



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

**Oral history interview with Anne Currier, 2006  
May 22-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.**

**Contact Information**  
Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Anne Currier on May 2 and 24, and June 16, 2006. The interview took place at the Artist's studio in Scio, New York, and was conducted by Mary Drach McInnes 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.

Anne Currier and Mary Drach McInnes 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

MARY DRACH MCINNES: This is Mary Drach McInnes interviewing Anne Currier at the artist's studio in Scio, New York, on May 22, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Thank you, Anne, for coming and agreeing to be interviewed. What I thought we would do is perhaps spend our first session talking a little bit about your background and about your education and your early work, and then move into conversations about your practice later on, okay?

ANNE CURRIER: Okay.

MS. MCINNES: Good. Could you tell us when and where you born?

MS. CURRIER: I was born on December 13, 1950, in Louisville, Kentucky, the first child of Mary Ann Ebert Currier and Lionel Francis Currier, who happened to have met on a blind date—[laughs]—and took the bus everywhere because they didn't have a car.

MS. MCINNES: Did you grow up in the city or out in the country?

MS. CURRIER: I grew up in the city. And here is a little interesting anecdote. My mother, who went to the Chicago Academy of Fine Art [Chicago, IL], which at the time in the '40s was a commercial art school, and it may still be. She was working for a department store in Louisville, Kentucky, and my dad was a bridge engineer working for the Louisville National Railroad.

They were engaged. This was, what, '48, I guess. And they went to a home show. They had a drawing. One night it was for a car; another night it was for a model home. And like I said, they took the bus, or the trolley, whatever. And the night they got to the home show, they were there for the wrong night; it was a night for the home. So they bought tickets, and my mom won the 1949 or '48 model home. [They laugh.] Can you believe it?

MS. MCINNES: No.

MS. CURRIER: Being, like, 21, 22 years old. Winning a home. It was kind of like a little Cape Cod style. It was Indiana limestone, and it had the requisite gray and magenta tiles in the bathroom, you know. So they were lucky, you know, to start off with a home.

So anyway, I was born in 1950. And then I have two sisters who were born in '52 and '55. I don't

know how much little anecdotal history you want me to give.

MS. MCINNES: It's interesting to hear about your father being an engineer. How do you think your parent's professions may have influenced you? I mean, did you grow up with a sense of architecture—

MS. CURRIER: No, not a sense of architecture, but when I mentioned my dad was a bridge engineer, that always seems to be a clue that people want to pick up on that had something to do with some of that sense of strict, kind of precision that my work has. You know, what they talk about, whether it's your genes or your culture, you know.

MS. MCINNES: Nature or nurture.

MS. CURRIER: Nature or nurture. What was really great is my mom was an artist. And when I think back on it, I think, in a way, my parents were probably pretty liberal, although they were very disciplined and strict, you know. But I can always remember that there were crayons, that the kitchen floor was always the place where—you know, the kitchen table and the kitchen floor was where you did your projects. And my mom would save the junk mail, like, these letters that would come, because they are only printed on one side. And she had a slot in a cabinet, and it was kept flat, and we went in there, and that was our—you know, you drew on the back of that stuff.

And because she was a commercial artist, the older I got, if I needed quill pens or ink or anything like that—we were always encouraged to pursue talents. You know, we were given piano lessons. My sisters had dance lessons. I think it's the thing that, I mean, you do with your kids. The Gills [John and Andrea Gill] do it with their kids. You know, it's what you do for your kids to make things better, probably, than what they had.

So, now, my dad, back in the '60s, like, where people would read novels, my dad would get calculus books. He would play with his slide ruler, and he would bring blueprints home. So all of that stuff was there. You know, the images of the blueprints, the images that were in the books—

The other thing I have to give some credit to - I just now thought of it—was that my mom was doing illustrations of furniture for this—it was a company department store called Stewards. And she did their furniture ads. You know, so that use of perspective, that sense of geometry, angles. So, I don't know, Mary, it was all there. And I think now even with all of the you-have-to-be-in-at-midnight—[laughs]—going to all-girl's Catholic high school, there were just some things where you really learned to figure out how to get around the nuns. I think that is where some of my—[they laugh]—you know, that is what you learn. But you also learn to write a good—a sentence, you know.

MS. MCINNES: Right, the sense of discipline.

MS. CURRIER: The sense of discipline. Also, I had a really great—Sister Gilbert was the geometry teacher I had in high school. And there was something about just that logic, that sense of being able to take lines and shapes, and how that was projected into space and—I can't remember any of those theorems now. So, I mean, it's not like my work now has anything to do with math or geometry in that kind of calculated, textbook sense.

Anyway, so I think at some point it was pretty clear—I mean, I did all of the posters for the high school plays. I don't think I want to embarrass my high school and tell about—art was remedial—[laughs]. It was a college-prep high school. So art and home ec[onomics], the places where you

made things, the making was second class. That is where the girls who didn't make the high-ranking trigonometry and algebra three—because this school, they tested you. So you pretty much had a sense of where—you know, you were either in the—what's that called when—

MS. MCINNES: It's called tracking.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, but it's like, you were dean's list or that kind of thing. So it was the girls who just didn't test out really good academically that ended up taking the home ec and the art. And I think that, in hindsight, that is very interesting how that school back—now, the school has totally changed in the 30, 40—I graduated from high school in '68. So it's really changed in the past 30 years. But back then, the making things, you know, learning to take materials and either to sew up some underwear or a skirt, or to build something out of clay or whatever, was not really looked on as being intelligent. They wanted you to rank high.

So anyway, so I went to the [School of the] Art Institute of Chicago. My mom and I drove up there, took the train up, and I showed my portfolio to somebody who then accepted me. It was summer '68. I can recall sitting in our kitchen with the doors open, because Louisville, Kentucky, is hot and humid, and it was August, and it was the year of the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Or was that July? Most people don't remember that anymore. But my dad is watching what is going on in Grant Park and everything, and he is going, you're not going there; you're not going there. [They laugh.]

MS. MCINNES: It's such a great school. How did you come to choose that school?

MS. CURRIER: I think because my mom—because she had been at the Chicago Academy, which is the commercial art school, that the Art Institute had this reputation for fine art. And that is where I would be going—you know, painting and drawing - because when you're in high school and working on the kitchen floor—

My parents, when they moved when I was eight years old, my mom designed the house, and she made sure we had an extra-large kitchen, so—where projects—which was great.

But the Art Institute in the '60s had really changed. I mean, it was extremely liberal and open. They didn't have grades; it was all pass-fail. No, it wasn't even that. It was credit. If you didn't get credit for it, it didn't even show up on your transcript, I don't think. I forget what it was.

MS. MCINNES: And did you take ceramics for the first time there?

MS. CURRIER: Well, this is curious because when I got there, I can remember my parents dropping me off. I lived at this place called the Three Yards Club; my mom had lived there back in the '40s. It was a residence at 1300 North Dearborn [Street] for women studying in art. They had to go back to Louisville, and they dropped me off in front of the Art Institute. I'm only 17 years old, but at the same time, I was so happy to get out of Kentucky, I think. I was ready to cry because I'm just dropped off, right, and—well, I'll go back to the Three Yards Club. That is haven; that is safety, right? Because I'm in the middle of Michigan Avenue.

And a bus pulls up, and I say to the guy, do you stop at the corner of Goethe [Street]? And he looks at me, and he goes, say what? And I remember hearing it pronounced Goethe [GER-tuh]. And I said, Goethe, do you stop at Goethe? Oh, yeah; come on, get on. [They laugh.] So—I mean, little things like that.

So then I go to register, and the Art Institute at that time, for freshman, there were requisite classes

you had to take. You had to take drawing, and all of the classes were all day; you know, nine to five, whatever.

So you had to take drawing; you had to take 2-D; you had to take 3-D. Wednesdays, as I recall, were art history, and then you could take an elective. So there is your five days, right? So I said, well, I want to take painting. And the guy says, well, I'm sorry, but all of the painting classes, elective painting classes for freshmen, are full. And I said, well, what can I take? He goes, well, ceramics and weaving are open. [They laugh.] So we can turn back the clock. What if I had chosen fiber? But it's interesting; these are the two materials, the two areas that are craft, and they were the only ones that were open. So freshmen are grabbing up the sculpt—I don't even know what the other electives for freshmen were, but fiber arts and clay were available.

So that is how I got into ceramics; it was default, the fault of my own for not registering sooner—[they laugh]. You know, it was like the lady or the tiger. It was clay or fiber. And then the first day of class it was right on the wheel, which really intrigued me because it was physical. I mean, I had Saturday art classes, which was the coiling and the pinching, which I just hated. I don't know why, but I did. It was the Louisville Art Center [Louisville Center for the Arts]. What was it? My mom taught there. I should be able to remember.

Anyway, there was always somebody who was off on the side. There was one wheel. So it was peripheral. In the high school class, you couldn't go on the wheel; on the Saturday class, you could only do the pinching and the coiling, and whatever.

So I was going through this class, and they have this row of wheels and these bins of clay. And I can remember walking home down Michigan Avenue, down a Magnificent Mile—I. Magnum's, Saks Fifth Avenue - with my overalls, and this—[laughs]—horseshoe of clay, you know, on my inner thighs just from sitting at the wheel throwing, and I don't care. I'm an art student. You know, I have been throwing.

MS. MCINNES: That is great. And was there a teacher at the Art Institute that really directed you, or did that happen in graduate school when you went to the University of Washington [Seattle]?

MS. CURRIER: Well, Bill Farrell had just taken the job at the Art Institute. So he was a freshman faculty, I guess you could say, and I was a freshman. And I just think he was really encouraging. I can remember my crits. See, the problem there was, in hindsight—well, I think not even hindsight; I knew it [all] along, but it was a situation where things weren't really organized. You really had to take care of yourself. It demanded independence, and I learned it the hard way. I mean, I am 17 years old, and these grad students are these big, hulking guys, you know, and I was really intimidated. You were supposed to take your work to a grad student and ask them to, please, bisque it and fire it for you. And I didn't somehow pick up on that.

So at the end of the semester I have got a whole table's worth of work, and Bill Farrell—I can remember him saying this. I thought, well, what the heck. He goes, well, I can tell this person works really hard, and blah, blah, blah. He gave me a really good grade. He goes, but you know what? It's all green. And he pulled over a hopper for reclaim and just took his arm and in one fell swoop it was gone. [Laughs.] I was standing there like, holy moly.

But I took it again—two-by-four in the back of the head—

MS. MCINNES: From him?

MS. CURRIER: No, that is kind of like, duh; dumb, silly me. I signed up and took another class. [Laughs.] But he was encouraging. There was really nothing that you couldn't do. He hired me to maintain the glaze lab, mixing in 30, 40,000 grams of glaze.

So the Art Institute back in the '70s—I mean, I remember my mom looking at me later and saying, I don't even know how you made it; you know, we were in [the] Vietnam [War]. This was '68 to '72. The school was incredibly liberal. Faculty were taking leaves of absence. I remember not having a painting teacher for one semester because he decided he wanted to go off and protest Vietnam or something.

I don't remember it being structured. And at that age, I think—oh, you mean, I don't have to do this? Not having this discipline, which, in hindsight, I really regret. In hindsight, knowing what I know now, I probably would have looked to have found a really good liberal arts university, gotten a pretty basic education about literature and history and the world. We had some—a few classes we had to take through the University of Chicago to meet our basic requirements, you know, English, and psychology, or socio—whatever.

But they were watered down, and we all knew it. But at the same, you know, this was great because you're in your teens, so.

MS. MCINNES: Did you have any important women professors?

MS. CURRIER: There was a woman named Leah Balsham, who I think is still alive. I haven't heard anything that she has passed away. But, you know, Leah, Leah was always the butt of people's jokes. She always did a lot of glaze testing. And I can remember this—you know, there is certain things that you probably have similar situations. She was unloading a kiln, and she walked by, and she showed Bill some glaze tests and she—oh, Bill, look this glaze. He goes, ooh, Leah, God, that is really ugly.

And I can remember looking at that color. It's kind of the same color as my concrete floor here. And she goes, yeah, but, Bill, feel it; I can change the color. And I can remember feeling that glaze; it was like the lobe of your ear.

And there was something about some situations with Leah that I picked up on. In fact, Bill was a pretty—he was a force to contend with. And then there was a guy named Greg Guiseman [ph], who I learned some, like, decals and slip casting [from]. Again, they had the information, but you really had to work to get it. You had to be pretty independent, you know. I think that when I did start teaching, I did everything I could to compensate for what I didn't get. So I had structures, blah, blah, blah, blah—not anymore—oh, I do, but it's different.

But Patti Warashina came and did a workshop. It was funny because I decided, I guess, in my senior year that I wanted to go to grad school. And Bill said, well, if you're going to go to graduate school, you better start making sculpture, which was very strange. This is like 1971. So I think probably the only place that really had pots was Alfred [University, Alfred, NY], and I was not interested in Alfred at all. I mean, I do remember as a freshman seeing slides of Val Cushing's works and being—ah, some of those forms, I wanted to make that.

One of things too, is back in the late '60s - the information that we have available now just with books, with slides; it is all so accessible now. There, you really relied on a faculty, an artist like Farrell knowing someone like [Paul] Soldner, or having a way to get contact—so it was all through—this was kind of like the second generation—excuse me—of artist, of potters, of ceramic, of people

working in clay. And so workshop was—like, you'd call somebody—you know, Don [Reitz]—so you were calling friends; you were calling a friend of a friend.

And so there were these, I think, reciprocal—because I know there wasn't a slide library that I could go to. Ceramics Monthly was there, but you also had Craft Horizons. They were the only two magazines, and they were thin. I remember seeing Val Cushing's work, and then Patti came and did a workshop. Bill somehow knew Patti. She saw my work and, again, as luck would have it, accepted me into graduate school at the University of Washington in Seattle. So I went to Seattle in 1972. And one of my colleagues was Mark Burns.

I was with a group of people—I apologize to all of them out there that I can't really remember. Stanford Sesman [ph]; Joanne Hayakawa was a colleague. She graduated the same year as I did. Mack McGruder [ph]. Mark Burns graduated the same year. I think those were the—it was me, Mack—no, Mack was the second half. It was me, Mark, and Joanne, I think, were the three who had our M.F.A. in '74.

But these are all people who are making work that is really heavy with imagery. Slip casting, you know, color, decoration, whatever term you want to you use. I mean, it was identifiable stuff; it was highly narrative.

MS. MCINNES: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

I am very familiar, as you know, with your work of the last decade. But your early career, you said that Farrell wanted you to get into sculpture. So early on, before you get to graduate school, I have this impression that you are working with sculpture. What kind of sculpture was it?

MS. CURRIER: Well, it was—I think I might have a few images of it—kind of tombstone shape. Like, imagine a bed frame, an arched bed frame that would be flat, that was cut out, but then a soft slab that would puff out of that, and maybe like an E that would have volume to it; it would have [a] shape that would be coming out of it. So you would have these verticals, and then you'd have these horizontal shapes moving out of them. I don't know what I was doing. It was all white. So that was the beginnings of that. That is what—

MS. MCINNES: And the scale? Was it a sort of an intimate scale?

MS. CURRIER: I would say the size of it would be—like, the verticals would probably be about 15, 18 inches, and then they might be two feet going out this way.

MS. MCINNES: Okay, so pedestal size.

MS. CURRIER: Exactly. And that is what is got me into graduate school. Then when I got to graduate school, I tried picking up—just like we tell our students now, just, well, keep making. And I realize I didn't know what the hell I was doing. So what I decided to do was to go back to what I knew from being a freshman—making pots, because at some point I really thought I was going to be a potter. And so I started making cups, but really thinking about where they were sited, so that when you're finished using this thing—so—which is a saucer, and then the saucers got bigger. And then the saucers started kind of coming up on the sides, so you have these half-dome shapes. I was really using slip casting and slab and wheel-thrown parts.

I think back now, how the hell I made those things, because nine times out of 10, I am looking backwards because I would have to shape the container to fit the cup, you know. And they were all white. Patti Warashina couldn't figure out, like, why I didn't decorate. I do remember going to the

local ceramics supply store and buying some Duncan EZ Stroke and Cover-Coat and doing kind of this Art Deco stuff with color. When I started doing the cups, Howard Kottler, who I think probably had—Patti was a really good friend. Patti is 10 years older than I am. I would spend a lot of time over there drinking coffee and just—I would babysit for her kids.

I think what I learned from Patti was a work ethic. Patti was nonstop in terms of—if she'd come in and teach, she would have two kids. She was a single mom. But, man, it was, like, get your work out there, you know. Put it in shows. There is a sense of professionalism that I learned from her. And with Farrell I think it was just, just try it and keep working. So the combination of the two—and just making things accessible.

And I apologize to them if they ever hear this. Is that all I taught you, Anne? But it was a lot, because I think that being an only child, I had my own head. Not an only child, but the first child, you know, which might be pretty close—it might have been a slip—it might be kind of closer that, the first child, you think you're the only child. [Laughs.]

MS. MCINNES: The only who counts. [Laughs.]

MS. CURRIER: [They laugh.] The only one who counts, because I was first. So I knew it was just—I remember, when I was an undergrad, seeing the grad students and thinking, you know, they had access to faculty in a way that the undergrads didn't and just let the people—whatever they're doing, I want to be there. So then I got into grad school, and then I saw Patti. And I saw what Howard was doing. You know, in terms of this professional place. And I thought, I want to be there, too. So I think I've been really fortunate to have some people who were generous. I think it's that sense of generosity that I learned from both of them.

MS. MCINNES: Because, as you've alluded to, their work doesn't look at all like your work.

MS. CURRIER: No.

MS. MCINNES: And yet they had the spirit to encourage you and have you keep going.

MS. CURRIER: Right, right. And I think that sense of generosity, of support, is—because I think somebody like me is, like, I'm going to figure out how to make it. I'm going to do what I—you know. And I'm watching. I had a boyfriend at the time, when I was in Seattle, who had gone to RISD [Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI]. He was in sculpture at RISD, and he really taught me how to make some molds. So just picking up what I needed when I needed it.

So, yeah, I left graduate school doing these all-white—I mean, Howard Kottler mentioned Art Deco. So that was good, but I'd say it was probably five years out of graduate school, when I'm teaching at the University of Colorado at Boulder, that it struck me that it was a problem—that I was—I knew my source. And whenever I got stuck, I remember telling myself—I'd sit in my studio, looking at what I was doing because I was, you know, making these shapes that were really connected to Art Deco forms—I was taking 2-D Art Deco designs and transcribing them three-dimensionally and doing this figure ground black and white. And I can remember, like, damn, if you're going to be doing this the rest of your life, you are in trouble. Because whenever I needed to make new work or whatever, I'd go to this outside source. I was probably 25, 26 at that time. I'm thinking, wow, if this is what you have to keep doing, you're in trouble.

MS. MCINNES: How did you shift your practice at that moment?

MS. CURRIER: I had to ask myself, what are you really making? And the conclusion I came to was



that I was making containers, but they didn't have to be—what was the most basic container that I could come up with, that I could think of? And it was a box; it was a cube. Well, I don't know. When the cylinder - but it was a cube. They had removable lids—so they maintain the exterior sense of a cube, but then there would be recessions. Like, you could imagine a square, and they were all identically eight by eight. I would set these strange kind of limitations or restrictions on myself. So imagine, like, a square but then an L-shape that might project, and there might be another square that would recede in.

George [Currier] and I were together at that point, and I remember him walking into the studio. He would ask me really good questions, which were really challenges to the restrictions that I would place on myself. He'd go, why do you keep making those lids? They sound terrible. Nobody's ever going to use them. He'd go—[they laugh].

You're right. And then he'd say, well, you're putting those recessions, and why don't they just go all the way through—duh. So he's been really good throughout the years. Whenever I give myself this strict thing, he goes, oh, I think that's what's—when he comes to these, says, well, that's what's getting good. You know, like, oh, I'm so pissed off; this isn't coming together. Look at—this doesn't match. He goes, oh, well, I think that's where it's interesting. [They laugh.] And I'm thinking, you devil, damn.

And then I really like that—I was using the ball and talc body, which is kind of greasy. It had a wonderful kind of brownish-gray color to it, and I really like that. Again, Leah Balsham—it was the color of that test tile that Leah Balsham was showing me. And it was the same kind of surface. So I had to figure out, how do I keep this in a fired surface? I only knew commercial glazes and cone 10 from undergrad. So I'd go to the ceramics supply store and get these commercial satin glazes—Duncan glazes—and I'd mix them. Okay, two jiggers of chocolate brown and one jigger of dusty grey—something like that, you know. Until something stopped making those—[laughs]—glazes. So I thought, damn. You know, I never went to Alfred, but I'm going to have to do some glaze calc[ulations]. I'm going to have to figure out how to get this.

And then simple things like realizing that—I'm going to say this. When I first came to Alfred, John Gill came—and Andrea [Gill] came - at the same time. And John and I were both pretty amazed at Alfred, that they didn't have group crits with the grad students. He had been doing group crits with grads at Kent [State University, Kent, OH]; I had been doing group crits with Betty Woodman and Tom Potter in Boulder. They were smaller departments, but still. So John and I decided to do group crits with the second-year grads or first-year grads. And it was outside the curriculum; it was extra time.

And John and I were talking once, and it's like, that semester everything was kind of these dumb, lumpy shapes. And John goes, Anne, he says, you know, it's like everything is this shape; that's dumb. He says, it's like shape in a coma. So we titled that semester, "Shape in a Coma." And then the next semester we did it again. And we were talking, and I realized—I said, John, you realize, I said, they don't even say what color it is. I mean things that are right under your nose. I said, it's like the obscurity of the obvious. That was the term, and then it started coming out in crits. And now—[they laugh]—I'm saying this because I was the initiator of that term—now Wayne has used it as. He's done a couple lectures. Like, he did one in Boston. It was called the "Obscurity of the Obvious."

MS. MCINNES: I remember it.

MS. CURRIER: But I'm injecting that comment now because now we go back to when I'm doing the

boxes. And this is how, I think, my work has progressed. I think that's why I was able to say it to the students, is that it's so easy not to see or contend with what is right under your nose. Again, I'm doing these all white things—what is it that you're really making? It's a container. All right, so I come up with a cube. A cube has right angles. Seems pretty obvious, doesn't it? But then it's like, oh, what if those angles shift? What if it gives a sense that this cube has been pushed? You know, like in cartoons where they see, like, houses are being blown, you know.

So again I think, it's this thing which is really obvious. So let's move the cube. So then these forms started taking on angles. And once they started taking on angles—then I came to Alfred for summer school; Val Cushing invited me in '78. There was an extruder which gave me access to these hollow squares. So I could then build some pieces much more readily, without having to cut all the slabs and everything. So I think from there it was just this progression of how to—but what if they had more than one—you know, how do you make these edges or these sides more complicated? Or, how do I introduce recessions and projections in it? And then it started having associations, say, with origami, things that are collapsible, foldable, things that shift, you know, this shifting of planes, so it took on a reference to tectonics. And that's how it really starts to move into architecture, moves into geology, which I think are associations that other people are layering into the work—which is great; I mean, it's all there.

But just to give you some kind of history of what I think is trying to make less obscure what are obvious things that are happening into the work and then just to act upon them. Because I think that's sometimes the most difficult in art—what's happening here? What are my intentions relative to what's really here? Boy, I sure made a big leap from—[laughs].

MS. MCINNES: As you're talking about your progression from your early work up towards the present, let's touch on two of your passions. First, I know you have a real interest in architectural terra cotta. You did a wonderful show for the International Ceramics Museum in '97, I think ["Defying Gravity: the Fragmented Facades of Architectural Terra Cotta." Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art, New York State College of Ceramics, Alfred University, Alfred, NY, October 1997 - January 22, 1998].

MS. CURRIER: Well, that was interesting, because I remember Margaret Carney coming to the ceramics division, and we were talking about the calendar. This was probably in April, and she had an October slot open. And what we were going to do—and actually it was John Gill's [idea]. John Gill mentioned, he said, well, Anne, you know, you're good friends with the Krouses up at Boston Valley Terra Cotta; could you do something, you know, doing terra cotta? John really had some insight there. And it was his idea, yeah. I called the Krouses, and I went to their graveyard. And, man, that was so much fun, but it was so hard to edit, to figure out what we could do. But that's how that show got started. There was a slot that needed to be filled, and there was no money for the museum. And the Krouses—they donated so much, you know—the transportation, everything, pretty much.

MS. MCINNES: It was a wonderful show. You brought in Susan Tunic as a lecturer, I remember, for that. But where does that passion go back to? I know you've been taking photographs of 19th- and early 20th-century terra-cotta facades and ornamentation for some time.

MS. CURRIER: It goes back to something that was just very real and very pragmatic. Tom Potter took a sabbatical leave. I was at CU-Boulder [University of Colorado, Boulder], and this was, like, 1980. He was teaching a tile class. And very quietly, Tom had one of these—I think it was made in Colombia—one of these paving machines—couldn't call it a machine—totally manual. And he had been tiling his house. I think I would have to put Tom Potter as somebody very quiet but somebody

—he was the first person I worked with, teaching, when I was hired at CU-Boulder. And, man, you know, to have somebody who was there for you, very supportive and encouraging and a good artist.

Anyway, so I took over his classes. And it hit me at that time—Tom's been teaching this tile class. In a university situation, ceramics takes two forms. It's pottery—well, maybe three: You have people making utilitarian ware, and then sculpture, and then someplace in both of those you have the vessel makers, right? But still it's—sculpture has both histories, and pottery, which has its histories. And I realized from taking this tile class over from Tom that tile had an equal history in ceramics, and nobody anywhere, really, was taking it on.

And at that time I was like, oh, man, this is an arena that I can move into. It intrigued me. And I really saw a place that students who were interested in glaze as material, and color and surface and sculpture and function—it became this wonderful place where the two poles of pottery and sculpture could find a place, especially for students who really maybe didn't feel a pull to either, you know.

So that was the first time I did it, and then when I came to Alfred, it was very strange. There were three people in my beginning sculpture class. When we came in 1984, I think the whole school had 60 or 45 students, or the freshman class was 45. So things have really changed. So the tile class kind of started—I brought it with me. And so it's evolved. And I think one of the reasons I'm interested in it, especially the architectural terra cotta, is the mass, is the sense of how things project and what it is that you don't see. I can't really put my finger on it. And maybe also because of my own history, you know, this thing between containment, which is still an element in my work, things that bear two roles in the world, you know, having to function but then just being for sheer ornament or beauty or sculpture.

But I do have this sense about it. Also, the fact that you can—like sculpture, like my work—you can never really see all sides of it at any given time and especially when the stuff is installed - which I think is also one of the reasons why the cube intrigued me, because you can only see three sides of it at any given moment, at the most. And then as you rotate it, the whole scene changes because another surface has introduced itself in relationship to the other two. It's been a place where—it's because nobody else is interested in it. I mean, Wayne's been doing really wonderful tiles and installations in that respect. So I really can't put my finger on it. Maybe it's because of its sheer mass.

MS. MCINNES: So it's the fact that it can be multiplied.

MS. CURRIER: Multiplied, that there's often such dichotomy between what it is that you see and what you don't see as you move around the piece, because the back sides have to be really, geometrically—I mean, they have to be engineered. And then there's this whole other place where it could be a gargoyle or, just, you know, it can just do anything. So—

MS. MCINNES: And that's fascinating that you mention about seeing it from more than one angle and needing to move around, because your other passion that I was going to ask you about is Cubist sculpture—[Alexander] Archipenko, [Raymond] Duchamp-Villon, for example. You make your pilgrimages to—[laughs]—Duchamp-Villon's Horse [1914]; you dragged me to the Art Institute [of Chicago] to see that—[they laugh]—which was well worth it.

MS. CURRIER: What, did it pain you?

MS. MCINNES: [They laugh.] No, not at all.

MS. CURRIER: No, it's funny.

MS. MCINNES: It was great. When did you come across that work of Duchamp-Villon's or Archipenko's? And was it at a moment when you were searching for something? Or did you just sort of happen across it?

MS. CURRIER: I would think it was probably I just happened across it. Something tells me in my memory that when I was at the Art Institute, like, taking art history, something even tells me that I didn't even like it back then. I can remember, like, looking at Cubism. I totally have a different point of view about that now, but I think I probably just fell into it. Or coming across a [Fernand] Léger and thinking, damn, I should've made that first.

MS. MCINNES: Yes, there's a lot of correspondences between Léger—particularly, I see in his early work of 1912, '13—and some of your forms. There's that wonderful sense of volume that he gets. It's great.

MS. CURRIER: And see, I don't even know where the cylinder came from in my own work. And I do know that most of the cup boxes that I made in graduate school had those half-round—so, and then the cylinder continued. Just tripping upon it, again, I don't know.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A.]

Maybe I'm just a little brain dead right now.

MS. MCINNES: I mentioned Archipenko, Duchamp-Villon, and you mentioned Léger—

MS. CURRIER: Gaston Lachaise.

MS. MCINNES: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. CURRIER: Now, see, but Gaston Lachaise and Lee Bontecou. When I was at the Art Institute, we would get the art history classes in the auditorium that was at the front of the museum. You'd come in; it was off to the left. And then we would walk through the Art Institute, and then there would be a garden open by the walls. We could go into the school. I'd go through the Art Institute a lot, and I can always remember going up these steps. There was this Lee Bontecou piece, you know, that has the cone shapes and those planes that are stitched.

And I think that—and I missed the show. There was a retrospective of her work not too long ago. I think that that piece was probably subliminally, you know, like a—I don't want to say a virus, but it was subliminally there.

MS. MCINNES: I can see that with, not only her form, but where those forms come together, that kind of seam and that edge she gets in her work.

MS. CURRIER: The seam, right.

MS. MCINNES: And you've got that edge that you emphasize in your work.

MS. CURRIER: And there's this penetration.

MS. MCINNES: Yes.

MS. CURRIER: What's great about her work is it does. It projects out and then has those edges, and you can really feel the planes. There's no hiding the structure, the construction of that work. And then there are those recessions that go into that and that sense of mystery. And I guess, too, the coloration, that they were just—they were stained. I can remember this canvas and kind of brown-black. I'll go back to the Art Institute and look at it again.

MS. MCINNES: What about artists within the field of ceramics or ceramic sculpture? Was there anyone in particular, or were you really finding material outside of ceramics?

MS. CURRIER: Oh, man, that's going back a long ways.

MS. MCINNES: Ruth Duckworth is someone who comes to mind.

MS. CURRIER: Ruth Duckworth—well, what's interesting is Ruth Duckworth was in Chicago, you know, while I was there. I remember seeing Hans Coper, like I mentioned, Val Cushing—those wonderful bubbled forms that he would make and the different ways he would make lids, like, three or four different kinds of lids for one pot. And also the way those bubbles just kind of dropped in, you know.

MS. MCINNES: Yeah, those are nice. The kind of acorn lids.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah. And also they had that satin glaze, that wonderful, buttery, the Alfred glazes. Bob Turner had some early influence. I remember I was really lucky: in 1975 I had a show at Exhibit A Gallery. It was in Evanston [IL]. And it was me, Bob Turner, and John Glick. I mean, I'm 20 —[they laugh]—25 years old, that was pretty nice. I go, damn.

I can remember Alice Westphal un-boxing the pieces of Bob Turner. And there was, like, a little—I can show you—well, no, it's all boxed up now. There was this little piece of Bob Turner's. It was \$75. I said, Alice, I don't know if I'll sell anything—but would you hold that piece for me? And she did. And then I remember her saying at the end when I came to pick it up, she says, something like—I think she could've sold it, but she wanted to keep it herself.

So anyway, yeah, Turner. I don't know how much I really was looking. I'm just doing my own work. I'm not really looking laterally to see what else is being done in the field. There are a couple people I can think of whose names elude me. There's a guy who's working in earthenware, red clay—I want to say it's something Martin. There have been occasions—people who have a kind of Spartan purity, geometry of form. And I, for a moment, will feel a parallel. I know that right now John Mason's doing some things that are—I can see where somebody external could look at the pieces that he's doing and say, oh, that's like Anne Currier, or Anne Currier is—but, you know, I don't see it like that at all.

MS. MCINNES: No. And he came out of a very different place.

MS. CURRIER: Exactly.

MS. MCINNES: It's fascinating that you were doing this type of abstraction and, as you say, more pared down or reductive—"Spartan" was the word you used—because so much of what was being produced as ceramic sculpture, particularly then in the '70s and '80s, was derived from the vessel. Even now.

MS. CURRIER: Right.

MS. MCINNES: And you really, while there are certain concepts about containers and containment in the work, you really separated yourself from the vessel form.

MS. CURRIER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] A couple years ago, and I wish I had saved it—it was in the back of a Discover magazine; they have these little games that you can play. It was a word game, and it had to do with a thesaurus that—that black is white, and that there would be five words—I think there were five words in the middle. So that, “If black is dense, and dense is opaque, and opaque”—I don’t remember the example, but it was following along that kind of line. I think you can pretty much see that you could—from opaque, you could get to white.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: In fact, I did it just in four steps. So—where was I going with this? Oh, shit. I’m having one of those mental—[they laugh]—back up, rewind the tape, what was it you were asking me?

MS. MCINNES: I think it was unusual in the '70s to become dedicated to a type of abstraction in ceramic sculpture. It was unusual, given that most of the people out there, it seems to me, were still working, in some way, with the vessel format, perhaps making it nonfunctional. And I’m thinking of the people that you worked with at Alfred when you came here in January of '85: Andrea Gill, John Gill. Wayne Higby was still doing the vessel format in the '70s and through the '80s. People who would think of themselves as sculptors or doing sculptural work, but they were all still working off of the vessel. And Betty Woodman, who you knew from Colorado, continues to work in this vein.

MS. CURRIER: Well, I just thought the reason I gave that example, and I think it has to do with the jump from a container to the question, well, what is art’s—what does it do? Well, it’s about the containment. So that’s where the thesaurus—how you get from one—so, taking a word. If I go from, well, I’m making pots, which are containers. But what’s the essence of these—what is it that these objects [do]? Well, their function is really containment. So then you can see now how I’m following that example of the thesaurus from black to white. I think that’s how I got from pottery and utilitarian to sculpture, which is nonfunctional, but very functional in other contexts. But using that word.

So from containment then I can move into these ideas about recession, projection, things about the body, you know, that the body—like when we talked about the panel pieces a couple years ago. You know, leaving that impression. So you can get from containment to the body and an impression in the sand, you know, which is then kept. So there’s a word play, which actually is something that I probably do, sometimes consciously, as metaphorical links or associations.

MS. MCINNES: Interesting. Let’s go back for a minute to the start of your exhibiting work. What do you think were your major exhibitions up to the present? I’m thinking you were in that LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA] traveling show.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, that was a good show.

MS. MCINNES: That was in 2000—“Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics[, 1950 - 2000.” Los Angeles County Museum of Art, June 4 - September 17, 2000, and traveling]. And you were in the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY] show, right?

MS. CURRIER: I was in the Met show.

MS. MCINNES: That was “Clay into Art: Selections from the Collection of [Contemporary Ceramics

in] the Metropolitan Museum of Art” in 1999 [November 24, 1998 - May 30, 1999].

MS. CURRIER: And now it’s probably—nobody’s been to it. That’s all right.

MS. MCINNES: But you are in the collection of the Met.

MS. CURRIER: I’m in the collection.

You know, Helen Drutt [Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia, PA] really—I think when I was a graduate student, I was in a cup show that she had. And then didn’t have really anything to do with Helen until probably, I think 1985; ’85 was—I’d have to check my resume. But I think it was the first one-person show with Helen. Because prior to that I had been showing with a gallery in Denver and with Alice Westphal. And, you know, shipping was always a problem with ceramics. So I think in 1984, showing with Helen—and Helen has been very supportive in making the connections with Jane Adlin at the Met and with Jo Lauria at LACMA, to bring their attention to my work. And she’s done that with Hawaii, with Montreal, the Smithsonian [Institution, Washington, DC].

So I like that the work is out there. And these people, if they’re looking to see who’s showing, they would find my work. But I think that, to give Helen her due, her rewards, really, she’s really been quite instrumental. We couldn’t name those shows, those collections, if it hadn’t been for her. Because I’m teaching—[laughs]. It’s a lot of work, as you well know, to try and juggle—you know, if I was just doing a full-time artist, I would probably be spending the same amount of time for teaching just coordinating the connections, you know, doing all my own secretarial work, which I still have to do. It’s a lot of work, and Helen’s really—she’s been there.

But in terms of, oh, geez, I don’t know what kind of pivotal—well, there was one at the Smithsonian, but it included my drawings [Rollway, 1992, Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC]. But I’d have to go back and look at my resume.

MS. MCINNES: Broadly speaking, how do you think the market has changed since you started showing with Alice Westphal up to the present, for ceramics?

MS. CURRIER: It’s flooded.

MS. MCINNES: A lot more practitioners, you mean.

MS. CURRIER: There are a lot more people practicing, because we don’t have so much of—like I mentioned earlier, like, Bill Farrell and Patti; they were, what I could call, second generation.

MS. MCINNES: Post-[Peter] Voulkos-type thing.

MS. CURRIER: Exactly. One of Patti’s teachers, who then became her husband, was Bob Sperry. But Bob Sperry’s of the generation of Voulkos and [Rudy] Autio, right? And so I would say I’m probably third generation. And so if I’m third generation, we’re probably now—[laughs]—30 years later—into the, I mean—

MS. MCINNES: The fourth or fifth generation.

MS. CURRIER: We mentioned Steve Lee earlier. Now he’s going to be director at the Bray [Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, MT]. You know, we have students—Walter McConnell, who was my first grad assistant, he came to Alfred in 1984. When I came, he was a first-year grad; he was my first assistant. He’s now on the faculty of Alfred. So you still have people of the second generation and

third generation—whatever, it's like an iPod, you know. I have the fifth generation iPod; it does video. They're still doing it, but then you have all these subsequent—Alfred graduates how many M.F.A.s every year? And we're only one of how many schools in the United States?

MS. MCINNES: Right. Well, there's eight M.F.A.s annually in ceramics, and then you have the other two divisions now. So there's, basically, between 18 and 20 people with M.F.A.s coming out of Alfred every year now.

MS. CURRIER: Right. And one of the things that's kind of sad is the number of galleries, though, that have closed for whatever, for various reasons. There was a place in St. Louis [MO] called Pro Art. Horty Shieber, she gave me a couple exhibitions there. She closed for whatever reasons. Sherry Leady is still—that's not Leady Voulkos; it's Sherry Leady Contemporary Art [Baltimore, MD]. She shows my work. She's one of the few places that—you probably couldn't fill two hands with the number of places in the United States that show ceramics.

MS. MCINNES: Right. Jun Kaneko said the same thing to me, talking about how there is this whole level of galleries that used to be "craft-based" that have just dropped out. They can't compete right now. So you have a few high-end galleries. I mean, you have the Garth Clark [Gallery, New York, NY], you have Frank Lloyd [Gallery] in LA, but there are not a lot of places. And yet you have increasing numbers of artists coming out.

MS. CURRIER: Well, let's see, there's Perimeter and Ann Nathan in Chicago. And there's another guy in New York who is now mostly selling on the—he's got a Ken Price show up right now. And he's done a lot of—

MS. MCINNES: Matthew Marks [Gallery]?

MS. CURRIER: No. It's two names. I'm having a blank. It'll come to me. But he's mostly selling on the secondary market.

What's curious is I got a phone call just a couple days ago from some people in Baltimore who have one of my pieces, and they go to SOFA [Sculpture Objects & Functional Art exhibitions] every year in New York. And it's really nice that SOFA used a piece of mine. Huring Lou, who has now taken—you know, Helen has passed; he was Helen's assistant. He now has a gallery in Philadelphia [Huring Lou Gallery]. And he's taken the work. And it's great—SOFA's—this little flyer that they put out, they have a picture of my piece. And Marcia and Skeets [Harris]—I won't mention their last name—they called me. They said, Oh, we're so excited to see your work being published in that advertisement. We love SOFA. And I can't even paraphrase what they were saying, but it was very interesting how it got me thinking there are a lot of people out there who collect ceramics. And where and how they find it—and I think SOFA—and they think the world of SOFA. Unfortunately, they're going to have their 60th wedding anniversary, and they're taking their family to—[laughs]—Italy.

MS. MCINNES: [Laughs.]

MS. CURRIER: Instead of going to—no. Well, it was curious that they—what it tells us is that we have good taste because we have one of your pieces. And I go, well, there was no doubt that you have good taste. But there was something about how they were—they were really praising SOFA, and that SOFA really brings the best work and the best galleries, and it's this place where the collectors can go. Now how much is actually purchased through SOFA, I don't know.



But to go back to your question about how the market has changed. The market has not been a place that I've put any—I mean, I know I'm in the market. I've taken my work to Helen. The pricing of my work—its value in that respect, the market value, I've really left to her, because I think that's where she is; she understands that.

That's her expertise, and I can't juggle that. I don't know what that means. So I know I'm in the market. In fact—[laughs]—when a piece sells, occasionally, that's how I can afford to have my floors redone. It does bring in a little extra income, which is great. Being in the market also is good for the university. You mentioned the Gills and Wayne. It provides a profile, that the faculty at Alfred who teach are professional and that we are out there. And the university, it's like that MasterCard commercial: it's priceless.

MS. MCINNES: It's good.

MS. CURRIER: It's very good. And I think that it's also that "publish or perish" thing, you know, that we, as you know, we fill out those "shine sheets," and what is it that you're doing? How are you maintaining your career? So I haven't really been looking laterally at the market. I'm just like, oh, God, can I get into the studio? There's Christmas break; there's spring break, maybe. When are those moments I can have some extended time in the studio? And, you, it's the same with you. When can I do what my reality is, you know, to get into that place? People have asked me, are you going to go anyplace on your sabbatical? Yeah, I'm going to go that foreign country called my studio.

MS. MCINNES: I just want to clarify your teaching positions. I have you at the University of Colorado at Boulder from, right after your M.F.A., in 1975.

MS. CURRIER: Right, that was a year.

MS. MCINNES: A year, in 1975 to 1984. And then you came Alfred, and did you start in January of '85?

MS. CURRIER: I did.

MS. MCINNES: Okay.

MS. CURRIER: Because I had—I mentioned that show with Helen? The show was in March of '85. Val and Wayne called—I interviewed late. I can remember John and Andrea Gill—John was teaching at Colorado—it was just north and east of Boulder. Anyway, he was teaching there. And they came down and did a workshop, and the notice for the job for Alfred was out. And I can remember we were talking like, are you going to apply to that job? I don't know. Are you—I don't know? Are you? I don't know. Well, they just needed more women to apply for the job. And Val Cushing even called me and asked if I was—so I sent a portfolio in. And school here was already over; there was nobody here. I think Roger Freeman and Ted Morgan came—[laughs]—to my presentation. And Ted Morgan says, why do you want to leave Boulder?

MS. MCINNES: [Laughs.] Gee, thanks, Ted.

MS. CURRIER: Well, it was a good question because Boulder is this hedonist haven. Sun 250 days out of the year, whatever.

MS. MCINNES: So why did you come to Alfred?

MS. CURRIER: Well, you know why? Because I went back to Boulder, and it was the first job I had had. It was a very supportive community of colleagues. And I just looked at some of my colleagues, and they were in their 50s. It had been their first job, and they were still there. Maybe it's just this underlying level of competition that I have. I remember asking myself—I'm thinking, like, I have to go to Alfred just to see if I can. You know, that it would have been real easy to stay in Boulder, because when I told my department head, he went and told the dean of Arts and Science. And things were going great. Well, he says, give her more money. So I could've stayed in Boulder and had a very comfortable life and been making lots of money. But George—George's family is from Niagara Falls [NY]; my family is in Kentucky. And I can remember we'd come and visit, and I'd pretty much cry from Louisville to St. Louis, you know. So part of it was just to get east of the Mississippi [River]. And I think for the better part of it, it was my own competitive drive.

MS. MCINNES: Alfred was the place to really match yourself against the other ceramic artists.

MS. CURRIER: And God knows, I didn't know what the hell I was getting into. It's been—

MS. MCINNES: You were the first, I think, full-time tenure-track woman professor. Marion Fosdick had taught sculpture years before, but I don't know if she was tenured or not.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, and also the school had changed so much. You probably know the history better than I do, but I do know that 1984 was when Tony Hepburn—where they restructured the school and created the divisions. There was no longer the director, so Tony moved into the division. Wayne Higby was the first division head. The whole school was restructured. So John and Andrea and I were really coming in to this new structure.

MS. MCINNES: And it was the three of you starting within, about, six months of each other, which was fabulous. I mean, you must have had a sense of camaraderie having the three of you start [together].

MS. CURRIER: We did, because we knew each other from Colorado. John had really created a profile for himself, and I found out from him that—I was recommending—seeing people go to Kent because of John. And he was recommending people to come to Boulder because of me. I can think of this one girl in particular—Cristina Carver had been one of his students. We didn't really know each other. Actually, John and I met back in 1973 or something because he's from Seattle. He was going through the Cornish School [Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle, WA]. He knew Claire Colquitt and Joyce Mody [sp]. Joyce Mody is another ceramic artist. And so, you know, I can remember going to a party and meeting John Gill. So we knew who each other was.

But the reason I didn't come till January is because I had this show. When they called me—they called me at the end of May—there was no way in my head I could see packing up. Plus, George had just built a studio. And he goes, I'm working in this studio for a year; I am not leaving. So when they called and offered me the job, I said I would love to take it, but I can't come till January. So if that's a problem, then I guess I can't come.

The other thing is when I got back after the interview—it was Tony Hepburn, Val, and Wayne. We lived in Louisville, Colorado, which was this little mining town just east of Boulder, up on a mesa. I got back, and I told George; I said, I don't think I did very well at that interview. I said, I don't think I really communicated that I really want the job—because I really didn't need it. So he and I talked about it, and I wasn't going to go make the move unless George wanted to make the move. So we talked about it, and I said, well, why don't you get on the phone? Why don't you call Wayne?

So he called Wayne. I can remember, he was on the phone out in the studio, and I can remember seeing him sitting there in the sun talking to Wayne. They must have talked for over an hour. Wayne jokes about it now. He says, you're the only person—he says, we've really worked to get you to come here. He says, I've never been interviewed—[laughs]—by the spouse of somebody who we wanted to hire. That's how important George's involvement with the move was. But that's why I came in January—because of the show, and there was just no way that I could do it.

Now, there were only two positions at that time. John and Andrea split the one position. So I forget what the order was. I think Andrea taught in the fall, and then John would come in the spring, something like that. So as it turned out, John taught for me in the fall because I didn't come until the spring. So John actually ended up teaching almost all year anyway, for either a sabbatical replacement or what have you.

It was tough coming in January. I can remember we were in an apartment on—it was on—not Sale Street—but there must have been three feet of snow; it was in January. And we went into that apartment, and I can remember just sitting down on a chair and just crying—[they laugh]—like, what the hell have I gotten myself into?

MS. MCINNES: Ah, the Alfred winters.

MS. CURRIER: It was bleak; it was bleak. And then George had to go back to Colorado, and he'd come visit every five, six weeks.

MS. MCINNES: That's tough.

MS. CURRIER: It was tough being here by myself.

MS. MCINNES: I wanted to also ask you about your involvement in other educational institutions. I know that you have done some teaching up at Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle] in Maine and then became a member of the board, right, a few years ago?

MS. CURRIER: Yeah. I've just completed my first three-year term. In fact, I was up for re-election for a second term. You know, I think it was one of those things where it's always an honor to be invited. One is because they've had to consider you. And it's also been really good just for, again, being out there, being able—like, oh, well, you're from Alfred.

It's kind of a love-hate thing, because it does cut into the summer. And it also is one of these things where it's a performance. You know, you're coming in with people who have other agenda. So what do you do? What can you do in two weeks or three weeks? But I've been, I think, really lucky. Like the workshops, you know, at Haystack or at Anderson Ranch [Arts Center, Snowmass Village, CO].

MS. MCINNES: I know you've also given a number of lectures and workshops around the country.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, there have been. I did a summer thing out at—I forget the name of the school—it's on, like, Lake Tahoe or something. I don't know, mostly it's just been Anderson Ranch and—I went to Penland [School of Crafts, Penland, NC] as an undergrad, but I've never done [a workshop] there.

MS. MCINNES: And not only are you on the board of Haystack, but you're also a member of the International Academy of Ceramics.

MS. CURRIER: Right.

MS. MCINNES: Is that based in Europe?

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, it's in Geneva [Switzerland].

MS. MCINNES: Geneva, uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. CURRIER: Wayne has been, I think in the past five years—I think he's been a member of that for a while, but it seems like in the past five or six years—it might be longer, I don't know—but he's been very active in that and especially active in trying to get the faculty, the ceramic artists at Alfred, to become members. And so the year that I was elected, and John and Andrea were also put forth—and this past year John, Wayne, and Andrea and I worked to nominate and put forth Marlon and Ginger Miller as the—within the collector's group. And then Linda Sikora and Walter McConnell. So right now we have—it's a unique situation. All the faculty, all the ceramic artists at Alfred are also members of the International Academy.

MS. MCINNES: And what's the agenda for that institution?

MS. CURRIER: Their mission is pretty much to support the exhibition, research of ceramics. It's also a really good opportunity. It's kind of like, let's just get together. I mean, what other situation is going to bring people from Bulgaria, China, Korea, Bolivia, you know, Italy. It's just a good occasion. I mean, the one that I went to in Korea [was] the only time, because it's expensive. And they only have their general assembly every two years. This year it's going to be in Latvia, in Riga. They have presentations, lectures, and, you know, there's a political—there's kind of that going on. But the best is just—it's the social. You know, like, it's networking. I kind of hate that term, but at the same time,, that's when I met Slinja [sp], who came this past semester to teach our students, which was great because he brought all his traditional—

[Audio break.]

MS. MCINNES: Hello, this is Mary Drach McInnes, interviewing Anne Currier, disc two, May 22, 2006.

Anne, let's continue with Alfred. You came in the mid-'80s, along with Andrea and John Gill. That was just over 20 years ago now. What have been the major changes that you've seen in those 20 years?

MS. CURRIER: Well, I would have to use my—as a vantage point, what's happened at Alfred. And not only has the school grown exponentially, but the program has as well. And I know to a good point [it] is because John and Andrea and me. We came from schools that did have big-name graduate programs, but we were really committed to the undergraduates. And I think one of the things the three of us have really done has been to develop—I mean, our contributions have been to the undergraduate program. We now have the tile class. Andrea's color class. John is in the systems class. John has also done—both John and Andrea—the glaze calc class. John and I have also done the sophomore and junior pottery classes.

So part of it has been necessity. And thank God—this goes back to my own education—I have access to that. I don't feel like, oh, you just can teach sculpture. And same with John. We've really gone across. Except for glaze calc, I don't think there's one class at the undergraduate level that I haven't taught. I think that over the past 20 years, at least at Alfred—and this is really where my focus is—has been how the undergraduate program has really been developed and how we've now accessed the processes and points of view to our students. And, oh, just the sheer number of

classes.

I guess if I look at ceramics across the board, it's really finessed. Through some of the technologies—there are virtuosos out there working. And I know they're out there because we get them—they apply to Alfred for graduate school.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: So I mean, I think that our graduate program actually speaks volumes to the other programs out there because these people, these younger artists, are coming from somewhere, whether it's Penn State [Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA], whether it's University of Colorado, you know—

MS. MCINNES: Or a lot of international students, also.

MS. CURRIER: And we've had quite a few international [students]. We have a young woman now from England, one from China; we've had Korea; we've had Germany, Japan. That, I think, because I mentioned earlier, [is because] we're out there. Walter's gone to the Netherlands; I just had this show in Germany; this whole connection with IAC [International Academy of Ceramics]. You never know where and how there's going to be some connection that's made. So I think Alfred has had that history—through its history, it's had that reputation. But I'd like to think that we're helping to sustain and maintain, as are all of my colleagues. So, yeah, we are getting them because of the history of Alfred but also because we're here as artists and faculty.

MS. MCINNES: One thing that's striking to me in the nine years I've been at Alfred is a shift from functional ware to sculpture—at least in the grad program. Out of eight incoming grads every year, or a total of 16, the primary interests of the grad students have lately been in sculpture, and sculpture being thought of very, very broadly. I mean, yes, using ceramics in installation, as well as object-based, figurative, abstract, multimedia. And there's still an interest in functional ware, but many people think of Alfred in terms of the interest in technology, the interest in craftsmanship, and yet our grad students are largely interested in sculptural issues. Would you agree with that?

MS. CURRIER: Yes and no. It's interesting because the incoming grads are really a reflection of the pool. And I'd say, since I've been here, in 20 years it's gone from maybe 60, 70 applicants a year to up to 160. The logistics of looking at that many images is overwhelming. But many years it's hard to find portfolios that are really committed—people making pots. And so I don't think that it's Alfred. I know for a fact that we really want to have a complement—we want the students who are making pots to be able to have conversations with their colleagues who are doing installations, who are doing sculpture. I mean, it's all clay, so we want them to be able to talk about it, be aware of it, be involved with it, on all those levels. You know, that there is no hierarchy. But sometimes it's a challenge to find the portfolios, and I hope, again, people look—you know. Other schools that are encouraging their students to make pots, to use that investigation as an artistic endeavor.

There was a wonderful thing on Sunday morning yesterday that was totally dedicated to design in architecture. Yeah, I might have to order that one. I think that our students could be, who are making pots, could be a lot more aggressive in really going about ergonomics. Why is it the sense of what's modern? I think it's great looking to the histories of ceramics. But at what point does imitation, granted it takes on a 21st[-century] veneer or assimilation, but what—I mean, I think of Marianne Brandt, who was a designer in the Bauhaus. These people had a manifesto. And granted, it was a reaction to something. But what came out of that was like nothing that was in the market prior. So it wasn't trying to keep up with the iPod or the iMac design, you know, or what

Michael Graves is designing for Target—it's not sustaining that kind of sense of design.

If I was to come back again as a potter, I think it would be one of the most challenging, creative, inventive initiatives to take on. So I would say if there's that perception of Alfred, I don't think it's totally true. I think maybe the people who are making pots just don't, somehow, get the press. Or don't get the support.

MS. MCINNES: Do you think if you're not seeing these portfolios coming in, at least in the same numbers as the sculptors, that functional work is not being valued in the same way by other universities?

MS. CURRIER: I don't want to make blanket statements because actually this year we have a pretty good—I think it's a 50-50 relationship of potters to sculptors. But then again, there's all those other places. Like somebody who's doing slip casting, somebody who's taking a more of, say, conceptual [approach]. I'm thinking of Jeremy [sp], who came in because he's using clay as soap.

MS. MCINNES: Right. That's great.

MS. CURRIER: And Michael McKean—I was on leave when he was accepted that year, but I think he had little peas made out of clay, which was the extent of the ceramic—but still ceramics clay is at the core—is in there in terms of the processing and the thinking. So, you know, when you want to mix it up.

MS. MCINNES: Moving from this conversation about the undergraduate and graduate program at Alfred, many people have talked about the role of the university in the American craft movement, particularly its importance in the '60s and '70s. What's the importance of the university right now in terms of people working in clay or learning how to work in clay?

MS. CURRIER: I think it's essential.

MS. MCINNES: Essential.

MS. CURRIER: I think it's essential because, unless we were to go back to a 19th- or 18th—you know, pre-19th-century culture - I don't think anybody really wants to fall into any kind of being a—intern—that kind of allocation of labor. Like, I know that Jeff Oestreich worked for the Leach Pottery [St. Ives, England]—years, maybe. And I don't think anybody wants to fall into that kind of apprenticeship. I don't know what the situation would be. Why wouldn't it be in the university? If the university is going to maintain painting and drawing and sculpture—the so-called fine arts - why wouldn't clay, why wouldn't fiber, why wouldn't—I mean, I wish that Alfred had a small metals—[laughs]. God knows, we have heavy metals, big metals.

But I don't know why we wouldn't have a small metals or some kind of—a place where students who are interested in making jewelry—utilitarian is not a term, as you know, that just goes to ceramics. I think that it would be really nice if that conversation, that vocabulary, that thing of addressing the domestic, the body could be opened up to small metals, to fiber, and glass. Those conversations—students—they're virgins. Those desires to make things along those lines, to design, to use, to be creative haven't gone away. And why wouldn't the university take it on? I don't know where else it would go.

It's interesting that there are students who are really good—I know of two young women in particular, and they're women, who are really good in sculpture. They're living down in Philadelphia now, and they're making jewelry, really, really beautiful jewelry, and they're able to sell it.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: So I'm thinking, why couldn't we take that on here? I used the word "exponentially" earlier—what is it if they wanted to do that, if we could set up a situation to really push some of the questions that people who [are] in that field now are dealing with? There are some really amazing jewelers out there.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B.]

—that are these miniatures—they're not even miniatures; they are at the scale they are intended to be, sculptures, you know, that happen, but you can also wear it. Yeah, in fact, I think Alfred, if it was really to take on being a full, complete art school, would really look into—of course, it takes space and money, but bringing on a fiber program, bringing on a small metals program.

MS. MCINNES: Do you think, in general, that the university system in the United States is not doing everything it can to support "crafts"?

MS. CURRIER: I can't answer that because—part of me says no, because I think of the young people who applied to graduate school in our program, and budgets are getting cut all over the place, so that's a given. It speaks in volumes to me in terms of the dedication and the people who are their teachers.

I spoke earlier about the generosity of my teachers. You read the letters of recommendation. I know who a lot of the people are who are supporting these candidates, these applicants for our graduate program, and they are professional artists as well, crafts people, but they're also very committed and dedicated teachers.

So I would say the graduate students we're getting have been very supported; so it's out there. The universities are doing it, but it's because of the people who are there. It's the people who are doing it.

MS. MCINNES: Thinking of the issue of support, particularly for ceramics, has NCECA, the National Council for Education of Ceramic Art, has that had a major impact? Is there another institution that you think of—a nonprofit - that has had a positive impact?

MS. CURRIER: You know, I can't speak to NCECA because it's not been something that I would involve myself with, for a number of reasons, but then I read—I think NCECA, they are doing things to encourage young artists. They have scholarships; they have introduced some international things. I just don't think I am the person to ask. I know that our students, whenever NCECA was close by, they all want to go. They're curious about it. I guess if it wasn't there, it would have to invent itself.

MS. MCINNES: That's a nice way of putting it.

MS. CURRIER: Because I think that there are so many—where all these people go when they graduate is beyond me. And I know that quite a few of our undergraduates who haven't gone to graduate school are making pots, you know, are working.

So there is a lot of woodwork out there that they're kind of moving into, but I think it's gotten awfully big.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: I think that's the biggest frustration that I've had when I've gone to some of the conferences, is that it's so huge, and, you know, I really am not interested—and some of the demos that they do. I, for one, am not interested in watching somebody who is [making something], like, the size of one of those little miniature ceramic things that you get out of a teapot—you know, because you are so far away; it's this arena demo, I just find to be—I don't get that.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: So I guess there are some people who are interested in watching the processes like that. And the lecture halls have gotten so big. It's a huge conference with thousands and thousands of participants.

[Audio break.]

MS. MCINNES: This is Mary Drach McInnes interviewing Anne Currier at the artist's studio in Scio, New York, on May 24, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc number three, session two.

Okay, Anne, today let's start off talking about your recent studio practice. We're here in your glorious—a little messy, perhaps - studio space.

MS. CURRIER: It's the residue from a show, Mary. It's what happens—yeah, you know, packing material. I mean, it's just the—

MS. MCINNES: "Exhibition detritus," there you go.

MS. CURRIER: That sounds good. I like the alliteration.

MS. MCINNES: Why don't you sort of describe your studio space here in Scio?

MS. CURRIER: It's a big room—big, square room, concrete floors that are gridded off in 10-foot sections for expansion and contraction. There is another room off to the side—let's see, to give you some dimensions here, this room is probably 20 by 30 [feet] and with a room a fourth of that size for glazing and prep, that kind of prep; then there is a much-too-small storage closet. In my next life I'm going to do monoprints, where I just need a table and a piece of glass and a flat file, and everything can be sent out UPS.

It's a large space. There's a lot of fluorescent lights. The walls are painted white. The north wall has a bank of windows that faces out into—I have a very fortunate view of trees in the valley, so I can just get the whole sunset and sunrise.

That's nice, but what's most important is just the space. When we designed these studios, it was because we were working—because my husband is an artist, as I mentioned earlier, and his studio—we were in an old barn, and it reached the point where, every January when we have an early thaw, I'd walk in, and the north wall was like Niagara Falls behind the drywall. And I turned 50, and it was like, you know, everything is really starting to deteriorate. The rate of the acceleration on the studio was pronounced.

And the rates were really good with mortgages, so we just totally refinanced the house and came up with the figure: this is what we can do to build a studio. So it was just a matter of pulling everything out, tearing it down. We found out that we were actually sharing the studio with families—I make that plural—of snakes and mice. They just kind of filled the—anyway, so we built this.



This studio was built, I think, in, oh—there was a period of time where pieces like First of June, which was titled First of June because that was the first piece I made down at the studios at school. Diane Cox was really great in saying, look, you know, the sculpture space is empty; you're without a studio for a while; if you want to come in there and work, you can.

So it was very strange to be down there—being used to having a studio to myself for 20 years, and to find myself back in that environment that I had when I was at CU Boulder, when my studio was at school, to find myself back like a graduate student in this isolated, albeit still communal, space. I remember George coming in, and he sees this really big piece that I'm working on, and he said, I thought you were going to go small, and I go, I couldn't [help] myself, because the kiln at school is so big. So I think there was this really subtle sense that, oh, yeah, PLF, I mean, this is the kiln that's the size of putting four washing machines together. It's huge.

So I think—so First of June, that was the first piece that was there.

MS. MCINNES: You also have a couple of kilns outside.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, and one kiln was built specifically for the commission that I did for Marlin Miller and the Arrow Corporation [Arrow International Inc., corporate headquarters, Reading, PA, 1993-94]. I needed a kiln where I wouldn't bend down, save my back, and it would be long and wide, but not tall, to accommodate the wall pieces.

So that kiln was the result of that commission, and the other kiln came a few years later when I decided I needed to go more vertical. Luckily we have Freddie, and I'm working with Freddie to get these kilns in here. That was real ordeal moving them out and putting them in storage while the studio was built.

Of course, you always use as much space as you have, but this space is really great because I can have enough slabs laid out ready to go. There's enough space where I can bring a student in and help me roll slabs, and I can have that stacked up and inventoried and sandwiched between plastic. And also, you'll notice there are no shelves in here, and for one, I find it really inconvenient either to drop down and push things on the shelf—you know, things get—you can't see them, and I really like—you notice there are the tables on the edges.

So back in January before everything was shipped out for the two shows, this space was saturated with work. Now I think it's dismal in here. There's one or two pieces still here, and it's having those pieces around me that—like when I was working on those shows, having those pieces around, there was a momentum going, where the work was saying to me what needed to happen. And rather than pulling it off the shelf, it was already on the table; it was already accessible in a 360-degree space. It wasn't hidden—just the psychological thing of being put up on the shelf. So it's still being out on the table.

MS. MCINNES: So it seems that what you need to work is the sense of space.

MS. CURRIER: And also other work, and a visual, physical access to that. Let's see, they are not around right now, but there are these carts, and what I can do is that I can pull something out and—I like to flip things, and I think it's something that I learned from my mom—because my mom is an artist, and I can remember she would take my old glasses, being nearsighted, and there's a point where there is a certain distance and the image flips, and then it's also reduced.

It's a technique that a lot of two-dimensional artists use in how to establish or create a more

objective way of looking. I used to see her doing that, and a lot of it—I need to flip the pieces. Gravity and the table determine that I have to maybe build a piece in a particular way. There comes a point where stability is established, and I can rotate that, and either complete it a different way. Or like the piece that's sitting back over here, that didn't go off to a show, but that was not originally—I can't move it over here to look at it right now, but that piece originally was not going to be in that configuration, because I really feel, well, it's still in my studio; I'm still in control, and if just the rotation from one—like, oh, my God, that's where it is. That's the place—that's how it should sit.

And what's been really good about that is that I can't make a piece that, say, sits on two lines, you know, or two planes or four planes, where two planes come together, but I can rotate it, and when it's finished, it can sit that way. So I think that's why the tables. Well, I'm just kind of all over the place—talking right now, but—

MS. MCINNES: No. This is wonderful.

Anne, I've seen you flip your work around and reconfigure it. Could you describe for me your working process, where your ideas come from? And then just, actually, physically sort of walk us through the process?

MS. CURRIER: Well, when we talked on Monday, the other day, I mentioned the cube and how you could only see three surfaces at any given time, you know, with the drawing. And I do a lot of drawings, just thumbnail and sketchbooks and everything. But if you put down two lines, you don't know whether that's a flat surface that's between, or if it's concaved, convex. And when those two lines exist on the paper, you know, gravity is only determined by which end of the page faces down.

So this relationship of gravity and space—like when I'm drawing, I think I know how it's going to sit, but then I'll turn the page, and I think, that goes to the cube. How much of this can I see at any given time? And I can't. I don't have a holographic mind. I think my mind is fairly photographic, you know, and I think I can see structures, and I can work through that, and I can see dimensionally, which I don't think—not everybody can, you know.

So when I come into an empty—like when this studio gets cleaned out, it's like, oh, shit, what's going to happen now? Sometimes it has to do with where the last piece was. Sometimes it means going back to the sketchbooks, sometimes sketchbooks from a year or more ago, and I'm trying to think, what did I pass up? What did I fail to see? Like the cube, how could I rotate this another way? What's on the side that I'm not—what's not there?

And I always come back to the slabs, the cylinders and cones of different diameters and heights and what have you, and I think there have been three—I thought about this—this is probably one of the things on the walk or in the shower this morning. I think there have been at least three people who have said things to me. One is George, and I mentioned the things about cubes and not feeling the sense of control, where he can come in and say, oh, I think that looks really great. What's your problem? And another was a friend who is an architect. He walked into my studio in Boulder. I was working, and I said [something] about how I was going to close it up, how I was going to finish the piece, and he said, oh, yeah, you do that a lot, don't you? And it was such a simple remark, but it clued me into habits.

So I mention that because that really has become a conscious thing in my studio practice: What are habits? And is that derogatory? Do I put that in the negative? Or do I just—I talked about a thesaurus earlier—do I find another word that maybe has a more positive twist on that? Why

would I have to keep repeating something like a line or a shape? So this question of whether it's repetition or always kind of coming—almost like a magnet or like the swallows, you know, why do I keep going back to that?

And then another was a man, who I didn't even know, who looked at an exhibition announcement that I had for the show in 1984 at Helen Drutt's, and he said, where is this piece? And I took him and showed it to him, and he goes, oh, that's not at all like what I thought I was looking at on the announcement. Because the way there was a reflection, he thought that the shape was concave, when in reality it was convex. It was going out. And that was like this two-by-four that hit me in the back of the head, because my hand is always on the inside, going to this pottery, this thing. Like, most ceramics, is hollow, you know, and I was always trying to create this thing with this projection looking on the outside—or projecting on the outside where I thought where I wanted the work to go, but then the reality of always kind of looking on the inside and having my hand there but never seeing it.

And that comment that he made in 1985, I guess it was, just really threw me back to my studio practice—the obscurity of the obvious, where I really thought, oh, how can I make those interior shapes? How can I turn this thing inside out? So that can mask—can the physicality of these things really be made present by what's not there, you know, which is what concave is.

So I'm probably digressing, but just to give you some things that kind of have run through my head —

MS. MCINNES: I've noticed in previous conversations that we've had that there have been times in your life that you've found cultural moments like Borobudur [Buddhist monument in Indonesia]—

MS. CURRIER: But you know, it was a sale book. I'm sure you've had those—thank God, something just falls into your—like you weren't looking for it, but there it is.

MS. MCINNES: Then you have the fragments of the concave and convex and the kind of play of volume.

MS. CURRIER: And the play of the cylindrical shapes.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: Again, there was somebody at Boulder when I was doing those really early cylindrical, more gyroscopic, almost like, put an empty can on a stick and spin it around, and one of my colleagues who taught sculpture looked at one and saw the beginnings—you know, your back where—the crack in your ass, you know. [Laughs.] It's where you had those wonderful, kind of, flat moving into that recession, and then you have these rounded forms coming around. And that—[Férrand] Léger's figures, it was—so being a sculptor, he made that—it's like, oh, that's very figurative. And again, certain words, observations that people make that have helped me kind of see what's there, and then how do I consciously bring that in my studio?

But, yeah, the book on Borobudur was just—it's like a muse, probably just some little sprite brought that book to the surface, you know. [They laugh.]

And also Greek architecture, it's been funny because I really have not been a student, I'm sorry, of art history in a kind of book—but being at the Art Institute and having access to that museum and the Field Museum [Chicago, IL], which I really loved, it's more like just looking at this stuff and making trips—specifically being in Italy and making trips to see the [Domenico] Ghirlandaio whatever—or

seeing things I just had to see, and Paestum was one of the places in Italy that I had to see.

Sometimes the books that you have access to before you go there, the photographer frames it in a way—where is this? Oh, no, it was the photographer's eye with his camera. So I had to find it in a different way, but one place was the British Museum [London] and the Elgin Marbles, because I had seen, again, photographs in books, and the way the photographer had framed them, that I just thought, ah, I've got to see that. And a couple of years ago I had the occasion to go there. I felt like if I was a religious person, in that organized sense, I would probably be making a pilgrimage to kiss the wall or whatever, the relic, and I felt like, oh, I'm here. And I kind of just want everybody to go away. They don't have any reasons for being here! I'm the only one who has any real reason for being—[they laugh].

And then this past February when we went to Germany, to Munich, to see the show, it's like I looked at the map and, oh, Berlin, I have to get to Berlin because Berlin has the Pergamon [Museum]. And I walked into that, and I couldn't—and George was doing the same thing. I think I spent I don't how much time just walking around and looking at it, and then going back with the camera afterwards and doing the framing, because there's something about that edge; it's something about putting it into the context with edges, which is funny, because that's what happens in my work. Maybe that's why I like doing the wall pieces, because there is that—pieces that go like both sculptures because they don't just kind of splay; they don't just drain off. They are kind of held in place—the sense of the fragment. And again, that conversation like, well, why do I like the architectural terra cotta? It's not just because of the math; it's because of the fragment and a sense of isolation.

And I came up with a whole bunch of other things on the walk, but—

MS. MCINNES: This is great. I've seen you work, and when you're working on three-dimensional sculptural forms, I see you rotating them. I've never seen you make a wall piece. How do you make that wall piece? Is the process different for your wall piece than a pedestal object?

MS. CURRIER: Yes.

MS. MCINNES: Can you tell me a little bit about those differences? And maybe since we're taping this, just to sort of go back and very quickly—I mean, I know how you use slabs, but if you could just go over that, that would be great.

MS. CURRIER: Okay. So both of them have to start with what I would call a footprint. And a footprint is kind of like a silhouette in that all you have is the external outline, which means that once the lights were turned on, and you really thought, it could do any number of things, right?

So with some of the panel pieces, like the ones that you wrote about, now, they weren't on the wall, but they could have gone on to the wall, and they were also built in the same way that I would build wall pieces—laying flat. When I did the big commission for Reading [Arrow International], I had to solve the problem technically. That's probably where the more creative aspect of that project was; I had to figure out how it was going to go on the wall and how 26 pieces, especially the internal ones, could vertically and laterally be moved to fit together.

So I worked with an engineer there, and we came up with this system. When I do wall pieces, I have to make sure that I have shapes, holes in the back. If it's a single piece, it can just be a keyhole shape, but I have to make sure there are shapes in the back, especially if more elements—as they're coming together, where they can slide back.

So there's a strategy there that's not as serendipitous. That has to be figured out. That being done, they can take on the similar serendipity as the freestanding pieces, but the thing is, I have to keep it within, say—I realize, wait a minute, this is not going to be coming off the wall—like Jeffrey Mongrain has these big projections coming off the wall, and there may be other artists who do; I've just seen some of his work. Or thinking of—

Anyway, so what the wall pieces tend to do for me is create a forced perspective, where it's even another step from abstraction. It's like abstracting my own work—

MS. MCINNES: That's interesting.

MS. CURRIER: —because in the three-dimensional pieces, they can project and receive, and they can just move out into space or be balanced. My limitation there is the kiln, right? But I find that with the wall pieces, there is a sense of compression, and I often think of artisans Schmorgey [ph] Bob, you know, the one that's in San Francisco?

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: You know, where I think that piece, it's probably, what, only about five—I don't know; I saw it once years and years ago back in the '70s. It's not a very tall piece, maybe 30 inches, I don't know; I'd have to look, but—this is all in my memory—but it certainly gives you the impression that he's 30 feet back, and that's a really long table.

So that's one of the things I like about doing the wall pieces—is the sense of forced perspective. And it also comes back to the sense of the structure of the site, the sense of place, like, bring this full circle. You take the pediment, and why is the horse—why is that figure on the far left corner? I don't know the name of the god, whoever it was, the way he is moving up, and then there is the mother and the daughter. That composition is predicated on that composition, and it's forced into that or works with it—I don't like to use the word—

So that's what I like about the wall pieces, is that I can create a different kind of sense of compression or—I wish we did have some visuals. You see all those holes that perforate the wall there?

MS. MCINNES: Yes.

MS. CURRIER: And you see the lines—I'm going to step away from the mike right now. You see how this kind of moves in? Does this feel like a back wall, and that feels like a side wall? Does this make you feel like you are on the outside, and there's a space that goes inside of here?

MS. MCINNES: Yes.

MS. CURRIER: Do you see? And when the piece is up, it would be about this tall, and you would be walking into that space. And also what I like is the fact that it's right in front of you.

So what is it about your own physical body, this frontal meeting another frontal, but then as you move and change your vantage point, how the recessions and projections with light and shadow kind of push or pull you in? I don't know if this is making any sense.

MS. MCINNES: It does.

MS. CURRIER: You can tell I get kind of excited about it, but it's what I think I'm intuitively working

with when I come in. And I don't [know] how it starts, but I do know that when I come in, I'll think, okay, I'm going to do some wall pieces. I'll start with some drawings, and I can't exactly say what my topic is. I feel almost like I should be—like, oh, I'm such a dummy, that I should be apologetic for that, but I have a sense of what it is, and then I just start drawing. And then the hardest thing is just to get started.

I would say probably by the third, and hopefully by the fourth piece, there is a momentum, and the work is clarifying it for me.

MS. MCINNES: And you seem to work in series. I mean, I'm looking over your work over the last few years, and there will be groups of, say, six pieces that are all of a kind, that is, all wall pieces.

MS. CURRIER: Well, actually, there are three pieces. They're double images.

MS. MCINNES: All from 2006, earlier this year, and they all have the same sense of compression and simplicity of form.

MS. CURRIER: And this one, Cloven, is the same as, for all practical purposes, as Pivot, but you see how this one is a little bit taller?

MS. MCINNES: Yes.

MS. CURRIER: And it's almost like they were put through, not Photoshop, but Illustrator or something like that, just the stretching or expanding. I think that little things like that really change the work. The color—the tone, the coolness - that changes what I think the subject of it is.

And looking at the work of other artists—and you mentioned Archie Henkel [ph]. Archie Henkel didn't really make, unlike somebody like [Constantin] Brancusi or like [Alberto] Giacometti—[Giorgio] Morandi would be another example. I'm thinking of artists who repeatedly came back - you know, how many times did Giacometti do Walking Man? And what is it about either returning or wanting to—it's not there yet. It's not—you know, just wanting to find it.

So more recently I think that I've been asking myself—giving myself more permission not to remake or imitate, but just to spend a little more time with some things. And I have to do that not with just the one piece, but almost by making it again. And that's curious with the habit - because I kind of think, oh, now your hands, when you pick up that knife, you know how to cut this, but let's see what happens here. Let's kind of change the tone a little bit. And I don't intend to do that all the time; it's a recent thing.

I have to say that as we look through this, one of the—I mentioned the flipping. One of the ways that this piece, Kadiz, came into existence is because I had made Angelica, which was a second generation from Belmont, which was from '04, that was this big, huge piece. I made Belmont again in the form of Angelica, but it was smaller, and as a result, it took on—like Belmont would be the Goliath; this became a much more elegant kind of piece. And then I made that again in the form of—I forget the name of it—and then that got rotated and moved around, and if I hadn't made it, say, three or four times, I don't think I could have come along with Kadiz, because Kadiz and Kinzua were actually these pieces that were rotated. And it becomes like, oh, my God. That's why I kept making those.

MS. MCINNES: Right. They're variations and extensions.

MS. CURRIER: Just looking.

So I think this has to do with the studio—your question about the studio process - because what's constant are the cones—the cones, the cylinders, the slabs, and—

MS. MCINNES: You make all your work with slabs of clay that are then shaped over forms.

MS. CURRIER: Right.

MS. MCINNES: I see you've got a whole set of forms.

MS. CURRIER: Well, here they are right under the table, different diameters of pretty sturdy cardboard tubes, cones—I know how to make the cones. You just take a needle tool and make arcs. So I can vary the diameter. I continue to surprise myself just what happens. I don't always use knives; sometimes I use a ruler as a way to cut in. I constantly am surprised by just what happens by what's revealed by being willing to cut into or—you know, I mentioned earlier about seeing my hand was always on the inside, and I might be putting two cylinders together at an angle, and I have to cut them in a certain way, and I think that what I really want—you know, I make a cut, and this is what I really want, but then I look at the scrap of what's been—wow, that's more interesting than what I thought I wanted.

So then that becomes—I showed you those little pieces, the scrap pieces.

MS. MCINNES: One of the things that strikes me about these pieces is their very intimate scale; they are even smaller than normal, and most of your work is what I would call pedestal scale; it's between 18 and 24 inches at the most, and even most of your wall pieces are also that size.

MS. CURRIER: I'd say, yeah, about 30 is about the maximum.

MS. MCINNES: So there's always a relationship to the body, even though your work has a real sharp edge to it. It has this play of geometry, and sometimes that geometry folds over or bubbles over into a kind of figurative work. Yet there's also the relationship of you as a spectator, but to the work. You're relating bodily to the work.

MS. CURRIER: Right.

MS. MCINNES: Is that important to you?

MS. CURRIER: It is. I mean, it's a conundrum.

MS. MCINNES: Well, it's interesting because you came of age in the '70s as a young artist, and that's a moment where all of these male American sculptors are making huge Corten steel [sculpture].

MS. CURRIER: But there are a few women. I mean, you have Beverly Pepper.

MS. MCINNES: That's true.

MS. CURRIER: You have a few women—and bless her—Louise Nevelson. I wish I could wear all that jewelry. [They laugh.]

MS. MCINNES: I'll give you some blue eye shadow [referring to Nevelson].

Yet you always have felt comfortable with this more intimate scale.

MS. CURRIER: See, this is the paranoia that I have, you know, because you've interviewed—you had Jun Kaneko, you have Tony Hepburn, you have—you know, what is it you're supposed to—not what you're supposed to do, screw that—to make your mark? And that's why I say there is this conundrum: what am I not doing, and why should I be apologetic for what I am doing?

There's a piece on my dining room wall right now that came back from a whole bunch of shows, and at some point I realized I didn't have any of my own work in the house. And now not a day goes by that I don't—this is going to sound egotistical, but not a day goes by that, because of where it's situated, that when I go into the kitchen, the first thing—even when I open the refrigerator, I'm looking through in the dining room, and I see that piece. I would really miss it. Somebody came and wanted to buy it from me. I said, it's not for sale.

But this relationship to—you use the word “scale”; I think that has to do with what is its relationship to another thing. So my pieces have a particular size because of that scale to my body, but also because, well, the kilns that I have—have I not been ambitious enough in pushing bigger kilns, bringing in people to help me build stuff to really get my work, like Arnie Zimmerman, out in front of museums?

The reason I mentioned my house is that it's really nice to find some—what is it—there aren't all that many museums or collections that can—what is it about people like the Harrises in Baltimore, or the Fishers in New Jersey, who want to live with the stuff and who don't have—well, wealthy people do have architect-designed houses, and they're wonderful, you know, that aesthetic, and then wanting my work to be in that environment. But what is it about having work that could find its way into regular people who want to buy art? And maybe it sounds like I'm pandering, but I'm not. These pieces cost a lot of money, it never ceases to amaze me why somebody would want to have my work in their space. So am I working to the marketplace? No. I think I'm working to me.

MS. MCINNES: I think you're working to your body; you mentioned your body as the site where you're working. You've been gesturing as you talk about your process; it always comes back to your hand, and your hand is making all these cylinders.

MS. CURRIER: If I'm dancing, how far can I reach my hands when I'm dancing, or—

MS. MCINNES: That's right. So it was the gesture and, as you put it, the dance.

MS. CURRIER: But this piece that we delivered, we took it down to Baltimore, and she sent me a picture—like, oh, Anne, here's—while you weren't looking, I took a picture of your piece in their house. These people have a small, little Anthony Caro, which is—that's interesting having Caro come up because I've always really liked his work, and having seen some of the clay pieces—like he did *The Trojan War* [1993/1994], which began to incorporate clay, but then he has this really small little metal piece.

But anyway, it was really interesting to see—work finds its way in relationship to the scale of a house where people live, and their bodies. In fact, I've had some people come—they want work on this size, you know, eight by 10 inches, because they live in a—I really like your work, Anne, but I don't have a place to put it. I don't take that as a thing of the market; I take that like with the body: What is it about a sense of monumentality? What is it that on a daily basis you will come in and see that? Like, oh, yeah—and some people, it's like being able to look out their window. It's just some kind of confirmation. I don't know.

MS. MCINNES: As you talk about scale and the process, it raises the issue of the material itself,



clay, and on your handling of it. I mean, you're not welding big sheets of steel together. Can you talk about your views on the importance of clay as part of your expression? What do you feel are its inherent strengths, maybe limitations, that you've come across?

MS. CURRIER: Well, the limitation would be—and I'll address this first because it's short. The limitation is that once I've made it, and before it starts to go through the drying process, is that it's not finished, in the sense that now we have to—we're in this holding pattern. I tell students, you know, you have to be really brave to stay in ceramics because there is so much that can happen. After you've made it, it's not finished; it's not over yet. You may think you're finished with it, but it's not done because it can crack while it's drying. It can break on the way to the kiln. I mean, there's this whole fragility thing. There's this whole subjection to at least 1,800 degrees. Then do you apply color?

So the whole process itself is fraught. I wouldn't say it's a minefield, and even though I think that I'm fairly good at controlling—I mean, just getting ready for this last show, whatever could go wrong seemed to have gone wrong.

MS. MCINNES: Really?

MS. CURRIER: It's the mistakes that come up. I mean, that's a whole other discussion, but it's the mistakes. I wouldn't have this kind of glaze that I have now if back in 1970, whenever, eight, a kiln hadn't screwed up on me, and then six months later I'm looking at the surface, and I think, oh, shoot, now how do I get it? That was a screw up; now how do I take something that was a mistake?

So to answer the second part of your question, the downside of the material—because, you know, there's how many hours? I have to walk away. Having been brought up Catholic—I'm not a practicing Catholic, but the only time I found myself saying Hail Marys is when the kiln is firing.

The reason I use clay is I don't like the smell of metal. I really don't like the smell of metal. I don't like the sawdust of wood, although I love wood. In fact, I would love to see these, not out of metal necessarily, but out of wood. And part of that has to do with seeing. When I lived in the Bay Area for a while, there were places where you could find those wooden forms that they would use to make—all the metal parts for ships they had to cast, and so the forms that were used to make the molds were made out of wood, and really beautiful, and they were solid. They were done in sections, and they had to lock together. So I would love to see some of these out of wood, laminated where the whole—just look at the floor the guy is finishing.

So it's not so much metal. I think one of the reasons that I like clay is its proximity, in a way, to paper.

[END TAPE 2 SIDE A.]

And what it is, it's starting from a flat surface. Maybe because I sewed when I was a kid, you know, if you take the sleeve out, what's the shape of that? It's not a cylinder that is stuck into a hole; it's a whole other shape. So it's this transformation of a flat shape into a three-dimensional form. So I liked that.

And I also liked the fact that clay's plasticity—I don't take to mean in terms of its molecular—how much slide there is with the particles. I mean that sense of plasticity is a physical—it's plasticity in the sense that, oh, did I cut too much off? Do I need to make an extension here? I just take the knife, cut it—oh, I shouldn't have—oh, no—score it, stick it back on—so it gives me this physical, this

mechanical plasticity, where it's not, you know, measure twice, cut once.

So I remember it was in the 1980s, I spent six weeks at RISD doing summer school. And I was there the entire time. For the first three weeks, Jeff Astride [ph] came, and for the second three weeks it was Akio Takamori.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, really?

MS. CURRIER: [Laughs.] Akio and I were—we are both [born in] 1950, and we pulled out the gin, and we just got right to it. We were talking about everything; it was great.

But anyway, Jeff went away. I had started a piece down in the studio, and I thought I was finished. And he goes away, and he comes back. But while he is gone, I am looking at it, and I go, uh-uh. I have been thinking about Archipenko and this pedestal, you know, how from one point of view you can look like you have an elevation, but then as you come around, it's integrated into the shape. And you know, now is the time I have got to do that. I can't—don't postpone. So I went about building a whole other base, if you will—initiate—you know, have the piece meet the table.

He comes back three days later, and he was kind of like, that is not the same piece. I said, well, it is, but, you know. It is in that range—that is where it is plastic; it's because even though the clay is getting stiff, it's not leather-hard; it's still really workable. And I like that, that I can't be regretting that I've spent all of this money on steel or whatever and—oh, geez, I cut that wrong.

MS. MCINNES: Right. Do you have a relationship to clay that you see in different examples in the history of ceramics, specifically with this type of piecing in working the clay? Have you ever been conscious of precedence in the history, either Western ceramic history or perhaps Japanese haniwa figures or—

MS. CURRIER: Well, I love haniwa figures primarily because of how I see the—look at some of the dogs or even some of the figures—

MS. MCINNES: I was thinking of their hollow cylinders.

MS. CURRIER: Well, the hollow cylinders and just the bluntness with which they come together, and representational. I had no idea how those were made. I sometimes think, too, the Chinese tomb figures, even though they are more embellished in their little art—definitely more realistic in their figuring when you really look at those—it's probably because of the armor.

If you were [to] erase all of that signature, there is still basically the two cylinders, these flattened, kind of comb-shaped feet. Sometimes those comb shapes where the skirt—you can still reduce that, and how it was probably put together in parts, partially molded. My work isn't molded, but there are occasions where I have had, like, oh, well, this would be a good idea maybe for a project for the university.

You know, it's fun. Like, what would happen if I had sections that were molded, rather than trying to remake that configuration over and over again, like, something like Andrea does, you know, where she has her basic core torso-like form, and then she can rotate it so the top and bottom is still open and then she can add all of that stuff to it. So I have often thought, well, what if I had some shapes where the dynamics of different shapes colliding or coming together was set, and I could just play that rather than having to remake them.

Yeah, to answer your thing about why clay is essential, I feel like I am drawing with it, with the knife,

and as a plane, I can close them off so they have semblance of—they have masks. I don't want to ever access the visual information about the thickness of the slab. George will come through sometimes, and he'll say, like, oh, why don't you leave that open? It's like, no; if you see that surface, which might be a half-inch, three-quarter-inch, that is not information that I am interested in.

MS. MCINNES: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So you hide that information to showcase other things.

MS. CURRIER: Well, it closes itself off.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: I'm not interested in that. If want you to have access to an interior space, I will build it in as a concave. Is that right? But not necessarily you having access just because, you know, you are looking into a cone. You might be looking into a cone, but I would do something to make sure that that edge was extended and became a surface, a plane.

MS. MCINNES: You actually sort of build an interior space on the outside.

MS. CURRIER: Exactly. I'm building the interior. I'm not having it be the consequence of just the coincidence of it being the reverse. I will build that in.

MS. MCINNES: You mentioned the accident of the glaze several years ago and how you ended up using that. Let's talk a minute about the surface quality of your work. Tell us about the kind of the edges that you use, because there is a real wonderful quality of drawing on these pieces that you highlight in different ways. Every single edge is highlighted. How do you get that?

MS. CURRIER: Well, the piece that we are looking at right now probably dates from a series. I think it's actually in the Smithsonian, I think the Smithsonian [Renwick Gallery of Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC]. It's called Rollway, and it's a cool charcoaled-base piece with one of these kind of rocker forms that sits on top. One of them is kind of green-gray, and the other is kind of a blue-gray, but each one of them has that black line. I did that on quite a few pieces for quite a while, and that was a matter of just putting an 04—03 glaze, satin glaze—now, feel your earlobe. That is what that glaze felt like.

MS. MCINNES: And you spray it on?

MS. CURRIER: I sponged that on. I sponged it on because it was the way that I could most consistently, efficiently, economically—a lot of E words there—get the glaze on. Spraying creates—it's a mess. Students think that spraying is the way to get glaze on evenly; it's not. And you're fooled in terms of how much you think you have on. So sponging, I get that on; fire that; and then when that would come out of the kiln, I would then use my 08 glaze, which is the glaze that has—because of the ball clay and the lithium, and the different materials in it—at a low temperature gives you that, like, 180-grit sandpaper. It is not the spraying that does it. The spraying really makes it consistent. I could sponge that glaze on, and it would still have the same consistency because of the materials.

But then while the glaze is still wet, I just take a knife or a metal edge, and I just run it over the edges to pull off that glaze.

MS. MCINNES: So you are actually highlighting the first set of glaze.

MS. CURRIER: So that first fire glaze is revealed, popped out. And then if I change whatever that 04 or 03 base glaze is, it is going to affect the color of the next glaze that goes on top. So with those people at the Renwick, they had a black base. But let's say I had put a manganese base, which is that wonderful brown-purple. I could put the same textured glaze on top of that as I would put the black, and it would be a total—it would be a different tone, a different value, because of the way the light can or can't move through.

I have boxes—[laughs]—there are times I just would do all kinds of tests and say, okay, you have X overglaze; let's see what it looks like on top of A through D, you know, just change the lower base. But that was a way of really bringing out the drawing. I don't do that really anymore, for whatever reason.

But the edge is really important, because if that edge—it doesn't have to be mathematically, mechanically—I'm not using any kind of compasses—but it has to look right; it has to have a precision to it. So when I put these two cylinders together, whatever that connection is doesn't have to be exact, but it has to have a precision that visually it follows through, if that makes any sense—when the [glaze] goes on and the metal rulers and the—because then I'm just kind of working the edges.

And I think it goes back to the cubes. That is the place where the transition is going to happen, and that is where the eye has access to the plane, and the plane is either flat or concave or convex. So the edges really are, for me, what are going to take you through. They are not the only way, but they are a means of moving through the work.

MS. MCINNES: Yeah, they do move your eye through it, and meanwhile the entire piece has this, generally speaking, single surface. It has two or more glazes, so you have the interaction of those glazes. But you present a kind of a monochromatic feel, so that when you look at your work from afar, there is a soft, taupe color or a soft stone color.

And one thing that is striking to me, looking at several years of your work, is how much of the earth they speak. I notice that a number of the titles are place names. Are you thinking of color in terms of associations to places, or how do you think of the color? I mean, how do you come up with that color?

MS. CURRIER: Hum, hum, hum.

MS. MCINNES: Hum?

MS. CURRIER: The hum that comes off of it. Well, like, it's the—what are you trying to tell me? I'm looking—what is it you want to—do you want it to be cool? You should be cool, you know. Yeah, it's the hum. I can't explain it. It's just, like, I had all of those pieces out for the shows. I had at least—I can't think how many new pieces I had. It was a lot. And then I had a table full of the test glazes. Of course, George comes in, and he goes—[they laugh]—what difference does— just put a—like, throw a dart. And sometimes I feel like he is right. But I can't do that.

There is something that when they are all-bisque, and they are all-white, and they are the ugliest—that chalky white surface. You know, why this one had to be a kind of acid yellow-gold, gold, and then, of course, you have got prints of these, but the colors aren't exactly right. Why that one had to be this rusty red; it is no coincidence. There is just, like, it's a hum, and it's not necessarily about the earth. I'm not consciously like that.

They are not as dry as they used to [be], but it still has to have that stippled—the color and the surface are also kind of a hum. So even with all of these edges, you can't really look into them. And one of the reasons that I want this surface is because I'm not a perfectionist in the sense—I am not a machine. They're often in places where if these pieces had glazes that were like this—this is one that has all of those edges. This was just messing around. This was scrap. You can see where there are imperfections.

So the surface is really a way—because it absorbs; it doesn't reflect. So not only is it literally, visually, I think, absorbing, but there is that abstract sense of what it does to kind of absorb you into the work. And all of this is by chance; this is a way of verbally, kind of, giving substance to a lot of things that just kind of happened in the process; it happened by accident that when I saw that glaze come out of the kiln, I knew that was right. And then people, in conversation, well, why do you use this clay? Well, I don't know.

Don't sound like a dummy, Anne. But comes through like, well, yeah, what is it? And I think it is important that art, any art, has some sense of, well, what is it about this? And it does take looking, you know. And, oh, I use these clays; I can't see that that surface plane dropped a little bit. But that is not really that important. What is more important is that it creates a nice hum. And if you could make the connection to the earth or another kind of sense of internalizing, or if that becomes then a segue for a viewer or a person who is interested in the work to connect with it, then I think that is great. But it is not a conscious part of the narrative that I'm looking in.

MS. MCINNES: In hearing you speak about this interplay of elements, it leads me to the question of, how do you think of the element of clay in your process or even in a finished work of an art?

MS. CURRIER: No, I think it's great. You know, you asked me about my studio; I think this is the best sandbox I ever had. And I have to thank Casey O'Connor, one of our students. He is doing great stuff now. He did when he was here—because he came to Alfred, and we were the only students who loved the NR [not ready] grade. He really loved—he said, wow. I know my work is not ready. This is exactly—this is perfect. And then he just saw being at Alfred and the studio and the engineering section this incredible sandbox time.

And I really liked that analogy because I think that this sense of play, really, it doesn't take—play has taken on another kind of context that, I mean, it's work for me. And when you watch little kids—you have two little kids—I think that when they are really deep in play, they are working something out. And so this is reality. So I think there is an incredible amount of play in my work. The play gets really good when I have a white out—[grunts]—where I can't see anymore; then I know it's getting good. It's kind of the "Catch-22," where it's like beating—[they laugh]—oh, this one is getting really good because I know that I'm now facing it, that it's really getting to where something is starting to happen. The intensity level has changed.

For lack of a better word, I think there is a lot of serendipity. It is serendipity that is within a canal. It's being bounced; it's partnered intuition. I don't know, I'm making this stuff [up], because I don't see it. I want to see it when I'm here. I kind of want to see it go out. But, yeah, play takes on a big part.

MS. MCINNES: Going back to some comments you made earlier today about, for example, taking a recent work, Cloven, and reshaping that into Pivot. You changed the dimensions. You mentioned something in trying to describe that process; you said, well, it's like putting [the work] through Photoshop or Illustrator.

And I know you are great at doing digital images. Even though almost all of your process, you're working with this basic substance of clay, and you're working with your hands, and you're working with a knife, do you find that technology has entered your studio recently and in unexpected ways?

MS. CURRIER: No, I don't think so. You know, the thing about Illustrator, I only used it once back in—you weren't even at Alfred yet. The design studios were in bins, and there were two computers. This must have been around 1995. So, yeah, you came in '97, right?

MS. MCINNES: Yes.

MS. CURRIER: And Don Weinhardt [sp] let me come in and work. I was doing a lot of the pastel drawings. I think I was division head. So I had to figure out a way—because clay doesn't wait. I mean, I have got clay; it has waited a couple of months, but once you're working, you have a certain window. And as division head, I was not able to keep working in clay, so I was doing the pastel drawings. I would have these little sketches.

Some of what I was doing the old-fashioned way was I was doing simple line drawings on velum, on tracing paper, and then I would have a whole stack of these simple lines, and then I would overlap them, because, you know, you can see through. So I found that this building up of lines that I mentioned earlier—do you see between the space—the lines as projections and recession? That really helped me. I was doing that with the drawings and the pastels, and then I think that really helped me in terms of seeing things to make in the studio as well. But there was no technology except if you wanted to use paper and pencil.

I took some of those drawings, and they fit on the scanner. And Don—I must have had about 14 or so of them. And we scanned them. And he showed me a little bit in Illustrator how to make them each scan a transparency, and then I could stretch them, and then layer it. That was the only time I ever used a program. But I could kind of do that myself just with drawings.

Taking digital images, I mean, that is my hobby, to go out with the camera and shoot what is just around the house at different times of the year. I came when my mom was quite ill, and I remember my sister and I taking walks and thinking, oh, well, we talk about it, but she doesn't see it. And I couldn't call her. I mean, a phone call is kind of intrusive, so every day I was sending her an image. And it was kind of great because I taught myself how to do layers and different things in Photoshop.

And every day I would come out, and whether it was beads of water on the jonquil, something, photographing that. It was great because, you know, I'm framing. What I haven't used, and I'm going to use it now, is the word "composition." I can remember once Tony Hepburn saying to a student during a crit—and I have used it, and I love it. In fact, it surprised me that he said it. I don't know why. But he said, you know, "Composition is a bitch." Because you write, you know, well, what is it that you're putting together? Well, it's the words. How do the elements come together? What is the hum? What is the resonance that they have?

And so when I go with the camera, and I'm taking those photographs, it is the composition—you know, when the wall pieces—oh, how is all of this coming together? What is the resonance? What is the narrative? There is narrative in my work, and that is why people—like, you mentioned the figure or architecture. Well, yeah, it's there, but I think it goes more to the play of how these parts, these elements, are coming together, and how am I responding to the composition?

And maybe that is why revisiting the pieces—because the composition, by extending it, by putting

one L shape at a greater distance to another, it changes it, and that is—for right now—[they laugh].

MS. MCINNES: You mentioned a couple of days ago when we first started the interview about going to Washington as a graduate student and how those people, Howard Kottler, Patti Warashina, and people you were working with, they were all doing kind of a storytelling on the vessel form. And you really haven't ever done that. So are there any ways that there is a kind of social or political commentary in your work, or is that just not present in the studio?

MS. CURRIER: Yes, it's not present in the studio. [They laugh.]

MS. MCINNES: [Laughs.]

MS. CURRIER: Yes, it's not present. I guess the only thing political could be, is anybody dealing [with] who deals with the arts—is there something political in that? But I don't think about that too much. I don't bring that into my studio, but that is probably a panel discussion some place.

MS. MCINNES: That is probably a panel discussion. [They laugh.] Let me ask you, because we are in this great studio that looks like it is ready to—

MS. CURRIER: Be cleaned up. [They laugh.]

MS. MCINNES: No, just to start again. Because you had some incredible exhibitions this year in Germany and in the United States, so there is not a lot in your studio. But you are officially on sabbatical right now; so you have a year off?

MS. CURRIER: Yes.

MS. MCINNES: Do you have any specific plans?

MS. CURRIER: Yes.

MS. MCINNES: Can you tell me about them?

MS. CURRIER: Well, actually, this is the third sabbatical—hmm—that speaks volumes to—third sabbatical since coming to Alfred. The first one was a full year; the second one, I think, was only a semester, which was over by the time I realized I was on sabbatical, because there is a—you have to move out of academia. And the other situation[was], oh, I just would [say]. I'm going to go to my studio.

People would say, oh, are you going to travel? I go, yeah, I'm going to go to that foreign country known as my studio, which I really think it is, you know, because just going through your studio is kind of being a tourist there, and also not knowing what to expect, or hoping anyway.

So this time I have two months in Paris; I still want to pick your brain more on that. I have two months in Paris, September and October, and again, there are things that, in terms of architecture, works of art, that I got to do some research, but just to be there and also maybe to have access to just traveling. But specifically, yeah, I want to do some clay bodies—work on some clay bodies. You asked about color. There is that small little piece - you see this - the terra-cotta clay—

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: That was a scrap. And where the color is the clay. So, again, you asked earlier

about material being subject matter—you know, how it is part of the content of the work.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, that is nice.

MS. CURRIER: And so I really I want to do some more pieces like that, working on colors of clay bodies. That takes a lot of work because I have to bisque it very low. And I have to thank Andrea Gill for this idea. I have always liked bisquing very low, and then when it comes out, and it's very soft, you take, like, wet and dry sandpaper and sand it. And you can see the grog, the actual materiality of the clay pops out.

MS. MCINNES: It's fabulous.

MS. CURRIER: And then I fire it again, a second time, so it's denser, but also the color comes up.

MS. MCINNES: I love this.

MS. CURRIER: Thank you.

MS. MCINNES: And it really is—I mean, the clay really is like your glazes, where it has the play of two or three colors.

MS. CURRIER: But it's better because it's not just this thing that is on the surface. It is the thing.

MS. MCINNES: This is wonderful.

MS. CURRIER: Well, thank you. I have some more I can show you in a little bit.

MS. MCINNES: This is a great project for this year.

MS. CURRIER: If you go into that conference room at the library, I have got different color clays in that. I can get a yellowish; I can go to dark brown, depending on how I fire it. The people in Baltimore, when they bought that big piece, they really were looking for something for their—they have a beautifully landscaped garden. And I have had a couple of people ask me, like, oh, can your work go outside? And I haven't thought about that because subconsciously I think I work knowing that my work is contained within the scale of interior spaces.

MS. MCINNES: And specifically a white wall. I mean, your studio is a working gallery.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, it is. So, part of my thinking was, like, oh, maybe I'll come up with some clay bodies that can go outside. But then, like, okay, if work goes outside when you don't have any limits on where the space—I have a small piece that is on my parents' garden wall. They have a wonderful little courtyard, and it's nice. I mean, you have got the size of the brick, but then the cylindrical shapes are smaller than the size of the brick. So it's really nice.

I hope to start that this summer, so that when I come back from Paris in November, then I can actually start—you know, the studio, I have to get the white clay out of here, but really start working with some different clay bodies to make pieces. And, see, just the reaction that you're having holding this piece—would it be interesting to have this the size of a Richard Serra? You know, that is too big. But of a Jun Kaneko? I don't think so, because I think that you would forget; you would visually not know what is going on, but right now, you can see it, but your hand is experiencing something else.



MS. MCINNES: This is really great.

MS. CURRIER: So it's the experience of different senses simultaneously that I think is really what is important about coming into size.

MS. MCINNES: Right. You feel the density, the surface, but these wonderful shifts in these angles—this is really wonderful. It is so complex.

MS. CURRIER: Well, thank you. I appreciate you saying that because, well, what you have just said, and what you're experiencing now, is like you are having a connection, what it is that I'm trying to do with the work. And often I don't know how it's going to start. Actually, I wish somebody would come into my studio and just leave me with a bunch of scraps. You know, take the cones and the cylinders, maybe put a few things together, cut some stuff up, the leave it on a table, and say, shh, okay, Anne—[they laugh]—come on in; it's your turn now to create that—oh—

MS. MCINNES: Now, you mentioned that you once had a student worker. Do you often have an assistant?

MS. CURRIER: There was a time in my life where I thought that the whole process of making the clay and then rolling the slabs and going through this process with a way of kind of gestation, so to speak: I'm getting ready to work. And now, at 55, I've come—screw that. [They laugh.]

MS. MCINNES: You finally wised up.

MS. CURRIER: I wised up. [They laugh.] My body told me wise up, because it's a lot of work to pull that clay out, roll the slab, pull the—so now I think it's great because I can talk to them. And I think students, you know, I think they feel flattered. They can make some money. I hope they feel a little bit of privilege that I bring them in.

[Audio break.]

MS. MCINNES: This is Mary Drach McInnes interviewing Anne Currier at my office at Alfred University, on June 16, 2006, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc number three.

Thank you, Anne. We have a few more questions to ask you. First, can you tell me something about your travels that have had an impact on your life and your work?

MS. CURRIER: Sure. [Laughs.] The first time I left the country was in 19—no, it was in the late '80s. George and I went to Italy. I think since then we have managed to go on an extended four- or five-week trip to one place every five years or so. And I think what has been important is that I had specific things I wanted to see. You know, I did my research in advance. I think we talked about before—seeing the Elgin Marbles, going to the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

So then it's like, oh, now I have seen them. So it still goes back to the fantasy about them. And I made some notes about this, knowing we were going to talk about this question. Sometimes I realize it's not the sights themselves; it's more just taking that pilgrimage, you know, making it. And then I started thinking about *The Canterbury Tales* [Geoffrey Chaucer. Westminster: William Claxton, c. 1478], and what you pick up, and who you get to know along the way, and what seems to be peripheral, or just that thing of, like, traveling at some other points in time, it works its way into my teaching. And then I realize, oh, that is why I really took that trip, so I could tell the student about such-and-such that I experienced while sitting in a bar having a drink in Amsterdam.

So it's this thing about observation, and it's a thing about needing to get out of isolation. I think this is the most important thing about the travel. It's not the objective to go see this thing, either made by nature or made by man; it's really just that I need to get into the world. I think I need to experience also firsthand that there are these things that people have created.

I remember two summers ago being in South Dakota. And I was, like, George, let's go to Mount Rushmore. You know, [Mount Rushmore sculptor Gutzon] Borglum. You can say what you will, but that—it's amazing; it's just this phenomenal sculpture. And what of the human efforts that it took. I need to get out and see that. So I think that is [what happens] with travel. And then I am connected to all of that stuff, and there really is no sense of time because, you know, the Greek things were done; give a date. But there is still a lot. So I just need to be part of this continuum of time and creativity. I know that sounds hokey, but I think that I really got to thinking about travel, and rather than putting it to—oh, this is what X has meant to my work. To make it that kind of linear connection, I really started thinking about it in a more sweeping—

MS. MCINNES: And in speaking about travel and your connection with different places and traditions and moments in art history, do you see yourself now as particularly American, or do you see yourself more in an international context?

MS. CURRIER: It really gave me a sense to see that I am American because other people saw me as American. I find no way to get away from that, you know, like it or not. And I kind of like it. I still feel like there is rugged individualism that is connected, maybe in this romantic sense, about being an American.

To go back to Italy again, we were in some little park. I think it was a little village on the coast near Capri or whatever. And on Saturday night everybody is out; they dress up; they have got their babies in the little carriages, and stuff. And we're just sitting in this park. And a couple came up and started talking to us. And when they realized we were American—at first they thought we were English because we dress pretty conservatively. And if we were English, there was a degree of disdain. [They laugh.] Because the English would come to Italy for their vacations, and they have this attitude, whatever, I don't know. I had never experienced it.

But then, I said, oh, no, we are American. For the Italians, at least the ones we met, there was this enthusiasm. Now, whether that still goes to something from after World War II, or whatever—

MS. MCINNES: Right, the Liberation.

MS. CURRIER: The Liberation. Even in China, there was something about being American. And I think, you know, I am. And I actually made some notes on that. I thought about it in terms of artists that I am interested in. I have mentioned Ralston Crawford before. For some reason, Seymour Lipton—

MS. MCINNES: You like Seymour Lipton?

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, I mean, that is a real—I hadn't thought about him in ages.

MS. MCINNES: You and I are probably the only two people who have talked about Seymour Lipton in Alfred.

MS. CURRIER: John Gill actually is the one who—

MS. MCINNES: Really?

MS. CURRIER: And the library has a really great book on Seymour Lipton. I think there is a rawness. It is not connected to the source of the “ism,” so to speak. And I have always kind of seen American artists as taking—I think American artists have been Postmodernists before the Postmodernism, term actually.

MS. MCINNES: In their taking from different traditions.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah.

MS. MCINNES: And cobbling those images together.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah. Granted [Robert] Rauschenberg could not have done what he had done. Well, maybe he would have, but I think, in that case, here is where [Pablo] Picasso and [Marcel] Duchamp definitely laid the groundwork. But given the time between that, I kind of—I don’t know; I just look at some of the American artists, and I think, yeah, I’m more American, where I think I approach things that—

MS. MCINNES: That is nice. Thinking about that sense of your connection with American artists, is there a particular community that has been important to your development as an artist? I mean, is that community philosophically that sort of American modernist, but specifically here at Alfred?

MS. CURRIER: The studio practice with the teaching, from Boulder—CU Boulder, the University of Colorado, I was very fortunate to have colleagues, both in ceramics and in the art department, that were really supportive of me. I mean, I was, like, 25 years old. I was encouraged there. I know when I came to Alfred, because of the same age [and] experiences with John and Andrea Gill, we came in - , you know what it was like coming in. You kind of bond—a certain relationship—who comes in when you come in.

MS. MCINNES: Right, it’s your “class.”

MS. CURRIER: It’s your class. And the Gills and I had talked about coming to Alfred and the implications of it. So, and also we were all homeless. We would drink copious amounts of sherry and bemoan the fact that there was no housing with studios in the area.

Anyway, yeah, I would say that my colleagues here at Alfred—but it’s interesting, the word, “community,” because it might sound arrogant, but I don’t really feel the need. Nobody can be where they are without others. I know that. And there are a lot of people that I would—like the Academy Awards, they would be yanking me off the stage—start playing the music—shut her up. There are a lot of people I know that I have to credit.

At the same time, I never liked playing on a team, maybe just because I never tried out for them. But tennis, you know, where there is this—and it wasn’t that I was wanting to beat the other person as I was wanting to beat my own game. So this sense of—and maybe that is where being the art—you know, going into the studio.

MS. MCINNES: Right, the solitude.

MS. CURRIER: I have to contend with my own demons. I mean, that is my community. The work that begins to emerge is what I’m dealing [with]. But in terms in how you are asking the question, has to do with the more public environment, the culture that goes through.

MS. MCINNES: Let’s back up a moment. I would like to hear some of your views of American “craft

practices” over your lifetime and where you think ceramics in particular is going in the future. Do you have any reflections about how the market for American craft has changed over your lifetime?

MS. CURRIER: We talked—[they laugh]—I had mentioned earlier about the different generations from, say, Voulkos, and then it was Patti Warashina. I think I'm that next generation, you know. I started looking at my—if I had kids, they are the grandchildren that are coming down the pipe now. My students now have students that they are sending to Alfred. So—

MS. MCINNES: [Laughs.] Teaching does that to you.

MS. CURRIER: I know.

MS. MCINNES: But since the time—because you have been producing work. I mean, you mentioned starting to teach at 25.

MS. CURRIER: Since 1975, I would say the work has been out there.

MS. MCINNES: Right. So you had a quarter century. How has the market changed?

MS. CURRIER: I think the fact that SOFA—Sculpture Objects, [&] Functional Art—I mean, back in the late '60s, early '70s—I think you still have them. But you had the neighborhood craft fairs. And there was—the Old Town was really big in Chicago when I was there. There were certain art fairs, and there probably still are, that are very difficult; they're competitive to get into, you know, like the Philadelphia [Museum of Art Craft Show, Philadelphia, PA].

We know of a couple of people who, I mean a lot of craft artists, you know, studio artist—makers - really rely on their income from those, maybe three or four of those shows, those sales.

And those are still ongoing, and they're very productive, and people rely on them. And they get a lot of attention. Then you have things like SOFA, which I think just recently celebrated—what, a 10th—and it's now [in] Chicago and New York. They're both really big.

MS. MCINNES: Big, important galleries.

MS. CURRIER: Important—yes.

MS. MCINNES: Dealers.

MS. CURRIER: You have international galleries that—in fact, that's one thing that SOFA is now priding itself—that it's attracting European, German, you know. And then just from what little I know, like, you have the Friends of Contemporary Ceramics, which is a group of collectors, basically, who have organized themselves, and I think what's interesting there is that they're trying to raise the profile of the quote, craft artist, that they collect, at least in ceramics, this particular group, because it has helped raised their profile. That's all good for the artist and for the market.

MS. MCINNES: What do you think about the name change for American Museum of Arts and Design?

MS. CURRIER: Well, what was it, two years ago [2002]?

MS. MCINNES: I think so.

MS. CURRIER: There was a lot of discussion about it. I guess I don't think about it too much. In a

way, I think it's unfortunate because why is the word "craft" being shunned? I mean, why give arts—I know design is big; design is kind of the ubiquitous term in activity, but I don't know. I've really not thought about it, which is unfortunate. We should—probably shouldn't take up any tape time.

MS. MCINNES: Okay.

MS. CURRIER: I think that what I thought about it is, I think collectors want be more involved. And so, the collectors want their—I remember this one woman. She said to me, oh, Anne we can't make it to SOFA, and that's such a prestigious thing. She said, we were so excited to see your work on the announcement of SOFA. She says something like, well, now they know they have good taste. You know, that somehow that it's validating.

MS. MCINNES: That's great.

MS. CURRIER: I think it is good. I think it's good for the artist. I think it is good for the craft, if you will.

MS. MCINNES: Sure. And you mentioned, SOFA's growth and expansion into international, sort of, interests with European dealers. Where would you place American ceramics right now in an international field? I mean, is it in a leadership position? Is it leading in certain areas and not others? How do you think of the field?

MS. CURRIER: I think it's in a leadership position, and I don't mean to sound arrogant, by any means. In fact, in taking a leadership, I think it has to be more magnanimous in it, like, really to embrace and to try and [see], what are the artists doing, and who are the artists in France? It's been really interesting going once to the IAC [International Academy of Ceramics] meeting in Korea. They see themselves as important, and they have just as much arrogance and attitude as anybody, which they should.

MS. MCINNES: Do you see the Americans leading in all areas of ceramics?

MS. CURRIER: No, as I sit here and really think about it, I think we have to be really careful, because with that arrogance or with that assumption that we are, which maybe we were, but that's not a wave that always is cresting—or has a crest. And so I think that we have to really look at what the Chinese are doing. I think that we have to really look to communities—there's that word. We have to look to where it's coming from. There's some work that's coming out of—Laszlo Fekete has been doing some very unsettling, very progressive work. That's one name that I can think of.

MS. MCINNES: And I was thinking of the Nova Scotia School of Design [Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, NS], how they've been interested in pursuing design and prototyping. And this is something that, for example, Alfred has not really gotten into.

MS. CURRIER: Well, Nova Scotia hasn't done it yet either.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, really, and they still haven't done computer prototyping?

MS. CURRIER: If they're doing it, they weren't doing it in the ceramics facilities there.

MS. MCINNES: Oh.

MS. CURRIER: They have an excellent program there, and you know, [Paul] Greenhalgh has left. He and Walter Ostrom were really close. But I was not taken to any studios or places where that

seemed to—like, what does that look like? Students were still making pots. They were dealing with sculptural, functional. They were dealing with all—it was a studio that was very familiar to me.

MS. MCINNES: Well, some of the people we've had as visiting artists from Northern Europe have dealt with ceramics, both as a purely studio practice and then the interface with industries. Do you feel that's a direction for the future?

MS. CURRIER: Janet DeBoos, Takashi Yasuda—both of those artists are much more progressive. Maybe they're not more, but they take a different tack, you know, and it was very interesting to hear their perspective in terms of modernism, of design and functional pots, and what they should look like, and how students should go about it. They probably should be here to speak for themselves, but what I remember is that they didn't think that Americans had the upper hand in terms of really pushing ceramics, at least in that area, and I agreed with them. I agree. I think that they had access to a lot—their schools, even, were a lot more forward thinking and experimental.

MS. MCINNES: So, you would say, if I'm understanding you correctly, that American ceramics is leading perhaps in the more traditional studio-based practices of sculpture and investigating functional design. But in the area of product design, industrial design, prototyping, this is an area that we really haven't yet explored.

MS. CURRIER: We're not exploring it here. And now one of the things that we do explore here that, is in some of the digital imaging and computer design aspects, and that's because, I would say, it's faculty driven. And I think the faculty, in order to do their own work, have really pushed to have those facilities. And they can get, then, donations or whatever from corporations. I'm interested in, say, things that can be massed-produced with RAM presses. I need to take that on aggressively if it's going to happen here. So if we're going to have any computer-aided design, and what that means in terms of ceramics and molds and projects, somebody on the faculty, I think, really has to have it connected to their own work. Right now every one of us is still—we're off in our own studio, which is good, but it has to be generated. If it's going to happen in our program, the faculty has to be the ones to generate it, to trigger it, and to make it happen. We can't say, oh, we need to do this here.

MS. MCINNES: Right, to have that personal push.

MS. CURRIER: Right.

MS. MCINNES: Stepping away from Alfred, is there any particular direction that you feel the field is going or a set of directions that you feel the field of ceramics is going into the future? Do you think it's being sort of pushed or pulled in any particular way?

MS. CURRIER: I think it's being pulled by its own history. Or it's being halted by its own history. I don't think this contradicts necessarily what we were talking about. Maybe this is the conversation that I feel free to contradict myself because 30 seconds later I have a different point of view, but enlightened maybe.

Maybe we should start looking in a little bit more with the international community, you know; Voukos came on the scene, when? In 1960—I don't know, was it '65?

MS. MCINNES: Well, he was at Otis [College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA] in '55, but that big show was in 1966, the Abstract Expressionist show ["Abstract Expressionist Ceramics." University of California, Irvine and Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA], which got a lot of people talking.

MS. CURRIER: Okay, so—

MS. MCINNES: The [John] Coplans show in Irvine.

MS. CURRIER: That was 40 years ago.

MS. MCINNES: Exactly.

MS. CURRIER: You know, a good friend and collector asked me after SOFA a couple of weeks ago, like, what did I think? And my response was, well, it's the usual suspects, and I'm one of them. Andrea Gill's one of them. I was with a student, a young woman who is going to be a grad student here, and she felt a little let down that there really wasn't anything very exciting. But there was some work by a guy, a Japanese artist in his 30s, and I have his name written down, and it was that kind of blob; there's a term, you know, that's kind of—

MS. MCINNES: Anime?

MS. CURRIER: Well, he's combining anime with incredible skill, virtuosity at handling material. Do I like it? No, but there's an aspect about it where he's taken what is really au courant like this—and he's doing it in ceramics, and it's kind of unsettling, but it's really now.

MS. MCINNES: I'd love to get that name from you.

MS. CURRIER: I'll get it and—well, it's in the SOFA book. It's in the catalogue.

MS. MCINNES: It's fascinating that—you just really hit it, that Voukossort of burst onto conscientiousness 40 years ago. He was at Otis 50 years ago. So that's two generations ago, and we're still talking in those, in his terms.

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, we're still talking in artisans' terms.

MS. MCINNES: Exactly.

MS. CURRIER: And I'm probably on the final wave of that. I don't know what it's going to look like. There are some people who—like Chad Augustine [sp] and Chad Curtis [sp], and Tim Berg [sp], you know, whohad some things at SOFA, where they're working the whole kind of—there are things that have to do with robotics. There's incredible use of material and molds, and it's hard to describe.

MS. MCINNES: And installation-oriented.

MS. CURRIER: Very installation-oriented, and yet at the same time, the objects they make out of ceramics are incredibly beautiful, but in a very haunting way.

MS. MCINNES: Or what's striking to me is they make these beautiful objects, but the objects are not the sole interest. It's about another total experience.

MS. CURRIER: Exactly.

MS. MCINNES: So these objects just help propel the overall experience. They're not the experience; they're not the focal points.

MS. CURRIER: No. No.

MS. MCINNES: And so you see it combined with digital imagery, or you see them combined with robotics, or you see them participating in an environmental space.

MS. CURRIER: Right. I think it's like surround sound, you know; maybe stereoscopic is not the right term. You look at an object, and then all peripheral information goes away, and you just kind of zone in on it; they are wanting the peripheral and the humidity. I mean, that's what I feel like when I go into these situations. It's almost like taking the vanitas painting and taking—you know how with computers you can give it that 3-D—it's like those still lifes and bringing them into kind of a holographic experience.

MS. MCINNES: That's interesting.

MS. CURRIER: I mean, that's the experience that I have from looking at it. Now, I don't know what that means, but I do think that ceramics is in a place—and maybe it's too bad that the word “craft” got knocked out of it, you know, with the museum, that the Museum of Arts and Design just kind of succumbed to some known entities—because the work that they're doing is very much about craft. And I think it's really triggered by ceramics.

MS. MCINNES: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Let's get back to your work in particular. How has your work been received over time? And related to that, thinking about your reception, are there particular writers that have been meaningful to you?

MS. CURRIER: You have. [They laugh.]

MS. MCINNES: Oh, that's kind of you.

MS. CURRIER: No, I'm serious.

MS. MCINNES: I was going to stop the recording if you didn't say that. [They laugh.]

MS. CURRIER: No, you have. It amazes me to see how somebody like yourself—and Nancy Weekly—you come to the studio, and I see that it creates all these triggers, you know, like firecracker—that it catalyzes. And I go, that's really great, you know, that I'm not such an island. I don't know how to describe that. I remember that—I will not name this critic, but the person became very upset when I revealed that I didn't follow this person's writing. And he goes, well, I follow your work. Oh, Anne, you just disappoint me. He didn't pay attention to my work anymore after that because I didn't follow his writing.

I don't think it's just me. I think it's very difficult for artists. I don't know how galleries go about to find people to write about work and to really address the work. I think that's what's—don't turn this off because it—you're a rare person in that you really look. And you can take what you see as being really essential.

MS. MCINNES: Thank you.

MS. CURRIER: That there is really nothing to write about unless you're really paying attention and observing what's going on here. And then what's great is that triggers all these others. But unless you're really looking, it doesn't exist. You don't bring all that other stuff to the—it's an organic—you have to look at the work.

MS. MCINNES: Right, it's the encounter.



MS. CURRIER: Right. I think that's sometimes the problem, is that some writers have other agenda, have other things that they're really involved with. And then they will look at work, and then they will try to figure out a way to weave that into what their agenda is.

And I know that one of the questions has to do with—is criticism by artists more valuable to you? To tell you the truth, you know, there's only so much time in the day, and reading about art and criticism often isn't at the top of my list. But I have to say that it's not so much the criticism written by other artists but just other artists either being interviewed or writing about their own work.

Making statements. I forget the name of her—but she writes really quite—I think this book is probably 50 years old, you know. Agnes Martin.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, I've just been re-reading her work.

MS. CURRIER: Writings [Wintertthur: Kunstmuseum Winterthur/Edition Cantz, 1992].

MS. MCINNES: Oh, fantastic.

MS. CURRIER: I know you read what she has to say, and the things like Ralston Crawford—Annie Dillard in the book, *Writing Life* [New York: Harper & Row, 1989]; if I could buy an infinite number, I would give that book to every student who comes in the door. The same with *Writings*. I will often feel like, well, I could've written that. There's a sense of confirmation. In a way it's like travel, you know, because you're realizing that you're really part of a bigger world, and it's dense, and it's really —

MS. MCINNES: And someone like Agnes Martin speaks about beauty in such a way that's very, very difficult to capture.

MS. CURRIER: It really is.

MS. MCINNES: And she speaks from a lifetime of exploration, which comes across. She was writing in her 80s about beauty, and you have that whole 80 years. That's extraordinary how she does things.

MS. CURRIER: I was looking at—I showed you that book—the interviews were done probably back in the '60s—with [Katharine] Kuh—Kuh now does the interviews. And there was one with Georgia O'Keeffe, and she was asking about working in a series, which is something that I tend to do, and I like doing. And then she said, it's like getting acquainted with a person, and I don't get acquainted easily. And I read that, and I go, yes.

MS. MCINNES: That's wonderful.

MS. CURRIER: The thing about a series and the thing about reading what other artists have to say is that you realize that it takes a while to get to the marrow, to get to the core, to get beyond the peripheral, to get beyond the, you know, the veneer. So I don't know what that has to do with anything, but sometimes I like reading critical things because it really does—sparks start to fly in my head. And mostly I have the argument with myself. But I really like reading mysteries.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, excellent.

MS. CURRIER: They're puzzles. And there are some writers who—there is one called, *Points and Lines* [Seicho Matsumoto. Tokyo; Palo Alto, CA: Kodansha International, 1970]. It's so complicated,

but it uses the Japanese train system and schedules. It's not just the mystery itself—oh, the other guy who really gets me is a Dutch writer whose name I just—van der Weyden. No that's a painter. God, now all of a sudden I've forgot his name. Anyway, it doesn't matter.

We should turn off this so I could remember his name, but he lived in occupied Holland, the Netherlands. He joined a Japanese Zen Buddhist monastery, came back to Amsterdam, joined the police force. So his two main characters have this whole thing of—they play bongo drums—you know, it's like they pay attention to all kinds of clues. And then they just—you know, how things come together. But what they're paying attention to—and I think that's what I really like about mysteries, is that you can go off on these circuitous routes, but you have to pay attention to clues. And something that may have been seemingly innocuous, unessential in another point in time, just kind of looms up. And it's like, God, why didn't we—now I see how that played in.

And so it's the clues, and it's this sense of suspense. And I also wonder about the mystery writers themselves in terms of this creative act. Did they know when they started to write it what the ending was going to be? Or is it like making art? Do you figure out how it resolves itself as you're making it?

MS. MCINNES: That's great. In fact, what would I like to do for the last few minutes here is go back to talking about your work. I've been looking at your recent work closely over the last couple of weeks and thinking about how you actually put things together. You don't carve the pieces. You don't model, which is traditional with ceramics. It's really kind of an assemblage, but it's not how we think of 20th-century assemblage. And I started thinking, well, what is the technique, the process most closely allied to? And I started thinking of all those pieces that you cut off the forms, and you fit together. And it's almost like a dressmaker's art.

MS. CURRIER: No, it's really funny you should say that because when I was in grade school, my grandmother always sewed her own dresses. And she bought me—probably I was about—I forget how old. I wasn't that old, maybe fifth grade. Short-waist dresses were big at the time. And it was probably in the '60s. So I learned to sew. I didn't really think too much of it—gave that up, you know; after a while, I stopped sewing for whatever reasons. I can still do it. But it was one of the early times where I could make something. And what was interesting were the patterns. And I've thought about this in terms of teaching, because your sleeve is not just the cylinder. If you were to take this shirt apart and lay that out flat, you know what it looks like. So I don't think your association with a dressmaker or with sewing—

MS. MCINNES: It's a tailoring.

MS. CURRIER: It's how to fit pieces in. But it's not just to fit [pieces in]—you have to make a transition from a shape that's flat [to another shape].

And maybe I'm using cylinders, but still they can be—you just don't cut cylinders. I mean, it's interesting to give a cylinder a shape to a student. They tend to make 90-degree angles; they cut it. And it's, like, wait a minute, you know, the knife can take on a much more complex curve because, well, you can cut it, but then it can be slightly rotated on itself.

MS. MCINNES: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. CURRIER: So in a way, how to take that three-dimensional, how to take the cylinder as analogous to the flat pattern from the sleeve, and what are the different ways that you could bring the different sides or edges to one another? It's a very interesting analogy.

I don't know that it's how different it would be to, say, somebody, like—oh, I think of artists, whether it's David Smith or Wade or [Julio] Gonzales.

MS. MCINNES: I was thinking of Richard Serra—the curves and how his pieces form space.

MS. CURRIER: That might be a little too Minimalist. More kind of like Léger—

MS. MCINNES: With the welding.

MS. CURRIER: Just some of the sense of—although Léger is more the subtractive, but I'm trying to think of artists who it is, more of an assemblage, kind of collage. But in my sense you would almost take, like, a nylon stocking and then wrap it over the whole thing so that you really wouldn't see any of the actual bones.

MS. MCINNES: Or you have a uniformity of the surface rather than—in most assemblages there's a kind of a collage effect with a multiplicity of surfaces and different tactile qualities to it.

MS. CURRIER: I think that it—

MS. MCINNES: Because when you look at your work—I mean, if someone just walked into a gallery, there's a stone-like quality to it—maybe a sandstone or something like that—and you'd think the work is carved.

MS. CURRIER: And that it's solid.

MS. MCINNES: But it's not. And there's something very particular about how you work and what the dynamics are that follow from it. In some ways the process sidesteps some of the sort of traditional readings of sculptural form, and it gives your work a very different inflection.

MS. CURRIER: I think so. But here, again, it's the extent to which the material and the process, at least for me, are just like tendon and muscle, you know, and being attached to the bone and—I mean, it's like all that stuff. As you were talking and articulating, I had in my head a particular piece, Cadiz, and I could see that as being—well, let's take it down to that place at Indiana and have those stone carvers, you know, size it up. And that's been a fantasy I'd often like to have. And I guess I could be challenged. I don't see my work—I think we spoke earlier—in metal. I don't see that at all.

MS. MCINNES: No.

MS. CURRIER: But I definitely can see the work, say, in stone.

MS. MCINNES: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. CURRIER: I think I would probably have to make it first with the hollow cones and cylinders, and the way I do it, and then have it scored it up. It would be interesting if somebody just—I've never done any of that kind of sculpture by subtraction.

In fact, I've always found interior spaces because they've been the interior cavities, not because I actually removed stuff. Projection and recession have been the results of the hollow forms themselves. Whether I would have found those kind of cavities by subtraction, I don't know. That may never be answered. But I think to address what you're saying is that—I think we talked about this earlier - it's more of a pottery technique, where the maker always has their hand inside of the—

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: You have to have your hand inside of the cup to make it, to pull the walls up. You have to have your hand inside the teapot as leverage, as a reciprocal pressure to apply a handle or a spout or something. So I think that it may be connected to my own history in that respect, that I never switched over, when I started making sculpture, to dealing with clay as solid mass.

MS. MCINNES: Right. So it's a craft-based practice, even though you're making abstract sculpture.

MS. CURRIER: Right.

MS. MCINNES: Which is really fascinating. I don't know of too many people really doing that. There are some artists doing that, but not many within the ceramics field.

MS. CURRIER: Well, Akio Takamori's sculptures are all hollow. Mark Burns—

MS. MCINNES: Well, I was thinking in terms of abstract form rather than figurative pieces.

MS. CURRIER: Eva Held [sp] is somebody—I think she's from Finland - within the past five years, in terms of seeing her work. We saw it in Baltimore, I think, at the Maryland Institute [College] of Art.

MS. MCINNES: And Wouter Dam's work, what do you think of his work?

MS. CURRIER: Well, it's interesting because I thought of Wouter Dam when I was thinking about the question of being American, because I was in a show with him.

MS. MCINNES: Really?

MS. CURRIER: Yeah, at the Lucy Rie, Hans Coper Legacy ["Ceramic Modernism: Hans Coper, Lucie Rie, and Their Legacy." Gardner Museum, Toronto, Canada] and Wouter Dam was in that. I always have and I still do love his work. It's really amazing. There are things that we hold in sympathy together. But then I looked at his work, and I thought—and this is why maybe I figured it out - that somehow with European—God forbid—that there's a system that comes into play. Like, I can see that his pieces are thrown. It's not that they're any less poetic, but I think what's interesting with his work is that I'm getting process, that I see how he's made them. And then often I don't know how to balance that with what I think the form is doing with its exterior, interior—like, it's tunnel-like, how it moves.

MS. MCINNES: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. CURRIER: Because I can see, well, he threw these two shapes, and then he kind of rotated, one and he—I can understand the system of how he made them.

MS. MCINNES: Well, that's really fascinating. And that leads me to ask you one last question about your work, because we've talked a lot about [working] in the studio. And I don't think I've asked you if you've had commissioned works. And I believe you have.

MS. CURRIER: I've had two.

MS. MCINNES: One of which is over in the Miller Performing Arts [Center] building [Alfred University, Alfred, NY].

MS. CURRIER: Yeah.

MS. MCINNES: That was in the late '90s, wasn't it?

MS. CURRIER: I think it was '97 [1997-98].

MS. MCINNES: I think it was '97 because it looks like the panel series that I had written about. And they have the same figurative quality. There's two wall pieces that are together.

MS. CURRIER: I think it maybe was '97, '98. I think those were being done the same time the panels were done, except they probably were finished in '98. I don't know. But anyway, I was trying to respond to the building on a couple levels. One, that there's a void in the space because there's a water fountain across the way. And then having [it] so it looks like these figures. And also it's performing arts, and it's right down by the—it's a bathroom by the theater, so that, you know, dance and movement. So this figurative thing seemed to be acceptable, whatever.

But it was also coming after doing the commission two or three years before, again for Mr. Miller—his building in Reading, Arrow, where I had this big, huge wall in their dining room and with this Italian slate. And that's where the creativity came in: how do we hang this? What I wanted to do was—but, how you going to do it?

MS. MCINNES: And was it a large wall piece? I haven't seen it.

MS. CURRIER: It's an 18-foot wall piece. And originally it was just going to be continuous. And there are things about the edges. I tried to play - like, just outside the door that they go out, there's a terrace. And the architects have done things where they kind of terraced the [interior wall] paneling with the stone. So I was trying to play off some of the geometry and some of the relationships of scale, and what have you, that existed.

So the architects looked at it; I made models. The one suggestion that one of the architects made was, what if I was to interrupt it, to create, say, a 10-inch, eight-inch space - because this is a huge room. It was a 72-foot room; it was a big dining area. And they had these beams that were placed. And it just so happened that that's where the next—if the wall wasn't there, that's where the beam—so—oh, that's interesting. What if there's a pause that represents the presence of that beam? So that got me to thinking—I used that idea when I did the Miller—

MS. MCINNES: That's great.

MS. CURRIER: —that this pause—well, if you turn around, there's the water, but this is also where somebody might insert themselves to be part of what's happening. The one at Reading took two or three years. And it was one of those situations when it was—and I think most people who have commissions would say this—like, once you've done it, then you're ready to do it.

MS. MCINNES: So did it have the impact—I mean, you said it's a large project. Did it empower you to sort of take on other, larger projects in your studio? Could you describe any kind of impact that you think it had on the rest of your work?

MS. CURRIER: I think I would say, well, I did the panel pieces after that.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MS. CURRIER: Because the figurative really became more—well, it's always been there. I mean, those panel pieces come the closest to almost being two-dimensional relief, you know, and a forced perspective. So the fact that I still had the table there from doing that big piece, I thought that I

could make the panel pieces; I could make them flat and then stand them up. So I think I was still responding to the environment, my working environment, just like I had mentioned to you last time we spoke down in the sculpture studio, when we were building our studios at home. I mean, I've got this big space. I know that there are these big kilns, and all of a sudden, the pieces.

So I think that subliminally I'm responding to the space. It might be that moving into the new studio—you know, you were noticing how some of the more recent work has kind of—some of that agitation has dissipated. And I'm wondering, you know, moving—it's curious thinking about it now—moving into a clean, pristine—there's a shift here. Like, all right, this is a new space. What's going to happen in this space? This is new territory; this is travel. How do I travel in this space?

MS. MCINNES: That's nice.

MS. CURRIER: That's where my people say, where are you going to go on your sabbatical? Oh, I'm going to that foreign country called my studio.

MS. MCINNES: [Laughs.]

MS. CURRIER: Learn some new language; you know, see what's going to happen.

MS. MCINNES: That's wonderful. Good luck with that. Are there any other comments that you'd like to make before we close?

MS. CURRIER: Did I mention Stella Kramrisch?

MS. MCINNES: No.

MS. CURRIER: I wanted to mention her name. She was a really good friend of Helen Drutt. From what Helen told me, she was also the friend of Anselm Kiefer and Clement [Greenberg]. She for a while was the curator of Indian art and architecture at the Philadelphia Art Museum.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, really?

MS. CURRIER: A good portion of their collection of Indian art was donated by her. And I would say in 1984, when I had a show in Philadelphia at Helen's, it was one of the first times I showed some of those large pastel drawings. Stella came and saw those. And she was really taken by them. I think I only met her once. She was already pretty old at that point. But she mentioned—saw things about the Kama Sutra—things about Indian art and sculpture, architecture—you know, just the whole—and I hadn't even thought about that. And it was her making that connection that really got me to—not so much, unfortunately, reading about it, but looking at it. And I just felt like I wanted to throw her name in there. Because—

MS. MCINNES: She was part of your community at that moment.

MS. CURRIER: Really, and she was one of these people—you're one of them. They're people who are very generous. Like I mentioned the man who looked at the announcement and thought it was concave instead of convex, and then Stella making the connection with Indian art and sculpture. And this whole thing of bodies, you know, limbs entangled and the implications of that. So I thought I should throw her name out.

MS. MCINNES: Good.

MS. CURRIER: My mom. [Laughs.] And I'm serious.

MS. MCINNES: No, she's been fantastic.

MS. CURRIER: She really has. So I hope whoever is listening to this at some time goes and looks up the work of Mary Ann Currier, her large still lifes.

MS. MCINNES: Born in?

MS. CURRIER: Louisville, Kentucky. Still, at 70-something years old, still making work.

MS. MCINNES: Fantastic. What a role model for you.

MS. CURRIER: She has. She's been a role model in a lot of ways: independence, control, but at a distance. She's taught, so there are times—I mean, we all go through them, you know, like, Mom, I can't believe that this is going on. And, go, Anne. I mean, she came through teaching in a very male-oriented, misogynist environment. So she learned a lot. Back in the '60s she was trying to balance—or not balance, but she had a lot of careers. How to be a teacher, an artist, a mother. And back in the '60s it wasn't easy. But she wasn't a feminist; she was too busy doing it.

MS. MCINNES: That's good. You have a great time on your sabbatical.

MS. CURRIER: Thanks for doing this, Mary.

MS. MCINNES: My pleasure. We'll continue this conversation.

MS. CURRIER: I'm sure.

MS. MCINNES: That's the problem with the tapes; they run out.

MS. CURRIER: [They laugh.] It is.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...January 6, 2008