was a student, and he would throw these large balls that were - when you lift them up they were paper-thin. And I remember lifting it up and going, wow, this is just amazing. And watching people throw - like Bob used to give students a really great demonstration. Like throw pieces that are, like, two and a half feet tall.

So all of this technical information, people were still learning from each other around the United States. And another thing, we used to dig clay out of the hill. And I think I discussed this with you earlier. A lot of time was taken in formulating glazes and learning about the clay's chemistry, empirical formulas. And so you kind of had to verse yourself in how the ceramic materials reacted with each other. And Bob was a natural. I mean, he just kind of picked it up because he was very much interested in science.

So all of these things you kind of had to learn as a student. And we used to go dig clay. I mean, we're going down to Boeing Field and digging basalt out of a hill and then coming back formulating these stoneware glazes. And we had to mix our own clay. We had to learn how to make clay bodies, formulate clay bodies. And since that time, all of this changed. Even the wheels have changed. And Voulkos came out with this wonderful wheel when I was in school - had a Reliance motor and was - and it was very powerful, because the potters wheels that we were able to get, or to use, were terrible wheels. You would have to be sitting up on a great big bench, and then your foot was straddling the wheel on either side. And I remember falling off all of the time - you know, getting my shins scraped.

MR. JECK: Like a kick wheel?

MS. WARASHINA: No, they were electric. They even had kick wheels, too. But it wasn't so much that, but that the way they were designed. Things were pretty primitive at that time, you know, when you think back on it. Now we have these powerful wheels that are on the floor. And Voulkos kind of started that with his Reliance wheel that he designed.

So, you know, when you're digging clay and - so you're so involved with the technical aspects of clay, you don't really have all that much time to really experiment with ideas, you know, like later on. So those kind of things - electric kiln was around. But as time progressed - you know, now students don't have to do that. They just go to the store and just buy it like they buy bread dough. And then you can buy any kind of clay you want: porcelain, English porcelain, stoneware, low-fire, everything. And so things are kind of spoon-fed for you. And students now can just buy a stoneware glaze out of a jar. You can buy all of these glazes that are already formulated for you.

I remember when I was in school, we used to try to formulate a red glaze. I remember - we used to use uranium as one of the materials.

MR. JECK: Uranium?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, we didn't know that these were toxic. And they would make these, kind of, like, orange glazes on them. And this guy, John Booker, and I - he is my classmate. We used to hang out with each other. And John was really good at formulation of these wonderful beautiful glazes. And he used to use chrome to make maroons. But, anyway, now we can just buy it in a jar - [laughs] - which is great. So it allows more time to really think, you know, in terms of concepts and those kind of ideas.

And yet there are still people - they are still making glazes. But things are available now. They weren't then. And mixing clay - that was a big deal. So a lot of your time was just, like, doing a lot of grunt work. And people loved it. People just really thought that was the best part of it, going out and digging your own clay and siphoning it off and -

MR. JECK: And you did that?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. I mean, you had to. And later on, you know - you just mixed your own clay, because they didn't have places where you could bag it up and give it to you in 25-pound bags.

MR. JECK: Yeah, but it's nice now to be able to do that.

MS. WARASHINA: Listen, I'm all in favor of that.

MR. JECK: Okay, good.

MS. WARASHINA: It's just learning how to - which way to turn the jar lid that I have trouble with [they laugh].

MR. JECK: So, I mean, just aesthetically, then.

MS. WARASHINA: Aesthetically, I think -

MR. JECK: In the way that things have changed.

MS. WARASHINA: And I think, aesthetically, it was mainly brown pots, you know, brown stoneware pots. That is how things started out in stoneware because that is all that people knew about at that time, or at least in the studio in the college ceramic departments, which were instilled [*sic*] after the war. These guys came off the GI Bill and they were hired right out of the army to start these programs up. And so things have changed drastically.

Ceramics was not even accepted into a mainstream gallery. You know, ceramic media was shunted off into, say, a craft gallery or whatever. And it's not that that's bad. I'm not saying that that was the way it was. And they didn't really look at clay as a viable medium to make art. And I think that things have changed quite a bit.

MR. JECK: What do you think was the impetus for that?

MS. WARASHINA: Voulkos.

MR. JECK: Yeah?

MS. WARASHINA: Voulkos was one of the key people. I'm not saying he was the only one. But Voulkos was the one that really changed things when I was in school, to make people realize that you didn't have to just pull something off a wheel and put a lid on it. He was the one that really used it as sculptural material and kind of bucked the system. And he said, I don't care what you think - he did it.

And I remember when he was throwing pots - there is a story that apparently, when he was in Montana, he used to look at a lot of Chinese ceramics or Asian ceramics. And I guess he thought they were really big in the picture. And so he was throwing these massive pieces for that time. And they were only maybe a couple - you know, five, six inches high.

MR. JECK: The ones that he was trying to replicate?

MS. WARASHINA: I don't know that that is true, but that is what I heard. So when you think about where it started - at least early on. Now it has changed. And people didn't use molds at that time. They did - I think after the industrial revolution they used it commercially. But, you know, it was one of those things, that you just never used a mold.

[Audio break.]

MR. JECK: So Voulkos came along and changed things. What do you think caused that?

MS. WARASHINA: Visually.

MR. JECK: Visually, yeah. Not necessarily -

MS. WARASHINA: Well, he changed things because of his dynamic personality. I mean, he was able to, through his personality and his stature as a - I mean, he convinced people that this material was very - he did it in such an artful way that he started slowly convincing people. And I think early on - you know, he had his people that just didn't know what the heck he was doing.

MR. JECK: Well, we know, of course -

MS. WARASHINA: And he attracted really good people around him to push his ideas through - you know, these more avant-garde ideas.

MR. JECK: But we know, of course, that Voulkos was at the Archie Bray Foundation [for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, MT].

MS. WARASHINA: Right.

MR. JECK: And then [Bernard] Leach - you know, this is legendary that Leach and [Shoji] Hamada, and [Soetsu] Yanagi came through. But there was also a kind of a synthesis between that attention and that aesthetic, but with also Abstract Expressionism.

MS. WARASHINA: Right, which was -

MR. JECK: So those were the kinds of things he paid attention to.

MS. WARASHINA: But this whole -

MR. JECK: But that doesn't seem like it was part of your attention.

MS. WARASHINA: Well, it was at a certain point in time.

MR. JECK: At a certain point.

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah, when I was a student. Yeah, it had a big impact on me. And the fact that you - you know, I was still hand building. I mean, I was - my main interest was in throwing, because I was challenged by the wheel. I wanted to see how big and how many pieces I could throw. But it was a very big influence on me in that he allowed - he made it legitimate to do something else with the clay besides making a vessel out of it, and that it didn't really have to be utilitarian. And I think that was the big explosion. And it wasn't just here. He did it for everybody around the world. I mean, he had that kind of notoriety. And so it allowed everybody to have this kind of free expression of what to do with the material.

MR. JECK: How do you think that that legacy has changed or been modified over the years?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I think it has changed. And, of course, the ceramics is going to follow whatever is happening in the real art world now because people have been allowed to have that kind of freedom with the clay. And so with that freedom, it's kind of following along what is mainly happening in, say, the main art scene.

MR. JECK: And so people who are working with clay now, like contemporary ceramic artists, are they - in your opinion, are they - do they owe something to those times?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I mean, it's the basis of where it started from. And it's not that they owe anything, but it's just part of history. And you don't - you can't turn back and deny that it happened. I mean, it happened. So it's just kind of an accumulative, accumulative history of American ceramics.

MR. JECK: And do you think that there is in the way that, say, Abstract Expressionism might have been part of Voukos's -

MS. WARASHINA: Aesthetic.

MR. JECK: Aesthetic. Say, something like technology these days or anything else for that matter. Is there something else that is informative to younger ceramic artists now? Like, what would they be paying attention to that might impact ceramics?

MS. WARASHINA: Now? Hmm.

MR. JECK: I know that is a tough question - [laughs] - because I don't know myself.

MS. WARASHINA: In other words, what they working on now?

MR. JECK: Well, you know, what are they grafting on? I mean, what are they pulling into the field? Of course, understanding that they are still working with clay. So what kinds of things are impacting them?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I think the main art world is impacting them now. In other words, I don't think that they feel a need to look back and look at - I mean, I think they probably know the history of it. But as science progresses - you know where the science and art are very similar in a lot of ways as it grows historically. So you can look back at your roots. And you can draw from those roots at any point along the line. But where are they going to go with in ceramics, God knows. If I knew the answer - [laughs]. I don't know if that is answering your question.

MR. JECK: No. I think it's - well, it's a tricky one, because we're immersed in it right now and nobody really knows.

MS. WARASHINA: Right, I mean, it's just like the art scene. You really don't know where it is going to go. In a way it's kind of nebulous right now. Everything is kind of in flux. And it will always be in flux. The future will always be in flux. And it isn't until, really, a long time goes by, when you can look back and say, hey, this is what happened in this decade; this is what happened in this decade.

And so I think now because there is kind of open-endedness with the art - you know, art, painting, sculpture. It's all kind of fusing - fiber - it's all kind of fusing together. So I think this whole idea - this notion about people working in various materials to get to their ideas is probably what, right now, is happening in terms of using mixed media. But, you know, anybody can go into any part of that history and drop into it, and then redefine it.

MR. JECK: Yeah, I think about that, too. And I wonder what it is in the midst of that. Why it is that people will still work with clay? What do you think?

MS. WARASHINA: Well, I can only go with my own personal feelings. And the reason I went into it is because I like the feel of it. [Laughs.] I mean, I just - I responded to the organicness [sic]. Ceramics is great because you can make it do anything, I mean, within certain limitations. You can't make it look like a - [inaudible] - but, you know, people are - that is not true because you're doing silica, you know, silica threads. But technology - look what they are doing with engines with ceramics. I mean, it's the cutting edge right now - ceramics.

So you can take it that extreme. But I think basically for an artist now who is interested in clay, it's really the feel of it that pulled me into it. And also it's an easy way to get imagery - not easy. It's a feasible way of getting into all kinds of imagery that you can't get in, say, through other materials like wood or - I think maybe metal is pretty close to it.

MR. JECK: Well, you're right about that. I totally agree with that. So as you said earlier, clay can do anything. You can make it be anything.

MS. WARASHINA: Right.

MR. JECK: And that is a real different thing than saying that you can go into Photoshop and make that look like anything. You can make Photoshop - you can take images and you can put them into Photoshop and make them *look* like anything, but with clay, you can take it and you can make it *be* anything.

MS. WARASHINA: Right, three-dimensionally.

MR. JECK: Three-dimensionally or in real space.

MS. WARASHINA: And it is an incredibly versatile material that way, you know, compared to other - like, paint. I mean - [laughs] - I know this one woman who is building up her paintings with just little pieces of paint three-dimensionally, and I think that is so cool. [Laughs.] But it's hard to make a thread out of paint - I mean, stand up three-dimensionally. So clay is really great for three-dimensional materials. It's easy - or not easy; it's possible. It makes it feasible.

MR. JECK: So one last question, if you don't mind.

MS. WARASHINA: [Laughs] Yes.

MR. JECK: What is one thing that you have always wanted to do that you're going to do eventually - make?

MS. WARASHINA: My next piece?

MR. JECK: Yeah, like your - [laughs].

MS. WARASHINA: What am I going to do?

MR. JECK: No, what's, like, the most giant idea that you have ever had that you have not yet made but you want to?

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, God, I can't think that far ahead. I just want to make a good piece. [Laughs.] I just - I mean, I really do. It's kind of a linear thing with me, and I always hope that I'm going to hit that next, you know, that really good piece. And I'm not sure of what form it will take. And it could maybe be two inches high - may be my ultimate piece. I mean, I'm - I just want it to be the ultimate. It has nothing to do with scale, I think.

MR. JECK: No, not scale, but, you know.

MS. WARASHINA: Profound.

MR. JECK: What is your most harebrained idea?

MS. WARASHINA: What do you mean harebrained? [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: Well, for a long time -

MS. WARASHINA: Probably all of my work. [They laugh.] Probably my whole career.

MR. JECK: Good point. But I thought for a long time I want to make a sculpture of Don Knotts.

MS. WARASHINA: Really?

MR. JECK: I mean, what is - that's me, not you.

MS. WARASHINA: Okay.

MR. JECK: But do you have any ideas like that?

MS. WARASHINA: Probably Doug Jeck. That would be my most profound idea.

MR. JECK: No, like an idea that you think, this could either be really terrible or it could be really great. Do you have any of those?

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, well, all the time.

MR. JECK: Well, what is the biggest one?

MS. WARASHINA: The biggest faux pas? Oh, lots.

MR. JECK: The one that you haven't made yet.

MS. WARASHINA: Oh, the one I haven't made yet.

MS. WARASHINA: God, I really don't know, Doug.

MR. JECK: Well, just imagine, like, the most egregious thing.

MS. WARASHINA: Egregious - oh, my God. My dog. [They laugh.] An honest interpretation of my dog.

MR. JECK: You mean, another one?

MS. WARASHINA: Yeah. [They laugh.] One that I can show.

MR. JECK: All right. Good night, everybody. Say good night, Patti.

MS. WARASHINA: Thanks, thanks, thanks for sitting through this. [They laugh.]

MR. JECK: You're supposed to say good night.

MS. WARASHINA: Good night.

MR. JECK: Good night.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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