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Oral history interview with Toshiko Takaezu,
2003 June 16

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Toshiko Takaezu on June 16, 2003. The interview took place at the artist's home and studio in Quakertown, NJ, and was conducted by Gerry Williams 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.

Toshiko Takaezu and Gerry Williams have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

GERRY WILLIAMS: Good morning Toshiko, it's wonderful to be here in your wonderful house, and to see the garden and the sunshine and the flowers, and to speak with you about your work and your life. My name is Gerry Williams. I'm interviewing Toshiko Takaezu in her home and studio in the big city of Quakertown, New Jersey. [They laugh.] And this is June the 15th, 2003, and it's being done for the Archives of American Art, the Smithsonian Institution.

Now, of course we want to start at the beginning, so please tell me, Toshiko, where and when you were born.

TOSHIKO TAKAEZU: Well, first, I can tell you where I was born, but I want to say this: you picked the right day because all we had these past few months, it was cold and wet, and to put plants in the garden was almost impossible to do. So you picked the right day and I'm grateful. Thank you. [Laughs.]

MR. WILLIAMS: Only I'm keeping you from your garden work, I know that.

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, we can't do too much because we did yesterday a lot of stuff.

MR. WILLIAMS: Good.

MS. TAKAEZU: Anyway, I was born in Hawaii in a small, little town called Pepekeo, on the island-

MR. WILLIAMS: How do you spell that?

MS. TAKAEZU: P-E-P-E-K-E-O-Pepekeo, which is not very far from the place called Hilo, it's the Big Island-on June 17, 1922. About when I was nine years old, we went to Maui to live, another island. And after that, going to after high school, or through part of high school, I went to Honolulu, which is Oahu, and that's where I stayed. And I still have a place there to be with all my family that lives in-they live there.

MR. WILLIAMS: Tell me a little about your father and mother. What did they do?

MS. TAKAEZU: My parents came from Japan, a place called Okinawa but we call it Japan, and they were-I can't-I had all these dates but I can't remember those dates now; I put it away. They were-my father came to Hawaii first and my mother came later, and they stayed in a place called Lahaina, which is in Maui.

MR. WILLIAMS: How do you spell this?

MS. TAKAEZU: L-A-H-A-I-N-A-Lahaina, in Maui. And from there they went to Big Island and stayed in Pepekeo, and almost all of their children were born there, and there are 11 of us. So some in Maui, some in Big Island. So in two islands, all of us, you know, were born there.

MR. WILLIAMS: What number were you in the family?

MS. TAKAEZU: There is 11 in the family and I always call myself "navel child" because I have five above me and five below me; I'm right in the center. [Laughs.]

MR. WILLIAMS: And all brothers and sisters, of course.

MS. TAKAEZU: There are eight girls and-sisters-and three boys. And so far, we have been very lucky, but only one sister died and one brother died, yeah.

MR. WILLIAMS: Are your parents still living?

MS. TAKAEZU: No, no, no. They would be 105, 100, yeah.

MR. WILLIAMS: Mm-hmmm.

MS. TAKAEZU: So they are gone, but my mother lived until she was 96 and my father at 88. And her family apparently, you know, long life; some died at 100, some in their 90s, so we're pretty lucky about that.

MR. WILLIAMS: And your father's work was?

MS. TAKAEZU: Oh, he came as a laborer, but also he became-this cane field, he was-he had rented a plot of land and he was doing his own work. But my father was not really a worker. He did-you know, he was sort of a musician, and he likes to play music and read books and play chess. So it was not easy for the whole family. The way the family worked was my three sisters went to school and they went not very long, but the oldest one got married really early but the second and the third went to work and they send money home. And that's how we did it, to keep up, you know-this is long time ago and that's what we did.

But we had farmland. My father wanted to be a farmer on his own and had a piece of property in the island Maui, up in Kula. But on weekends we went to help him because he wasn't that interested in really working that hard. So we did that; we took the bus and went up and stayed and helped him because we lived near the beach and went-and so, on weekends we took the bus and went to Kula and helped him.

MR. WILLIAMS: What is it like living in Hawaii, then? What are the things that you remember about it?

MS. TAKAEZU: We didn't know any other place that we lived, so, you know, we didn't have any comparison, but it was very natural. During the Depression, my father didn't have a job so we all-he all packed us up from Big Island and went to Maui, and that's where we stayed with my uncle. He had a watercress patch, so he-it was very interesting that he took all the sister-my mother, and he loved my mother, so anything she did was fine. So all the kids were packed on the boat and went to Maui, and we all stayed there and went to school. The school, it was isolated, right near the lighthouse, and we had our own spring water, and all this watercress patch went down to the ocean. It was very nice.

And so, early in the morning we got up, had something to eat, and we helped with the carrying. My uncle would cut the watercress and tie it, and we would carry-we all carried-not all of them, but almost all went to the second part of the, you know, water-spring water, and washed the watercress and packed in his car, and he had a Model-T Ford, and he went and peddled it. So the family was very close because we were just by ourselves.

In the next place we moved, it was almost like that. We had neighbors, but not near the beach. And we had-we had a good time while we were at my uncle's place because we had our own turkey, we had everything. We had honey, we grew vegetables, and we had mountain and water at the same time. So we used to go up and play before going to bed. We would go up there and have a good time. And then I remember, we were-we had so much watermelon that we took our knife and went out and cut the watermelon in, you know, a section like this here. If it's not red, we threw it away. And it was that casual; it was kind of interesting.

And then my uncle was an interesting man because he had this honey, and he made taffy for us. It was kind of interesting, at that time, you know, he used to boil the honey and used to pull, and so we had wonderful taffy. So we had enough food. For one thing, we had fish also, near the water. It was not that easy to catch the fish, but we've salted it. And we had pork because we had pigs, and we had a vegetable garden, and so-but we had woodstove, and so it was-we didn't know any difference anyway.

MR. WILLIAMS: Did you feel you were very close to your parents' Japanese heritage, or were you-

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes, in the beginning because they didn't speak English at all.

MR. WILLIAMS: And how soon did you start-

MS. TAKAEZU: When you start going to school.

MR. WILLIAMS: -becoming American, if that's the term of what belongs in there?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, for a long-well, when we went to school we start learning English, so the thing that I think is quite difficult is that when we want to know what we want to know in English, but we can't speak Japanese well enough to be interpreted. And I think that my parents had that same problem, too, because they couldn't speak English to ask us question to speak, to learn Japanese-vice versa. But we knew enough to communicate and live pretty well. And we went to Japanese school, but during the war that was closed.

MR. WILLIAMS: And then you went to the University and-

MS. TAKAEZU: No, I went to high school, and I quit high school earlier because I needed to go and work. So I went to part time in university, not registered really, you know-I don't know what you call that now. So, when

Claude Horan came, I did work with-I worked in a place called Hawaiian Potter's Guild, but I was working for the family first, and during the war they left. So they hired me at this potter's guild, and we made things with slab-roll out the clay and put on the mold to make dishes and things like that. And so I worked there for a while during the war.

MR. WILLIAMS: Was Claude Horan an influence on you during those years?

MS. TAKAEZU: Oh yes, because he came later, and he decided to start something like potters guild also later. But prior to that I was working for Honolulu Planing Mill, a lumberyard. There is a man who was a high school teacher. He wanted to play with ceramics, so he got some molds made. He was art teacher; his name is Archie Erickson [sp]. So I worked there for a while, and-at Honolulu Planing Mill.

He left after a while, but Claude Horan came right around the same time, when Archie Erickson left. So he decided to do-use the kiln that Erickson built, gas kiln or oil kiln, whatever it was. And I was doing, with the help from one of the men that worked for the planing mill-well then, when Horan came, he wanted to get into business, so he decided to take that over, but he wasn't that successful. Horan was a very good man; he still is.

MR. WILLIAMS: He's still alive, yes?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm. He's about 84. And I would say that Horan is, to me-I have always said this, that he's the father of ceramics in Hawaii. Directly or indirectly, everybody has been in touch with him, and people don't realize-don't pay much attention to him, but because he doesn't work very much. He would work if he needs the people to see how good he is, and he wants that kind of glamorous position.

MR. WILLIAMS: But at that time were you also bringing in your Japanese heritage into your work? Were you aware of the ceramics in Okinawa?

MS. TAKAEZU: I was aware that-we used to go to Japanese movies, and that would draw me to Japan, Japanese culture, because we went to Japanese school anyway. And then when we got home we had miso soup for breakfast and all this Japanese food. But then when you go to school you learn how to make stew and you learn how to do this, so I felt like a ping-pong, here and here. It took me a long time because music and film made me feel one way-I couldn't tell one way or the other, because I used to go to Japanese film all the time and loved it. And so then if you read Japanese you're back to the Orient, and then when you got to school your language is English.

But that took me years and years to realize that it wasn't one or the other; it's yourself, you take the best of each. But it took me a long time to realize that, and sometimes when I am in Japan I smell Japan. When they're cooking, I feel very nostalgic. But at the same time, there are other things in Japan that, you know, you don't feel very comfortable anyway because people are so much in need of being-rushing around in Japan, and they have changed a great deal. So when I go to Japan, if I go to the, you know, farm area, I feel more comfortable.

MR. WILLIAMS: Were you aware of any kind of spiritual heritage from Japan at that time?

MS. TAKAEZU: When?

MR. WILLIAMS: When you were growing up.

MS. TAKAEZU: I guess so, because-

MR. WILLIAMS: Shintoism or-

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, we were supposed to be Buddhist.

MR. WILLIAMS: Buddhist?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm.

MR. WILLIAMS: Do you still adhere to any of those precepts?

MS. TAKAEZU: I think I feel that way. I have-religion is to me-my mother was pretty good, you know. Everybody went to-well, we were isolated to begin with, and Sunday, well then we have to make a special trip to go into-she said, religion is daily, so if you want to go, you can go, and she left it up to us to have a choice.

MR. WILLIAMS: And you have a temple bell still, out here in your yard, do you not?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, I like the sound of the bell. [Laughs.]

MR. WILLIAMS: Is it just aesthetic or do you bow down and pray to Buddha?

MS. TAKAEZU: No, no, no. I don't do anything of that kind. I feel that my work is my religion in some ways, and that's enough for me.

MR. WILLIAMS: Where did the temple bell come from?

MS. TAKAEZU: What, the idea?

MR. WILLIAMS: The one out here.

MS. TAKAEZU: I made it.

MR. WILLIAMS: You made the-the bell is-

MS. TAKAEZU: They're all-they're all made. Well, I was working in terms of sound and form, and I always feel that plants and everything has sound. And so I was working with the idea of-and all my pieces, just about almost all, they have sound in it, and that sound came by an accident but it's still a sound. Now, I feel that it's very important to be able to see things visually-the important part is to see things visually. And then the second to me is that if you see things-and that's why you see children touch things all the time, because the second is touching. And the third to me is sound. But it doesn't need-in that sequence, but it's all connected.

And so, I start making bells; I start putting things in the pot that I was trying to make sound and make-but I was trying to work with Bell Lab or AT&T-they were doing experiments with artists. But they wanted me to help them, but they didn't know whether they could help me, so I decided not to get involved. To get involved with anyone, to have collaboration, I think you have to know them pretty well and be able to respect them. And I did have time to search-I did want to have sound in my pieces. In fact, I made a piece that you can't see, but there is a sound, because I put a sound in there, a tape in it, but the tape would ring as you walk. You have a path here as you walk, and then when you get there, there is a sound.

And I sort of related that even with humans you think you know them; sometimes the closer you get, you really don't because you are involved and you can't tell. And that's the philosophy that I had with the sound that, you know-but all those things that I had in mind I have given up because I couldn't solve it myself, like all those pieces that have those flat pieces that-I can show it to you. They have all different sounds, and I wanted someone to be able to make a platform and put one pot here and to have-you can maybe synchronize to have do-re-me-fa-so-la-ti-do. So if you want to sing, you can touch one that would make a sound, and that's the idea I had, but I don't know if we should talk about these ideas because it never formed. And then I was thinking people can jump and get "do," and then jump another way and make the sound, and that's what I had in mind.

MR. WILLIAMS: It's a wonderful idea.

MS. TAKAEZU: Idea, but it didn't work because I didn't-

MR. WILLIAMS: I would like to pursue that with you again sometime. But out of this, was there any sense of community that you were developing as a beginning artist, or as a commercial artist?

MS. TAKAEZU: What do you mean, community?

MR. WILLIAMS: A sense of working with people for a common purpose, or like-minded people, or the heritage of people serving your interests in a certain way.

MS. TAKAEZU: I don't think so.

MR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

MS. TAKAEZU: I don't think so. If you can elaborate more, maybe I can have sense. I went to school and I worked with people that is interested in ceramics, so we did that, but that was commercial. But then I wanted to work on my own. But then when Horan came, I worked with him, but it didn't last very long. But I went to his classes-joined his class. At that time I was also teaching at the extension, adult education department at the YWCA, so I had Horan and then I had my class in the evening or afternoon. And at that time I had about 75 students. It was the peak of my career at the Y, and I bought the kiln and I was teaching, but then I decided, that is enough.

No matter how much people say they can't work without me, you know, all those things they say, but inside of me I realized that it was time for me to leave Hawaii. And I also say in my video that there is time for everything; you know yourself when the time comes. And to me-so I told my mother, I have to go to Cranbrook [Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI], I have to go away in Michigan, but I didn't know whether I would get in because at that time all the veterans were coming back, but I got in.

MR. WILLIAMS: Before we get to that point, though-

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes?

MR. WILLIAMS: -did you have any formal apprenticeship with Claude Horan, or was it just a mentorship?

MS. TAKAEZU: No, I worked with him because he wanted to be in the business, and he-

MR. WILLIAMS: Did he take you on as an apprentice, in fact?

MS. TAKAEZU: No.

MR. WILLIAMS: You just worked with him?

MS. TAKAEZU: I just worked with him. And I went to classes also.

MR. WILLIAMS: So your education, in terms of the clay, came through working with other people and through classes as well?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Prior to that, during the war I met a sculptor who came to the commercial area and said he would like to rent a kiln. And we were-I didn't know I was running it, so I said yes; I could rent you a kiln. I showed him a kiln. And he's a sculptor, so he thought-he wanted to laugh I'm sure: a kiln about this size, electric kiln. He wanted a big sculpture, and then he said-I said, you know, I made a head for myself but I don't know if it's good. He said, bring it and I will show it to him. Then he taught-I had some classes with him. And he was in the army, and he was with a special group that they have 10 artists and one officer; they were doing topography. They were all specialists in different areas, yeah.

MR. WILLIAMS: So let's talk about your formal education more extensively now. Did you leave Hawaii and come to this country to work?

MS. TAKAEZU: I came to go to Cranbrook.

MR. WILLIAMS: Why did you choose Cranbrook?

MS. TAKAEZU: Because my teacher went to Ohio State [Ohio State University, Columbus, OH], but I had some friends who went to Cranbrook. And I saw Maija Grotell's pieces. I didn't know what, but there was something in the piece that made me feel that she is the one. I should work in a small school, and that's why I went to Cranbrook.

MR. WILLIAMS: Who is Maija Grotell?

MS. TAKAEZU: Maija Grotell came from Finland. As you know, in the book we have all that. And she was an excellent teacher. She didn't tell you what to do; you worked on your own. Most everybody had some background to begin with. So if you didn't ask for crit, you didn't get it; and when you were given a crit, you wanted to crawl in the corner and just melt away. But you knew that she was right, so you had to continue. And it's very interesting in many ways because I didn't know anything-I didn't know about Paul Klee, I didn't know about anything. I just-I'm from Hawaii just fresh, nothing, but here, going to the museum, to, you know, Detroit Art Institute [Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI], and having big people that had all this kind of background.

So that's where I learned a lot, and I realized that, in retrospect, there is one time that-every year at Cranbrook, they gave medals, two for each class, and everybody was nervous, trying to get-thinking that they would be the one selected. And I didn't think anything of it, and when the time came, at the banquet-after the banquet they call the names. And from weaving, they name two names. And when it came to ceramics, that they-two names. One was Steve Fulton, who was teaching in Nebraska after that. And my name came up, and it was completely a shock; I could hardly walk to get the medal. The funny part of it, the friend that I was with, he expected to get it.

That was terrible in a way. But two days later, or three days later, I went in to see Maija Grotell. I said, Maija, I want to thank you for the award I got. She looked at me and she said, don't thank me, thank God. And I was petrified; I was expecting her to say, you worked hard enough; you deserve it. None of that. That's what I expected her to tell me.

MR. WILLIAMS: That's a great answer.

MS. TAKAEZU: And I thought, I don't even remember thanking God. I walked out, isn't that funny. And years later I realized that she probably thought that I probably would make it. And so now I can laugh about it, but at that time I was crushed because I was feeling sorry for the other people that didn't get it, so I wanted to thank her.

MR. WILLIAMS: What is the difference between a person who has gone through a university or regular academic training and a person who has apprenticed and gone through the workshop background? Which of those-

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, that depends on the individuals, though, yeah, so I can't say that-I think it depends on the person how much they want to do and how much they want to work, and realizing they have to do extra work because they need that.

And I realize after Cranbrook-but I did teach-Maija made me teach at Cranbrook-and I was offered a job at Albuquerque and University of Wisconsin [Madison, WI]. Wisconsin was just one semester; Albuquerque was a year. I decided to take Wisconsin for a reason I don't know. I thought Albuquerque would be too hot for me, that's what I thought; it is one year. And I stayed-I went to visit my friend, who was at-she took the job at Albuquerque, so I went to visit her, and her husband was connected with the Folk Art Museum. She said, you have to come and see some of the potters-pottery that we have in our collection, so I did go. In the basement, they had-in the corner they had huge pots, huge, and the impact was so great that I wanted to just-I went into tears because it was so dynamic. In the inside of the piece, you can see the warmth and can feel the pressure, we can feel the strength which-you know.

So I decided: I'm hooked. [Laughs.] I was thinking, what can I do when I go back to Hawaii? But-

MR. WILLIAMS: What is the most important factor, do you think, in your becoming a potter?

MS. TAKAEZU: I just loved it.

MR. WILLIAMS: Why do you love it?

MS. TAKAEZU: Because of the possibility that you have with this material. It's just clay, and you can fit beautiful things-one thing I know, my mother was always interested in pottery and textile anyway. She was very interested and she had some nice collections that we still have. I don't know, the feeling was that this is what the possibility-

MR. WILLIAMS: Was there any special moment when you said, that's what I'm going to do because of this, or an intuitive decision?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, for one thing, the impact that I got from women potters, the strength that you could feel, the strength that is in the pot, made me feel that I really like this. And so, I thought that it's too late because I have gone through this, and to have such an impression that I got from the pottery that the women made and the force that they had with the piece, and they didn't make to have it in the galleries and the museum, they make because they can use it. And so, that was really very big impact that I had.

Plus, when I was still going to school, I happened to have anthology of Japanese poetry that was translated. I read this, and I was so impressed by one woman potter [Otagaki Rengetsu], but she was a nun, and her background was-later on I found out-because she was making pots and then she used to write poems, tanka and haiku on the pots. I said, I can do that, too. It was a disaster. I made one on my brother's visit for my brother who died to have in their home, with a huge cylinder like a chopstick holder.

But I tried, and I always wanted to know who and why she was what she was. Later on I found out she was a nun, but she was married but her husband and two children died. So she was beautiful, and then she tried to make herself unattractive, but she was also pursued all the time because of her beauty, whatever beauty she had. And so she joined the nunnery and she was making pots. I read about her later. So that made me feel that I can try. I mean, so when I went to Japan, I was looking for her pots all over at antique shops. I went with my sister; she was getting tired that I was looking for pots. And I don't know if she knew that this is a pot-I think I told her, this Rengetsu made pots, and she became very famous because she trained all the monks, all the people that's interested, by writing, making pots, and writing poetry. So I found one, after many days of looking for it, in an antique shop.

MR. WILLIAMS: And you still have it?

MS. TAKAEZU: I didn't buy it; I didn't have any money. I didn't even ask for how much it was, although it did satisfy my soul. I thought, that's enough; at least I came to Japan to look for it. That's one of the reasons I wanted to-but there would be so many reasons that-and also went to Japan-I don't know what part I'm supposed to be, but I wanted-it's a kind of a circle. My parents came from the Orient, and then maybe I could go back and re-track some of the things that they had there.

I didn't want to do pottery at that time because while I was teaching at the University of Wisconsin, I used to want students to be able to catch on without being told, explicit or implicit. I wanted implicit; and of course you don't get it, because I didn't in some ways. And that made me feel that I must go to Japan, in some ways to be

with people, not only potters, so that I can understand different things that might enhance me as a teacher if I'm going to start teaching. And that was kind of interesting that I wanted to be able to-and of course, you never get that all the time. Once in a while you have students-you can never tell-that do those things that I was thinking that I would do, but they know themselves. Only once or twice that had happened.

MR. WILLIAMS: But you have been teaching here-

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm.

MR. WILLIAMS: -for the last number of years.

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm, over 30 years.

MR. WILLIAMS: Princeton [Princeton University, Princeton, NJ]?

MS. TAKAEZU: Princeton was 25 years.

MR. WILLIAMS: Twenty-five years?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm. But I-my first job was at the University of Wisconsin, and I didn't have a job, nothing, and I decided to go to Japan. This was something that I wanted to do so that I can be with people, and to see it, and some reaction that I can get, and get some feeling of background and all those things, artist philosophy or whatever you call it. And my sister went with me, and I worked with a couple of them, Kaneshige was one of them that I worked with. And Rosanjin I met, and he was very, very good to me. And everybody said that he was very difficult man, but I don't-for some reason he was very good to us; I can't believe how nice he was.

MR. WILLIAMS: And even though you're a woman, he respected you?

MS. TAKAEZU: He seemed to-he seemed to. He liked Noguchi; he didn't like his wife. And he even fed us lunch. And then, when they would have a kiln opening, it was-and I went myself because University of Hawaii faculty wanted to go with me, but he didn't show up so I decided to take the train and go anyway. And I saw him, I talked to him, he said, where's your sister, he told me. I said, well, she couldn't come; I wanted her to go but she said that-because, you know, she knew that I really wanted to be-see this man, but-and it was a good experience.

MR. WILLIAMS: Wonderful. But you never worked with Rosanjin?

MS. TAKAEZU: No. I did with Kaneshige. He told me I can use the clay and-

MR. WILLIAMS: Then you came to Princeton when?

MS. TAKAEZU: Princeton, 1967, about that time.

MR. WILLIAMS: And why did you choose Princeton to be attached to?

MS. TAKAEZU: I didn't. I was teaching at Cranbrook-no, Cleveland for-yeah, I came back to teach the summer session for Cranbrook, and after that I didn't have a job. But then a job came to me from Cleveland Institute of Art [Cleveland, OH]. They asked me-Schmacaber [ph] was who had just left, and [Joseph] McCullough was there. And Schmacaber was at Syracuse [Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY], and he called and said, I want you to come to Syracuse. I said, no, I have a job at Cleveland. He said-he asked me, how much do they pay you? I said, enough. I didn't want to tell him because it was very low. But I went to Cleveland Institute of Art and I worked there for eight years.

MR. WILLIAMS: Then you went to Princeton after that?

MS. TAKAEZU: No, I came back-I decided that I have to do my own work. So I rented-and I saw a place in Clinton [New Jersey]. There is a waterfall and a nice place, so I said, this is the kind of place I want to live; it's far away from New York City but not that far. So I had a friend of mine, I said, please look for a place for me, and she found one. And I found it was a music hall building. The upstairs, the front upstairs would be my apartment; downstairs would be my studio, and that's what I took. I was there for 10 years. I went back to Cleveland to go back to teach for one semester one year, and I told director, I have to leave. He said, what can we do to keep you? I said, I just have to do my work. So I went-but I didn't have any income, only Tiffany Grant [Tiffany Foundation]. That was not enough, but-I don't know how I survived. And my sister was here so she helped me a little bit.

MR. WILLIAMS: What is your philosophy of teaching?

MS. TAKAEZU: I feel that-I think this came also from Maija Grotell. She didn't say in words, but anyone can see that. The philosophy of teaching, to me, that everybody's different, and so you have to leave them in their way of-and everybody can find their own identity; it's not that easy to find your own, it's a struggle. But that's how I feel, that you have to love what you are doing, otherwise you can't, it's too hard of work. So, you know, you have to make them-in teaching you have to make them excited, the possibility with this material. And students, they can't major in my area. If they want to major they have to be from art history department. And so I had students from there, and I still have students that really come around here that was my students, yeah. But they have to be the one that want to come; I don't push. They have to-if they want to see.

MR. WILLIAMS: What do you think is the place of the university in the American craft movement? Is it critical to development of the crafts or not?

MS. TAKAEZU: I really don't know. I really don't know. I think everybody would like to be individuals in their way, but sometimes I don't know, you know, what they want, and I think they want to do something that is probably acceptable.

MR. WILLIAMS: Most students, however, entering the field, go through the university now.

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm.

MR. WILLIAMS: Is that a good thing or not a good thing?

MS. TAKAEZU: Sometimes I think it's a good thing, sometimes I don't. I think if they can find out themselves on their own, and not be influenced, because galleries is-help them in a way. You see, if you get into the gallery, this is what is supposed to be the most important thing, and what other people see, they would mimic that, you see. So I really can't say one way or the other, but if you can work on your own and develop on your own, I think it's much stronger.

MR. WILLIAMS: You have done a lot of demonstrations and things like that.

MS. TAKAEZU: Yeah.

MR. WILLIAMS: Is that a valid way for your teaching philosophy to be achieved?

MS. TAKAEZU: I think so-I think so. I didn't do that in the beginning. I thought I needed to-I needed income, for instance. I wasn't paid that well; it was a part-time job. So I did a lot of-but then I tell them about how you can be on your own, and for instance I would say, if you see something, an object or thing that you like, you can take that and make it. You have an idea-but you have an idea but you have to go through a process, for instance, I used to tell them, then that becomes the seed. You have this idea, you see. You see a flower in bloom, you take that flower, and if you have that idea, make that yourself, idea, a seed, and let it grow. Let it grow here and there. And what bloom is your flower?

I try to tell to them because when they come to class they want to do exactly what you do. I said, what are you going to do about that, now you got it? They don't know. I said, why don't you try and work something out? And they don't like you for that. But one woman told me later, years later, she said she was very glad that I told her not to do exactly-I said, for instance, if I had an old lady in my class and we can make the closed form, I think it's great, let them have it. But if a student will do that, it's either they draw it out or they make something out of it, and sometimes they have good result because they can't do what I do. They have to find a way, they have to find-so, you know, it's a long process of teaching to make them understand this, and whether I have accomplished that, I don't know.

I had something on my mind to tell you about that-of design, to make things on their own. It will come back to me sometime because-it may come back. I was just thinking about that to tell you, then the senior moment happened.

MR. WILLIAMS: Let's move into your clay work and what you do, if we can.

MS. TAKAEZU: That's what I was going to say.

MR. WILLIAMS: Right. Let's start by your describing the studio space here. What is your studio like here, and your kilns and so forth?

MS. TAKAEZU: I have one big kiln. For a long time I didn't have a kiln when I moved over here from Clinton. And people say, why aren't you making pots? I said, I can't because my-but they asked me to weave because I got everything ready to weave, and I said, I can't weave because I don't have my kiln. But that's what it was. I mean, it seems strange and stupid but I said, I can't-my kiln isn't ready yet. It took me three years to get the kiln ready.

MR. WILLIAMS: What kind of kiln is it?

MS. TAKAEZU: I will show you the kiln. It's a downdraft, and the kind of kiln that Jim McKinnell designed.

MR. WILLIAMS: Jim McKinnell?

MS. TAKAEZU: Jim McKinnell. I met him during the war also. Jim McKinnell did this design. And I got DeKay [ph]- he was an expert in building a kiln-to come and help me with the kiln, so he got everything going on. But I got the brick from a company that handled bricks. But anyway, the name will come later.

MR. WILLIAMS: Babcock and Wilcox.

MS. TAKAEZU: Now-coming back to how I started doing my closed form-is first I made all the functional things. In the '50s, when I went to Cranbrook, I thought, when I go to Cranbrook I'm going to experiment with volcanic sand that we have a lot of. I thought, I go to Cranbrook for one year-and my mother said only one year. I said, yes, one year. She kept repeating this. I said-I repeated, I said, yes, but in my mind I wasn't too sure.

I was asked to apply for a grant from McInerney Foundation. As long as you're there-stay-that was the president's wife of the McInerney Foundation. The president's wife was in my class, Mrs. Dean, and he was the head of University of Hawaii but he was connected with McInerney Foundation. So she kept writing to me and said, hurry up; the deadline-I barely made it. In fact, I didn't make it, and she got this entry; she said send it to her. So she gave it to Dr. Dean and said, make sure that she gets it. Of course it was late, but they gave me \$800, which is-you know, you can use that in no time, but that's fine. But then I had a position to teach so that worked out. I was-

MR. WILLIAMS: So you stayed on a while longer?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, coming back to-starting on my own teapots, plates-I still do that but-I don't make teapots now, but some version of it I do. And finally, I made a teapot that looked like a bird. I made the handle long like a tail, and a head for a spout. So gradually that became distorted; in fact, the head and the tail were together, two-spouted bottles. So I made a lot of those. And finally, while making those, I fired a piece, and when I saw the piece it looked like a mask. From the side, from the top, it looked like a mask. I say, ah, this is like a mask; why not mask pieces? I didn't plan; it just happened. So I start making a lot of pieces on mask and I put two forms and put mask, and the masks got smaller. The two eyes and a mouth got smaller and smaller, and into one. And that's how it started, the form that I thought-I made forms but I didn't mean anything until I start from teapot and gradually went to these all kinds of spouts coming from all over. And that's what I'm working on now to give a lecture. And so that's how it formed.

And then, it's-to me, this is the solution, that I was working all these things and it happened, and this is a solution. And people criticize my doing the same thing, but I don't care because it's like-almost, to me, this form is like a canvas, a three-dimensional canvas, anyway. In a certain stage of my life I decided, if I don't do this now, I will never make it. The time was right to make big pieces. And also, I like the idea of dancing around the piece when I put the glaze on. You get the big brush and you walk around. And when I'm glazing I don't like to have people around, but there are always people around.

MR. WILLIAMS: Why do you not put a hole in the top of the piece?

MS. TAKAEZU: There is a hole, air hole. And I put some on the side because it is so big, if you don't put the hole in there-you know, once I had-or twice I had this accident during the winter when it was cool on the outside. We took it out from the kiln and the blast of that, just like a gun sound, because it's cracked, so you know the inside is still hot. And then now I put on the side also. And I try to put-unless the hole is plugged, it's purposely I put the hole in so that there will be some heat going out that way.

MR. WILLIAMS: But essentially they are enclosed forms, are they?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm. I make some so that you could float also.

MR. WILLIAMS: Float them. And if-are you concerned about the exterior only, or do you think also about the mystery of the interior?

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes. Well, an answer to that, if it's right or not, there was a governor from Okinawa [Chobyō Yara] who came to the Big Island when I was an artist in resident and I was going to have a show. With him there was newspaperman who owned a newspaper, a Japanese newspaper. You know how newspaper people are, they are so curious about everything. The governor just came and this entourage of people that came, and this newspaperman, he said, what is that for-what is that? He gives me a question. I had no answer, so I was kind of trapped in a corner that I have to give an answer. So I said-I said, very calmly, I said, the most important piece-

thing about this piece is the dark space that you can't see, the dark air that is in it that you can't see. Whether he was convinced or not, the governor was impressed.

MR. WILLIAMS: He was listening?

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes. He told me, I want to meet your mother. [Laughs.] And then he said, we're having a banquet; would you come? And he's the only scholar-governor they had there. He was kind of a big man. He went to school in Tokyo and decided that he should be there, or became a governor anyway. People must have respected him. So he said, I want you to come to the banquet; be sure you come to the banquet tonight. So I brought him two bowls. I had two bowls; I carried bowls around with me. So I carried two bowls and I gave it to him.

When I went to Japan, the show that I had, the traveling show that I had, there were Rotarians there that sponsored me probably, or it was the newspaper people that owned it and sponsored me, and they said that I must come to the Rotarian meeting. Well, I had my former student from Japan that went with me, so went to this, sang all kinds of songs and, you know, and then I was supposed to be the speaker. So I was saying things and they were all dull because they haven't seen the show yet, so they didn't know what I was talking about. And my former student was very good; she was explaining things with her hands. Finally I decided I have to change this. I said about my incident with Governor Yara, and then they were more attentive then. And one man from the corner lifted his head and said he was there. One of those people who went with the governor. And the following day-I went that afternoon, but there was a couple who wanted to meet me and there was a son and daughter.

[End Tape 1, Side A.]

He was teaching at the university. He said, my father said he can't-I'm sorry that he can't come. So the connection-we don't know how the connection happened but it was kind of nice.

MR. WILLIAMS: Have you always thereafter envisioned the interior of the big pots that you make as being special? When you make them, are you aware of the space inside?

MS. TAKAEZU: The space inside, I used to write things on the inside of the pot. I haven't done that now.

MR. WILLIAMS: What did you used to write? Such as-

MS. TAKAEZU: "Peace" or something. I didn't want people to read it anyway. They asked me, I said "I don't know," because I don't really know what I was going to write anyway. But I haven't done recently. But the part about big pieces, very interesting making it, you have to be on a scaffold 72 inches tall, 30 inches in diameter. I have to have one man who would be working with me-

MR. WILLIAMS: A helper.

MS. TAKAEZU: -run the pedal, because the pedal can't come up that high. So we had what are called pedal boy. You say "faster," "slow;" "faster," "slow."

MR. WILLIAMS: These are all thrown pots.

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes. But in the beginning I was still fresh. You can see this thing moving-it doesn't go-it's very slow but it's moving, and I felt all this beckoning to drop into the pot, the sense-

MR. WILLIAMS: You yourself to drop into the pot.

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes, I wanted to go in the pot itself.

MR. WILLIAMS: Did you ever do it, get inside?

MS. TAKAEZU: Are you crazy?

MR. WILLIAMS: No.

MS. TAKAEZU: [Laughs.] That's crazy.

MR. WILLIAMS: You could get in and seal it up and-

MS. TAKAEZU: Make a hole. [Laughs.] But that lasted-so, you know, you can feel your pounding of your heart. It was beating, because it's a frightening experience that, you know, you want to move with the form going, and then, you know, you get dizzy, you want to go in, you know. That sensation was powerful, but I enjoyed it

anyway.

Now, coming back to glazing on the outside-

MR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

MS. TAKAEZU: I feel that I want to be alone with a pot, to put something-I have a form-something to merge the pot and the painting that I'm going to put on. So that to me was very sacred. That's not sacred too much anymore because people are around. And when they talk too much I ask them to leave, because even it looks so simple, your whole body has to be working to even make this big pot.

MR. WILLIAMS: What are you putting on the outside?

MS. TAKAEZU: Glaze.

MR. WILLIAMS: I mean-

MS. TAKAEZU: Texture maybe.

MR. WILLIAMS: Yes, I understand that, but what-in essence, what spirit or aesthetics-

MS. TAKAEZU: I don't have anything; I just do it. Just automatically I want certain things. And I was being pretty fortunate that everything turned out good once-the big piece cracking in shipping-packing-being transferred here, but outside of that I was lucky with the glaze.

MR. WILLIAMS: Have you ever written on the outside of the pots or-

MS. TAKAEZU: No, nothing.

MR. WILLIAMS: It's always glaze?

MS. TAKAEZU: Glaze and brush.

MR. WILLIAMS: But no indentation of any kind.

MS. TAKAEZU: No.

MR. WILLIAMS: Just the color and the form of the color?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm, that's it.

MR. WILLIAMS: Are you painting?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, in a way because you try to put the brush and you move around so you could see the whole thing-not all at once but when you move: can see, can see, can see. So it's all connected in a way. And I've made-the more recent things, I made *The Three Graces* [1994] and *The Mother* [1990].

MR. WILLIAMS: In form or in texture?

MS. TAKAEZU: Form.

MR. WILLIAMS: Form.

MS. TAKAEZU: So, very abstract so you can't tell, but *The Three Graces*. And they're almost the same-I gave one set of *Three Graces* to Tang Museum, which is at Skidmore College [Saratoga Springs, NY]. So they have that; that's the best. When I put up the show we had that one. To me it was so great I wish I had one for myself. I'm trying to make one, a smaller one. So the time has come for me not to get the scaffolding so high to make 72 inches, because you have to know your capacity.

MR. WILLIAMS: If you fall off it's a long ways down.

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes. Be very careful. If I make 50 inch I still have help. With one person-one apprentice that I had, we worked together very well. He sees things, says, I think this; I say, okay, let's try. And I make sketch, so he says, I think it should go in. So we work together very well. Really-

MR. WILLIAMS: What do the Three Graces mean to you? Why did you call them *Three Graces*?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, it's-what is it now? The three graces-two graces are love, beauty, and what's the other one?

MS. [Unknown Voice]: Wisdom, I think?

MS. TAKAEZU: Something like that.

MR. WILLIAMS: From Greek mythology.

MS. TAKAEZU: Greek mythology, and the names are all in Greek, too.

MR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

MS. TAKAEZU: And I read a book somewhere that Sophia was the mother of the Three Graces, but I find otherwise when we check. She's not Sophia, but I really want Sophia to be the mother and Zeus the father. So I have one-I don't call it Sophia anymore because when you-Three Graces are the Greek names, then you keep the Greek mother name. Kind of nice to have Sophia as the mother. I read in one place that Sophia was the mother of Three Graces. That's not important anyway.

MR. WILLIAMS: The large forms are ones that you made for many years. Are you still making those forms?

MS. TAKAEZU: The latest one was last year or maybe two years ago, and there's one that's finished-the last one's finished, and it went to Hawaii for an auction sale for fundraising. It's called *Autumn Song* in Japanese.

MR. WILLIAMS: So when you come down off the scaffolding, will the pots be smaller? Will they be flatter? What will they be?

MS. TAKAEZU: When you're up there, it doesn't seem as though it's going to be big. When you come down you say, ah, and you're surprised that it's pretty big.

MR. WILLIAMS: How do you get them into the kiln?

MS. TAKAEZU: They have the wheel that comes-the kiln that comes out. And there's one guy that's always there, so they bisque-fire. And then the following time I go, I glaze. And then he has it already set so they can put-I don't know what they put on the carrier-they put on the carrier. They go up that way and they put it right into the kiln. They move it in such a way-

MR. WILLIAMS: So one pot in the kiln.

MS. TAKAEZU: One pot in the kiln. Sometimes it is smaller-they have some smaller ones, which they feel is better to have more than one piece.

MR. WILLIAMS: Has color ever been an important factor in the glazing?

MS. TAKAEZU: Oh, yeah.

MR. WILLIAMS: What colors and why?

MS. TAKAEZU: I like the blues, but I like the earth ones-earth colors also. I like some of the pinks that I've been doing, but you use a lot of barium so you can't put it on plates so much. And the blue is the same thing. I have one blue-maybe you can see-that I have that's cracked on the bottom so it has to be mended.

But I like colors; I've always liked colors because in some ways it's like you're painting on it.

MR. WILLIAMS: Are you interested in salt firing or wood firing, or any of those things?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm, I'm interested, but I don't have the facility for that. But I'm always invited to participate, yeah. And this man named Dan Anderson, who has had a good kiln in Peters Valley [Peters Valley Craft Education Center, Layton, NJ]. I was working there-did some stuff for me.

MR. WILLIAMS: He was coming here recently, wasn't he?

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes, Dan came here recently. He came here to help me, but he really wanted to make some pieces, so he made-in the 10 days he was here he made the clay that he made, and he packed it and took it home and he had it bisque-fired. It was in a show, and I think it's in the Internet.

MR. WILLIAMS: Your work has changed a great deal in your career. Which elements of it are you-do you feel have been most successful in that context? Do you like the larger ones best?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, you know, some of the smaller things are growing stronger. It has qualities that the big ones may not. The big ones are big and sometimes if it's bad it's worse.

MR. WILLIAMS: So scale does not necessarily mean good.

MS. TAKAEZU: No, but I wanted to try because I want the action of glazing to be so that you can realize the space. But then I knew I wanted to do that and I knew that if I don't do it at that time that I'll never make it. So, you know, there's always time for something that-when you feel anything you have to pursue it.

MR. WILLIAMS: Where do your ideas come from?

MS. TAKAEZU: Everything.

MR. WILLIAMS: Such as?

MS. TAKAEZU: Everything that you see is beautiful, even you don't say if you like it I think it goes into you, and that's how I feel. And everything-like, to me the garden plays an important role in my life. Even the potatoes that you see I think are so beautiful. And you do that too, don't you?

MR. WILLIAMS: The form of-

[Audio break.]

MR. WILLIAMS: You were talking about-

MS. TAKAEZU: About the plants.

MR. WILLIAMS: Plants.

MS. TAKAEZU: Like the cabbage, for instance. You can see now they're beautiful; the leaves are beautiful and they look like green roses. And the poppies; when I have poppies and I have tree peonies, they're so beautiful, and I have a feeling that it's very hard for me to move from here because I think the tree peonies are beckoning me to stay.

And also, the three things-to me it doesn't make any difference-there is no difference between your work, your cooking and the garden. They're all the same. You have to put yourself into it. The result won't happen unless you are in it. I don't like people to pull weeds if I don't like them, if they just pull weeds for the sake of pulling them. I told my nephew-it was grandnephew-I said, you pull weeds to really actually free the other ones that you want, so it should be beautiful. I don't think he caught on, but I think he did it. So we can't plant seeds and say, grow. I think you have to change part of yourself. I like the idea of using my hands transplanting, but I let him do it now.

MR. WILLIAMS: Do political or social interests affect your work in any way?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, I'm sad at what's happening so it may be affecting my work.

MR. WILLIAMS: Well, what is happening?

MS. TAKAEZU: The political situation.

MR. WILLIAMS: Here or in Iraq?

MS. TAKAEZU: Here in our country.

MR. WILLIAMS: In our country.

MS. TAKAEZU: Yeah. And it affects my work because I knew that people are suffering. You feel the same way for them, so you know-

MR. WILLIAMS: What aspect of the suffering especially bothers you, children or women or-

MS. TAKAEZU: Children are starving- MR. WILLIAMS: Yes. MS. TAKAEZU: -and you do the best you can but you can't help them all; you only can do the best you can.

MR. WILLIAMS: Do you contribute to social services or send pots to-

MS. TAKAEZU: I send pots to people who want for auction, for their own benefit, but I maintain certain price that if they can't maintain that they have to return it. And a lot of places sometimes I give three or four away. Now Arizona State [Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ] would like to have one-I gave them one, but they want another one, and Archie Bray Foundation [Helena, MT] just about every year, and Biemens [ph]. But mostly it's easy to give money; you don't have to pack or ship. But they get more from the pot. But, you know, I like to give

money where they have-I mean, to help the starving. And also you can't give to them all because they get the address and I get so many.

MR. WILLIAMS: What particular service do you contribute to most easily, the Salvation Army or-

MS. TAKAEZU: I don't do the Salvation Army or the Red Cross now. I'd rather give to people that are starving and I think Red Cross is doing okay. I used to every year. CARE-help McDonald-Ronald McDonald House, people are sick and the parents have a place to stay.

MR. WILLIAMS: Do you know the Empty Bowl people?

MS. TAKAEZU: I used to help them. Remember? They were at the-

MR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

MS. TAKAEZU: -workshop? And they started also in Santa Fe and at Skidmore. And I have the bowls but it's hard to-takes time to pack. If they would write again I would send them.

MR. WILLIAMS: I'll tell them.

What are the most powerful influences on your work in terms of people or art movements, technological advances? What kinds of things have impacted your work that-

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, I you know-curiosity.

MR. WILLIAMS: Very good.

MS. TAKAEZU: That's one word I can say, because you want to know what would happen; you're curious what's going to happen, what you do. I'm interested in playing with glazes to see what application you can have one on top of the other, what happens to that. I don't even measure sometimes; I just apply things and see, almost like palette. I brush it on; pour it on.

MR. WILLIAMS: You spend a lot of time experimenting with glazes.

MS. TAKAEZU: Yep, and the problem is lots of times I don't write it down. If I write it down I can't figure it out. So, you know-

MR. WILLIAMS: I know the feeling.

MS. TAKAEZU: And then I like to have it so that if I have a glaze-so I don't know what to do. I put another glaze and put it together and mix it up-we don't even measure-and just apply it and see what happens. And then you wonder. People ask; I say, I don't know.

When I give demonstration glazing, I don't let them write it down. Just watch-just the possibility that you can investigate on your own. So I say, this glaze, I'm going to do this, and this I'm going to do-and later on I'm going to paint with a brush. You just see that and have in your mind what they could do to make something. So sometimes they don't listen and they write anyway. And some people are smart; they can catch on and they can experiment on their own.

MR. WILLIAMS: What about some of the movements: abstract expressionism or anything like that have changed the art field?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, expressionist, I think it's kind of interesting in a way. I like the brushstrokes that they've been using in a way-in some ways, like [Robert] Motherwell and a few others, because the brush that you use-and I think they've been influenced by the Japanese in a way. And this comes naturally in a way that-when I was teaching at Haystack someone said, I came to study with you for inspiration and a brushstroke, so I said, brushstroke, you go out and get some, you know, paper and put on the deck and you start a dot at a time, dot, dot, dot, and gradually see if you can play around, which has happened to me anyway. Gradually the swinging is this-has become-now I can just put glaze on like that, the brush design. I'm not doing too well; now I'm getting kind of bored I think. And that inspiration, I told this guy, I wish I can put in a box and give it to you. [Laughs.] He wasn't so happy.

MR. WILLIAMS: It's a wonderful answer. But in terms of the art world and its impact on you, is there any aspect of that that-

MS. TAKAEZU: It hasn't changed me, but I haven't-I can see some beauty in some of the things if I feel that they're really doing from the inside of them.

MR. WILLIAMS: Such as?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, you could see that what they have gone through to come to this point. And so I cannot say too much because sometimes you get used to and get to like what you didn't like in the beginning, you see so much of it.

MR. WILLIAMS: What makes your work relevant to the world today?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, if they ask me a question-Perimeter [Perimeter Gallery, Chicago, IL] had a secretary who was very curious. She wants everybody to make a statement who belong to this. So I told her-what did I tell her? It was kind of good-that the unknown element that comes from my work without my knowing it, the unknown intangible things that happens, and that makes me want to see if I can do over again to see if I can pursue it and get the perfect piece. It's the unknown, the intangibles.

MR. WILLIAMS: Both inside and outside.

MS. TAKAEZU: Inside I don't think anymore. The inside I always think about beads that shouldn't get stuck. [Laughs.] But the sound.

MR. WILLIAMS: How do you invite the unknown? How do you open up to the unknown?

MS. TAKAEZU: Working. That's all, because I can't use my intellect and say I'm going to do this because it's this. It's just that when you work I think something happens, and that's what I want.

MR. WILLIAMS: And you work freely, not for a museum or an exhibition or for sales.

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes, I didn't think about museums at one time-not museums but galleries. Sometimes they expect you to. For a long, long time I didn't like galleries at all. It took me a long time to even have galleries. The people that-the galleries that I have now, they didn't want to ask me-they were afraid to ask me.

MR. WILLIAMS: What gallery is that?

MS. TAKAEZU: Perimeter. Someone said, there's a gallery in Chicago that wants you. I said, I can't ask-I can't have the gallery unless I ask Perimeter because I know they want me and they haven't asked me, so I'm going to ask them if they want. And they said they did; they were happy. And so they've been supporting me in that way, in many ways.

MR. WILLIAMS: Do you mind working for a gallery? I mean, making your work for sales in a gallery is different from making my work and putting it in a field and letting God see it.

MS. TAKAEZU: I like that one better, but sometimes you know what they want, like they like the blues. They say-

MR. WILLIAMS: I want the blues, yes.

MS. TAKAEZU: Yeah, and I don't mind doing the blues. For a while I was getting sick and tired of the blues, but I like to make some small things in blues to play around with it, and that seems to be pretty good for them.

And so-and then someone told me, you should have a gallery in New York City, so I invited someone who knew Charles Cowles, and I said, could you have Charles Cowles come for lunch? And then he came to see some of my work. So I invited him, but he was the one that is supposed to make the decision. So now I have two galleries and I don't want any more.

MR. WILLIAMS: The second one aside from Perimeter is-

MS. TAKAEZU: Charles Cowles Gallery-

MR. WILLIAMS: Charles Cowles Gallery.

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm.

MR. WILLIAMS: When did you first start exhibiting work?

MS. TAKAEZU: You know, at Princeton, every year. You have to like to list the things that you have accomplished for the year. You do a workshop here, you write down; you have exhibition here.

MR. WILLIAMS: Publish or perish.

MS. TAKAEZU: I didn't think it meant that much to them anyway, but I wrote it down so that they would know

that what I did-my salary didn't get any better or anything like that. But I thought-I was kind of curious whether you get in or not, in an exhibition, and so I tell people, it doesn't matter whether you got in or not because the piece doesn't change.

MR. WILLIAMS: Have you been rejected from-

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm.

MR. WILLIAMS: -museum galleries?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm.

MR. WILLIAMS: Does it make you angry?

MS. TAKAEZU: When I was younger, I did. I said, how come they didn't take my work, or something like that. You know, this not why-we were all trying to get into Syracuse Exhibition [Syracuse International Exhibition, Syracuse, NY] at that time, and that was a big thing for us. And Horan also put in, and a few older students put in. And I got in several times, but, you know, you really want to be in it.

MR. WILLIAMS: What are some of the major exhibitions you've had that are important, both from the point of view of what you put in and their impact on the field?

MS. TAKAEZU: The one in Japan; the traveling-traveling ["Retrospective," 1995, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan]-

MR. WILLIAMS: Who sponsored that?

MS. TAKAEZU: The government.

MR. WILLIAMS: But why did they choose you?

MS. TAKAEZU: Because I was in Japan, and I thought, this is-it is very important that I have-because my parents are from Japan, so they go around and I go back to that and it's a full circle. So, from that point of view, I was interested, and Noguchi tried to help me get into a gallery in-you know, [Hiroshi] Teshigahara's flower arranging [*ikebana*]. His son was head because he died and a sister died, and Noguchi had some of his-he did the interior and said, go and see Hiroshi. He arranged it for me to go and see Hiroshi. This is my work. And then I told Noguchi anyway, you know that place that they're going to put my pieces? They don't need anything, because that's already a piece of sculpture. And then they said they would have a show if I-but I have to pay shipping. I didn't have any money, so I didn't pursue.

But then I had my former student from Cleveland, who was in my class, and he needed-and he was interpreter for Mr. Kaneshige, and he took my class, and apparently he needed an A, and I don't usually give A, but he did a lot of things for the school, for the department, being an interpreter and entertaining, and he made a couple of good pieces, so apparently I gave an A, that's what he tells the story. He died recently; so it's too bad. He decided that I helped him go and get his masters degree in Oklahoma. "It's my turn," he said. I went into Japan looking for him. He said, "I'm going to try and get the director or curator in Kyoto National Museum to have your show," and that's how it started. And so we had it in four different places. But it's a retrospective show, so that was good.

MR. WILLIAMS: Did you sell anything?

MS. TAKAEZU: None. It wasn't for sale-for sale. And then I had a show at Honolulu Academy ["Toshiko Takaazu 1950-1980," 1993, Honolulu Academy of Art, Honolulu, Hawaii] and the Contemporary Museum ["Toshiko Takaazu 1980-1992," 1993, The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, HI] simultaneously in another place ["Toshiko Takaazu: 1950-1992," Hui No'eau Visual Arts Center, Makawao, HI]-two places. And Contemporary Museum I sold some smaller pieces; they were interested in selling, but they take only 10 percent, so I did that, and that was important. And what other place is important? Quite a few other places.

MR. WILLIAMS: The Craft Museum and-

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes, the Craft Museum [American Craft Museum, New York, New York] took right after it came from Japan and went to four different places, and that's the end [Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK; Nathan H. Wilson Center for the Arts, Florida Community College at Jacksonville, FL; Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AR].

MR. WILLIAMS: The pieces from Japan came here?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm.

MR. WILLIAMS: Why did you label every one "collection of the artist?"

MS. TAKAEZU: Not every piece. There were very many. There's people-Amy Russell was the one that-the green heart that she did, that traveled. I thought we should let her know that it was in a major exhibition. She's a very good friend and she also went to Cranbrook with me; a very good friend. It was her piece that we had to borrow anyway, so when you borrow you put the name on. And in Japan, Katsi [ph], the one they got me to help-he had his pieces that he had his name on. So it's that way.

Sometimes the collectors become celebrities-powerful. And I don't write all the people that bought my pieces, even there-who know.

MR. WILLIAMS: Do you have a favorite dealer, or someone who you worked with for a long time?

MS. TAKAEZU: You mean the museum-the galleries? Perimeter.

MR. WILLIAMS: Yes, Perimeter?

MS. TAKAEZU: Yeah, mm-hmm. They're my first gallery and they are-in fact, through him I gave 14 pieces of the big pieces for the Racine Museum [Racine Art Museum, Racine, WI], which is recently opened.

MR. WILLIAMS: Racine, Wisconsin?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm.

MR. WILLIAMS: How nice.

MS. TAKAEZU: And I do want the set-you know, the whole set of the Star series [1999-2000], which was in Tang Museum plus also in Neuberger Museum [Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York, Purchase, NY].

MR. WILLIAMS: Neuberger.

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm, in New York-Purchase, New York.

MR. WILLIAMS: Neuberger.

MS. TAKAEZU: And so, they have the whole series, 14 of them. The last two-last three I sent recently. That one I did not want to sell any. Someone wanted to buy one. It doesn't mean they're going to buy, but I said, no, it should stay in a set. And when I gave it to them there were no strings attached except making sure, one, the main was the Star series. And number two, you could have the Star series and *The Dark Companion* [1999-2000]. And number three, there's another one-three, you could have. And then I would prefer the whole thing be shown. I think there was five different sets that I described and said that if they're going to split it, it shouldn't be in that order because they go together.

MR. WILLIAMS: The titles are wonderful: *The Dark Companion*.

MS. TAKAEZU: That's a name of the-that's a name of the-

MR. WILLIAMS: What does that mean?

MS. TAKAEZU: Because Sirius has a dark companion in the back that they don't see except-

MR. WILLIAMS: The star.

MS. TAKAEZU: -yeah-at certain times when the Nile floods, that comes out. And the Dogon tribes knew all of these things, and they didn't disclose until they got someone who could write for the *Scientific* magazine, I think, and that's how we got all the names.

MR. WILLIAMS: So you read a lot?

MS. TAKAEZU: I didn't. I know someone who knew about the stars, and so when he told me about the-I said we have one and it looks by itself, and I said-and he said, there's one called-he didn't say the word *Po tolo* [Dogon name for Sirius B] but he said, there's a dark companion. I said, I have a piece just right, so I named it *Dark Companion*.

MR. WILLIAMS: *Dark Companion*. What does the piece look like?

MS. TAKAEZU: The piece looks like-the whole set-I'll show you a catalogue and you can see that. It looks very

good because it can go from one star-you have all kinds of meaning to each stars, and that has to be written down somewhere. We're going to have someone print that out from Racine Museum because they want to show that show-piece in about a year, year and a half.

MR. WILLIAMS: Is it an enclosed form or a large piece? Glazed with brushes?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm. Those are the pieces that I want the people to see because it will be away, can't be seen anymore, and that makes a difference because in the gallery they are interested in selling. This one I wasn't interested in selling. And so I'm glad that-and Perimeter Gallery is connected with Racine in a way because the woman who has the gallery or is the head of the museum is Johnson Wax daughter.

MR. WILLIAMS: Karen [Johnson Boyd]?

MS. TAKAEZU: Karen.

MR. WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. Are you a close friend of hers?

MS. TAKAEZU: I feel that I am close to her, yes, because she gave a lot of her pieces, and I thought, if she gave a lot of her pieces I think I should donate to her interest. And so I asked Perimeter, what do you think? And they thought it was a good idea, so they got in touch with the director of Racine Museum called the name of Bruce Pepich. And was he in Japan with you in judging a show?

MR. WILLIAMS: I don't remember the name.

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, Bruce Pepich was really taken by it, so he came-I said, well, we have 10 but I found another one that goes with it, 11, and I found three more to make the whole set complete. I had one that's like a twin, two the same size, and I had the piece. And then I have the black one that I put in, so there are 14 of them. So that's a big, major collection they're going to have.

MR. WILLIAMS: When will that be shown?

MS. TAKAEZU: I think next September, October, when they have SOFA, at that time.

MR. WILLIAMS: Are we all going out to see it?

MS. TAKAEZU: I hope so.

MR. WILLIAMS: Okay.

MS. TAKAEZU: Um-hmm. I'd like to have you see it, the whole thing. And then I have other pieces that are called-oh, I have some pieces that I made called *Honoring Tetragonolobus* [1979]-in this way here, four sections. And I have one piece there. And that idea came when I heard that there was plant that the third-world countries used, and they can use every part of it. So they can use-so that I cut the beans in half-the beans like this here, you cut that in half and they're in sections like this here. And all the seeds are in-so that's what-in homage to Tetragonolobus. I did that because of the third-world countries.

MR. WILLIAMS: How do you spell that, please?

MS. TAKAEZU: Tetra-T-E-T-E-T-E-R-A-T-R-A-gono-G-O-N-O-L-O-B-I-S, gonolobus. It sounds like a disease.

MR. WILLIAMS: All one word?

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes. In homage to tetragonolobus. And that came because of third-world countries who are benefiting [from] this. So when different ideas come, and that one that came.

MR. WILLIAMS: Many people have written about your work, of course, even some critics perhaps. What do they say about your work on the whole?

MS. TAKAEZU: I don't read-I don't know. I don't pay attention too much.

MR. WILLIAMS: You don't pay attention.

MS. TAKAEZU: You can find them out. There can be a lot of newspaper all over. And so, it doesn't change my work, for one thing. [Laughs.]

MR. WILLIAMS: Do you have a favorite critic, a person who's written about you? Aside from me, of course.

MS. TAKAEZU: You know, the one critic who really knows my work is Jeff Schlanger, and he can put it beautifully.

MR. WILLIAMS: You and Jeff have been friends for many years.

MS. TAKAEZU: Because we used to go and see Maija Grotell—we used to drive together and go out to see her. And we were the two that she, I think, realized that—that she could trust. I knew she could trust me.

MR. WILLIAMS: And of course you published the book on Maija Grotell [Jeff Schlanger and Toshiko Takaezu. *Maija Grotell: Works Which Grow From Belief*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1996].

MS. TAKAEZU: Yes, we did. I did send a box to Chautauqua—you know Chautauqua [Chautauqua Institution, Chautauqua, NY]? And I have to be a speaker.

MR. WILLIAMS: How nice.

MS. TAKAEZU: That's why I'm working on slides. I know I said I'm going to show my video, and he was the head—the president is a really good friend, I would say—Scott McVay, who was the president of—director of Geraldine Dodge Foundation, that gives money. And when he left after 25 years he got this job as president of Chautauqua, and he's having all kinds of people go there.

MR. WILLIAMS: Wonderful.

MS. TAKAEZU: Yeah.

MR. WILLIAMS: Is it a college or an institute?

MS. TAKAEZU: It's an institute that they have for the summer or whole year to enhance art and religion and whatever. So anybody can go and stay there. The town has all kinds of places where you can stay.

MR. WILLIAMS: Chautauqua, New York?

MS. TAKAEZU: Yeah. So I'm going for the first day on third of July. It takes about six to seven hours to get there, and then we—the following day at 10:45 just give my lecture. At 12:00, I have to be finished, and people can ask questions. They want that period for the people to ask questions. But the video that I have is self-explanatory, so they don't have to ask questions. Everything I said probably—not about the inside of a piece. And I said—I kept it for a long, long time; I didn't disclose the expression that I used until fairly recent. I mean, you know, who cares about your inner-of a pot?

MR. WILLIAMS: Tell me a little about *American Craft*. It has changed, I'm sure, a great deal in the years that you have been acquainted with it. How has it changed, and was that a good idea or not a good idea?

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, people are changing so I guess it's a good idea from that point of view, and they have their own ways of doing it. Whether we understand or not is not my problem.

MR. WILLIAMS: And what does that change in your mind?

MS. TAKAEZU: They have—they want to be different.

MR. WILLIAMS: More arty?

MS. TAKAEZU: Yeah, supposedly arty.

MR. WILLIAMS: Less function?

MS. TAKAEZU: Less function is correct. Less physical function but maybe aesthetic function, I don't know. To them they must have it. And they have ideas, these conceptions—they must have some ideas. And those conceptions, unless they explain to me, sometimes I can't understand. So, I mean, I'm an old hat that, you know, passed that kind of period.

MR. WILLIAMS: But what's happened to the old verities of beauty and function and symbolic usage that we used to associate with—

MS. TAKAEZU: So that's how it was at one time because there was a function that we needed, but now—

MR. WILLIAMS: We don't need it?

MS. TAKAEZU: We do need it, so there are parts of this doing it for function, and they're making a living through that. And there are others—they may still do both, I'm not too sure. But the bizarre it gets seems to be more attractive or more accepted by the critics or by the collectors. So—

MR. WILLIAMS: Is the collector driving the field then?

MS. TAKAEZU: I think they do. The higher they pay they know the collection gets better. And then galleries are sometimes good and bad. It's very bad when they use that as something that we should be doing, and when people go and see it, that's what they think should be done. Whether it's good or not, they may just do it because that's what's selling. That's the kind of, you know-sometimes I wonder about the role of the galleries.

MR. WILLIAMS: What is your position in the field, do you think? Where do you stand?

MS. TAKAEZU: My position is keep on working-just work the way I feel. And then, you know, I might be penalized for making all these things because, you know, I can't get rid of all of them; I have so much. And I'm curious-maybe one will turn out good out of this year because-

MR. WILLIAMS: But you're highly regarded in the field.

MS. TAKAEZU: Well, who knows? I don't know that-

MR. WILLIAMS: But I know it. [Laughs.]

MS. TAKAEZU: -because I'm doing my own work, they regard that as being accepted.

MR. WILLIAMS: But is it becoming more acceptable because you are considered more abstract rather than functional?

MS. TAKAEZU: I think they accept me because I don't change for the sake of change, and it doesn't make any difference that I have to pursue my own direction. It all happened from the beginning, with form/function, that it started to grow on its own. It's going to me naturally, and the belief is natural. So it's-I'm not playing games, in other words, or I don't think I am. They may think I am because they think that maybe that will sell, or they're-but I like the idea of having-this last statement that I made is the one that I can continue. Look at Peter [Voulkos]; he had definite and strong statement, and he continued doing that, and [Paul] Soldner did that, and Jim Mason is doing that.

MR. WILLIAMS: And what is your statement?

MS. TAKAEZU: My statement is doing what I want and doing the form that I have come to a conclusion that this is mine.

MR. WILLIAMS: Which is?

MS. TAKAEZU: Have a closed form.

MR. WILLIAMS: A closed form?

MS. TAKAEZU: Mm-hmm. That's what I feel, that it has come from, you know, gradually, and it came to this naturally. And so, if I have criticism I accept it, I don't give a damn, because I can't change my way because whether they like it or not, they're not going to change my life.

MR. WILLIAMS: Is that the-

MS. TAKAEZU: I'm too old to change, anyway. I mean, you know, when you get to be 80, you have to do what you want anyway, and I have been doing that a long [laughs].

MR. WILLIAMS: Is that the advice you would give to young people: do what you want to do and don't always change?

MS. TAKAEZU: No, I don't want to give advice to anybody because I don't know what preceded their work or what they think or what background they have. But I can say that they must have a mentor of some kind that has touched them, and to be able to do what they really think is honest. If they are honest enough to want to make functional things, there is something very beautiful about that and I accept that. And I think that's great because that's-so, what to believe in and what to continue what to believe in-but enjoy-everything is given you-whatever you see-you are touched by everything, whether you know it or not. If you see beautiful flowers, you're thanking-and I feel that, to me, there is another element that I can't pinpoint that is helping me.

MR. WILLIAMS: Which is what?

MS. TAKAEZU: I don't know.

MR. WILLIAMS: Still to come.

MS. TAKAEZU: The other, you know, a superior being or something that is helping you. So you don't know; I think you just have to be yourself, really. So everything can make an impression, anything you see: beautiful flowers, beautiful plant, beautiful house, everything. I think everything is giving you some idea that you can go on your own.

MR. WILLIAMS: Are you happy with who you are and what you have done with your life?

MS. TAKAEZU: You bet I'm happy. [Laughs.] The only thing is I'm tired of working and I'm enjoying working also, because there is so much you can do. There are so many things-I want to get into huge sculpture and I can't do it, but I will show you the last sculpture that I did, because I don't think I can make good clay anymore. You make a piece and-I made a piece and they have enlarged it, and I said, I can't work with clay that big anymore so make a six-footer. And I thought it was ghastly. I thought, oh, what am I going to do with this piece? I ordered three; you pay a mint for it. But now that I put the patina on, I'm pretty pleased with it. I'm sort of accepting-

MR. WILLIAMS: It's metal?

MS. TAKAEZU: Bronze.

MR. WILLIAMS: Bronze?

MS. TAKAEZU: Yeah.

MR. WILLIAMS: Wonderful. No regrets? Would you do anything over again?

MS. TAKAEZU: I wouldn't, no. I think I was destined to be what I am, so I think I, you know, I'd probably do the same thing. Who knows?

There goes the bell; can we stop for lunch?

[Audio break.]

MR. WILLIAMS: This concludes the taped conversation with Toshiko Takaezu in her home in Quakertown, New Jersey. She had wanted me to include some additional material, in terms of a chronology of her life and work, and had sent me a small brochure from the Hunterdon Museum of Art in New Jersey, which is a chronology of her career and work, and I would like to read directly from this for these taped proceedings.

Toshiko Takaezu was born June 17, 1922, in Pepeekeo, Hawaii. In 1940 she begins to work for the Hawaii Potter's Guild. 1948 to '51 she attended the University of Hawaii and studied clay with Claude Horan. 1951 to '54, attends Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan; she studies clay with Maija Grotell. 1952, she is a recipient of the McInerney Foundation grant. 1953, becomes Maija Grotell's assistant. 1955-56, visits Japan for eight months, meets folk artists/potters Hamada, Rosanjin, and Kaneshige. 1955 to '64, she is a faculty member and head of the Ceramics Department, Cleveland Museum-Institute of Art. 1957, participates in Asilomar, American Craftsmen's Council's first annual conference. 1959, had a solo exhibition at the Cleveland Institute of Art. 1962, received Founder's Society Award, Michigan Artists Craftsmen Show, Pemco Award, Syracuse. 1964, receives the Tiffany Foundation grant, establishes studio in Clinton, New Jersey. 1966, had a solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Center in Honolulu. 1967 to 1992, she was a faculty member of Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

In 1973, she had a solo exhibition at the Hunterdon Art Center, Clinton, New Jersey; 1975 establishes studio and home in Quakertown, New Jersey. She was elected fellow of the American Crafts Council that year.

[End Tape 1, Side B.]

In 1979 she had an exhibition at the New Jersey State Museum; 1980 she receives the National Endowment for the Arts fellowship. In 1986 receives the first New Jersey Governor's Award. 1987 received an honorary Ph.D. from Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon. She also received a Living Treasure Award, Honolulu, Hawaii. 1988 she had a solo exhibition at Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey. 1989 to '90, a solo exhibition, the Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, Princeton, New Jersey.

In 1991, solo exhibition at Cranbrook Academy, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. 1992 receives and honorary degree, Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She also receives the Howard Behrman Award at Princeton University. 1993 receives an honorary doctorate of Human Letters, the University of Hawaii, Honolulu. 1994 received New Jersey Pride Award from *New Jersey Monthly* magazine. She receives the Gold Medal Award, American Craft Center, New York, New York. She receives the Human Treasure Award, the University of North Carolina, Wilmington.

1995-'96, a traveling exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto, Japan; the gallery of the city of Naja, Okinawa, Japan; the Takaoka Museum, Takaoka, Japan; and Seta Ceramics Museum, Nagoya, Japan. In 1996 she received an honorary doctorate of Fine Arts, Princeton, University. 1997, a traveling exhibition: the Philbrook Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma; Jacksonville Junior College, Florida; the Arkansas Craft Museum, Little Rock, Arkansas; the American Craft Museum, New York, New York; and a solo exhibition at the Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, New York. In 1998 she received an honorary doctorate of Fine Arts at the Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

This concludes the written chronology of Toshiko's work and life. I'll just end this taped conversation with a short statement by Sandy Grotta, the curator for the Hunterdon Museum of Art Exhibition that Toshiko had held.
Quote from Sandy Grotta:

"Toshiko Takaezu's work has long passed its ultimate test: the test of time. It has stood up when it was done, it stands up today, and it is sure to stand up in the future. Built on a firm foundation of experience, her work is subtle, no matter how large, and strong, no matter how small. It perfectly reflects the very special person who created it."

This is the end of the conversation and recording by Gerry Williams on Toshiko Takaezu.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...March 2, 2006