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Oral history interview with Akio Takamori,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Akio Takamori on March 20 and 21, 2009. The interview took place in Takamori's studio in Seattle, Washington, and was conducted by Mija Riedel 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.

Akio Takamori and Mija Riedel have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art interviewing Akio Takamori in the artist's studio in Seattle, Washington, on March 20, 2009. This is [mini] disc number one.

We were just talking before we turned the tape on about, Akio, your upcoming shows at Barry Friedman in New York this fall, 2009 [*Akio Takamori: Alice/Venus*, Barry Friedman, Ltd., New York City, 2009]?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, this fall.

MS. RIEDEL: And then in 2010, in Paris or [inaudible]?

MR. TAKAMORI: I don't have a plan yet for 2010.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. We're sitting here in your studio surrounded by the pieces that you're currently working on. We've been talking about the newest piece, which is a landscape.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Which is quite a change for you. You started experimenting with these when you were in Belgium in the residency?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. This is actually for preparation for Belgium. I was anticipating -

MS. RIEDEL: What was the preparation — okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: What should I make?

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because I had only one month. And in one month you have to kind of make the piece and then have exhibition and we came back. So the pieces kind of now shipped out and I'm waiting them till they arrive — so I got — it is all like a really wonderful experience, which I really liked. What part of the residency I really like is like, of course, like the way you move into a new place. The materials and everything is new. And especially environment, you know, history of the place, the landscape and culture and food and everything is really kind of — freshened my mind up again, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Sometimes like in the studio, you know, I have a wonderful studio. So there's no reason for me to go out. I have, you know, perfect setup here. But it seems like I like kind of to displace myself and then refresh myself and then just work. And then especially like the way you are in the residency, you just pay a little attention to your community, but mostly just from morning to evening, you know, you are in the studio, and then nothing else I would need to worry about, which is like a really kind of a — I love the kind of a sense like I can be so productive. And especially like in my age -

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] You're not that old.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah. But I feel it physically, you know? I work too hard and I get headaches, and you have back pain stuff and all this stuff. So you know, I kind of worry about from now on, you know, if I'm lucky and healthy, then I'll keep on making another 10-20 years. And then I really have to figure out, you know, the system. Maybe, you know, like I might need some help. Differently, like now there's when I'm loading a kiln. My wife can't help me much anymore. So whatever the occasion, you know, young people are around, I have to plan, loading kiln,

you know, that accordingly.

Yes. So anyway -

MS. RIEDEL: Do you ever have student assistants from the university [University of Washington, Seattle]?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. You know, students are so busy. And then most of them have like, you know, one or maybe like — some of them have two, three jobs.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then, you know, so like I feel like really hesitant kind of to ask, because all I need is, when they drive down here, and then just only one hour, you know? Which is not really — maybe it's not really, financially for them, it's not worth it. More like it's like living to help me. But young people are really kind, and they do. But at the same time, I'm kind of a, you know — I have to really figure out some better way, you know, something like a neighbor, high school boy, or something — that would be more flexible.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So you're preparing for Barry Friedman, and that was probably still going to be figures?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And the landscapes you were saying that you had experimented with these 16 small islands sort of spread it on the ground.

MR. TAKAMORI: In Belgium, yes, I did, yes. [Sint-Lucs Beeldende Kunst, Ghent, Belgium, December 2008 to January 2009 -AT] That was still kind of an experimenting for me. So I have to kind of really — I like to kind of take time to develop it. [*Venus with Islands*, 2008; Exhibition of 16 small islands and four larger figures titled *Moments in Time*, a two-person exhibition of Saturo Hosino and Akio Takamori at the Witte Zaal Gallery, Sint-Lucas Beeldende Kunst, Ghent, Belgium, while I was a resident artist there. -AT]

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And so that time in Belgium, you've done these residencies from time to time in different places, and they seem to be a great opportunity for you to just try something completely different.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that something about going someplace completely new where you're detached from everything that's familiar is in some ways really liberating?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Because that's how the first standing figures came about. That's how these are coming about.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like that's something you've done throughout your life, really.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That's true. Like if it goes like — like when I came to the United States, you know, '83 or '84, that was kind of odd. That kind of excitement, which is like, I think, still, you know, the important saving up. So like it seems like I kind of repeatedly saving up this situation, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And what inspired these islands? Because this is completely different than your usual -

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, like you kind of pointed out, like my first kind of — my base piece is the village piece. [*Village*, 1976] And from that village piece, a figure came out. And then I just wanted to go back to going to like a landscape part of it, architectural landscape part of it. And at one point, like last year, I was thinking about revisit the village piece because I still own it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I like to set up them, and then -

MS. RIEDEL: Is it still set up upstairs?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, it's not set up, but in the boxes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: But because — yes, it's going to take time for me to kind of setting up and take so much space.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But my children were small — when they were in high school or something, they were kind of interesting that I shouldn't be this and stuff. So for just play, myself and my son, set up the village. And then shoot the video [2005].

MS. RIEDEL: Aha.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so like ideally, I wanted to have a kind of sense of that you were kind of walking into the village. And so because of the village pieces, I have a like interior of every houses. But then when you're looking at the piece, you don't really experience it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So if, you know, had like some kind of technology, the camera would be, you know, like I was thinking like a medical camera, to view inside the stomach kind of thing. So if that kind of camera can go visit each houses and stuff, that could be interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So you know, in the really low-tech kind of a way, you know, we shot some images. And then like I just kind of a couple of years ago, you know, [inaudible] are something like ongoing, but some they might be able to do kind of an idea. So like the last year when I visited my hometown, I took up my camera and videos and stuff. I was just shooting the area, which is supposed to be the place — I made the piece based upon that neighborhood.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And you know, after so many years, that area is like so deteriorated. I guess it's also an industrial city, countries now — all the development that goes into city, and then, you know, local, small areas kind of, you know, diving down, like the population went down, the population went down. And they are like very quiet. And then for instance, the town where I grew up is like — now if I go visit, lots of like old buildings torn down. And they have like a little higher condo, apartment. And so around there is like almost like missing teeth, like the space, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then when I stand on a street, you could see the second street, the third street, because of this empty lot. And they are all kind of parking lots or can be abandoned, but for tax reasons or whatever, they make into parking lots. And then all those like leftover buildings is like revealing back side of it because the other buildings are gone, and this and that. And that's like a really — still have this right-after-the-war kind of quickly, cheaply built, you know, part of the house and stuff revealing.

And then after that they're kind of patching and adding and new material, you know, like a cheap new material patching, and a new roof. And then some kind of an aggressive retail building with a big signs. You know, it's kind of — if I kind of open up my eyes and looking at them with fresh eyes, it's like really this past like so many years, you know, like supposed to be developmental thing. It's like I don't really see it. It's kind of almost like going backwards, kind of [inaudible] human activity type of thing is just gone.

MS. RIEDEL: So the opposite of progress? You're not saying [inaudible] deterioration.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, deterioration.

MS. RIEDEL: Without anything that's moving forward.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: I thought it was very interesting because all those years, from right after the war, economically and everything is supposed to be, you know, thriving and developed. But I guess it's a part of like, you know, rich and poor kind of social kind of gap between poor and rich, or a city to the countryside. It's like really getting so obvious.

So that's kind of making me kind of think, you know? In my memory is kind of a time like the population was big in this small town because small industry were thriving there. And so like they have like in the May they have like a workers May Day parade and things I remember. Or like festivals and a neighborhood and all the noise and shopping and people, you know, visit the neighborhood shops and this and that.

MS. RIEDEL: And this is the town where you were born?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were born there, and you grew up till junior high or so, yes?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the name of the town?

MR. TAKAMORI: Nobeoka [Japan].

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And what year were you born?

MR. TAKAMORI: 1950.

MS. RIEDEL: Nineteen-fifty. What day?

MR. TAKAMORI: October 11.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: My birthday is very close to Rudy Autio.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: When was his birthday?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think it's October 23rd or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. You must have gotten to know him very well at Archie Bray.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll talk about that. Well, since we've gone back in time, we may as well — your father was a doctor?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: He was a urologist and a dermatologist; is that right?

MR. TAKAMORI: That's right, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And his name was Michio?

MR. TAKAMORI: Um-hm. [Affirmative.] Wow, you have a good memory.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] And it was a pretty unusual — well, it seems unusual childhood because you grew up in a very extended family right next door to your father's clinic, correct?

MR. TAKAMORI: Right. Well, actually, the one building — and I think, you know, because I don't have much vivid memory of that place, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: That was supposed to be — because it's like something that you hear later. And then we moved out of the neighborhood. And the move to a new area, but it's like probably less — well, maybe seven minutes away, walking. So it's like it's not that far.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But the section of town, it was kind of an arcade and kind of one street and the movie theaters,

and then the back street is supposed to be like a red-light district in the street. And then — so later, I went visit there. So the house was still there. Of course, it's gone now. So I could see from outside. So — and then some of those neighbors still lived there. So like — well, like sometimes we go — walk to there to eat out or, you know, things like that. So I visited.

But the house we lived is like — you know, sometimes like a flashback kind of things. And then I see this kind of a wooden stairs goes up. And then have like a rail, wooden rail. And those are rooms here and rooms there. But I don't know if that was like really my memory or I made it up by hearing stories, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And the funny thing is like, I was born there, too, because my brother and sister, they were born in hospital. But for some reason I was born at the house. And my father didn't take me out, but there was a — how do you call those -

MS. RIEDEL: Like a midwife?

MR. TAKAMORI: Midwife came. And then — so I thought, well, maybe like I'm going home now. So I'm going to ask my mom, you know, why was that?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Were you the youngest or the oldest?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, I'm the youngest.

MS. RIEDEL: You're the youngest.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And did she — have you had a chance to ask her yet?

MR. TAKAMORI: No. But I'm going to do this thing. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And you have an older brother and an older sister. What are their names?

MR. TAKAMORI: My sister is the oldest, Hitomi. And my brother is Takuo.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And did either of them go into the arts as well?

MR. TAKAMORI: No. But my sister, since she was little — she was like three or four — she studied the violin. So — and my brother did the piano. And so when my mom asked me, what is your choice? I was interested in violin. So I went to violin, same teacher, for about six months or something. And my mom didn't have much patience anymore, right?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Because she'd get really into it. So like I remember like my mom like when they come home, the kids come home, and they have to practice. And my mom, you know, was always there. And then she'd get really into it, like the kids would make a mistake and she — whatever. So I saw it always like a — I was really jealous that they have so much attention from my mom. But at the same time, that intensity of like when they're doing the exercise lessons, was like pretty intense. So I was just kind of looking at them.

But I just — you know, I didn't like that kind of [laughs] intensity my mom got into too much. So I said, you know, I would like to quit it. And then my mom was like — she was just fine with it because she was already just kind of -

MS. RIEDEL: Tired. She had done it.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: What was her name?

MR. TAKAMORI: My mom?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Misako.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And how many years were there between your siblings?

MR. TAKAMORI: Two.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So she was fine with you quitting the violin. Did you choose to do something instead?

MR. TAKAMORI: While I was in kindergarten my teacher said, you know, "Akio is good at art." And then I think — I don't remember if I was there or my mom told me. Then I just really simply believed in it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So that was a kind of point I almost kind of felt like, okay, my career is going to be art.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember — were you drawing or painting?

MR. TAKAMORI: I did a lot of drawings. But -

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember what you were drawing?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, figurative.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: It was kind of funny because one incident I remember was like — I like to draw girls, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Even when you were little?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And, you know, a little girl's drawing is like — you have tulips, you know, three tulips and then a little girl. There the scale is about the same, almost, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then the sun is up in the sky. You know, that's kind of a typical thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And you know, so it's Japanese girls. They have kind of a bang, straight bang, and straight-cut kind of hair. And they maybe have like a big ribbon on the head or something like that.

My brother liked to draw like more aggressive, like little kind of stick figures with tanks or with, you know, like battleships and airplanes and sometimes the crashing airplanes and all that stuff. I think my brother is like differently, you know, vehicles, like cars, and airplanes and all that stuff. I did that some, too. But one day I was drawing those girl things, and my brother — you know, of course, he teases me. He says it's a girly thing. So I got really tired of him kind of poking me that way. So I remember that I tried to make it aggressive, you know, boy thing. And I gave her a bloody nose. So this little girl standing there next to tulips, and then make it straight down from her nostril, you know, blood is — pshew — coming down. [Laughs] This is kind of a funny little incident, you know, you don't forget.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Absolutely. Trying to bring in a new influence and see how it could overlay. That's really interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I have the same kind of girlish program, which is like I also had this stuffed doll. It was kind of like — it's before the kind of Barbie doll things, so there was like a very Japanese doll. But this probably created that prototype — came from [inaudible] or something like that. It was like the head and body and legs and arms are there like a little bag and covered with cheesecloth-like this. And inside was shredded wood.

MS. RIEDEL: Like wood chips.

MR. TAKAMORI: Wood chips kind of things. And only head was like on top of this cheesecloth, they have a gesso kind of things on top, so like a little stiffer. And they painted, you know, like two dots for nostrils, and then the big eyes, round eyes, and the tiny red lips.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And then have like a wire goes around the head, and they have a fabric. So it looks like a bonnet kind of. And then the backside is just red cloth. And then she's wearing simple kind of a girl clothes, red skirt.

MS. RIEDEL: So Western clothes?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. And then the end of the leg was like red fabric sewed like this, so like the end of the bags. And that was supposed to be shoes.

MS. RIEDEL: Her little feet. Right, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Anyway, and her name was Miyo-chan.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I think it had something — that was kind of a — I was carrying them around, and that was important, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. How old were you? Do you remember?

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, probably kindergarten.

MS. RIEDEL: Was she big?

MR. TAKAMORI: She was about this size.

MS. RIEDEL: So almost a foot-and-a-half, 18 inches, something like that?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So when you were five, that would have been pretty large.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I start to realize my dad is concerned about it, and my brother is kind of making fun of me. And so like one day I had to make a decision. And toss it or just give it up, but I just needed some kind of a good reasoning of it. So I have to rationalize myself.

[They Laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So I made a — I remember there was the corner, you know, in the courtyard, and we have like a faucet there, and have a little pond or whatever. And that's where, when we were kids, we used to play with water in the yard. And I was there. And then I just decided she got really sick.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I had to operate her.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And so I kind of opened her up. And all the stuffing came out. And that was — and the operation didn't go well. And she died. And so I remember that.

MS. RIEDEL: That's pretty interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then also, something about dolls and figures. I have — I don't know that was before or after, probably after. I got a Cupie doll. It was a big one.



MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And it was made of celluloid back then. It was like before plastic.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. It was made of celluloid?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. It's dangerous.

MS. RIEDEL: Is it?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. It's flammable. So that's what happened [laughs] —

MS. RIEDEL: That one went up in smoke? That one burned?

MR. TAKAMORI: I was like — you know, wintertime. In my parents house we have one kind of a center room, which is like — more like a formal room. We have like a *tokonoma* and, you know, we have a piano there and probably about eight *tatami* wide room. And then we have like the lower lacquer table. And then we have this — in the closet, if you open the door, there's futons in there. And they have like — we called it a *zabuton*. It's just like sitting cushions.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So when you have a guest — is, you know, coming, in the wintertime we have this hand warmer. And we have it filled probably halfway with ash. And then you have this really good wood charcoal to be heated up in the other room. And once it gets going, we put on this ash. And then so like an hour before the guest arrives, you put that to warm up the room. So it's like a tricky kind of sparse space, you know. It's like a square lacquer tables and *tokonomas*.

MS. RIEDEL: And this is the only source of heat, is your furnace, right?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: There's no central heating.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so then like I walk in there. So like you have those sliding paper door. And then I have to go to make sure the heat doesn't go out. And I was kind of holding this Cupie doll, and kind of looking to this charcoal thing. And the Cupie doll caught fire. But then there's like — in my memory, that just kind of goes Puff! And almost disappeared, like explosion.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I remember, I didn't know what to do. And I was shocked, and I was scared. So I was just kind of running around this lacquer table, I was just shocked, running, crying probably. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: And you were about the same age, about five?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, four or five.

MS. RIEDEL: So the dolls did not come to good ends?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But that's interesting that from that age you were compelled by figures.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: That is really interesting. Do you have other strong memories of growing up in the village?

MR. TAKAMORI: One thing is like I, you know, can't figure out — well, I talk to my mom and she kind of laughed and she helps out, can figure out. But we moved out there, and then we have — you know, my parents have the new building, [inaudible] houses next to it. And once — see, at that time, like we have very good bus transportation through the city. And when we'd go up to shopping in the, just, you know, downtown area, I just

always followed my mom because she likes to have me because I have a pretty patient — you know, like she goes shopping for shoes or clothes, you know, I'm just kind of with my mom and I don't complain. And so she sometimes asked me what I think, and this and that.

I kind of liked it. My brother and sister are already in school. So I can do that with my mom, you know. So that was kind of a time with my mom and myself. And then like when she finishes shopping, sometimes we go to coffee shop and I get some café, you know, kind of things. And that was going to be nice.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it a big village? Is it a small city?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, actually, what it is is like, this is the coast.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.] So it's right on the water?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, actually, you have to kind of — it goes in about one kilometer or kilometer-and-a-half. And then there was a town. And the railroads goes, and the bus goes. And then we have two rivers. And kind of between the rivers, they have a double hill, and there was a castle on it.

MS. RIEDEL: A castle?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, small, nothing really.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So that was in the Edo period, it was a kind of center.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then the other side of river, when the industry came, those workers would move in there. And so like we were on the other side of the river. And the central area between the rivers, they have kind of shops.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then the other side of the river, they — later, they sub-developed, so that department stores and stuff like that. Yes, but now, like all those little shops are gone. And then all those department stores they tore down. And then we have one shopping mall, which is kind of a national chain kind of, you know. So that's the only place. Well, anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there bridges across the river?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Or boats? Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I was waiting for the bus with my mom. And there was a huge woman, fat woman. And she was in her probably — I don't know what. Kids cannot tell age of people.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And she was like a really outstanding kind of unusual-looking because, you know, at that time in Japan, adult woman is very slim.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then also modest. But she was kind of rather kind of wearing some kind of bright color clothing, and she was big. So I said, "Oh, look. Look at her. She's very big and blah-blah." And then she kind of looked at me and said, "You know" — she's so mean. She said, "She's your real mother."

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Isn't that unusual? It's like I got really pissed off and was kind of — made me cry, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And who she was was, she was a madam from this big whorehouse across my parents' clinic.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Across the street from the clinic?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Sort of like old neighborhood. And I had no memory of her.

MS. RIEDEL: Was prostitution legal?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think it's illegalized in 1954 or something, 1953 or 1954.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So it was legal by the time you were -

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I think it's, once it's illegalized, or just about time they moved out to rural — and also, according to them, there was not really good place for kids to be there, you know. Because I don't remember, but my mom say like — my brother was a little older, so he kind of like mimic kind of what — you know, sort of like my brother kind of — you know, I'm kind of following him around. So we played like drunks, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Or like that kind of things. And yes. But that street was like — I think it was like, in daytime it was just regular. And when the sun goes down, all the kind of lamp stands all this stuff lights up and the girls go out in the street and dressed up. And then the workers combing the streets comes around. And there's a lot of little tiny, tiny bars. And so like those guys just go in the bar and go to a whorehouse and all that kind of things.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And sometimes, like I heard later like, you know, fights. And then the drunk kind of — one of the stories would be scary to me is like some drunk or someone would bite into the glass. And so inside his mouth kind of bleeding and stuff and was going to go into the hospitals. Or like sometimes a prostitute escaping to my dad's clinic, and they would have to kind of protect her and stuff like that. So there was an intensity.

MS. RIEDEL: And do you remember this? Did you see it?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, I don't.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember the stories?

MR. TAKAMORI: Those stories.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then my — in the daytime, like this madam's children was like playmates with my brothers, and we were supposed to have kind of like played with them. So like daytime, I would, you know, normal kind of a neighborhood. There's like — we have a clinic, and then like they have a little yard. And then that was right after the war. And then there was a homeless family build a shop there. And they were living there. So in your own yard, this other family, you know, and they were living there.

MS. RIEDEL: In your front yard or in the house next door?

MR. TAKAMORI: Not the front yard — side yard, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Of the clinic?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And your father was — he accepted that?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And eventually, he helped them to buy a house. And then when they — my dad sold the place — and I noticed that, it was like when I was in high school or something, this young man came to thank my dad, you know. Yes, it was great.

MS. RIEDEL: Your father must have been an extremely compassionate man.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, he was. He was quite generous.

MS. RIEDEL: And all his clients were from the neighborhood? They were the workers, they were the prostitutes?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. But also — so then they have a yard. Then the family was living there. Then the next was ink-stone carver. And it was a very unusual profession to be in in this neighborhood.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And his wife was a woman from Kyoto, you know, which is — especially back then, it was far away. She speaks different dialog. But for some reason, she was kind of an old lady and very peculiar-looking and tall. But she always was dressed in kimono. She was proud, she had the pride of like a woman from Kyoto or something like that. But sometimes she has this uncontrollable hysteria. And when she starts getting to that, you hear that she is screaming and yelling at her husband. And her husband was a very quiet, you know, like a really gentle old man.

And that — well, also, like that family who are living in my parents' yard, he doesn't have a decent job. And he — so on a Sunday, he goes to a park, which is like this old castle on the mountain. And they have a week — goes there Sunday, and they go up in the hill, and go to this kind of a flat area. And he is always there selling toys he made with the wires.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MR. TAKAMORI: He made this fabulous bicycle, you know, like a little bicycle, and then the wheel turns and handles moves. And have a little kickstand.

MS. RIEDEL: A little kickstand. And he made these toys out of wire?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a heavy — he just — was he self-taught? Do you have any idea what his background? How interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: I don't know. I don't know what was his background. But I'm sure that probably they came back from Manchuria or something, you know. That was like it was Japanese government encouraged poor people to go to China and to, you know — so they kind of kick out Chinese peasants and gave those lands to them and, you know, expecting them to immigrate there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: To this puppet government country in Manchuria. So they were all like poor people when we were growing up. And those bridges we were talking about, you know, people lived under the bridge. And then some of my classmates, you know, on the other side they have another mountain. And they have a ditch made to — I guess it's agricultural canal to send water. And they put the wood over it, and they built a shack on top of it. And then a lot of them are living there. And, yes. So — and then also, at that time, another thing is like the mental ill people there are not hospitalized or — not hospitalized — institutionalized. So there are — not a lot, but like there's a famous, like Kazu-yan and Mee-yan and Apron Obasan. And kids named them because they just kind of go around all day. And Kazu-yan is the one who was scary. His hair is like this.

MS. RIEDEL: Long.

MR. TAKAMORI: And his pants is always, you know, like torn, and you can see his ass. And then he carried this kind of pull wagon, and he collect junk, you know. And at that time I guess he was supposed — I don't know. But like kids always, you know, follow him around and, you know, kind of say nasty things, some of them. And he'd get mad and kind of yell at us. "Come back so I could catch you," or whatever, you know, that kind of thing.

And then the other one was — Apron Obasan is like — Apron — you know aprons?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: She just have like a, you know, layers of many, many aprons all around her instead of a skirt, like this thick, you know? And her hair was like trimmed very short. And, yes. So she is kind of old. [Inaudible] organized around, you know, when the kids is kind of about teasing her and stuff. She is just mumbling something, just walking around.

MS. RIEDEL: Sort of ambivalent — it doesn't even register what's going on around her.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then the Mee-yan is like — he's a tall guy. But his head is very small, like this. And he was like, he wasn't scary. But sometimes when he'd get really mad, he can react to kids or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you free to just wander all over by yourself as a child?

MR. TAKAMORI: Between my house and the school is a kind of my territory, which is — it's not that far, but maybe like 10 minutes walk to the school. And then once we get older, the bicycle is going to expand your territory. Usually, like on the way back home, I go to other friend's house, like where those poor people live neighborhood. And then there was a lot of like still like rice fields. It's kind of a fun place to go, by the rice fields

where there's canals. The water was really clean and usually those green underwater grass is kind of going in one direction. And you see a lot of like minnows and like some insects kind of swimming on top of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Like the water spiders.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. And another place I liked was like when I'm walking by, and there was still like a lot of empty spots. Probably it was because of war damaged and nothing was rebuilt. And then the neighbors kind of needed the food, they kind of make up the garden. So like the cabbage patch in the spring was like really great because you'd see so many little — what is it called, those butterflies — caterpillars?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And then you see like — if you sit there looking at them, you can see the moment of like a butterfly comes out.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? Out of the cocoons?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, the cocoons, and the wings are still wet and soft. And they eventually dry out and goes up and to fly.

MS. RIEDEL: You saw that happen?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Those are so many of them.

MS. RIEDEL: That's amazing.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And sometimes like we bring to the school, and we have a little cage. And then we can see them just kind of develop and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like a really diverse childhood full of diverse experiences in a very diverse community.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But it felt fairly safe. There was -

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I'll say so.

MS. RIEDEL: Diverse, but never truly threatening.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So you had a range of experiences, a real range of experiences-

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But without ever feeling truly threatened.

MR. TAKAMORI: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Does that seem accurate?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Because that resonates somehow, this wonderful diversity in terms of a community of people.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes. There was like — the factories there, there the factory is like a kind of [inaudible] in the area, and then they kind of branched out. And so did their office in Tokyo or like a new factories in the different cities and stuff. So like we have like a kind of a — how do you say? — like a workers, and then office workers, I guess. So those office people are more educated people. And they come from other areas.

And so like we have the company — we have like elementary school, all right? Next, are surrounded by this company housing. And then they have kind of a segregated section — is like mostly from a higher officials. And this one is other, more like local workers. And then this official place, higher kind of housing, is usually — people come from a different city. So they kind of — so like every year, when you enter the new class, there's several kids from other areas. They have like more — sound to us like a little more sophisticated dialect, you know, like Tokyo kids or whatever. And they usually stay two years or something. Then they move to somewhere else. So that was kind of interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: An influx of kids from other places, too.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And what do — were your parents supportive of your art interests from early on? Do you remember?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes, I think so. But, you know, it's a country city. So especially back then, there was nothing like a really sophisticated, you know, schooling for art or anything. So art is basically what you learn from elementary school, and you don't have any kind of classes you can take after school or anything like that. But my father was really interested in art. So like we don't really have like those private galleries or anything. But city hall has a little space. So like the local artists, sometimes they kind of display their work there. And my father sometimes took me to see those.

MS. RIEDEL: Were they primarily two-dimensional or three-dimensional?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Mostly I remember is like either oil painting, photography, and maybe the print, printmaking.

MS. RIEDEL: All traditional Japanese landscapes or prints or some contemporary -

MR. TAKAMORI: No, I think it's more modernist.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And do you remember anything about ceramics from an early age?

MR. TAKAMORI: No. The area where I grew up didn't have that much ceramics tradition. There was, but there was kind of a discontinued and — yes. But you know, some of my father's friends are kind of collecting antiques and stuff. And then also, I got, you know, middle-class, upper-middle-class people, they always have some little ceramics to put flowers arrangement, *tokonoma*, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there any sort of library? Or did your father have a library where you could look at books and see art?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. My father had — my first art book was like — because of right after the war the publication wasn't that really good — he had a tiny kind of — paper wasn't very good, print wasn't that great. But I think it was series. One was Pieter Bruegel, and then one was Picasso.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. But he also liked to show us photography books.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. He was — you know, he was — you know, like in Japan, when war ended, there were a lot of people at the time who were really moved from — they are already mad about the war and, you know, like militarism. So when the war ended, when democracy came, there was a right side and left side. And the left side was like quite influential at the time, you know?

And then my father was kind of — well, my mother's brother during the war, he was in Kyoto University, and he was studying economy. Marx, Engels kind of, you know. And he was thrown into jail. So during the war, he was in jail. And when he came out, he was Communist Party member. He's still alive, but all through his life he was kind of a — became a Communist guy.

And my — he and my brother [sic] [father] went to the same high school. They were good friends. Well, it was a kind of reason my father married his younger sister.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. TAKAMORI: So anyway, so when war ended, he was really felt like guilty about not noticing all this, you know, military things.

MS. RIEDEL: Your father felt guilty?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And so he kind of joined the Communist Party. So there was like a kind of a left kind of a socialist, Communist kind of people around us. And — but when 1954-1956, it's a Hungarian uprising, I think. You know, my dad was disillusioned, so he left.

MS. RIEDEL: Left the Communist Party?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. But he was always kind of a really cautious about — you know, he's kind of a youth. He didn't really — he was sucked right into this kind of propaganda from the, you know, militarism. So he — even he wasn't the Communist Party member. But he was taking like — I think it's almost five different newspapers. One was a Communist newspaper. So he just wanted to make sure, you know, he's getting the right information.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So he was wary from that point on. He wanted to make sure that he had the full range of information, all the different perspectives.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And did he talk to you about that in terms of your own education or ways to see the world, that there are different interpretations of the same events?

MR. TAKAMORI: I guess so. But he was really — didn't say anything about — you know, as long as I'm aware and make my own decision. But he didn't really try to influence us on anything.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Just to make your own decisions.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you come — you left home when you were 13 to go live with an aunt and uncle; is that right?

MR. TAKAMORI: My grandparents.

MS. RIEDEL: Your grandparents?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And why did you? Was it to go away to school?

MR. TAKAMORI: My brother was going to local, you know, public junior high school. And then at that time there was like a — still some teachers, especially like some teachers like really tough, you know, like — well, there was like a kind of — at the time there was some teachers, they are like belong to union and they are like almost like more left. And some teachers, more right. And some teachers are like still carry on this kind of a, you know — how would you say? Kind of like militaristic kind of way of trying to control kids.

MS. RIEDEL: Militaristic, very authoritarian?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, authoritarian, yes, that's the right word.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And my father had trouble with that. And my brother was 13. And he was a very little kid. He kind of grew — latecomer, you know? And then when he was in the school, according to the story, he had a little mirror, and he was on the second floor. And when the people were walking around there, he kind of reflect light to their face, and you know, he was having fun with that. And this teacher came and beat him. And he came home with his face puffed up.

MS. RIEDEL: My gosh.

MR. TAKAMORI: And my father was really mad about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he kind of was thought, you know, "I can't send my kid to this school." I don't know what

else he did. But eventually, my parents decided, you know, we go to a different school. And that — so that was capital of the state prefecture, we say. It's Miyazaki. And that's where he grew up there.

MS. RIEDEL: Your brother?

MR. TAKAMORI: My father.

MS. RIEDEL: Your father, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: My father grew up in the small village. But usually at that time, if you go higher education, like junior high school, high school, you know, I guess like a wealthy family, they can afford to send their kids to cities.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, like a private school or a boarding school.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. It's not private, but — yes. Only the elite went to like, I guess — selective kids went to higher education.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But my father's mother came from that region, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That's kind of an interesting story itself, like — because after my father — well, about the time when he was dying like that, I went to his library. And I found several of his — like a diary.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: And it was really cute, the time when he was junior high school, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Diaries from when he was in junior high school?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And it's very interesting. He has a lot of drawings on it. It's beautiful. And it's like a childish, but it's kind of — you know, that kind of coming-of-age.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's really sweet. And the part of it also, like — he was going to, on Sunday school, this American missionaries, a couple. And there was a page here like a picture of like, for Christmas, of two, you know, middle-aged American couple. And I think it was like a day of playing of some instrument for Christmas things. And then — but the page that he wrote about when he went there, he saw like Hoover, President's picture on the wall.

MS. RIEDEL: Herbert Hoover?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he thought, oh, this must be like, our parents have our Emperor's picture in the house.

MS. RIEDEL: Aha.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, stuff like that.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So you had really insight into him as a young man.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And then the later one when he goes to college. And then once he was in Tokyo, and that kind of a period of times like he's kind of a really — like, you know, young kind of a teenager. And he is kind of attracted to this kind of Christianity. It's kind of a plurality. And you know, like a spirituality. And he's kind of tried to figure out with, kind of his own lust.



MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And this, you know, how he should kind of — it's very cute. And it's like very human, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

[END OF CD 1.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, did you have art classes when you were really young?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think depending upon your home school teacher, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And when I was fourth grade, his name was Mr. Yamada. He was just kind of an ordinary man, but he was kind of — brought more kind of art material into class.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I remember the first time we worked with paper mache. And when then we'd do like drawings and stuff, he encouraged — send them to kind of a citywide competitions and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So you had a sense of that even as a child that that world existed.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And then that really opened up for you when you moved to Miyazaki, no?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, when I went to Miyazaki, you know, I was already deciding going to art school.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? You were 13.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Because, you know, like my mom is like really serious about education and stuff like that. And then like I knew my brother is kind of getting pressure or expectation of a go to medical school, become doctor and stuff. And just like how I escaped violin.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: I figure out, as long as I take initiative, and if I say, "This is what I want," then the parents will leave me alone.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: And yes. My brother was kind of interested in literature because oldest uncle, my father's oldest brother — he was a poet. And he went pretty — up to a pretty good place. But unfortunately, he — during the war, he was in Manchuria. And after the war he was sent to Siberia. And he had all just terrible experiences. It was kind of a miracle he came back alive. But, you know, that -

MS. RIEDEL: What was his name, Akio?

MR. TAKAMORI: Fumio.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And that really -

MS. RIEDEL: Also Takamori?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And that really changed his direction, you know. He couldn't write anymore. I don't know exactly what that was. But — and also, one point, he was an oldest son. And then he — I think he felt like he had to go back home to my grandpa to take over the, you know.

But it's a funny thing. A long time ago, my grandfather had a lot of property and mountains around where the village where he lived. And then when the [General Douglas] McArthur came and the kind of restructure began, they forced the wealthy landowners to give up their land. So it is kind of interesting because it's really idealism, you know. It's like the epitome of — more like socialist, communist. But it was kind of interesting how that happens.

Anyway, so like a lot of people lost their land overnight. You know, that never happened in Europe, never happened in the United States. It maybe happened in Russia, China. But anyway, so — but mountains wasn't the case.

MS. RIEDEL: So he was allowed to keep the mountain?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So like he didn't — he wasn't really interested in kind of doing kind of lumber business or anything like that, but that was kind of — came from ancestors. So he just kind of maintained. So he hired people, woodworkers, to take care of those. So he kind of was more like bookkeeping, you know, keep eye on that kind of things. But he didn't kind of develop anything. But, you know, like trees are like almost nothing now, you know, because like all important lumber — you can't compete with the Canadian lumbers and the States and, you know, other countries. But there are plenty of trees in Japan, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Still?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. But people can't afford doing those labors. And then like they can't really sell trees.

MS. RIEDEL: Because the price is so inexpensive in Canada and other countries?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So like more like — more and more, there was a huge woodchip, paper companies kind of buying out. And then they used the woodchips mostly, I think, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And did you ever visit that mountain when you were a child?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Well, when we, you know, were kids, like my — you know, my parents wanted us to know. So like we — and then especially when grandpa died, my grandpa left a little — you know, he had 12 children.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: So everybody get a little bit.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Only boys. But, you know, women, they sold trees and they got cash. But anyway, so like there was an old man. He worked for my grandpa. And he took us and showed kind of border lines, you know, how they do. And you have to undercut -

MS. RIEDEL: The under story, right, the trees.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, branches, you have to cut.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, trim them, right?

MR. TAKAMORI: And trim the grass and all this stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But anyway, I don't know what the future for those things.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But what really kind of impressed me is like, there was a newly planted tree, you know, cedar — mostly all cedar trees. And then we're talking about, you know, by the time when you get 60 or whatever, you know, you can cut them, you know, and this and that.

MS. RIEDEL: So it had become almost a tree farm?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, it is kind of like that.

MS. RIEDEL: And they were harvested for paper?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, actually there was like a lumber.

MS. RIEDEL: Woodchips, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Lumber. But like they don't do that anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So now it's more like chips.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like some like real successful like mountain — lumber owners, they have their own kind of wood mills and, you know, make it their business to be big and strong. My grandfather wasn't interested in that.

MS. RIEDEL: What was he interested in?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, when he was very young he had to kind of, you know, do that. But I think that was too much pressure for him. I've heard he himself wanted to become a doctor. But he was only the son. So he was kind of a — you know, have to carry this on.

MS. RIEDEL: The family business.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So for awhile he was doing it, but he just completely lost interest. So like as long as they can live, and they can support kids for education, and then that was just enough for my grandfather.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And then your father became the doctor?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. My father wanted to study literature like my uncle did.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah. Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: But then my grandpa really wanted him — his kind of a dream, I guess, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's interesting, then, because your brother was interested in literature.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But maybe not vocal enough about it. Did he become a doctor?

MR. TAKAMORI: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No?

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: He had a very difficult life.

MS. RIEDEL: But you were able to — they were fine with the fact that you wanted to be an artist?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. My second uncle, he was very interested in paintings. But when he was teenager, he was like — he was always had like kind of a — was weak child, and he was hospitalized. And then I think also my grandpa was overly protective of the kids, and he was like really nervous about — and one is like — my father's mother, she died of tuberculosis. And then so, from — after my father was born in a couple of years, she went back to her parents. And she built — I think her parents built house in Miyazaki. And then she was just living there.

And my uncle was old enough to really matter, you know. So my uncle was never — you know, he wasn't really — his kind of longing for mother was really, really strong. And then that was like all through his poetries and all those kind of important part of it. And he never fully forgave my grandpa for that. And — but my dad was like young enough.

And then he — my grandpa remarried woman. She was kind of a head maid for in all this time. And she was very, very sweet woman. She was very humble. And she really took care of, you know, the children. And then between them, they had another like five-six kids. So it was a huge family.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. But my uncle who wanted to be a painter, he was like a really, for his age — like by the time he was like 15-16, he painted in the kind of a realism, like Western style, like drawings and oil paints. And it was like really, really sophisticated.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you see those a lot as a child?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. But he — I think he was kind of schizophrenic. And so when he was hospitalized, he eventually married his nurse. And my grandpa put him in the way up into the middle of nowhere, the land where he had. And so like financially, my grandpa took care of them all their life.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: But they lived like in a land my grandpa gave in the mountains. And then they lived very humble, you know, life. But they had maybe five kids, and, you know, my grandpa helped their education, children's education and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: So now, when you moved to Miyazaki with your grandparents, were those your paternal or your maternal grandparents?

MR. TAKAMORI: Paternal.

MS. RIEDEL: Your paternal grandparents?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And was there a big house full of kids there, besides you? Or was it just you and your grandparents?

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, by the time I went to my grandparents' house, there was only one uncle, still single. He was a banker. And then when he got married, we moved out.

MS. RIEDEL: So how long did you live there?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think I was with my grandparents for maybe two years?

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you at this point begin to really study art in earnest?

MR. TAKAMORI: I was like — you know, like in junior high school you have the club after school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I joined to art club.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And what did you do in the art club?

MR. TAKAMORI: I remember one thing what we did was, we bought the plywood. And then we did portrait of, you know, students, like a profile of them. And we kind of worked together.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And was it all painted? Was it cut out in silhouettes in the plywood? How did that work?

MR. TAKAMORI: No. Just, you know, instead of canvas.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And it was painted with oil paints or acrylics, something like that?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think it was just poster color kind of thing, because oil — my sister, when she was high school or something, she asked for a kit for oil painting things. And her interest didn't last too long, so it came to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Aha.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I start, you know, doing — buy a canvas and start to paint.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Sort of like I did for myself at home. And at that time I was really interested in impressionists. I especially, my favorite was Modigliani. So I have a kind of a portraits, kind of an after kind of Modigliani.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were how old at this point?

MR. TAKAMORI: I was probably 14.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And you were focusing primarily on figure painting?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I have one painting from that time at my home. If you'd like to see it, I'll show you.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I'd love to see it.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's a portrait of a dog.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: My grandma's dog.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And then how — where did you go to high school? Did you stay in Miyazaki?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That's the high school my father went.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And you continued on with your art studies there?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. You know, we don't have — you know, public school in Japan much better in art education, like music and visual arts. And then they have calligraphy.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: And I don't know now, you know, but when I was growing up that was the thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So it was a regular part of the curriculum?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Unlike here, where it's more of an elective.

MR. TAKAMORI: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So everybody took that?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: I think the art was about two hours.

MS. RIEDEL: A day?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, no, a week.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And the music, too. And — yes. But that's just kind of very kind of a — nothing very sophisticated. You know, like the kids go outside and do sketches. But anyway, but even like the — we start to have some art history in the junior high school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And is that how you learned originally about impressionism and Modigliani?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. But my father, you know, was interested in art.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were already exposed?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, a lot more than other kids.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.] Because he had a library; is that correct?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You would look through that?

MR. TAKAMORI: Medical books and, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And they taught children. But, you know, like the first time you get the art text — well, I remember in the junior high, you get the art textbook, and they have like the art history in it. And when you open the page, the first page, there's a black-and-white picture of an Engel's nude picture. So of course, it was all boys, you know, get all excited, you know.

[They Laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So introduction to art is a nude woman.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. Yes. And also then, were you looking probably at the figure, not only through art books, but through your father's anatomy books and medical books? So you had really a different — an expanded view of the human figure?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, I think so. Yes. And then I was like — I think when I was living with my parents, actually like — you know, like my mom is busy feeding nurses, and we also have in-stay patient, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you do?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like in the evening -

MS. RIEDEL: That's a little hospital, almost.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, domestic, but hospital-like. Only one doctor. And then evening, like about four o'clock or so, two kitchen ladies and my mom, they start this kind of cooking things. And each patients have this lacquer, wooden lacquer tray. And there's was a plate with the rice here, and you know, four dish and the little small dish in the center, and tea and whatever. I helped them, you know, so I know where to go.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then sometimes I like to kind of bring this to the patient's room. So, you know, so like I probably what I liked was kind of being a good boy. And the patient would talk to me. And being — you know, and that was kind of nice. And then like when patients we served first. Then my father comes back, and then the nurses come back, and we eat all together. So that it was like in the kitchen, you know, like everybody is eating.

MS. RIEDEL: So the whole clinic staff and your family were all eating their meals together?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes. So like when I was a kid — and then like after that is like people take a turn taking bath, then they recede to their room. So when I was little, like, you know, kids take a bath sometimes my dad, sometimes my mom, sometimes my uncles and aunts that were living in the house. And sometimes maybe — not often, but it was nurse or, you know. And then after that, like, you know, I wasn't — well, when I was little, I don't need to do homework. And then I just go sometimes to go visit the nurses room and then they kind of listening records or, you know, they were telling stories. And sometimes they kind of do origamis or that kind of things.

But what I remember is like, you know, storytelling. Because those young women, they're coming from near the village where my grandpa was. Usually, those people come from the area — you know, farmers' daughters, they like come right after junior high school. They were only like 15, 16. And so my mom's kind of work is also to kind of watch over them because, you know, they soon start to kind of putting on makeup and, you know, being very friendly with the patients or especially those drug salesmen.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: They are very cool, you know, for them. But anyway, so they have like those countryside folklores and, you know, superstitions.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And all that thing was quite interesting. And the one story — I don't know if I told you. But I remember it vividly. It was like at that time, our bath, toilet wasn't modernized yet. So it's outhouse system, but indoor. So like if you walk into this hole, they have waste on top of it. But then you can kind of see some of it down there. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: And sometimes, like, you know, they will all be young women, so they will have a period. So it will have the bloody down there. I don't really ask, but it was kind of weird and shocking. But what really caught my attention is like those baby maggots tried to climb up, you know? They hatch there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like, I went to kitchen, and I took boiling water to pour in there. I don't know — maybe some people did, that's why I kind of pick it up.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And at that time the young — one of the young women, I don't know who that was — but she told me to not do that because there was a goddess living down there in this dirtiest, filthiest place. And she's a really beautiful, fair-skinned woman with a beautiful black long hair. And she's blind. She's living there. And so like it's not good thing to pour -

MS. RIEDEL: Pour the boiling water.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. [Laughs] So that kind of a gap between beauty and spirituality of this story and then the reality of what it is, and the maggots and all this stuff, it was kind of interesting, you know, just the juxtaposition.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely, absolutely.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I do remember reading that, and it just resonates so well with your work.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I think somebody talked about your work, a combination of — I can't remember — the awkward and the awesome or — but there is that huge juxtaposition between what's beautiful and what's more difficult or what's really the more difficult parts of life. And also that sense of mythology.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And I think it also was very interesting was, my mother when she was young, she was in Tokyo area. So she's outside person. And she's also [inaudible] intensity, you know, then like — and she like — you know, she is kind of dealing with those farmers' daughters. They're young, and they're naive. And she was very uptight about it, you know, because as a matter of fact, later when I was like 13-14, like that, I realized, you know, some of the girls got pregnant. And my parents feel kind of responsible.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah — responsible.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I remember the one girl. She was quite coquettish and pretty girl. And she — my father had to kind of help her to — I don't think he did it himself, but organized to abort the baby, and then she went on somewhere. So there was like such drama. Like I remember there was one woman. She was like a really fun woman. She came from a fruit farm. So like when she go home, she bring peaches and all this stuff. It was great. She was very athletic. But anyway, one day the bank was empty and she disappeared — you know, stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, there are lots of little stories like that, you know? I think I was pretty kind of influenced by this kind of environment with those stories from each woman. And then there was — my brother and myself really liked this woman. She was kind of short and kind of chubby. And she wasn't necessarily beautiful, but she was kind of attractive in some way. But she was very, very sweet. And she was — you know, she — oh.

At first she was kind of an arranged marriage — came from the home. And she married a railroad worker. And they settled down not too far from my parents' house. But I remember that day she got married, she dressed up in traditional bride, and she came to greet my parents. And we were all sad, and she was crying, too. Then a little later, I think there was like a kind of humble little housing, and we kind of — not like we can't — we're not allowed to just visit her casually or anything, but just that we'd just walk by her house. And then later, I've heard like that she's very unhappy and her husband was kind of a drink too much, and this whole domestic violence and stuff like that.

And I think maybe like his mother, and her mother-in-law, is not very nice, and this and that. That was kind of a — and then a couple of years, I think she got divorced. But those I've heard, you know. But she remarried. The young man, he was a salesperson for a drug company.

MS. RIEDEL: For a drug company.

MR. TAKAMORI: And they were kind of in love, but, you know, she was forced to marry another man and all that stuff. So that was probably — you know, probably that was happy ending.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So there was, in your childhood, there were these extraordinary stories, which were real. I mean, they were very real experiences and lots of drama. And then the mythology that came with all these tales from the country. I would imagine as a child, it would probably be hard to draw a line where one ended and the other started.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And what were people wearing? Were they still very much traditional dress? Was it a mixture of Western and traditional dress? I'm curious as to what costume it was.

MR. TAKAMORI: When I was little, like probably middle-age, older people, they were wearing kimono regularly. My mom wear kimono when she go to special occasions, like even like PTA meetings or just an outing, you know, and stuff like that. But, you know, eventually, she started to wear less and less. It was like also, it's not comfortable, you know, for when you get really old, you know? And stuff like that. But yes. She liked kimono.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting to think about this because we're here surrounded by such a range of dress from sort of Renaissance and Baroque and neck ruffles, and all these figures around us. And this one is so different than anything else you've done.

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, this one is like for this new show. I started with a kind of a Venus image.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like a body is West, and the head is East, kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, in terms of the scale and features?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And then also, so that body is like three-dimensional calculated, and head is not really kind of a realism and three-dimensional formation, more like an exaggeration than informational. Then the information is all brushed. So that kind of dichotomy. [This piece was not finished or shown. I worked on the piece in 2008. -AT]

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting because I think of some of the — like I think of the boat piece and the figure pieces — the juxtaposition was between the figures. One would feel very much of a Renaissance, in a Renaissance painting, or one would feel very contemporary.

MR. TAKAMORI: Right. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And then these, you've actually contained the dissimilarities within the figure itself.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And this one, though, is so different. Does this one have a title? Is this one also based on Venus?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. This piece is like —

MS. RIEDEL: The hair is completely different. This is long hair streaming down.

MR. TAKAMORI: I tried to kind of connect the head and body with the hair. But basically, I didn't really — I just satisfied with how armor looked like chopped up instead of like — those are like they are more created



referencing with a historical Venus.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: But this one somehow just didn't work out really well. So like I'm kind of like — I tried to fix it up by adding this, does that change it? But it still is not working. So this is kind of a rejection piece. But I'm going to do some more glazing over the shoulder or something if anything will change it.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because I've never seen anything that looks quite so contemporary. This one has just a very contemporary feeling from the costumes and treatment of the hair.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And the body, too, feels very different somehow.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's true.

MS. RIEDEL: So this is potentially for Barry Friedman, that show?

MR. TAKAMORI: Potentially —

MS. RIEDEL: You'll wait and see how you feel?

MR. TAKAMORI: — throw away.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: But I am just — if I push it, in the process they become, you know — come out better or not. I think kind of, you know, other test piece, I can learn something from it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Right. It's just so interesting to hear you telling these stories surrounded by these figures, going back hundreds of years with their own mythology and history.

MR. TAKAMORI: Probably she came up from the outhouse. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: She looks — actually, whether she's got the long black hair, she could.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So moving us back to school a bit, because this is fascinating, so in high school, were you still working primarily two-dimensionally? Were you beginning to branch into 3D at all?

MR. TAKAMORI: In high school, it's more like — it's a public school, but it's more like their goal is kind of prep school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So you have to be kind of top group to get into this high school. And then once you get into high school, or even like junior high, too. It's like a really severe year. But they have a mid-term and a final exam. And they put the name from the first person to 150. So if you have the top, it will be fine, but if you're like about 150 and up, [inaudible] that will just be hard.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then high school, the first year I was about like 50 or something, which was like okay, you know, because, like the top group can go to Tokyo universities and Kyoto universities and stuff, which probably took like five. And then about 20 can go to Kyushu University [Fukuoka, Japan], where my father went for medical school. And then top 150, 100 maybe, or 150, you can go national university, but Miyazaki, you know, next prefectures, and stuff like that. And then somewhere in between, like 50-100 maybe, you can go pretty good private schools.

In Japan, usually top — you know, here, the Harvard-Yale kind of thing, is national Tokyo University, Kyoto Universities.

MS. RIEDEL: And is it not broken down at all in terms of disciplines, in terms of, you know, medical school versus art school?

MR. TAKAMORI: What they do is like, first year is not, but the second, sophomore in high school, they start to

segregate with people who go humanity or science.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And the sciences usually go top-class kids. And humanity is kind of the second group. And then others, you know — and we're others.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] You weren't even in humanities?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, yes, humanities. But they have an elite class for the science, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Biotech or whatever, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So you know, I didn't want to kind of get involved in that kind of a fierce competition. And also, my weakest was science, math, physics, and that kind of thing. I liked history or Japanese. I don't like English that much. Well, anyway, so like I was over at — you know, I wanted to go to art school. But there's no students' advisors — all those people cannot help because they don't know that many people interested in going to art school.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. TAKAMORI: So we kind of belonged to art club. And the art teacher is supposed to be kind of advising us or whatever. But you know, that was usually like a really old art teacher. They're like not really interested in teaching or anything anymore. So that basically, an art club had seniority. They just kind of look up to them, like that. So in the summer, those kids would say like "I went to summer school in Tokyo," went to so-and-so school and advised them, you know, like if you — like a nude drawing, make sure you wear like a swimming suit first so it doesn't show the sign.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Things like that. And so we are kind of ourselves. And then like it goes like — most of teachers, they're not even interested in arts. So we're kind of losers, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Oh, dear.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like if I'm doing, you know, math badly or whatever it was, as long as I don't flunk, it was okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And my parents didn't worry about me in that sense. So you know, like every end of the semester, you get this report card, you know. I even didn't show it to my parents, and they didn't ask me. And then I ended up by, you know — you're supposed to kind of show it to your parents so your parents stamp, and you return it to your homeroom teacher. But I even didn't return it. So like the teacher, he kept asking me, you know. But he didn't worry either.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like I didn't need to see my grade, you know? [Laughs.] So I really kind of get, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Skated through.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, skated through. And so after class, we just go to art club, you know. And teachers are, you know, five o'clock, he's gone. So like we just kind of do whatever we like. Especially the seniors, we become senior, we just kind of, you know, smoking cigarettes in the room, and just throw them on the floor, and like a real — I wasn't that bad. My friends, they were pretty bad. They were a pretty crazy bunch. I didn't participate, but there was a — I've heard one of them say like one day that some kids would not be a model. So he just got naked and he's masturbating, and then the other kids have to draw, and stuff like that.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And that was like — a lot of the worst is like — you know, when you're young and so cocky, you know. Like we — like my club-mates were pretty sophisticated. They're like, you know, reading like, you know,

Freudian, books, too, Norman Mailer, and, you know, all that stuff in the high school, and then contemporary, you know, Japanese writers. And so that was very good for me. I just really introduced to those interesting contemporary stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was their literature club?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, art club.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, in art club?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so they were reading a lot?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And I remember like Norman Mailer's like *Advertisements for Myself*, and things like that?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And things like that, we thought was like really cool, you know, because we are kind of more modest kind of Japanese culture. We know that kind of American ideas and, you know — and we were also like into like erotic literatures and stuff like Sartre and Georges Bataille. And then who was the American writer? *Capricorn* [*Tropic of Capricorn*, Paris: Obelisk Press, 1938]?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, Henry Miller?

MR. TAKAMORI: Henry Miller, you know, stuff like that. And you know, I didn't really — you know, I prefer to go along with them, but I don't know how much I really understood or digested it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: But, you know, John Updike and all this stuff, you know, like we liked, you know? And especially like, being such a countryside. And so like when we have like a school open house and stuff, we say we should do something — you know, our club.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: How about like doing a happening and stuff?

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: So we made just a huge plastic kind of a sheet, made it into kind of balloon, glued them together. And a lot of my club mate, h goes inside. And it's supposed to be womb, you know? And we kind of rolling around in the kind of the front of the school. And the teacher comes out, "Get out of here! It's a parking lot!"

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So we are just — we could do whatever we liked, but we were just completely ignored.

MS. RIEDEL: But you were reading a lot. Were you looking at art as well?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: What were you looking at? What work were you looking at?

MR. TAKAMORI: Art?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, sort of like — my colleagues, they were showing me a lot of what contemporary Japanese art at the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's Arikawa and all those people. They were really out there. And Kudo Tetsumi [sic, Tetsumi Kudo], I don't remember his name. But I was kind of surprised at the art going out in *Art in America* this month, because his work in there.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I saw that. I saw that.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. It's weird, kind of grotesque and messy stuff, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Exactly. You were looking at that back then?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Kudo Tetsumi, I think, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Like in Japan, like that was in the '50s, like Gutai and all those groups were there. But you know, I wasn't really too familiar because I was kind of looking at impressionists and stuff. But you know, my club members, you know — but those, I think, is very unusual.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because our seniors are looking at more like Japanese Taisho period, it's like 100 years old. Westernized oil painting from Japan, you know — the guys, they went to Paris and they mimicked impressionists, you know, that kind of thing. So like, those, you know, club-mates, they are very radical. And one of the worst things was, you know, they are really cynical. They were kind of really looking down on this kind of old, you know, ideas, and you know, sort of like that.

Our high school did not give a shit about art. But like somebody who became a locally famous painter, or somebody who went to Tokyo and, you know, we don't know who the hell that person is, but they're supposed to be selling paintings or whatever. And those people sometimes would donate, you know, their work. So that we had like a kind of cabinet and a whole bunch of framed canvas. They are all like oil paintings with really low-key, mundane. It's not interesting, but they were like very proud, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And once like we, you know, take them out and kind of, you know, just like kind of a cultural revolution in China.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, we condemn and make fun of them.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then took out several oil paintings in the courtyard and we burn it.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Isn't that terrible?

MS. RIEDEL: That's amazing.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That was, I think — I bet it's like a time of cultural revolution. You know, young people became so radical, and then we just kind of condemning.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And there were no repercussions for that?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Because like good thing nobody found out because we could have been kicked out.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes! And was there any three-dimensional work happening at all? Were you looking at ceramics, Japanese ceramics at all, Chinese ceramics?

MR. TAKAMORI: No. You know, we were kind of young and were supposed to be looking at Western contemporary.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But it's kind of — you know, we didn't really look at like hope after.

MS. RIEDEL: You did not?

MR. TAKAMORI: Hm-um. And the music, you know, my friends like actually classical music. And one of the old friend of the guy who hung out in the clubhouse, he went to music school in cello. So we — my friend — you know, I was the naïve one. But they just kind of introduced me to a lot of things. He was like — we were listening to Renaissance kind of Baroque music and the lute. And he liked the harpsichord.

MS. RIEDEL: So again, really diverse. From very classical, very traditional Baroque music, that sort of thing, to Henry Miller and John Updike.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, that was kind of interesting because himself, you know, he really couldn't break into — his work into kind of a contemporary mold. Himself — when we were reading other books, we were kind of impressive, you know, what's happening in the contemporary art. But he was really, you know, just like my uncle when he was young. He was a very sophisticated painter. He had — you know, he copied from the classical painting. How do you pronounce it? French, Delacroix — we say Delacroix in Japanese.

MS. RIEDEL: Writer or a painter?

MR. TAKAMORI: Painter.

MS. RIEDEL: What era?

MR. TAKAMORI: He had a painting of like Dante's Inferno.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: He's on the boat, and he's going like this, and all those dead people tried to climb up from the boat, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right. Right, right, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he did copy of that. And he gave it to me. I still have it at my parents' house.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll have to look that up.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's almost like just, you know, black. But you can see the Dante's drawing direct hood, kind of a cloak. Then like it goes like, the skin tone of those people trying to climb up.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And all I — yeah, he liked the Japanese painter Shigeru Aoki. He's like one of the kind of Japanese painters who is kind of adopted Western painting really more in personal level.

MS. RIEDEL: What was his name?

MR. TAKAMORI: Shigeru Aoki.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: But like 3D things, it's like — yeah. Because of my friends, you know, they are all paintings and drawings. And — but only for these happenings and, you know, that kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And also, we would — we could use our own classroom. So we went to junk shop, and then from buying the part of fire engines and everything, and we just painted what we collected. We painted all white. And we filled this room, you know? I have no idea what we're doing, but we just wanted to do something, you know, like this — I guess like, "Here we are, you know, Art Club is here!"

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: The happening, and just, you know, sculpture, you know? And that was that.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did you make the transition from high school to — you went to a college that specialized in

industrial ceramics, didn't you?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. You know, I — you know, that time, the best art school was [... Tokyo University of the Arts – AT]. It's the only national art school in Japan. And to get into there, people really seriously studied. And then some of them, like wait — if they can't get in, wait two, three years. Every year, they try, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I wasn't that kind of person. I just don't — so like — also like my academic kind of thing was, I wasn't really studying hard enough. And those universities, even like you have to have a good portfolio, you know, hands-on design, and paper test. And paper test, if you don't pass it, you know, you even don't get near there.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So like I was approaching private art school because private art school doesn't require math and science. And so like I was just — history and Japanese and English, I think. Then you have hands-on exam, which like — you know, still life. You have to do pencil for industrial design. And for painting, charcoal.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So would you have to have a portfolio as well?

MR. TAKAMORI: Not a portfolio.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. You'd just have to go and do it?

MR. TAKAMORI: Just hands-on, yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Just like a test?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So like two — so like once I get like a senior, I have to start really seriously thinking, you know, what do I have to prepare? So I started going to this private school, after school. Like I went like every Sunday or Saturday or something like that, for like three hours. And there's a kind of an old painter. He teach those kids. And then usually, you know, he will ask you which school you're aiming for and which department. And he'll say, "Oh, if you're going to get into this school, you have to draw like this. And this school, you have to draw like this." You know, so it's just various styles.

MS. RIEDEL: He'd actually coach you?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So it's really bad, you know. It's like — they don't teach you anything about drawing, but styles.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then anyway, I tried that. But you know, my drawing was pretty bad, I'd say. It's just kind of stylized. And I aimed for a four-year program, but I couldn't get into four-years program. And I was in two-year program. And they say, well, after two years you can transfer. So I thought, well, okay. I'd rather not to wait another year, you know, to prepare.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: All kids like go to Tokyo stay Tokyo and go to those preparing art school. Anyway, then in the college, we get —

MS. RIEDEL: Was this the Musashino [Tokyo, Japan]?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But that was in 1969.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like it was like student movement was fully on then. That was almost like — I think '69 was the peak or something, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then after that it deteriorated and became more and more radical, and then they end up to be very tragic because Red Army's, you know, highjacking the airplane or killing each other and stuff like that. But we stepped right into that right away. So I was kind of in this club called Socialist Way. So like the first day, you know, you'd have to — they'd give you manifesto of the Communist?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then like one girl, she was really pretty. And she took us out to a store, a department store.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And we'd go into like a section, and you'd buy spray paint, and we'd have to buy plastic helmet. And then we're kind of going out. I would try to take my wallet out. She said, "No, we have to steal it. You don't pay to those" — you know, like bourgeois pig or whatever, that kind of thing. I was like, "Wow, can you do that?" I had never stole in my life, you know. And so then like we — you know, they'd take us to demonstration, downtown Tokyo. And then that was like scary, that was like really scary. That was like — once it was like — well, when you, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, because this was your first time in Tokyo now?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So like 1000 students demonstrating, you know, entire street, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And we'd have to go over like this, and we'd have a helmet, and they would hide your face with towel. So you know, the police were taking pictures.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: I didn't belong to any kind of radical sect. But they were — people who don't belong, we have kind of a group they call the *Be-Her-ren*. It means kind of, I think, [inaudible] against Vietnam War kind of a thing, group?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like we're wearing this gray helmet. The Red Armies are red. And this group is blue, and you know, the color kind of — but that was like really scary. It was like so much kind of a force, you know, energy.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And, you know, like I remember when it started to rain, it was like steams up from walls, you know, river of the people.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then once there was like the parade or demonstration doesn't go any farther because there was like farther up there, there's a front and then the police having battles and whatever. So like you can hear some people start to come running down here, or like you start — you see the smoke from those — you know, I don't know what they call it.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Smoke something.

MS. RIEDEL: Smoke canisters that they would detonated.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then your eyes start to hurt.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, you don't know what's going on.

MS. RIEDEL: Like tear gas.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah. And then sometimes somebody said, "Move!" Or, you know, like — and then once it was like some — all the groups of people moving that way. And then it was like it was a fence here, a tall fence. And all those people get kind of pushed against it. And then I came to the end. And I thought, I can't breathe anymore because the chest is compressed like this.

And there was on top of the fence the other guys up there, and they're pulling people up. So that somebody pulled me up there. So it was really scary.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then like, you know, I was kind of really alone, you know, just I don't know what to do. And I just take a train going back to my apartment. And then like I was walking and just holding a helmet. You know, I was just too naïve. And then like a couple — like the right-wing guys came, rushed against me, and kicked my stomach.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: But you know, that was kind of a — you're young, and you feel like the world is no perfect and I have to do something. You know, you have to do something. And you know, you have such a kind of naïve kind of a way with — kind of doing something.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like all that — probably — you know, few of my classmates were kind of involved in that. And then the other half was kind of sympathetic. And some others were kind of against it. And so — but by then, like the school is locked up from the student government, you know, all that. And the crazy things are happening, you know. So eventually, we couldn't get into school anymore. Then —

MS. RIEDEL: What do you mean you couldn't get into school anymore? It was closed down?

MR. TAKAMORI: Student government took over the school. And we're doing whatever you like there. And then —

MS. RIEDEL: And this was specifically an art school [inaudible]?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And the student government took it over?

MR. TAKAMORI: Then like, eventually, we were — the college negotiate, and then worked out. And then the police comes, and then break through the barricade. And then lock down the entire campus.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then a cooling time. And after that, it's like you have to be a person who shows I.D. and go in there, or you're refused, you know, that kind of thing. So like that.

MS. RIEDEL: I see. And how long was this taking place over the whole —

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, probably I was in the college for two years. But it's like I didn't go to the school most entire one year.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Just kind of meetings and, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you doing any artwork at all, or was it all pretty much political at this point?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, I'm hanging out my friends.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And you know that kind of thing. You know, that's kind of a time I — it's like I lost three years. My memory is not as big as when I was a kid. Confusing and, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And also, like really disappointed with the education.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. We talked about that briefly on the phone, that you just were — what they were teaching



wasn't what you were looking for.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And I'm just wasn't doing myself much, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: And was it primarily — it was all ceramics, this university?

MR. TAKAMORI: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Art school?

MR. TAKAMORI: Entire art school.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. You were involved with industrial design, ceramic industrial design?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. So I get three-dimensional area. There was sculpture and then industrial design.

MS. RIEDEL: That was it?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And then they have, you know, design, graphic kind of things, and paintings. And maybe they have a printmaking. And also they have traditional painting, that kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So the point when I, you know, applied to the college, because of my classmates, club mates, they are really much advanced than myself. So I just thought, well, you know, like my kind of practical way of thinking again. You know, my start is no good here, you know. I'll just go somewhere else. Then just drawing and painting. So like, you know, I mentioned you the paper mache when I was fourth grade.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that time and that was kind of a hobby, you know, at home. I was making those paper mache kind of — like, you know, this is a bottle — empty bottle. You put the paper mache around it. And you paint it. And then you kind of put the varnish. So I have a bunch of those. And — or like I make a wire structure, put the paper mache around it, and then paint it. So my father liked it.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So he had a most collection of those. I don't know where they are now.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was when you were still living at home?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think that was maybe towards the end of the high school, to — I was still doing it when I went to college.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Just in my home.

MS. RIEDEL: At home, and still it was a hobby?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But you were already working on form, three-dimensional form, and then painting?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. And then especially for the one empty bottle ones, a vessel.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So then I get — did you finish college? Did you graduate college in '71?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That was a kind of a sad part of it because, you know, it's a private school. They want to push out the kids. So you probably got a really good education, or you had a kind of a — didn't learn much. They liked to send you out, right? So like I had — eventually I had to go back. And I had to kind of do a kind of a final project, you know. And it was so lame. I did — I decided to do this — you know, like Japanese house, most have like the fence. And so like the post is like you have a little slip, and so the postman just stick the mail in there. So from the other side of the fence, you collect the mail.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I was going to design that. [Laughs] So I had a kind of a squarish like this. I had a little overhang, and have a slit there. And I kind of — I think I planned something writing here so you can put like a name or street address or whatever. And so it's industrial design. So I have to kind of drawing and then have to do like drafting.

MS. RIEDEL: A model?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Measurements and everything.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then I was supposed to make a model.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So a sketch, a scale drawing, and then a model?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. But I didn't get to the model.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And so I kind of put that down, you know. It was like kind of one day, the classroom is cleaning up under the tables. And everyone have stuff. And then everyone is standing in front of it. And then like the ceramics teacher, and then they have another industrial like teacher's metal, whatever. It's three old men, kind of comes in there. And kind of walked by, you know, and each student, and say kind of, "Rah-rah." And you know, I don't know — like 10 minutes, you know. And then it came to my turn, and I was standing there. And my project — say, hey, you know, this is — he is going to be lazy boy, you know. Just kind of didn't do too much. And then they walk out, you know. But they graduated me.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: No, no, no, no. I couldn't graduate. And then, all I have to do is I have to do one more drawing or something.

MS. RIEDEL: In order to graduate?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So they didn't want to kind of really put their energy themselves into kind of pushing me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like they just kind of — one more lame thing.

MS. RIEDEL: So in a two-year program, you didn't go to school for one of the years. And then the second year —

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, at the beginning was like, it was boring. But from the beginning it was like really, really uninteresting. And also, you know, you're going to like class. And then the afternoon, the studio, and then at five o'clock it ends and we have to get out of there.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, so at five o'clock you had to leave?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: There was no studio space or anything?

MR. TAKAMORI: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's like a high school, or, you know, worse than that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because high school could have art.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Well, when you graduated, then it was 1971. And I know a couple of significant things happened then, the trip to Europe and that exhibition [The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, 1971 -AT]. I'm going to change the disk because we're just about at the end, and we'll pick up on the next one.

MR. TAKAMORI: Are you hungry or anything? What time is it?

[END OF CD 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija RIEDEL for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art interviewing the artist Akio Takamori in his studio in Seattle, Washington, on March 20th, 2009. This is [mini] disc number two.

We're picking up in 1971. It's a bit after you graduated college. You weren't quite sure what to do next.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah. Because like recently I — you know, when the economical crisis and then I feel like I lost 10 years in the Japanese economy. So I was kind of — yeah, kind of lost three years in my youth.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, here I am productive and confused. And then it's like I really — just a good sign of it is, I just don't remember so well. Any kind of interest [inaudible] whatever, you know. Maybe my brain is not really awake.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you living in Tokyo at this point?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah. Yeah. I moved out from my old apartment, and I moved into a place with my brother. And I lived with him for — I don't remember it was how long or anything like that. But I think my mom kind of started to kind of be concerned about, you know. So that time my mother was in Nobeoka. She — there was one craft shop. And they sell like *mingei* stuff, you know, in a *mingei* shop. And the owner of that is kind of encouraged their clients to belong to the folk craft association membership and stuff like that.

So through that, my mom saw this — they are taking a trip to Europe. And so she asked me, you know, if I'm interested. She's going to gift that for me. And you know, at that time, like you were a little bit still and so hesitant to get kind of financial — that kind of support gift from your parents.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But, you know, I'm a practical person.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So I thought that would be all right.

MS. RIEDEL: And she thought perhaps you'd find inspiration or new ideas?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah. Yeah. So that group was probably like 15 people there from all over Japan. But the most — mostly upper-middle-class.

MS. RIEDEL: Older, Akio or your age?

MR. TAKAMORI: I was the youngest.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I think there was one other person who was younger. She was probably upper 20s or early 30s. And she joined the trip with mother. You know, mother and daughter. Most of them have their own small businesses and things. I remember there was somebody have a cake shops or like — one of the guys I befriended was — he is from northern Japan. And he had a little company. They produced gift items for tourists.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah. He was a very interesting guy.

MS. RIEDEL: What about the trip appealed to you? What made you interested in going?

MR. TAKAMORI: That basically, you know, I have never been to foreign country. And so like I thought it would be interesting to, you know, go.

MS. RIEDEL: So where did you go?

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, it's like all over. And like in each place in two days or something. I think we flew out from Osaka and then landed in — I think it was Amsterdam [The Netherlands]. And then we went to maybe Paris, and we went to Madrid and Lisbon.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then we came back, went to Nice [France], and then went to — I don't know if we went to Switzerland. And then we went to kind of Denmark and then maybe somewhere in Germany.

MS. RIEDEL: And the idea was to look at folk art in all these locations?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, pretty much, you know, the idea was that. But it felt like a just kind of a, you know, tour group, typical tour group going museum to museum to sight-seeing.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you seeing contemporary artists, or was it all museums?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, old museums.

MS. RIEDEL: Museums, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you see anything that made a special impression?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, the one thing I remember is like I was impressed with this gift shop guy, you know. He didn't speak English or anything, but he was very brave, and he just kind of wandered around. And he'd just come back with some interesting things in his hands. And the one, I think it was either Spain, or I'm pretty sure it was Portugal. He brought back a bunch of clay-made figures. But it's like an ordinary scenery, but it's not contemporary. It looks more like Medieval.

But the one was like, the guy is going to put his pants down, and then he's kind of squatting like this. And then you see the little shit in behind. I thought, wow! You know, where did you find it? This is great. It's all like — that was kind of really interesting, those little clay figures, very primitive, but at the same time really funny and very well articulated, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Completely unconventional, but very well made.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I think one of the highlights was the Sacred Familia Church [Barcelona, Spain].

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, in Barcelona?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, Barcelona. That really impressed me.

MS. RIEDEL: What year was that? Nineteen seventy-one?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I just saw it a couple of years ago. I'm sure it was completely different.

MR. TAKAMORI: But, you know, there wasn't like — it was not like really — my mind wasn't really reopened yet, I think. But the result of that — this head of an association, he was an old man. And he and his wife were in the popular group. And he liked me. And he kind of told me, like if I'm interested in ceramics, you know, "I'll introduce you to this guy." And that was — so it ended up to be the next step.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was the apprenticeship that you started?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes. So like when I came back from the trip —

[END OF CD 3, TRACK 1.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So out of this trip, you know, the outcome from this is like the next step, which is — I was going to Koishiwara [Fukuoka, Japan] and the work with Mr. Kumao Oota. And you know, that was like a really big kind of a change.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Had you worked in ceramics at all before?

MR. TAKAMORI: See, like I was in art school in Tokyo. The first year, we learned how to throw.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you did?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like we have — but the wheel turns different — I think in Tokyo area, we're taught —

MS. RIEDEL: Counterclockwise?

MR. TAKAMORI: Counterclockwise.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then when went Koishiwara, it was clockwise.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, goodness.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I had to kind of learn from the beginning in some way.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But now there's — when I'm teaching in 10 weeks students can throw really well. And I just can't believe how clumsy I was and — or like the education, you know, teaching was half-assed. We just never really learned.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I was like really, you know, being — studying Koishiwara, I had to kind of learn again from scratch.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And were you interested?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think what I kind of — I was very interested in this kind of lifestyle.

MS. RIEDEL: Aha.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because I was kind of grow up in the upper-middle-class in the countryside, and then being kind of a — you know, lame student and involved in kind of political things. And then I went there. So that was kind of a really, really different environment.

MS. RIEDEL: Where was it? It was a village.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's in Kyushu Island.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: But just about central north.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And closer — it's a part of Fukuoka prefecture.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I — you know, when I — well, by then, like all the, you know, political kind of idealism kind of thing was kind of crashed, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so I was kind of — in one point I was thinking like, if you really like to work for helping people or helping — you know, influencing the change of the world, I thought, well, either you have to be professionally, you know, politically involved or like academically involved in that kind of like socio-economical things. And what else I can do? So like that was like really suit me, to go to the place and really, really humble, and making the production of functional things to people. So that's kind of a romantic, still romantic notion. But I thought that was like more suitable for me as a direction.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes sense.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And can you describe what the routine was? Because it was production, you were producing so many teacups a day, so many tea bowls?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, I think my — you know, the family I worked with, they were kind of a little bit exception in the village because he was a second son or a third son, but he started his own shop, which is kind of illegal for village law. And then the Japanese word called the *Murahachibu* means like, if you break the rule, you be — your entire family will be ignored. You are outcast.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MR. TAKAMORI: So his son, first son, but then was probably his early 30s or whatever — he was a quite complex, you know, angry person.

MS. RIEDEL: I would imagine.

MR. TAKAMORI: And, you know, he kind of — he helped his father to set up, you know, and he was kind of discriminated from among the young people in the village. And he even didn't go to high school, you know, just kind of worked hard for his dad.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Anyway, so like he was really hard on me. You know, I'm a kind of outsider. So like the first thing — I don't remember those first day, second day — is like he said, you know, "I don't like educated people. I don't like city people, you know. You came here of your own will, and if you don't like how the way we're doing, just get out of here." So that was the first thing he told me.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my goodness. And this was the owner of the shop?

MR. TAKAMORI: The son.

MS. RIEDEL: The son?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, let me get this straight. There was the — he was the third son?

MR. TAKAMORI: My boss, old man —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Was, I think, the third son or fourth son. But he was really, really into pottery making.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: The one reason is that he couldn't hear really well.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So he didn't get drafted during the war.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. All right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he was really ashamed of that, I think. And then so like all during the war, like everybody doing something else, he was still making pots. So he — one point, he was only the person making pots in the village.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, was he the one who wasn't supposed to make them because he was the third son rather than the first son?

MR. TAKAMORI: Right. He could always work for somebody else.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But he was supposed not to have his own shop.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah. But he was the only one during wartime who was making pots.

MR. TAKAMORI: Right. But probably he was making for his brother.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So, you know, this is like — it's interesting because, for them, we call it *hano-hanto* means half-potter-half-peasant, or farmer.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Half partner, half peasant?

MR. TAKAMORI: Half potter, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Half peasant, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Which means like, you know, they kind of a minimum of their life, they make their own rice and vegetables. And then when they make pots, they carry them and walk down the village, and then go visit other farmers and exchange with, you know, other stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: And later, after kind of industrial revolution, when they start to sell less and less — and, you know, those people like no hesitation to change the income source. So like pottery is not like — they really like, they chose. But that's the way they were, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So they're very casual about, you know, do anything.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like when they were not selling potteries, you know, everybody just stopped and just go find another job or, you know, do something else.

MS. RIEDEL: But this third brother who owned your studio really liked making pots?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. He just loved it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I remember —

MS. RIEDEL: So that was different?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: He had a different feeling for the whole —

MR. TAKAMORI: He was.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And was he — who was the fellow then that told you he didn't like educated people? The [inaudible]?

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, his son, first son.

MS. RIEDEL: His son, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like my boss, after the war, he kind of set up his own. He needed somebody else to supporting him besides his wife, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So his son wasn't really given a chance, but he had to work for him and, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. TAKAMORI: I'm sure there was a lot of physical labors. And other kids might go up to high school, and he just was with the father, you know, working hard.

MS. RIEDEL: I see, I see.

MR. TAKAMORI: So he was kind of a little bit angry young man, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Was he about your age, Akio, or older?

MR. TAKAMORI: He was about — I think, now to think of it, he was probably late 20s to early 30s. He was — when I got there, he was already married and had his — he had two children.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Kindergarten, and one of them was three or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: It was already an unconventional studio that you've arrived, in some degree.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. And at that time, you know, all the people were kind of — because of this *mingei* movement, brought them wealth with selling pots.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. TAKAMORI: So people were kind of — on the tour group, goes in there. So they have like gas cans and stuff, but they're hidden. And they have like a wood kiln there, so tourists see only the wood kilns, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And there is also at the time like a lot of dropouts, young people move into those places. So when I was there it was like a whole bunch of apprentices in the different shops in the village.

MS. RIEDEL: And the village was full of potteries?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, my boss broke the rule and they changed it. But basically, when I was there, they're still — then he was included by then.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I don't remember exact number, but the eight or seven or whatever, they're like original shops.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then my boss's. And they have their own guild.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And this could have been around for years and years and years, right?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And then the later, you know, there's young people from the village. They kind of apprentice, and they start to kind of open up their shops along the highway or whatever, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And was your shop making a specific kind of ceramics?

MR. TAKAMORI: They're just very humble things.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Like plates and teacups and, you know, jars. But originally they were making only large jars, storage jars, water jars, tea jars. But when the *mingei* movement started in the [inaudible] and all those people, I think their work must have been like — I don't know after the war, before the war. They start to teach them how to make little things. So that was more suitable to city people's life.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, if it is war treasures and stuff, they don't buy it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right. And was it earthenware, stoneware, porcelain?

MR. TAKAMORI: Stoneware.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And my boss was — he didn't have any gas cans.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.] Only wood fires?



MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. He was really into like old style.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And we fired almost every month. Filled up this — I don't know, four-five chambers. And Noborigama, it's climbing kiln?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Filled up the pots. And so like my boss and the first son and second son was still there, and myself. And later, there's a young man from Minnesota joined the apprenticeship.

MS. RIEDEL: What was his name?

MR. TAKAMORI: Chris Holmquist.

MS. RIEDEL: And so would you describe just a traditional day? Get up and —

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. We get up and go to kitchen. And then first son's wife and grandma is, you know, preparing breakfast or whatever, mostly the son's — first son's wife. And then we go into kitchen. There's a concrete floor. And then you have like levels up, and there's a *tatami*. And then, you know, grandpa and grandma is there. And then you set — have table in the concrete room, and you have stools, and then you sit around and have breakfast.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you live with the family then?

MR. TAKAMORI: There was a family house here and shops here and above that we have a room.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So we slept there. And then later, they made the toilet here so we could use the bathroom, you know, outhouse kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And the bathroom was in the main house. So anyway, in the main house, we just have this concrete kitchen floor. That's where we eat. And then right next to it was a bathroom. So we took a bath there. And then, you know, there was kind of a — in the morning, we just kind of preparing the stuff for making pots. And then lunchtime we go to kitchen. And then afternoon, we have a tea break. And then until dinnertime, we would make pots, until like my boss would stop working. Then —

MS. RIEDEL: And were you all throwing all day long?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Or were you preparing clay or digging clay?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, it depends. Like usually, the first month, we start from throwing about two weeks. Then trimming, glazing would be maybe two-three days. And then loading and kilning, one day. And then firing a couple of days. Then like after — when the kiln is cooling, we start to do other things, like gathering ash from farmer's kitchens. And we drive around and gather them, or sometimes in the season we just go visit rice field and burn straw ash and make ash, straw ash.

Or we gather feldspars. And also, we're involved in farming, too. Like in the spring, it's like you have to prepare the rice field and the plants and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: So you actually were doing agriculture, too?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So then half-potter, half peasant life?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, but only rice fields.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: They have a little small vegetable garden, but that was grandma's.

MS. RIEDEL: And was the clay dug locally? Where did the clay come from?

MR. TAKAMORI: Locally.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: But by the time when I got there, that the guild have their own clay company.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so they gathered, then we go there. No, no, that wasn't right. That was later. Right. We had like a clay shop, shed. And summer, we dug clay. And put it in the dump truck, and then dump all the, you know, like just roomful of clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MR. TAKAMORI: And then once we had trouble because the son took too much or something was wrong. And then we had to return part of it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] To the site where you dug it?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Too much clay — interesting. So there was a certain amount that was allowed?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah, something. You know, there were sensitive rules in the village, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then mostly, like men threw pots. And his first son's wife — she was a really pretty, nice woman — but she does all kinds of other labors. Mostly, while we're throwing, she's making clay, but which is like — we have three kind of pools. And in the center pool, this square, and not so deep, and also the two other, the round and very deep. And she — first, like dug out clay. She put into the pounding machine, which is like — by then they were using power, instead of water power, you know, water pounding? And so like those — you know, iron hammers like this big and really heavy, and they're connected like this, two of them. And they are basically have those things and then the machine pulls this up, and then boom! That's doing all day, boom! boom!

And then like clay, it's going to be like kind of a pulling there, then like a pushing down, and then they go up, and they fall down. And —

MS. RIEDEL: So trying to make it consistent?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's really fine clay, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then hardest thing was like how to stop this hammering. It's like you have a long wooden stick. And then when they come right at the right time, you have to catch it.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then you have those things to hook it so they won't — then you shovel out and you put it in this square pool. Then you have this kind of an awl-like things to mix it.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So the water get all muddy, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then when —

MS. RIEDEL: But it's not a slip texture?

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, it's more like it's water.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Oh, so it's really —

MR. TAKAMORI: Muddy water.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then those two round pools, you have a bamboo basket. And then they have it filled with cedar branches, leaves. Then you have a big scoop, and you scoop into those pools.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so like — I guess like maybe bamboo — no, I mean, cedar branches avoid the splashing, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then catch any kind of —

MS. RIEDEL: Impurities.

MR. TAKAMORI: Impurities. So like in this round pool, the muddy water stuff accumulated, right? So when the clay particles sink down, the water gets clear. And you take the bucket again and put it back here. Or they have —

MS. RIEDEL: Because of the water?

MR. TAKAMORI: Plug, maybe. So like water travel from center to side, side to center, and then repeat. So like the clay is so fine and buttery.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, so just fine, fine particles.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's beautiful clay.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll bet.

MR. TAKAMORI: And the color was kind of a dark beige, kind of. Then last, those both sides of the pool filled up the thicker slip, then they have this vacuum machine, and they have like in the center they have canvasses. And then the slip push through these canvasses, and the clay is going to be halted in each board. Then take out those boards, and we just dump into where the clay is supposed to be, that kind of little pool-like things.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And from there, they have like a really simple — those are clay mixing machine which is like — they have like a rotating machine with two kind of cylindrical things. They kind of traveling like this. And then you put the clay in there, and then they just rolls and rolls and rolls. Then from there —

MS. RIEDEL: It's sort of like an early kind of pug mill almost?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, it's more like — I think more wedging, I think.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Then you take out and it looks like a kind of a big donut. And then it's, you know, cut with a wire in a chunk, and then you kind of start wedging it, and then you throw it. It's a long process.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And so the first son's wife was doing —

MR. TAKAMORI: Most of that.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MR. TAKAMORI: I do once in awhile.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, like end of the day, when — or like when she's washing those canvasses, you know, and then we do — you know, help her. But most of those, you know, we call the shit jobs, were her.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. That's why.

MR. TAKAMORI: And especially like when you kind of unload the kiln, then the kiln is all empty, but there are those shelves and you have to chisel.

MS. RIEDEL: The glaze.

MR. TAKAMORI: That was a hard job, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then making the glaze, which is also — we have like a wooden bucket like this. And then you dump those wood ashes. And then you soak in the water. And then you have to kind of check, wash the ashes, so that alkaline is all removed.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And that's a hard job. And when all the wood ash is all prepared and the boss comes, and he kind of takes a long scoop of this and that and make glazes. And also, like they — this pounding machine that pounds the feldspars, and also sometimes people donate or some — I think when they — some shrine changed the roof and then the copper tiles was available. I don't know they bought it — you know, to gather them. And then when we fired the kiln, we put that in the saggars. And in the chamber, you leave it there. So after firing, just kind of a burned copper will be taken out.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And the bowl mills will use that for copper oxide.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow! Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Actually used the copper tiles.

MR. TAKAMORI: Iron oxide — we went to somebody's rice field. And the rice field, like when the water is out, you kind of dig. And the certain layer — they have this kind of crusty kind of chunk wood like or more kind of flakes off, this iron kind of layer. We gathered them. And then also like in the ball mill, and that will be used for iron oxide.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow! Wow. So all the materials were actually harvested like that locally.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Even like white slip — you know, they don't buy it in bags. But when you're digging clay, this is some areas brown and some areas white. So you gather only white part to make white slip.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. Amazing.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Amazing.

MR. TAKAMORI: So, you know, like even the term of like if I go out for something, you learn rational or scientific study, you know, which that didn't happen to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But as a kind of a more primitive way, to grasp, you know, what the ceramics is about — was like a really good thing to learn.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. And so the clay itself, when it was collected, was dry?

MR. TAKAMORI: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Just kind of — part of the mountain, you know, kind of digging.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. What an extraordinary experience. I don't think most contemporary ceramicists have had a better experience or most contemporary artists.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And so how long were you in this village for?

MR. TAKAMORI: For two years.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, first time when I got there, they haven't had that many experience with apprentices, I think. So I was maybe third one. And the first summer so intense, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like it's like a really — I knew he's not a bad guy, you know. But it's like so intense. Like he — sort of like, he didn't — after I finished the day's work, at the beginning like I was kind of — walk out and visit another workshop and see other places and meet those other young people. And sometimes we made friends, and, you know, like at night we'd just go up to the room and have sakes and talk and listening Janis Joplin or whatever, you know.

But once like the first son didn't really like it, to myself socializing, because, you know, he himself was kind of segregated, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he kind of prohibited for me to go visit others.

MS. RIEDEL: My goodness.

MR. TAKAMORI: So you know, like —

MS. RIEDEL: You're just supposed to sit in your room by yourself at night?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, then, later I have American boy came. So I have company.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I guess he was kind of a little jealous, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like at the beginning was like their kind of mind was like really totally traditional system is in their mind. But the rest of the shops, they are a lot more kind of, you know, just industrial business, you know? So like they take apprentice, and they kind of — you know, everybody is considered apprentice is cheap labor. They hardly pay anything, but they at least those places are more rational. So like they pay them a certain amount. But the apprentices — some shops is like, they have a jigger machine behind the door. And those apprentices are just trimming for work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Stuff like that. My place was like really old-fashioned. So like also, they took only one day off a month. They worked straight 30 days.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my.

MR. TAKAMORI: That was really a hard thing because I was like at first like I had to really get used to it, and I was just working hard.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then Mondays off, and then I have to wait another 30 days.

MS. RIEDEL: And you'd work from eight or nine in the morning till five or six at night?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. And then you couldn't socialize in the evening. Wow! What did you do? Did you read?  
[Inaudible.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, then eventually I kind of sneaked out or, you know. But most of the time I was just kind of in my room and drinking sake and smoking. And then I was just listening to the Rolling Stones and Janis Joplin, you know. And yes. But usually, by the time, you know, we finished dinner, you go back to your room or you'd recline a little bit. Then the first son's wife comes calling, our turn to take a bath.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. TAKAMORI: So one goes there. So like there's an order, right? Like grandpa take a bath right after he finish. And then I think it's the first son goes, and second son goes, and grandmothers. And then myself or other American boy goes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then usually, the first son take kids with him to take a bath.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then after dinner and everything, the first wife clean the kitchen, and then she can take a bath.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh. So it's the same first wife who's been making the clay all day.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MR. TAKAMORI: She was tough.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, she was a strong woman. But she said like, you know, when she going out with this first son and she decided to get married — her parents are farmers. They really, really against it because in the village, they're all saying like — well, even like normal farmers looked down on the half-potter, half-farmers, to start with. And they know how hard their life is.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like if they said, in the village — the wife said, like a village saying is like, "I'd rather climb up this thorny tree than marrying a potter."

MS. RIEDEL: Wow!

MR. TAKAMORI: And the grandma was like — she was also very strong woman.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll bet.

MR. TAKAMORI: And she was talking about, you know, she's on her way back from a rice field and she had a miscarriage and all the things coming out, and she had to walk home kilometers—

MS. RIEDEL: And so you were really very far from any place you'd been before. Even considering the diversity of your experiences as a child, this must have been really so extreme.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And was it enjoyable for the most part? What kept you there? Had you signed on for a particular period of time?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think one thing — well, actually, the ended up really liking me because I lasted longest than anybody else. Usually, they kind of, you know, in a couple of months they run away or —

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Because they were, you know, really — for contemporary modern society, they are really backwards, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But they say like, well, you know, the first son was kind of lecturing me sometimes. You know, usually, you know, like an apprentice kinds of lives there and just works like a servant, a slave, and then they even didn't have any day off. Only the time off was like one day in Bon season, which is like the devil's death kind of, you know, like all the ancestors come home and they have to clean —

MS. RIEDEL: Bon season they call it?

MR. TAKAMORI: Bon.

MS. RIEDEL: Bon.

MR. TAKAMORI: It must be a Buddhism word.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: We say Obon or Bon.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And it's in usually summer, July or August. And then New Year, you can go home. So like usually, those apprentices used to be no pay at all. But you can eat their food and live in there. But the Obone [Japanese holiday -AT] or New Year, they will be giving you a new shirt or something, you know. And then a little gift to take home, you know. That's how that was. So like he kind of lectured me to kind of let you know —

MS. RIEDEL: That you had it easy.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah. You have a deal.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: But I was getting paid like about probably — my guess is about 15-20 bucks a month.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow. Was it based on how much you produced, or it was just a flat rate?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, just flat rate. And so then like [inaudible] kind of money. I go down to kind of a near-by store where I usually buy for cigarettes or like sake. I drunk too much.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] It's understandable.

MR. TAKAMORI: That was — you know, the money was spent for that. Because at some point, you get so exhausted. And you're so exhausted that you can't sleep, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so like I was just fine. I was interested in their kind of a life. And I was really interested in that kind of a hard work. And I can do it. I was like testing my strength. That was like a really — as a young man, you know, that's kind of a challenge.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then also, basically, I was respected those people. They were nice people. And I liked simplicity of life. And, you know, like when you're in Tokyo, you know, you go to demonstration or, you know, you go to bar or you read the difficult books, you know. And then you are just kind of head-big. And then you are just kind of lazy. Then suddenly here, it's like they don't put any kind of emphasis on intellectual conversations or anything. But it's like just a really simple daily life. And that was a certain kind of comfort, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And so did you do this for six months or a year straight?

MR. TAKAMORI: I did pretty much straight year.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And then apprentice from Minnesota left.

MS. RIEDEL: That was Chris?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, Chris left. And a new young man came. He was right after the high school, but he went to a ceramics high school in Arita [Saga, Japan]. And his father owned kind of a ceramics supply. I don't know exactly — glaze company or whatever. It's domestic.

MS. RIEDEL: And where was he from?

MR. TAKAMORI: From Arita area.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So he was Japanese?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so he was — you know, Chris was a year older or two. And then this young man was much younger. You know, he was 18. And by then I was 22 or 23, you know. When you're young, you look so young.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he was very quiet. And I think it's one of the reasons I found out — he hit old lady and killed her in a car accident. And so like there was — one of the things, you know, his father thought might be kind of good for him to get out of town for awhile, or, you know, he need kind of a time to process that.

MS. RIEDEL: It was a car accident?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I didn't ask the details or anything.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Of course.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he was a nice, quiet young man. But he wasn't the kind of person kind of to express his kind of feeling or he can't enter the conversation much. But he was cute, you know. And — but anyway, one of the things I was really looking forward to was, he — you know, Chris was guest, right? And he was foreigner. And he had a certain kind of special treatment.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And also, he knew he's kind of coming in here and so many — I don't know how long exactly he was there. But like probably my guess is about eight months or so. He was leaving. So he had the kind of a specific goal.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so he — there was a shop, it's like this. The higher part — boss is here. He using the traditional kick wheel. And then have another kick wheel. And then electric wheel, and his third son was the baby, you know, in the family. He was throwing. And the boss throw like basically large jars. And he likes to make teapots. And he then finish all — he like to make little caricatures and all that, the feelings, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And then the first son, he make just only plates, which is — I think it was this size and this size.

MS. RIEDEL: So, small.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Sometimes special orders, like very small. And then down here, Chris was here. And we, three of us, like Chris, first son, and myself — we are connected a wheel, which means that we have a shaft. This is turning. And then you have like a kick wheel, but it's kind of connected to belt, like a belt from a shaft. So this is once in the morning start, so it's just kind of a drrrr, you know, turning only one speed, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my gosh. One speed all day long?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes.



MS. RIEDEL: No matter what you're doing?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, pretty much. So like if you put the legs on the wheel, you can stop it. You know what I mean?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. And it doesn't affect everybody else.

MR. TAKAMORI: No. [Affirmative.] Just a slip the belt, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And Chris started from — I think it was kind of little bowls. And I was already making cups.

MS. RIEDEL: Were these all thrown off the hump?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Big hump.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I have like one is kind of a little longer one, and one was a half-spear kind of round one. That was my job.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was all done by eye?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Well, we had this tool called a *Tombo*, which is like a stick. And then we have like a cross is there. So the cross, the width is the width of the cup.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then this is the depth.

MS. RIEDEL: Depth, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then we have a rib. It's exactly half size of this.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So it's almost like a jiggering, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: You just do — and then you push this down, and they go like this.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: [... -AT] And that's it.

MS. RIEDEL: So fairly quick [inaudible].

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So my — I had to make, I think it was 600 cups like this and 600 taller ones. And then when I finished —

MS. RIEDEL: In a day?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, no, no. For the first couple of weeks.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then when I finished that, I made about 1000 little sake cups, little just simple, like straight, you know? So they are very kind of frugal. They, you know, don't waste any space in the kiln.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so like what we have to do is the same, you know? And so like Chris is like sometimes like, after we take a bath or something, he goes down there. And he'll like learn how to use the kick wheel. He's

allowed to, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Because the one, the old-fashioned kick wheel?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. So he goes up there, with my boss is the next one, his kick wheel.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a flywheel setup, where you kick down below?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. And it's not a flywheel. It's like top and bottoms are the same size. So you have to constantly kicking it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: The flywheel is, if you kick, it just turns for awhile.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But it's like Korean style.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: My boss is sometimes kicking with both hands — feet, you know, like this.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay, constantly.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then, you know, but sometimes like some days on a day off or whatever, or like, you know, after work, my boss was kind of a guy, you know. But usually, I'm kind of — I picking up English from him.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because I'm the only educated person there. [Laughs] And so like I became kind of like a translator for Chris because Chris never really spoke Japanese.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Oh, my goodness. Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like when he is kind of — my boss was teaching kind of, I was there too kind of, you know, help.

MS. RIEDEL: And you had had some English in high school?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But that was pretty much it?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And a little bit in college, but I almost failed.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: But that was kind of funny, that day Chris is coming. I thought, well, you know, I have to say something. So I really practiced in my head.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I have never spoken to a foreigner in person until then. I was, you know, 20-something.

MS. RIEDEL: In Europe, not even?

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, maybe, yes, in Europe, yes. That's true. So I was really, you know, tense.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like when he came, I just kind of said something. But you know, he didn't understand me.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: At all. Whatever I said, he didn't get it. Anyway, so — but you know, myself, Chris, you know, put his energy for awhile to just — after work goes down there and he does that, you know, practice. I was too tired. And I just couldn't do it. So then go back to the time Chris left. And then when the young man came, I thought, well, you know, now, this young man going to make cups. So I'm going to learn plates. And then the sons will go do different things.

But I was very disappointed to tell you that in their mind is, I already mastered this. So why — you know, I have to start on something else? So this young man took Chris's role, right? So I was very disappointed.

MS. RIEDEL: And they wouldn't let you change to learn something new?

MR. TAKAMORI: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: That must have been frustrating.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And there was — I don't know exactly when, but there was kind of one incident was really interesting. There was a first time my boss had some kind of occasion like a tour going to Korea to see — visit the country there. And — well, anyway, he wasn't really interested, but back then, okay, to go to Korea you have to get certain shots and stuff. And then one of the shots gave him shock, you know? And then which he was supposed to be very ill. And I didn't know, but the one day after meal, I was up there in the room resting. And then the first son run up to our room. And he was so excitable and saying that, you know, like, "My dad might die" or you know, "My dad is dying," or whatever, you know.

But that was like really — I could feel the sense like, he was excited, upset and excited, you know, excited because he is gone, the shop will be his, and he can make whatever he like, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So it kind of reminded me of like almost like Shakespeare kind of, you know? Struggle between father and son, you know, and the house, power and everything goes down to the line, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so like, oh, I thought, oh, my god. You know, if I like to kind of move to some different job, somebody have to die.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: That was rather depressing, you know. But that's what it is, you know? That was what it was.

MS. RIEDEL: And there was no way to negotiate or discuss that now you were the apprentice, you wanted to learn how to do this.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, I think I was free to go down there and study myself, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I knew that — there's a certain discouragement in the air because that is the kind of humbleness, you know, in our society. And then in Japan, for instance, there, if you say, "Oh, I would like to become potter," or whatever, and they go visit the potters, they will really try to dis-encourage you because, you know, you have to learn how to wedge for three years and, you know, that kind of a bullshit, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So you know, we have that in our minds. So like you know, when I came to States, I was kind of teaching the classroom and stuff. I was just kind of amazed that- even like teaching kids. If you be kindly teaching them, in a couple of weeks they can throw. But for me, even back in the college in Tokyo, took me so long, you know. It's a kind of skill, you know, if you get right kind of teaching, you know, it's not that difficult, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. But there wasn't that emphasis on instruction.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I went down and sometimes, and I — not often, but I made little figures with the clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. But I didn't want to show anybody because I haven't — I don't — you know, I wasn't really sure, you know, what they think or, are they going to make fun of me? Or discourage me? I don't think they will get angry. So like, why did I make something and hid something like that?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then when they were loading kiln, I just go back and just grab it and just put somewhere, little corner. And when the kiln is opening, I just go there first and just take it and put it in my pocket.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you bisque and then glaze fire, or was it all one fire?

MR. TAKAMORI: One fire.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So the figures, too, were just —

MR. TAKAMORI: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting that you were doing figures even back then.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. When did you see the show of American and Canadian and European ceramics?

MR. TAKAMORI: That was before — you know, let's see. The other day I was kind of thinking, but I just can't recall it exactly. But that could have been before — you know, that's missing three years. [The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan, 1972]

MS. RIEDEL: Was it right before — exactly.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Either right before or right after —

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, how long —

MS. RIEDEL: Did you see it before you went to your apprenticeship?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think so, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: But, you know, I was very excited. And I had to kind of put that somewhere in my mind.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then when Chris was there —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I was a little jealous because he could study something else. But you know, he has a specific goal. And he came to Japan, he learned. So I kind of felt like in some point it kind of — when I was a little jealous, I said, well, you know, I can go there and I can learn, too.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then the exhibition contemporary American ceramics traditions kind of connected some way.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, exactly. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: But those things, it kind of takes me a little longer, you know? Because even like when I decided to go to the United States, I was still thinking about — go somewhere to learn functional pottery.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: So originally, I was looking for Jugtown Pottery in North Carolina.

MS. RIEDEL: At which?

MR. TAKAMORI: Jugtown Pottery.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And they actually contacted them. And they said they welcomed me if I would like to come. So that was the first one of the options I had.

MS. RIEDEL: And when did you meet Ken Ferguson? He came while you were an apprentice?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That was — I think Chris was already gone.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So beginning of the second year.

MS. RIEDEL: And can you describe that? What do you remember of that meeting, because it was wonderful?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Did many tour groups or many —

MR. TAKAMORI: No, by themselves.

MS. RIEDEL: Not many people came through, okay. So he came alone?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So like I was — that was a day off, you know? So I was resting in my room and sleeping in, you know. And then my boss, you know, opened the door. And he kind of called me. And then I kind of came down. And he said, you know, "There's a foreigner guest here. You speak some English. So why don't you show them around?" So I kind of — coming down the stairs, and then there was Ken and Gertrude were standing there. And I remember, you know, vividly.

MS. RIEDEL: Ken and who else was there?

MR. TAKAMORI: His wife, Gertrude.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And then it's kind of funny because I was in my early 20s, so they looked really old.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, you know, there's this kind of old American couple. So you know, I showed them around the shop there. Then I was going to show them the rest of the village, because it was day off, I could do it. So we walked down. And then we walk up to — we have a little museum, which is not — nothing fancy, but have a new building. And they have a collection of old Koishiwara ware there. So there's one attendant. She sells tickets. And Ken wanted to take a picture of the pieces. And — but he said too dark. So I went to the lady and, "Is it okay, you know, you trust me, I can take those pots and take outside and Ken take pictures?" And she allowed me to, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because it like was folk pottery, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But anyway, so he — I took maybe like — I don't remember — many pots. I don't know, 30 minutes, 40 minutes. And then, you know, Ken was happy, finished. And he realized there was no film in there. [Laughs] So he asked me, you know, "I'm really sorry. But do you mind" — you know, I don't ask as many as I asked before. So we did that.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: That's why maybe he liked me. Then we walk down the hill, and then this road here, this road here. And then this goes with the rest of — you know, the pottery, the museum. My boss was like, you know, here. And then comes down beside this little store, they sell candies and pops. He said he was going to buy me a pop. And so like we sit down and, you know, talking. And I don't know how much my English was able. But that was the first time I talked to him, you know. I'm kind of this American exhibition I saw was like really great. And then I'm thinking the future, I don't know when, but I'd like to go to America to study ceramics.

And then immediately he said, "Well, I teach. And, you know, my school is one of the best undergraduate in the United States. So you've got to come," you know. But, you know, "Thank you very much," and stuff. But usually, when you're traveling yourself in a foreign country, you promise, "I'll send you this picture." But you forget, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: [Laughs] So I thought, well, yeah, that was nice. But, you know, I wasn't expecting anything. But like very soon after, he sent me the application form, you know. And it was very quick. And I didn't — wasn't really sure, you know. I wasn't really ready for it. So I put it away. And then I stayed, you know, the rest of, you know, second year.

But somewhere at one point, when the new apprentice came and then like first son decided to, you know, make a garden. And because he was like — you know, his father, boss, was kind of really, making ceramics was like the best thing he can do. You know, he was even like New Year Day, entire nation rests, after kind of a first sake or a little food, he goes and he just throw, you know, because he likes it. You know, I could see, you know, when he's throwing he's so much kind of pleasure. It's not labor for him, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But first son was kind of — you know, started very, very poor and all the *mingei* movement. And then the village started to get rich. And everybody wanted to show off well to the kind of a *nouveau* rich mentality, you know. Fancy houses, you know, like by the time when I got there, then my boss's house was really nice.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And that son's, you know, drive really nice, you know, Nissan, Toyota, you know, sports-car-like, you know. And then the first son wanted more. You know, like he wanted this kind of an almost — I don't know, it's like a little bit too over-the-top kind of garden. But at the same time, you know, they're like poor mentality. They don't want to pay for gardeners or anything. So he just — well, he hired somebody, of course, to bring in the huge stones and all this stuff. But he wanted to use us as kind of labor.

So we worked a lot, you know, in the shoveling, you know. And even when he make a toilet, you know, I had to dig the toilet holes and, you know, all this stuff. So they tried to trim as much as they could, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Which is fine. But I was really at that time, no pottery, just kind of day by day.

MS. RIEDEL: No pottery at all?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, somehow.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: I don't know why. Maybe — I don't know. That was maybe one week, or I don't know. But anyway, and then I was just really exhausted. And also this disappointment with, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Ken?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, the — my job to be getting new, learning new things.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I'm kind of like humiliated, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I was kind of depressed. And I think I was drinking too much and not eating well, you know? I mean, doesn't mean — I'm not complaining their food; it was good. But a little more simplistic. But it's interesting. They're kind of old, kind of — when their kind of habit or way of thinking from their poor time, you know? Like for instance, like when we finished the firing, that day or morning, we get one egg, you know, raw egg to mix with the rice to eat it, you know. That kind of special treatment was an egg.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then like spring, like they harvest the bamboo shoots. It's free, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that season, miso soup to everything. The curry rice, there are bamboo shoots in it. You know, that kind of humbleness.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I'm not complaining.

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, no.

MR. TAKAMORI: Which is like good, you know? It was like really simple, simple basic food, and was actually quite good. But anyway —

MS. RIEDEL: Monotonous after awhile.

MR. TAKAMORI: I was drinking and not eating well. I got really, really skinny. I was like — that was skinniest in my adulthood. Like I was — let's see. Now I'm 60 — should be like 60-something kilograms. But I was down to 40-some kilograms.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I don't know what is equivalent to the pounds. But I got really exhausted. And the one day, you know, I just couldn't take it anymore. And then I even didn't tell my fellow young man. I just dressed up and started to walk down and to walk out. And I walked village, and keep on walking, you know, two o'clock, three o'clock. And then I tried to hitchhike. There was like a big truck goes by. But nobody stopped for me.

Then I just walked as much as I could. And then I came to a railroad line by the railroad station. And that was by hot spring. And I was freezing cold. And so like they have a public park, you know. It goes by the river. They have this public park. It was just outdoor. So I was so happy I could warm up. And then I took cloths off, I tried to get in there. It was way too hot. I couldn't get in there. But there was huge rocks around it. They were warm. So like I laid down and slept.

And then I waited till morning. And then —

MS. RIEDEL: You just slept out on the rocks?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And then I caught like first train. But I think I didn't have enough money. But there was somehow something like, when you get off train, you know, you would pay, or some kind of system helped me. Then I went home.

MS. RIEDEL: Without saying anything to anybody, you just left?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I went home, and then my mom sent me for a checkup and everything. And then I just — and then I called them up and said, you know, "I'm very sorry for what I did. But" —

MS. RIEDEL: I'm done.

MR. TAKAMORI: [Laughs] Yes. But, you know, that was — but I was going to go back because I just felt bad, you know? And because — so like anyway, I said to them, "I'm going to be — you know, take a break for awhile." "That's good, you know." The first son's wife was really — she's really concerned, you know, these kind words and stuff like that.

And then I think maybe like one month or whatever, my mom said, you know, "If you don't want to go back, you know, you don't need to." You know, she asked me. And — but I wanted to go back. And I went back. And then I stayed another — probably five months or something.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you did?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes, yes.

[END OF CD 3.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Then by, you know, I kind of prepared mentally, after I finish here, you know, I'm going —

MS. RIEDEL: To Kansas?

MR. TAKAMORI: To United States. So that is a kind of time I started contacting Judd Town Pottery, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because I wanted to go to the States, but I just think, you know — I had this application form, but I just wasn't — I thought I wasn't really ready to get into art school again.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: My English and my —

MS. RIEDEL: Past experience with art schools.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I thought about, you know, maybe I could go to another art school in Japan or something. But in Japan, there is a paper test, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And after so many years, I wasn't really sure I can take those histories and Japanese and English and math or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I thought, well, forget it, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: If I have to go through that entry examination again, you know, I just try out in the United States. So my original plan was like, possibly Judd Town. Or I thought, you know, Kansas City Art Institute was possible.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But first of all, I'm going to study English. So I visited — I flew into like — yeah. I was going to involve the — I got the student visa and everything. And then my plane flew from Tokyo to Los Angeles. I remember the landing. I could see the Rocky Mountains. And the back was all dark gray. And I could see lightning, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: It was really beautiful. And the city was kind of lit, you know, backwards really gray and dark. And then I took another plane and landed in Minneapolis, because I wanted to go visit Chris. And I had a whole address and telephone number and everything. But some reason, I didn't contact with him.

MS. RIEDEL: Did he know you were coming?

MR. TAKAMORI: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, he didn't know?



MR. TAKAMORI: [Laughs] He didn't know.

MS. RIEDEL: So you just flew to the United States with nobody expecting you?

MR. TAKAMORI: Right. But I had a school in Chicago, English school I was going to get in.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you were signed up.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And why Chicago? Because it was close to Minneapolis?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, I don't remember, but it must be. I don't know. I don't know.

So you know, I had a correspondence from Chris. So Chris went back to Northfield, Minnesota. That's where he went to school. I don't remember, St. Olaf [College, Northfield, MN]. So he was kind of telling me, you know, he rented this studio in the basement of a paper shop. And from my window I can see the river and, you know, blah-blah. So when I — from Minneapolis airport I took the bus. And it directly went to Northfield. And I remember it was like — I spoke some English, but my hearing wasn't really good. So I had to kind of make sure the bus driver would let me know once the bus arrived in Northfield so I could get off, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I got off. And it was early morning. But it was probably about nine or something like that. And then I was like — I got off in the front of an old hotel. And across the street downtown was a cafeteria. And I walked in there. They have a counter and those stools. And not many people there. And I walk in there and looking at the menu. But the menu itself, you know, it kind of first time in looking at American breakfast. And I didn't know what to order. So I just ordered coffee and hash browns.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Did you know what hash browns were? That's so funny. Was there a picture so you could choose?

MR. TAKAMORI: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Or did you just guess?

MR. TAKAMORI: I just guessed. Even — hash browns sounded to me, was something potato with like some vegetables in kind of a mushy food. But it's something more — have like flavor in it and have like a mixture of vegetables and stuff. But it was like just shredded kind of, you know, burnt potato, and just ketchup, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: I was kind of a little shocked. But that was my first American breakfast.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then after that, I just kind of walked out, because Northfield is so small. And I had — probably had an apartment address or something. He was renting a room from — outside of the town. But I knew his studio was by the river, you know. The river was right there. And then I saw the paper shop right next to the river. So I walked into the paper shop. And this old lady, she was there. And I asked her, you know, is — if — Chris? And she kind of guided me from there.

And I walked down there. And I think Chris wasn't there, but his fellow studio-mate was there. And then Chris later came in, and he was totally surprised.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, he had no idea you were coming?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, gosh. [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: But that was like a really nice summer. I stayed with Chris for one month. It's kind of — you know, Midwest, like really low key and you know, rolling hills and kind of a rural — lots of ponds, Fingerlake weather. And he — I stayed with Chris. And Chris's landlord was a single mother with, you know, three kids. And I'd just play with them and go to studio and help him. And, you know, didn't do much, but that was like a really kind of a nice, you know, slow, good summer to be introduced in a new place.

And I took a bus from there and went to Chicago. So I think it was [... Loyola University -AT]. And I think it's like

an extension program, they teach English to foreigners. And then I think that was a time Nixon resigned.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I remember we were talking about it. And my class was like, population-wise, mostly Arabic and Latin Americans. And there were a few Asians. I know there were — I remember a couple of Korean guys. And there was one Japanese man. He was to study architecture. And then school kind of helped me to find apartment. And I was in this apartment all, you know, like plain apartment. And the whole building was kind of all different nationalities, so that you walk in there, one door you smell soy sauce, the next door you smell curries. All those kind of place.

And my roommate was a doctor from El Salvador. And he kind of wanted to have English. And I guess he tried to have English medical exam or whatever, you know. And then — yeah. It was kind of a really one — you know, studio apartment, two beds, a little kitchen and bathroom. And then at night, you know, cockroaches would fall from the ceiling. They're walking and fall on you, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Ugh.

MR. TAKAMORI: But that was fine because the Japanese cockroaches this big. So didn't scare me. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Because they were small.

MR. TAKAMORI: But —

MS. RIEDEL: And how long were you in Chicago studying?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, I was there very short time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, because you called Ken.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. You know, actually, I wrote a little postcard, you know. I said — I wrote to him, you know, "I'm here. I don't know if you remember me, but you know, I met you in the —"

MS. RIEDEL: Because you had never sent the application.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I'd never responded back. And — "but I'm here in the States. I'm studying English. And then, you know, a year after my English is better, I would like to apply your school." And so that was like — school probably started, you know — Kansas City Art Institute started toward the end of August. And probably I was — my school was, too. So that was probably second or third week in September.

MS. RIEDEL: This is 1974?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. That sounds right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then he — you know, like after, you know, I mailed my card, just very quickly, like four days or five days — I don't remember, it was so fast — I got a letter from him. And the school had already started. But they will have space for you, you know. Your English, you know, like, we'll figure out. And mostly, you know, you can take a studio for first year, or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: So just come. Just come.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So I just decided, you know. I just hopped on a Greyhound bus.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I arrived in Kansas City. And then I called the school. And then — but, you know, at that time the English hearing is hard, especially on the telephone.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so I didn't really quite understand. But I think that Ken told me that one of his students will come pick me up at the bus station. But I didn't get it. So like I took a bus, and I went back — I went to the school, and I just showed up there.

MS. RIEDEL: Just arrived?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And did he help you find a place to live? And you just started classes?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. You know, advising office I had to go. And then I had to get — what are they called? Like high schools, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you got a diploma or a certificate?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, paperworks, yes. But I was already in, but they have to kind of submit.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And fortunately, or unfortunately, I was in college in two years. And then also, I took a teaching certificate so I have extra credits. So I really didn't need to take so much academics when I was at Kansas City. So I just kind of focused on my studio work. But you know, that was kind of, you know, one of my mistakes, too. I mean, not a mistake, but if I were to do it again or if somebody is doing it, I really encourage to really study English.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because timing — you know, your youth, you know, and learning a new language, it's very advance you really fast. So later it was much slower, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: So you really focused on working in clay and less on language skills?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I didn't really take it seriously.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Because I could get by.

MS. RIEDEL: And you weren't sure you were going to stay. You were just coming to learn and maybe go back to Japan.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes, in two years.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. So like I could get by to my English. But after, you know, couple of months, and everybody is, you know, kind to me, but it's like I realize without kind of English, you can't really make a friend. Because you can't really talk about yourself, your thoughts, you know, no way to carry that intellectual conversations. So I kind of realized, you know, that I can start to feel really a little bad about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Isolated?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. You know, people are kind, and they're good at me and this and that. And then, you know, critique — the hard part was like, oh, I know the teacher always broke a joke and stuff. And I couldn't laugh with them, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right. Now, what was the work like? What was the first work like? What were you studying? How was that?

MR. TAKAMORI: I studied with — you know, Ken Ferguson kind of introduced me, like, "Oh, you know, this is a Japanese kid, and he helps throwing of 200 cups a day, and, you know" — almost sounded like I can throw anything. But I could throw only cups. I couldn't throw anything else. You know, I couldn't make anything bigger than this, you know, after two years.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So like I was transferred to junior. Junior was — Victor Babu, he's another teacher. He is character, really. I studied throwing. So Ken said, like, "You made like 200 same cups. So why don't you make 200 cups, they're all different?"

MS. RIEDEL: Oh.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that was my first assignment.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then like I — you know, I was in class with the rest of the kids making pots with Victor. But, you know, I — whatever the assignment, I had to make covered jars and casseroles and bowls and everything look like Koishiwara ware because that was only my information. That's all I knew.

MS. RIEDEL: Aha. Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I was like really excited. I can see those young people, some of them younger than me because they knew a lot about Japanese pottery because Ferguson loved the Japanese, you know, mingei stuff. And the museums are right next door. And Ken is always sending kids out to the museum. You know, if you have problem, you don't know idea, you know, just get out there, you know?

And you know, unlike my school in Tokyo, you know, studio open until midnight. Kids just literally live in the studio. You know, they go out for hour, go back for lunch or dinner, they come back. You know, we just spend all the time in there, you know. I was so impressed with the energy and curiosity and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: It was like really so much going on.

MS. RIEDEL: Was the emphasis all on functional ware?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, that class was.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And they can — but the — when I was working, like younger — so most of them were younger than me. But they were seniors and I was a junior. And then making their own work already, you know, and sculptures and figurative works and this and that.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, so they are?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, they are going on. And, you know, some student is making huge jars and, you know, bogus like things. It was like really always the thing to do.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But my work was all so tight. And I couldn't make anything else. Koishiwara ware, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so like after a semester or two, you know, I just kind of started thinking of how I'm going to do, you know. I can't make my own pottery, you know. They're all like Koishiwara ware. So that was the kind of time I just decided kind of leave from throwing because that's — you know, I was trained like how to swim, you know? So that's like the time I kind of thought, I will go back to — where was it last time I was making was something similar, three-dimensional.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: That was like the paper mache figures. So — but I wasn't really — I was still like very timid, you know? Like I had to hid my little piece in Koishiwara.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, yes, the little figures.

MR. TAKAMORI: I was — you know, I was much freer to make anything, of course. I knew in my head, but I was kind of really — I have no idea how good they are or how bad they are. But — and I didn't have any skill to make anything big. I didn't know how to construct them. So I had like a little porcelain clay, and I just kind of making figures this big.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm [Affirmative.], three inches.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Then like I was kind of like excited using, you know, like points of Koishiwara is in one type of clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, everything is — so — but in Kansas City, I was introduced to porcelain and reduction oxidation and china paint, under-glaze, you know. So I was kind of wanted to explore that. So I had porcelain, and I used the Koishiwara glaze paint on it, and then put the clear glaze, and then fired, high temperature. And then I put the china paints and lusters, and you know, that kind of whole thing.

But anyway — but when I started doing making these little things. And then one day I was kind of working almost like hiding, you know, my shoulder over.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And I heard Ken's voice, you know. He's a big guy. I looked up. Ferguson is kind of standing, you know, behind me, you know. And he kind of said, "Oh, those are good. Those are nice. You've got to make lots of them." And that was it, you know. I was so happy. It's kind of like, you know, I — you know, I'm kind of a simple person that way, like when I get encouragement, I simply believe in it.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, like my kindergarten teacher, he said I'm going to be artist. And my father liked whatever I made. It's not like Mom liked what you made. But he just — you know, he kind of take in and he have a little cabinet in the clinic, and he put all my works in there. That was like really great. And then like now, you know, the Ferguson is kind of first kind of adult, you know, other than family or, you know, schoolteachers, kind of gave me permission, you know. What I'm doing for my own kind of root, coming up from myself, was a good thing. He liked it.

MS. RIEDEL: So everything opened up.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes, definitely. It was great.

MS. RIEDEL: So did you then spend a fair amount of the rest of your time at Kansas making figures?

MR. TAKAMORI: That hand-build and things, I think it's maybe started the end of the first year or the beginning of second year. So entire second year, I was kind of combining — then after hand-building, I kind of went back pottery, and I start to paint on it, figurative.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like I was like a figurative vessels going, but also hand-building going, you know. And hand-building is very, very simple. Like I kind of pinch up like a porcelain bowl. And then a figure grows out of the center. So like kind of a figurative bowl with drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like a little figurative sculpture, like the size of a figurine. And so like I'm just exploring salt firing, all different things. But it's a very all, very small, and — but it's kind of, you know, just all figurative.

MS. RIEDEL: So nothing bigger than six inches?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Only the thrown thing, I started learning making something bigger.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I have plates getting bigger, and draw figurative things and can be porcelain, sometimes raku firing. And then towards the end, I started making houses.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that happen?

MR. TAKAMORI: Nelson-Atkins Museum — they have a very good Oriental collections. And like when I was — Ken really encouraged me to look back my roots. And also, I started making paper mache things. It was kind of going back to childhood.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that thing is like kind of looking up, I get inspiration from my childhood. And that — and then also going to museums, seeing lots of those nice Chinese, Japanese stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: The old houses from some of the tombs, that sort of thing?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes, exactly, yes. And I was really — one day I saw them, and then I thought, I would

like to make that because they are very, very nice. I have a kind of sense, like — it's — you know, like I like something you see, you really like. You know, you almost like want to possess it. You'd like to live with it. You know, those objects are — not necessarily have to be different culture, different time, but very rare. You know, you just kind of have incredible attachment, and you like to take it home and live with it, kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like, of course, you know, museum piece you can't. But you know, I almost feel like, you know, I really liked it. I'm going to make it for myself. And when I'm making them, I kind of learn a lot. And from there, I can making two more kind of my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: I think I feel like I kind of really try to approach, you know, through all those years, you know, like Chinese Tung Dynasty figure?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: I really like it, and I have to make it.

MS. RIEDEL: I see. Okay. Yes. That makes sense. And so when you were making figures, you were experimenting with figures from different periods of time from different cultures?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. You know, I think that time my favorite artist was Shiko Munakata. So my early figurative drawings are very much, you know, his influence, you know, black and white, you know, like simple, kind of almost naïve, you know. But it's like really — how do you say? Inclusive, open. They have like male, female, sexuality, and everything is kind of so inclusive. And they just kind of reach through to the level of like heavenly, or, you know, like — he does a lot of Buddhist kind of or god kind of images. But it's almost like there's no kind of hierarchy there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And at the first, when I was doing it, I was still kind of interested in the Western culture kind of thing, you know, Western paintings, Western sculptures. But when I get to Kansas City, I would spend through Ferguson, and also I realized — you know, I grew up in the countryside, and we didn't have a decent museum or anything. And so like Kansas City I started to see a lot more, you know, great artworks from everywhere in the world. And especially, I guess, I started kind of looking at Oriental things because, like I said I had to check on my own root. And also, I was really impressed with how much those young students knew about Japanese surroundings, which I didn't know because in Japan when I was in Koishiwara, I knew only Koishiwara.

And I know, of course, they exist, and sort of the tea wares and other things. But in our society they tend to really suppress to kind of look around too much.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because like, for instance, the sectionalism is very strong. Like you are a tea potter. Tea ware is only the kind of a good thing. The rest if junk, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And the same with the *mingei*, you know. Like Bernard Leach, those guys, that they really almost ignore or discourage us to kind of investigating in them.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But in the Kansas City is openness of like you can just kind of look around. And Ferguson was one of the things that always taught us was, curiosity is a really, really important thing, you know, like movies and books and, you know, theaters, and operas and jazz, you know. He says like, you know, the time to dig a deep well. And if you have a deep well, like you can go a long way. That kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: So find a way to sustain your inspiration or find a way to dig deep for inspiration. It will carry you far.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes. And then — and when I start making those figures, I wasn't really sure if I was making those naked women from Japan or from Europe or wherever. And I was kind of — at first I was — my idealism was something avoid the difference. I wanted them to be just human, period. So soon I start to removing the clothes or hair so you cannot see anything, like you know, kind of a black hair, curly hair, blonde hair indicates some kind of a culture and race and background. So in my mind, they were kind of just idealized

human form. And then avoiding the social, historical, that kind of conflict.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And though I've been always like the kind of stories. And especially I was kind of interested in Greek mythologies and stuff like that. And not only that, but Arabic kind of — *One Thousand* —

MS. RIEDEL: *One Thousand and One Nights*?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible]

MR. TAKAMORI: *Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron*, you know, I read all that stuff. I really liked it. So like I — kind of my subject was something like that because I thought those are like — mythology have like very symbolic stories, but they're very, very basic over human desires and human behavior. And in some way there's very universal, because very same stories exist in all different cultures.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that was kind of my resources, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And then also, you know, there was — I was, you know, come to a new country. And then this is a kind of first time I was totally be able to open up because I don't have this kind of a political agenda or traditional weight or, you know. So — and then far away from my parents. My parents were nice people, but still like, wherever I was in Japan, they were only a telephone away, you know. You have to hear this — you know, like daily stories or whatever, how the relatives are doing or whatever. But back then, there was no emails, and telephone was quite expensive. So like either you write letters or, you know, once in occasion we may just pick up the phone, you know.

So that was — I think that was a really good thing. So that that was quite luxury. That was a time, first time all my concern was encompassed around me, you know, myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And that was — yes. That was great. Like Ferguson told me like later when I was graduating, you know, "You're going to look back at the time when you were in Kansas City, and that you're going to cry because that was going to be — this going to be the best time in your life."

MS. RIEDEL: You said he was a really big influence on you. What in particular, besides — clearly, he offered you a way of seeing and opening up and a permission to open up. But is there anything else in particular that comes to mind?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think because of one thing, is like he really respected Japanese culture, you know. Like when you go to foreign country, you might run into somebody who's like really interested in your culture. But maybe, you know, can be very scholarly, or sometimes they really try to be sympathetic, but that they — you know, I can see their kind of culture chauvinism or some insensitivity. And then, you know, Ken wasn't.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Ken was like really — you know, he was a kind of interesting combination of a lot of different things. He can be very rude and, you know, he can be really short-tempered. And then he has just incredible sensitivity. Yes, he was a very, very interesting person. I've never met anybody like him, you know? And he had a lot of stories of things he can share. Like he wasn't really shy about all things. And he was kind of — and sometimes he can be like a really — I don't know if that would be — what do you call that? — teaching method. Not the didactic, but —

MS. RIEDEL: Dogmatic?

MR. TAKAMORI: Not dogmatic. But it's like he put you in the certain way — well, you know, manipulative, maybe? Like for instance, if he — but it's in a way — it's a lot more kind of a role instead of trying to be academic. Like for instance, he won't say so much analyzing your work. But he will simply encourage you, you know, "This is good. This is great." You know that kind of vocabulary. So you know you're doing fine. And also like, when you're working hard and you're doing — you know, being good student, you get a lot of attention. But you get kind of slacker or you're not doing well. Like he just see it. And he won't talk to you. You know, he won't be around to

you.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, I see.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I was kind of like early 20s and it still probably was really important for me to have this paternal person to look over me.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he did that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. How did you come up — your final project at Kansas was the village.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that come about?

MR. TAKAMORI: The Chinese things I made, and then I just wanted to kind of push it. And then I started making the figures with houses, and then houses become figures. You know, the house itself is like kind of figurative. And I did a bunch of that. And then I was kind of wanted to prepare for kind of an exit kind of work. And at that kind of time I thought, I'm going to make all this accumulation of the houses.

That's — and I felt this neighborhood I left, when I was little, which is like — I have a very kind of peculiar kind of stories, which is I'm not really sure it's coming later — came later, or I have some kind of intuitive memories, you know. That was kind of an interesting thing. So I decided to, you know, look into, what is my memory? Because I thought it was a good thing I don't have any photographic images or nobody to talk to or I just go visit there, to make. But I thought it was a kind of very limited, and I'm in a different culture, different place. And all I have to believe or trust is my memories. So that was as simple and direct as that, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: It also seems that it established a pattern that you seem to repeat periodically, which is being able to look back on something from a distance.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And it seems like the first time you were really able to look back on the whole experience with Japan from a little bit more of a distance.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And then begin to reconstruct it in the way you remembered it and what was significant about it that you were going to take forward.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. There's a second date when I arrived at Kansas City. I was [inaudible] in my dormitory. And then that date — Ferguson prepared a slide show. And that was all about the slides he shot when he was in Japan. That was 1954, I think. And you know, so like we would have to all go to auditorium, you know. And at that time like I kind of, sometimes I wear glasses, sometimes I don't. But somehow I forgot to bring my glasses. But then I didn't have the time to go back to dormitory. And then I sat very close the front, and I was looking at them because I couldn't see them so well.

And I felt really bad, you know. Ken prepared this, and he wanted to kind of introduce new student, and he would like to kind of talk about what his experience as a young man in Japan. And I felt really, really bad. So like — but I don't — I really find the timing, you know, I run out and run back with my glasses? And what is kind of the right thing to do, polite thing to do? And I just kind of started to get really, really uncomfortable. And I just thought, I really have to see it well, you know, it was like really rude to my teacher.

So I run up there. And when I came back, the slide show is over, and people kind of walking out from there. And then, so like we kind of walked back. And so like we kind of go into studio. And then we're kind of settling in to work. And Ferguson came to me. And he said, you know, "I hope I didn't say anything" — I get kind of emotional talking about dead people, my dad or Ferguson.

He said, you know, like — he was really concerned, you know, I had to cover my mouth. And so I was like really shocked because I was kind of in the complete opposite reason.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I realized that kind of his sensitivity.



MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. Extraordinary that he would — that just that — yeah.

[END OF CD 4, TRACK 1.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Like, you know, his kind of feminine side? It's not necessarily feminine, but he was the kind of person to actually say that. Usually, you know, men just can swallow it, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And something like very similar is like, one day — morning he kind of came, show up in the studio. And he saw this empty whiskey bottle in the trash. And he blew up. He just yelling at everybody and this went on and on. And he got really mad. And he went into his, you know, office.

But usually what happened is like after like 20 minutes or, you know, 30 minutes, he comes back. And the doesn't say loudly, but he comes and then just kind of apologize, you know, his behavior.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like it kind of reminded of like that — when I was little, sometimes my mother get really upset. He'd get kind of really yelling at, you know, but then later, she comes and apologizes me. Then that is the time kids usually cry, you know what I mean?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. I do know what you mean.

MR. TAKAMORI: That moment, you know, like a poignant moment.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Ferguson had that side.

MS. RIEDEL: A level of humility.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And sensitivity that adults don't always show children.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Because this culture here in America — I don't know, I shouldn't generalize it. But the people are really stubborn about apologizing. "I'm sorry" is a really tough word here.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think so?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: In the States?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Because you're accepting your mistake. And especially like, business or [inaudible], if you say you lose, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes. I have heard that. That apologizing is the equivalent of losing or showing weakness, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But you had the opposite experience with Ferguson.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: There was a real open sensitivity. That probably was extraordinarily helpful in helping you figure out how to proceed with your own work, and then an enthusiasm for what you were doing, and an appreciation for Japanese culture and your experiences as an apprentice.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Someone who really understood who you were and where you were coming from as much as anybody probably could at that point in time.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How then did you make the transition from Kansas City to Alfred?

MR. TAKAMORI: How did I decided?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.] And you went back to Japan first, though, didn't you? After you finished at Kansas, you went back to Japan for a couple of years, or a year?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, that's — no. I don't know if I went back. But if it did, then that was just kind of a — just a short while, for summer or something.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay. Then you started right away at Alfred in '76?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And Ken helped you set that up, or he suggested it?

MR. TAKAMORI: There was — Ferguson graduated from Alfred, and he really believed in Alfred to be the best graduate school to go. So he was clearly almost like — his pride to how many students he can send into Alfred type of thing. So like art students themselves are like — to be the top, you know, in the class means go to Alfred. That was kind of — objectively kind of recognized kind of thing, you know [inaudible].

So by — you know, like probably the middle of the second year when I was doing all hand-building stuff, and I was realized I'm shifting my goal from become a functional potter in Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: Aha.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I thought, you know, what I can do, you know? What will be next? So everybody — you know, they're talking about going to graduate school, this and that. So I thought that that would be a good idea for myself, to — I felt like I just got started and got real excited about what I'm doing. So I felt like, if I go back now to Japan, and I don't think that will be a good idea to have, you know — I would like to be at the place where I will be kind of encouraged going that direction.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Because now you've started to see a career as a sculptor?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, you know, I didn't think that far. I was just happy what I was doing. And I just wanted to see, you know, what I can develop into. And that was kind of a time, you know, now to think of it, like, you know, economy wasn't — I don't know, that was the '70s. But at least tuition is inexpensive. Housing is very inexpensive. Not many students really need a lot of jobs to support themselves. The student loan was, you know, just fine.

And so we weren't really thinking about the future. You would likely become teachers or you would like — sell your work through galleries. Of course, at that time we didn't even have a ceramics gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that naively we are just kind of, you know, very abstract idea of becoming artists. However, it was good enough.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So you started at Alfred. And how did you find that, compared with your experience at Kansas City?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, that was —

MS. RIEDEL: Val Cushing was teaching there, and who else was there at the time?

MR. TAKAMORI: Wayne Higby, Tony Hepburn — [Ted] Randall was still there — Bob Turner and Val Cushing, Bill Sperry? Is that?

MS. RIEDEL: Sperry?

MR. TAKAMORI: No. William —

MS. RIEDEL: It will come.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. He was more like the sculpture side. And at that time, like graduate school was only ceramics. But we have like — Bill, William Perry.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then like Glen Zweygardt, he was a sculptor there. But anyway, ceramics was young ones

[inaudible]. And then Randall was ready to — he just retired. And Turner was still there. And Val Cushing, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That was like — you know, suddenly, the — you know, the word "art" kind of came into me, you know, because like graduate school, you know, you're going to make art. But you know, I — you know, I knew contemporary art. But I really didn't look into like art magazines or — more like I was interested in artifacts from the past and the museum pieces, you know. But suddenly, like you're concerned like to be a young artist to create something of a — you know, contemporarily artworks. That was kind of overwhelming because I didn't really put much emphasis studying and I didn't do much research myself.

So — but I kind of — everybody in the graduate students, they were like the best students from all over the country.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: We are like, you know — we are hot shots. And then everybody is kind of anxious to make art, you know. So that was like kind of a really — kind of a new pressure I had to experience.

MS. RIEDEL: Very different than [inaudible].

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. And you know, I'm kind of a really try to ease in slowly. So like the first semester, I just kind of worked something like very similar to — I was doing same approach Kansas City. And that was fine, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: With the figures again?

MR. TAKAMORI: Vessels, figures, figurative drawings, decoration. And then I just — towards the end, I start to kind of put some kind of challenge into. And then as a naïve young person, I have to kind of ask, What is art? It seems like art is something completely opposite of what I can do.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, for instance, like I make small things. Art is big. And I make figurative. And art is abstraction. And, you know, and all that kind of thing. So like I have to quickly kind of [inaudible] my technical skills, be able to make something big. But, you know, anyway, I think I made a really kind of a wrong kind of a decision there, I think. Because I should have really be honest and, you know — I don't know how I would do things if I go through the graduate school, but I don't know. But it's been kind of — since I left Alfred, it's been kind of a question for me, you know, because especially like when you start to teach again, you are a graduate student. And then how do you advise, or how do you, you know — what will be kind of — what kind of advice can I offer? You know, what kind of philosophy or attitude I should have? And all that stuff.

Still, I don't have like a really good answer. But at least like, when I just kind of think about what happened to me in the graduate school, I think it's a lot to do with my — you know, under-preparation, too naïve, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Too naïve in terms of not being confident enough yet about your own work? Or how so?

MR. TAKAMORI: I guess like one of the things is like, my English ability, end of the second year, you know. And I didn't really seriously study English.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So my language skill is very poor.

MS. RIEDEL: So your ability to defend or to discuss whatever you were doing was really limited.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And more like defend, but more like — to understand what the teacher is saying.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like completely lack of this kind of advantage or, you know, what a kind of academic institution can offer you. Dialog didn't really exist for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I'm kind of — so like kind of intuitively, like how I always kind of survived through Tokyo or Koishiwara, you know, I kind of used that kind of tactics, I think. So like I kind of make critique to be satisfiable. So I just passed through. So I show kind of like a development every time. But it's not necessarily truly, I'm struggling to come up with something authentic.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I'm just kind of displaying what the expectation is, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that was one of the biggest mistakes I have. But the other hand, though, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Sometimes those mistakes have to be made, right?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Better earlier than later.

MR. TAKAMORI: You have to suffer later.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's true, too.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like you know, I'm just kind of easygoing and making whatever, you know, I was expected. So I passed. But there's nothing really tangible thing I was learning.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And by the end, I made something larger and not figurative, abstractive. And something looked like art.

MS. RIEDEL: What was it?

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: I was working with black clay. And I'd make a big slab and have shelves. And I make some kind of same my figurative structure is in there. In my mind, they were shrines. And then I was thinking, for instance, like you have a Buddhist home shrine, and then, you know, you living with grandpa. And then, you know, grandparents put like a candle and pray every day. And they were my ancestors. Then my grandpa died, and he will be part of in this shrine. And so I was kind of interested in the kind of shift, change between physicality to become nonfigurative. So that was a kind of a hint for me, maybe, for I had to leave figurative, you know. Something — I'm kind of thinking figurative, but something becomes something else.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But you know, I couldn't really — because of, I think, I wanted my work to be kind of — looks like art. Something looks sophisticated and very cool, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like at that time, you know, like Tony Hepburn was kind of a new voice in the ceramics. So I really kind of looking at how he worked with the materials, you know. He had slabs, and he had like a very kind of smart little sharp lines, and you know, like really hard edge in some way, and very reduced. So that's what I did. You know, I never said anything like that. But that's what I did. But — and also, you know, every critique I kind of listened. And, you know, I pushed away my fear or my understanding. And then just moving that direction. And then I just start to feel like that work is not mine anymore, you know what I mean? Like I just tried to do — you know, think that way, like, you know, my grandpa in the shrine and this and that. But I just kind of end up like at the close of [inaudible] just thinking how to make it look cool or, you know, whatever.

So anyway. So you know, I just have a thesis show, and then I have to kind of go to Archie Bray. And then I was like — nobody really, you know — it's not the kind of thing that everybody said, "Hey, can I have it?" [Laughs] And I was traveling back to Montana and traveling back to Japan. And I just — well, I have to toss them all. So I tossed them all. I take down the show, and it just all went to dumpster, you know? But, you know, I have no

regret or, you know, any attachment to those works anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: There's only one piece. Glenn Zwiger, I think, he said, "If you're going to toss it, can I have this?" The last piece I did was like figurative. But it's a flat slab. But they still was like black and very cool. So I kind of shaped it with my hands. It was really more kind of a tactile and loose-looking thing. And it's kind of man — ghostlike man figures standing. And then have a bunch of windows. And then inside the window I have small figures that I made, simplified, and they are located inside. And they are supposed to be like my ancestors and, you know, all that stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: And how then — so you tossed everything in the dumpster, and you climbed in the — was it a blue Datsun? Isn't that right. You had a little blue car?

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, oh, a Mustang.

MS. RIEDEL: A Mustang.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And drove out to Archie Bray.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did you make that connection? Who was it at Archie Bray and how did you get there?

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, at that time I think I already have arrangement.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because when I was in Kansas City second year, Kurt Weiser — he drove through town and Ken Ferguson asked him to do a side show.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And at that time I think he was teaching at Oregon. And then he got — I think he was just confirmed a job, directorship, at the Archie Bray Foundation. And then that lunchtime, Ken told me that — maybe you should make lunch for us. So I got — I invited Ken and Kurt to my apartment, and I made them cold noodle.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: That was the first time I met Kurt Weiser. And then like probably Ken's advice or, you know, that time Kansas City Art Institute — Ken Ferguson had two important places [inaudible]. He came from Alfred, and he went to Archie Bray. And he went to Kansas City. So he loved like his students went to Alfred and Archie Bray, or Kansas City, Alfred, Archie Bray and Alfred. That kind of — we have this, you know, triangle.

MS. RIEDEL: Triangle.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And Archie Bray — this was still fairly early on, and it had been open for, what, 10 or 15 years now?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, no. They started in the '50s.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So this is — oh, right, this is —

MR. TAKAMORI: Over 50 years.

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, no, I'm thinking when you first went, in 1978.

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh.

MS. RIEDEL: So this had been open 20 years, right, Archie Bray?

MR. TAKAMORI: Fifty years.

MS. RIEDEL: In '78?

MR. TAKAMORI: It's 2008.

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, no, when you first started.

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. RIEDEL: When you first went.

MR. TAKAMORI: I went '78.

MS. RIEDEL: So it had been open for a couple — for 20 years by then, '78 to '58, right? It opened in the '50s?

MR. TAKAMORI: Oh, I see. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It opened when Voulkos and Rudy Autio were there.

MR. TAKAMORI: That's right. You're right.

MS. RIEDEL: And then I think David Shaner was there.

MR. TAKAMORI: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: And was Kurt maybe the third? I can't remember exactly.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, actually, Rudy and Voulkos — then there was Ferguson, David Shaner.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And — oh, what was his name? Somebody — fifth person, and then Kurt.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, then Kurt was sixth.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And what was the Bray like when you were first there? Were you there on residency?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And you've had a long history with the Bray?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That was, you know, like — I finished school, and then crossed the country. And also had a summer residency. And when I got there, there was a bunch of us, mostly Kansas City connections. John Gill, Andrea Gill, Larry Bush, and Wendy Mueller, and — yes, there were more. But anyway, so —

MS. RIEDEL: And everybody had residencies?

MR. TAKAMORI: Right. We all get like a studio space. And then on top of it, there was a summer workshop was going. So some like students are there. And then that was — I think it was probably first summer for Kurt. So he was just started. And he is like same age with me. So he was 28. And he's a young director, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then all of the — John, Andrea, either like the same age with us. So like all of us are like anywhere like 28 to somebody is like 35 or — you know. So Kurt was kind of having a little hard time to kind of establish himself because like young people are kind of cocky towards too young authorities, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So he had to deal with that and other things. But that was very, still very casual and fun place.

MS. RIEDEL: Very extraordinary place. Just like nothing else.

MR. TAKAMORI: And also, you know, that was kind of time — that was a popular thing, for young people to take summer off and go to the place like that. It's almost like a commune, you know? And you enjoy each other.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But like now there is like students barely can afford.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because they have to really work hard through those times. So yes, it's a kind of different time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. But you know, students like Archie Bray — they have to raise money and create more scholarships. So there's a way. They are working hard to, you know, maintain this energetic place, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: And they actually just went through that wonderful fund-raising campaign and just opened the beautiful new building.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Which just seems sort of extraordinary at this time.

MR. TAKAMORI: But it's the other hand, like, you know, we didn't have the kind of a sense of an institution there. It's more like a free camp kind of, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Not much rules and whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Would there be some facilities where the studios and the kilns were operational?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was your work like right after grad school then?

MR. TAKAMORI: I thought, you know, I kind of have to find myself. And so like I thought I should go back where I was with Kansas City Art Institute time. So I just — and also I just thought it's important for me to just kind of have fun, to re-energize myself. So there, I was just stuck to kind of throwing just pots and then just kind of painting with white slip and black slips. So I just made a whole bunch of these kind of really carefree kind of pots.

MS. RIEDEL: Just functional pots?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: But [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Were painted?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Interesting. And then you went back to Japan?

MR. TAKAMORI: Um-hm. [Affirmative.] That is another, like kind of a — usually, I tell graduate students, you know, you get out of the graduate school, you finish your [inaudible] education. Now it's you go home and that next couple of years will be very hard. So you know, you've got to come buckle your seatbelt or whatever, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Get ready.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm going to stop us here.

[END OF CD 4.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija RIEDEL from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art interviewing Akio Takamori at the artist's studio in Seattle, Washington, on March 20, 2009. This is [mini] disc number three.

So you finished the summer at the Bray and you're heading back home. Do you have any idea what you're going to do?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, I kind of, you know, in a realistic way, if I go back, you know, I thought probably I'll end up having a crafts studio not too far from my parents and make functional pots.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? Make functional pots?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And as you're getting home are you thinking that you may be coming back to the States, or you really have no idea?

MR. TAKAMORI: I thought — you know, it's kind of — you start to kind of think about what my mother, you know, want me to do.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Really?

MR. TAKAMORI: Because, you know, at that time I kind of — probably what my mother wants is like, I marry some good, you know, Japanese girl and have like a pottery. And then she can visit us and kind of, you know, in a participating way or enjoying results of, I guess — I don't know how. I don't know what's the word. But to —

MS. RIEDEL: How you —

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, enjoy the participate in the children's life, I guess, yes, yes. So actually, you know, like I didn't know exactly what I'm going to do. And when I went back, and I have visited my old friend, who were apprentice in Koishiwara, and then that guy —

MS. RIEDEL: Is this the fellow from the Mengei Museum?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, one of the apprentices, you know, in the village.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he was outsider. He went to the village, and he — after he left there, he went to somewhere else, apprenticed for awhile. Then he decided to set up his own shop. So I just wanted to visit him and —

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, see how it worked.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, see how the life is going. And it seems, you know, like they're kind of enjoying their life. And then I was — they were kind of interested in what I learned and what I can do. So —

MS. RIEDEL: Was this in Seto [Japan]?

MR. TAKAMORI: This is in Miyazaki.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And it's not the young man, the other.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: He was actually more like kind of a hippie guy and that he came from Tokyo and he apprenticed in Koishiwara and then he got married. And he had nice — you know, in the nice, beautiful kind of [inaudible] countryside he had a shop. And making pots, and it seemed like they were living decently, or whatever.

But anyway, so I was kind of — they allowed me to kind of hang out there for awhile. So I was just kind of helping him or like living there for awhile. But then I just, you know, realized that some kind of a stress between myself to them because them is like, they're living real life, you know what I mean? I just kind of went to high education and don't know what to do, just kind of hanging out, you know. And so I just kind of felt like I'm not welcome there, you know. I mean, I guess I can't be there too long anyway.

So I was like really tried to figure out. And then I went to state prefecture government, and I just wanted to know what kind of a system they have to support the small businesses and, you know, do they have any kind of a department deal with cultural, you know, support of whatever? But like the system itself is so different in the United States because when I was in America I kind of enjoyed the kind of sense of, you feel really into. You feel gung-ho. You know, you get what you want, kind of, you know. And if you kind of approach that way in Japan, you know, they — you will be pushed back, you know, pushed down, right?

So like I just — and then I didn't go my kind of a youth, that kind of time to learn about social system. I was out of the country. So I had to kind of relearn, you know. So like to, you know, talk to so-and-so, at first I have to



bring the sake to my uncle who works for the state government, and my Uncle Mike, who, you know, write a letter, introduce me to this and that kind of thing. You know, I was so depressed, you know, because the place where I could not really freely kind of approach anything and I can't get immediate results, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that also really confused me, you know, how I should approaching it. And then I — so like I decide I'm going to visit Jun because I met Jun previously. And when I was in Kansas City, Jun came through as a visiting artist. And then I knew he was teaching at the RISD in Providence. So first my summer at Kansas City, I visited Jun Kaneko on Providence.

MS. RIEDEL: In Providence?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I just wanted to kind of get know him and I just wanted, just curious, you know? And then I realize he was on the way to Japan. He was kind of packing. And he was kind enough to meet me and, you know, we had — he took me out for dinner or whatever. And so that was more — a little bit more personal encounter. So then like when I went back to Japan, I knew he is settled down somewhere in the country, and he's building his house for a couple of years. And he's setting up this kind of a, you know, big, kind of a wonderful kind of settlings there.

MS. RIEDEL: So he was setting up some sort of ceramics studio?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. He made his home with telephone poles, and his studio of railroad ties. And it's like — you know, he always kind of have big plans, and he can actualize it. So I visited him. Then hung out there for awhile, not too long. Then I went back to Kyushu. And then I don't know how long in between. But one day I got telephone call from Jun, and he said he decided taking Cranbrook job. So he is going back to States. And, "I just finished my studio and everything."

So he just need somebody to living here. So I'm — he didn't ask me for rent or anything. It's very generous. You know, I've always run into generous people, and I get so much help, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I was living — you know, I moved there. Yes, my parents bought me a car. And then I found a dog.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So me and my dog drove up all the way to Jun's place.

MS. RIEDEL: And where was he living? Where was this place?

MR. TAKAMORI: It's called Nagura [Japan].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Which is pretty remote from everything. So this was like, you know, Jun's house and studio and just woods. And then if you don't go out from there, that day if you get the mail — mailman will come, so you can see him. Or like there's a — we'll go far away, there's a really humble farmer live there. And they walk by the house in going to the woods and collect little twigs and stuff to make charcoal. So you know, and that kind of place.

So like it was a really nice, happy time for me, like being just like, you know, very close with my dog. We got very good friends, you know. My dog was really happy just getting attention from one person. So I just kind of start to make stuff. But I didn't know, you know, where to start with.

MS. RIEDEL: And he had a kiln set up?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And so, you know, I was still new from graduating, you know, the school. And now I was kind of a — I thought maybe I need kind of a structure. So I just gave myself assignment. And then I just kind of said, like, I'm going to work on this assignment for two months, you know, that kind of a structure I did. And so like I have like a simple project. Like I have a humped mold I made. And I'm going to using this simple mold. And then, well, I can do it. So like from mold, you know, I can cut the edge or draw on it, or like put two molds

together and making 3D or whatever.

So I was just kind of working like I was like student, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: And experimental. You weren't trying to have a functional pottery, and you weren't making figures, per se. You were just experimenting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I did kind of little pots because I was kind of looking for the possibility if I can sell my pots to have an income. But, you know, that really didn't happen.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And yes, actually, I did have once brought back all the work and have exhibition in the coffee shop in Nobeoka, and then also Miyazaki [1980, Himawari Gallery, Miyazaki, Japan -AT], yes. Anyway —

MS. RIEDEL: And was it functional work?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, just kind of little kind of figures and just kind of like — you know, this and that.

MS. RIEDEL: And how were they received?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, you know, like your hometown, you know, your mom's friends, and you know. But there was in Nobeoka, when I had the show, there was a printmaker. His father was printmaker, too. And his father was like my father's friend. And so my father's and his — my father's friend, he was a poet. And they were supposed to be like they are going to offer to help his child to go to art school. But this young man declined. And he is like — and he did his own. And he established himself. And I was very looking-up of him because he's sophisticated, intelligent person. He didn't go art school. But he just kind of learned printmaking from father, woodblock. And he pushed it. And he made it as a professional printmaker to support his family with just a little town.

And he just — he made things like — he published a calendar every month. And he has his kind of collectors lined up. And so every month, he just sends those, you know. So that became a little income, you know, and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: Or like he has show in coffee shops, you know, whatever. But he is very strong person. But anyway, he was kind enough to kind of come in to see the show at the coffee shop. And he was saying — you know, he wasn't like — in Japan, people never say, "Oh, this is dynamite," or "This is great," or, you know. "Fabulous" or anything like that. Usually, if you get a reaction or something, "Oh, this is interesting" it's pretty much the best thing they can say.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: But anyway, he was — you know, he said he liked those, and especially, you know, "This is nice," and blah-blah. So I said, you know, I was like really honored. And, "If you like it, I would like to give it to you." And he kind of looked at me, and he said, you know, "I make living with art, you know. You never give away." And you know, if — it's almost a giving away is an insult for me, you know. So that really helped me to recognize what is kind of means to become professional.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because, especially like my generation, we kind of, you know, romantic notion of becoming idea, but we never really research for, you know — we kind of sell them like hippies.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, like we sell them by the street and the fair, you know, selling and this and that.

MS. RIEDEL: The whole economics and marketing aspect wasn't really part of the education.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So anyway, when I was at Jun's place, I really tried to focus on finding what I really like, you know, what I really be happy doing it, or like that — because, you know, in Japanese saying, if you really like

enjoying it, that's you can do the best.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I was just kind of really deciding that my favorite thing is this kind of drawing on the ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: Drawing on ceramics?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, drawing on ceramics. So pictorial things, vessels.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I was 28. And then I — this is rational mind, you know. Like I decided, you know, I'm going to push it until my 30th birthday and see what is the outcome from it. And then I thought, 30 is still young enough if I like to shift my direction to other things I'm interested in, like photography or just drawing, paintings, films, you know, or whatever. And then I thought maybe I can still kind of go back to a little more education to kind of explore different areas. So that was kind of a superficial kind of time line I made.

So fortunately, by 30, I felt like I start to offered summer workshops, or sabbatical replacement — that kind of things is happening. So I felt kind of good. You know, so like if by 30 I felt that was a time I can shift or I just stick with it rest of my life. So like I made that kind of a — you know, it's just in my head.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, so that's what I did.

MS. RIEDEL: And was there something in particular that convinced you by the time you were 30 that you were going to be able to make this work? Was there exhibits or — you stayed in Japan. And then how did you end up back in the States?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think because of my first teaching job in Nova Scotia.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: College of Art. So I went to Nova Scotia, and then I finished it. I kind of traveled back and, you know, visited the Alfred area and stuff. And I came back. Then when I was in Nova Scotia, I met a teacher from Vancouver. He offered me the following year's, or — yes. I think it was in the following year's workshop or something like that. So like I — then I went back to Japan. Then I went back to Vancouver. And when I was in Vancouver, I think it was somehow — I think I decided, I finished at Vancouver, I would like to do a residency at the Bray again. So I stayed for six months or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: At the Bray?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Then when I was at the Bray, I was offered sabbatical replacement in Bozman [MT, at Montana State University -AT]. So I went back to Japan and to came back. So I always went back because I was have to take care of Jun's place. That was my lease kind of, responsibility, to living there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Sort of like a house would be taking care of, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: So you could come back here to the States and teach for a few months or teach your residency, but then you'd have to go back to Japan and take care of Jun's place?

MR. TAKAMORI: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And this started during the early '80s, a real time of traveling and back and forth, because you were substitute teaching and filling in for people on sabbaticals, all over.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. Yes. And then like when I- by the time when I left Jun's place —

MS. RIEDEL: And when was that? Do you remember?

MR. TAKAMORI: I got married 1984 in Denver. And then that was — I went back to — we, my wife and I went to Jun's place and lived there for the last time for about six months.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then we left there and went to Archie Bray. And then that was '85, '84?

MS. RIEDEL: And was it traditional at that time for Archie Bray to have a residency as long as six months?

MR. TAKAMORI: Residency — Archie Bray have a kind of a dual residency. One is just only summer, which is the three months.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because of, there is a studio. There is enough heating systems.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And another one is like a long-term residency.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: You can stay as long as two years.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I kind of visited first time in the summer. And second time was like probably I stayed fall through spring. Then when I get married and I went back there, I think I stayed about over two years, maybe, you know, because we got married '84. My son was born '86. And I came to Vashon Island [WA] in '87, maybe. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And how and where did that first slab construction piece come about, the sort of envelope forms?

MR. TAKAMORI: That's in Toronto.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Which is, I was working with the press mold things. Then I was just kind of using this thing, like this, bowl, and the edges cut out. So like a figure is almost like floating on the surface, but start to come out a little bit, kind of a dimension, you know, coming out of it. [*Couple*, 1980]

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I went to Nova Scotia, and then — yeah. I think that was same summer I did a workshop [inaudible] workshop at Toronto, the Sheridan College of Art. And while I was doing the workshop, I came up with — which is kind of interesting because, you know, I was — Toronto was as close as Alfred, right? And when I was in Alfred, that one image — it's a really bad thing, but in the library, there was a Japanese, you know, like a wood-cut print. And there was Gutamaro's lovers. I was just so impressed and mesmerized or whatever.

That was the kind of old book they have, like print is glued on page lightly.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I took it.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Oh, dear.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I kept it.

MS. RIEDEL: Which was by [Kitagawa] Utamaro, is that right?

MR. TAKAMORI: Utamaro, yes, that's right.

MS. RIEDEL: Utamaro, yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And when I was in —

MS. RIEDEL: What was it called? Was it *The Lovers*? Do you remember?

MR. TAKAMORI: I don't know what was the title. *Lovers* [1980], I called it. So that kind of somehow came across again to me, you know. I really liked it. And then probably I was carrying around that for all that long time.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like when I opened my sketch book, and then I thought, "Oh, yeah, this is like, I can make it with clay," you know, that sex structure.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that's how it came up.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, so you had been carrying this around all that time?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: By putting these forms together in a new way, you realized you could create that in clay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So it's just like those Chinese house, Tung dynasty, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And Utamaro's print is like a time like something you really like. It's kind of end up to be giving me direction, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: And that really started a series that you worked for 10 years at least.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes. So I left a piece to my friends. He teach there. He retired, maybe. And then like when the Garth Clark came, he saw that piece. And then he — well, I guess like he asked, "Who made this?" and you know. And then at that time I was at Archie Bray. So he called me up and said, like he opened a gallery in L.A., and are you interested in? So, you know, that's — you know, everything is connected, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And that was your first real gallery connection, wasn't it?

MR. TAKAMORI: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MR. TAKAMORI: Actually, before that I have a little show, the pots I made when I was in Nova Scotia. I had a show with — in Toronto, starts with a "P." Perimeter Gallery? No.

MS. RIEDEL: Perimeter like in Chicago?

MR. TAKAMORI: That's in Chicago, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: There's one of the first ceramics galleries in Toronto.

MS. RIEDEL: We can look it up.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. The woman's name is Susan somebody used to run. But they don't exist anymore. Prime Gallery

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, Prime. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Did they do the SOFA fair for awhile?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think she did.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. I remember her, I think. And when you were working on those forms, those slab constructed forms, did you — how consciously did you begin to develop the tension of the interior space? And how much of that was just intuitively over time?

MR. TAKAMORI: The first piece I made in Toronto is earthenware. And just two slabs. It doesn't have much kind of volume.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Pretty much kind of straightforward like this. And then I guess it's a gradually — like when the

understanding of structure and then getting better with construction, they gained the volume and they start getting bigger, and then more volume got added to it.

MS. RIEDEL: Those pieces have been written about and discussed quite a bit. But what about that particular form was interesting to you for so long? How did it hold your attention over time?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think it's because of it's, you know, two-dimensionally oriented.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But it's still three-dimensional object. And then also it's a drawing, but they don't fit into this square frame.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So almost cut-out drawings, but itself have its own objectivity as, you know, stand in space.

MS. RIEDEL: It is such a back and forth and a fusion between two dimensions and three dimensions, just constantly, when you're looking at it. It's back and forth between that. And the whole concept of a vessel, which is so fundamental to ceramics and to the figure, is so primary, both in a formal sense and in a metaphorical sense, although the metaphor comes with the idea of vessel and body. And you really worked with that form for 10 years.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I think, you know, for first more than half, six years, there was almost like nonstop, you can just, you know, pull out of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I kind of start to almost like kind of investigating the vessel idea, structure. And then like kind of like become too fussy, you know, like two-sided thing. And the image is the most important. But then like if you're kind of thinking about, well, two-sided, how about three-sided or four-sided? You know? And so like in some way like, once if I started to pushing that direction, almost kind of start to spoil it, to be kind of direct, you know, or image was most important thing. But when I have a kind of image, I have to really kind of twist arm to fit into this kind of a structure.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I start to kind of getting more struggle than just, you know, direct kind of canvas to put all my energy, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so I — you know, I just kind of start, you know, tired about talking about importance of vessel thing, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: The imagery, of course, in the beginning is so passionate and so sexual and so — so much about two, two-ness. And then over time you can see it evolve and come to a more in-depth study of sort of psychological narrative, a large inner personal dynamic.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Between more people, or almost a psychological examination of a single person.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes. So yes. I just kind of felt like kind of a need to find some new structure to open up. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And the drawing must have really — because this also was a shift from very three-dimensional, very form, vessel oriented, or [inaudible] figures. But this was really very much a vessel with much more profound drawings, much more emphasis on two-dimensional lines.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, it is.

MS. RIEDEL: And were these all fired with [inaudible] the same way, or these were salt-fired?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I construct with high-temperature porcelain. Then I — once I finish construction, I drew with under-glazes. And, you know, back then under-glazes weren't as good as now.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like I was trying all different colors with this only very consistent like, you know, dependable was black. So — and, you know, I always kind of used black lines, so that was just fine. So like I started just draw with the black. And then I put in the salt firing, with just very little salt. And when those come out from the kiln, I decide, you know, what kind of coloration will be necessarily. So I refired them with the commercial glazes, 06, 05, because those colors, the primary color or whatever the fancy color was available in the lower temperature, but not for high temperature.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then I refired them again with [inaudible] 018 over-glazes with Japanese enamels and [inaudible] and stuff like that. And yes. That kind of served me really well with taking advantage of material which is so much about process. So each process I can contribute or add something, you know? So go along with it instead of like —

MS. RIEDEL: [inaudible.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Because when I was a young, you know, less patience and — then when you kind of throw pots and you draw with the white slip and you think it's great, you know. Then like the rest of the process, it's going to dry up, shrink, and then not really nice glaze. And then the rest of the process is a disappointment.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So once I started doing slab things, and I just kind of started really enjoying do the process. And so like sometimes like when people ask why you work with the clay type of things. And I kind of thinking about why, and one of the things that reason maybe is because of that process-oriented material, and then my temperament fits pretty well, you know. Like I tend to overdo, and I like to kind of swiftly work and finish. And then I overdoing it, and I get disappointed.

But like ceramics process, I like this kind of a — you have to work really quick, and then you have to patiently wait, you know, the drying process of whatever. And then you work again. And you put it in the kiln. And then you wait. And they come out. And I still have — you know, instead of like putting everything at once.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, that doesn't work for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But also, I don't like working too slow, too carefully. Then the kiln might — that's what I can do. So the process of a material and then how I work, I work — and the speed and all that matches really well. Or like maybe I learn how to match with it, you know, in the longer process.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And you also definitely developed a process where you were firing these pieces multiple times. I mean, that's not necessarily a standard practice. I mean, that's something that you've cultivated over time. And you'll have multiple pieces going at once. So you can have them at all different phases.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So the '80s were just an extremely busy productive time, it seems.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You were teaching in all sorts of different places. You were working. You were showing regularly with Garth — and I think at one year, 1985, you had 11 exhibitions in one year.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, just a phenomenal amount of work.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, mostly that group show, you know, at the Garth Clark.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But, you know, the '80s, I had two one-person shows a year, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: And you were teaching as well?

MR. TAKAMORI: It was as a kind of workshop part-time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. But two one-person shows a year — that's extraordinary output.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. I can say yes now because I realize I can't do it anymore.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So you were showing with Garth Clark in New York and Los Angeles? And where else?

MR. TAKAMORI: For awhile I had a show with Esther Saks in Chicago.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I had — let's see. Where else? Oh, I had several shows at the Morgan Gallery in Kansas City.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then, you know, like Seattle galleries were much later.

MS. RIEDEL: And when did you start teaching at the University of Washington?

MR. TAKAMORI: Eighty-three or '86. No, I'm sorry. Ninety-three or '96.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So not for awhile yet.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I think it could have been — I've been teaching about 15 years, so '93.

MS. RIEDEL: Ninety-three sounds about right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And in the mid-'80s you also — is that the first time you really did a series of prints?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that come about?

MR. TAKAMORI: In '83, I taught one semester in Alfred. And that was a time — I wonder now how we connected. But this is Lawrence Photography. And he have a shop in Lawrence, Kansas. And it could be — I wonder if I went to workshop there, or something. And then Mike Sims, he's the owner of the Lawrence Gallery. He asked me. So I went there, and I made a couple of prints, lithograph. That was my first lithograph.

And, yes, I was doing like kind of like a hobby like. I was doing woodblock in Japan when I was in Jun's place and when I was at college, you know. So I was —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, in college, too, you did woodblocks?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, but it's like not assignments. Just kind of like the paper mache stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. And my interest in print was because of Shiko Munakata, is probably, you know. And then also, when I was growing up, woodprint was a quite popular medium, wasn't it? It's kind of a little strange how it's — you know, it's not really popular anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: And what does the printing — because I know you've continued to work from time to time two-dimensionally. What does that — why are you held to do that as well? Because I know we were just saying how much you like drawing on three-dimension. And also, we can get into this — how playing with scale has become increasingly important. I wonder if playing with dimension also somehow?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think because of the basically, you know — I guess one of the most characteristic or most recognizable things about my work is my drawing. So it is on a three-dimensional form or two-dimensional. But



you know, like my drawings basically is pretty much developed on clay surface through the vessels.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I think I feel less comfortable drawing on paper. So in some way, like, you know, if I had drawn that and then make transfer back to flat by photography, and then I claiming it's still my drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And this is just kind of, I drew on it, on top of it, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And I think I'm kind of still searching for, you know, the drawing on flat things, I guess. Because people say, like, oh, you're drawing really represented your drawing as kind of a product.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I haven't, you know. I did — I do prints, you know, which is like some kind of hesitant whatever it is in there. It's kind of a — I'd like to kind of figure out, I guess. I'm kind of going around and around, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Makes you think of Don Reitz a little bit, because he likes to do 3D clay and then take off and do prints for a period of time. He has a little bit of back and forth between the clay and the print.

MR. TAKAMORI: Rudy did on the drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: That's true. But even on this, is this what we're looking at? Is this a photograph, and then you've drawn on top of that?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And what comes — what's immediately apparent here is the increasing interest in scale, even more than dimension.

MR. TAKAMORI: And you know, how your brain works, and then you have certain kind of a trend, a way of doing it. And it seems like I'm kind of a little bit timid or careful, not jump right in things. So I create some kind of a reason to myself, just like I have to kill my old baby doll, you know? Last — was it two years ago, I had a show at the Frank Lloyd?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: I had a photography and figures.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: That was kind of a first really attempt. I'm kind of using digital images.

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Which is coming from the reasoning part, you know. It's like I — when the Ferguson's memorial gathering, Gertrude prepared a carousel of slides that Ken took when he was a young man. And then on carousel type of — Ken did, probably. It's cute kids. And also he's like just married, no kids, young, tall, American man. He has his own first camera. And they're going around taking pictures, and how he was so interested in little children.

So after couple of years of his passing, I just — you know, it was the same — you know, that was after a couple my father died, and he passed. And then I just — life is busy and you're going. And I just kind of wanted to create a project which is like, I spend time with it. So I, you know, had kind of an idea maybe I would like to look at those 1954 photos. And I would like to create a project.

MS. RIEDEL: And these are your father's photos or Ken's?

MR. TAKAMORI: Ken Ferguson's. And so I went to Kansas City, and got some copies here. And then I made kind

of a loosely kind of based upon that. But more importantly, you know, I kind of think about the kind of a connection crossing between him and myself. And I like to think about kind of time a lot, which is like a kind of a perspective where you're born and you die. And then my life is like this, and Ken's life is somewhere here, and we have a crossing.

And the first time in this kind of imagination, you know, in that kind of land of Japan, and Ferguson is, you know, a young married man in northern Japan. I was in southern Japan. I was only four years old. But one time we kind of stand in the same ground or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then the next — 20 years later we crossed in the Koishiwara, you know? That kind of like the things you create in your head, which is — I'd like to imagine that, you know. Like for instance, when I'm looking at the Tang Dynasty things, I like to imagine that those people who are living that time and, you know, what are they eating and what kind of life are they living? And they're not direct my ancestors, but I like to see the humans in a period of time in the universe, humans histories like this. And I'm somewhere here, you know, or somewhere there.

And — but the structurally, basically, we have a complex world. But it's like if you see in the huge scale, we're on the same string, you know? It's a very fragile string.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like, you know, there's millions of people before me. That's why I exist. And then I like to pass that to the future, you know. So that kind of a way of like imagining — the Ferguson's life kind of stimulate me because twice we were kind of like — once did meet, and the other time we crossed. And then how my life changes and shifting through, you know.

So, you know, that kind of thing is like always occurred to me. You know, like, for instance, I was in Hungary residency. It was the same thing, too. When I was in Hungary, the director, he's in his 60s. And he was talking about uprisings when he was a little child in an apartment in Budapest. And he's looking out the window. And he sees this atrocity. And then like at that time, I was in my parents' house and I remember the night my parents were quite upset about it. And that was kind of a first kind of world is no — political, you know, the kind of political war news for me, you know?

So wherever I go, in a different place, this place meant — I like to kind of connect somehow, you know, as kind of a — and it does. There's always something.

MS. RIEDEL: So is that — it makes me think of the piece that you did when you came back, the small child running and the poses, sort of the military statue.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And it also makes me think, did you start to do the *karako* pieces after this Ken Ferguson slides?

MR. TAKAMORI: Actually, *karako* came about the time of my father's dying. Because he had Alzheimer's, so I kind of see — I visit him once or twice a year. And every time he becoming disabled. And then — but he loved children.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like, he can't speak and he can't do much. But I put him in a wheelchair and go to the shopping malls and stuff. And like, he sees babies and he just smiles. He just loves it. He just wants to touch them and stuff like that. And so at that time — and I always like *karako* things because Peter Bruegel's painting of 100 of the *Children's Games*, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because that reminds a lot to me is *karako* painting.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Which is amazing, the possibility at that time, you know, that Dutch might have seen it because that was a time, you know, Chinese porcelain and people collecting tons of stuff, you know, from Asia.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I learned *karako* things is that it goes, longevity, kind of, you know, Chinese kind of favorite subject, which is a part of an incarnation. So like the life is like this, and the line is here. And this is the kind of another world. This is our life.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then if you draw a line like this, and this is a time you are kind of preparing to reborn. And then line here, and this much they call the *warabay* in Japanese. So like they have a special name because they are very vulnerable newcomers from a different world. So, you know, they die very easily unless they go back there, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then from here to there, the pie shape like this is real human life. And then you pass 65, this is the part called *okina*, you know, the parallel — I mean, symmetrical, from here to there. And there, people preparing to go back into another world. And then once they get there, that first little pie shape is, you are not totally there. But you are kind of preparing to, you know, dead. And that — and, you know — and I thought it was interesting because I know a long time, especially my father when he became disabled physically and intellectually and almost becoming child. So like, this, while they are in *okina*, somehow it's very similarity, you know, beginning and the end.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so that was another thing, you know, kind of motivated me to do children. So I wanted to make children to be a little bit more like otherworldly because I really think, you know, children subject matter is like not really explored, you know? Because people say, ah, you know, they be cute and, you know, baby store, they're all cute stuff. But they are really mysterious, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And especially like, once you are a baby, and then we don't remember. The memory thing a little bit, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And once you were there, and then they start to experience with their own children. You know, it's very interesting and peculiar experience, you know? And like artwork, they dealt with human children is very rare. You know, like you see little like Roman statues and portrait, they're like dead children because adult, parents miss them, so they recreate. But it's not really about them. Or like those baby Jesus and the angels, you know? They are babies, but they are not human, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. TAKAMORI: So in that sense, I think it's still pretty interesting to me. I think Goya did kind of portraits of — you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: They are portraits of royal families, so they are [inaudible] and so on. But yes. And also, *karako* was general over popular culture in Japan, you know. Like Edo period, when ordinary people started getting more wealth and stuff, they start to pay attention to children's fashions or toys and all that. And then that is kind of the time colorful fashion became very popular. So they have this kind of hairdo. And then also, a lot of motif design for kimonos and ceramics ware. So it kind of reminds me of — like, you know, same thing with Hello Kitty, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So.

[END OF CD 5.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija RIEDEL for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art interviewing Akio Takamori at the artist's studio in Seattle, Washington, on March 21, 2009.

I thought this morning we would start talking about teaching. And because you've been involved as a student and as a teacher in teaching in so many different venues and in so many different — what's the word I'm looking for? So many different styles of teaching, from an apprenticeship through the Bray and residencies, through

weekend workshops, through substitute teaching at different universities, through a full-time university position. Is there one of those scenarios that you find especially successful? Or has it changed over time?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, I'm really — I think right now, we have very healthy program at the University of Washington. And now we also expanded to sculpture and glass. And then we have autonomy as ceramics program, but we kind of are looking for the possibility of new kind of a form towards the future, which is, we kind of have a name, like 3D form, three-dimensional form medium forum.

So we have, besides Jamie Walker and Doug Jeck and myself in ceramics, and Amy McNeel. Irish name .

MS. RIEDEL: We'll get it. Is Patti Warashina still there?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, no. She retired. And then we have a glass person. He's Mark Zirpel. And then faculty was a really good team, working together really well. And that really make me feel really happy because I — you know, like we sit down and then talk about students and grading, whatever. We have a very good discussion. And sometimes I find how I approach or how I think is different from other faculty members. So like those really make me think and they make me really — it's challenging. And I feel like I'm learning a lot. And after all this, so many years.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like teaching thing is, I think it's — exciting part is that, you know, you're kind of getting older and teaching such a long time, but like almost like — not necessarily every day. Some days down or up. But there are still so much kind of a learning experience. And I think how — you know, from the beginning, my first teaching experience was at TA at the Alfred. And I had no idea, you know? And then so like many years I'm doing this workshop and this and that, this and that. And then up to now. I think I'm much happier with the teaching because I have a better sense about it, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: In terms of what you'd like to accomplish? Or different ways to do it?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. You know, like when I was young, my goal wasn't become teacher.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: My goal was become studio artist. And so like — but, you know, as a practical thinking, again —  
[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Like, I thought there might be the possibility in the future I'd need to, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I always kind of thought, if I have a short kind of a residency — not residency — replacement or summer workshop or, you know, other workshops and stuff, I would like to experience it so that will give me better kind of an understanding about what teaching is all about. So I kind of, you know, did that. That was one of the reasons. Of course, the visibility and stuff was important. But — and so like my kind of idea about what the teaching has been changed a whole lot.

But my personality is like really — how I deal with people is like, it's always the same, right, which is like, number one is, I'm very interested in what each person is about. You know, I kind of tend to ask questions about where they're coming from, what kind of experience they had, what kind of a life they had. And then I kind of would like to know whole vision of what this person is about, which is not necessary, maybe, for teaching. But that's the way I always approached to people because, I guess, like my childhood experience with those young nurses and all the people around my house.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I guess like I kind of have to know who they are. So in that sense, it's also very interesting for me to like — every quarter or every year, you have this new people comes in and I have to really, you know, kind of figure out.

MS. RIEDEL: So it must be much more satisfying to be in a university setting than doing a week-long workshop?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. It's amazing to see someone like, you know, freshman comes in and then became like a major in ceramics area and then, between like, you know, 20 to 22, you know, two years or something, how much they changes. And then like after school — fortunately, like, this area — Seattle is attractive city, so a lot of students stay here after they graduate. So like once in awhile I run into them or they come visit the school

again or like they kind of thriving in themselves into the art area. And it's really interesting to see what they started and how much they have changed and grown.

So kind of like, generally, I'm just enjoying that kind of a perspective of each individuals, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.] So in some cases, you might choose to focus more on technique with someone? In another case you might choose to focus on ideas or sources of inspiration? It really varies — am I understanding that correctly — with who they are? Are there certain — of course, there are certain courses you teach.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Like beginning classes are a lot more about technical things.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But, you know, earlier time when I was an undergraduate student, the class structure is focusing on the making, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I'm like a maker. And so like I kind of really fit into that. But then, now I think education system is like a lot more kind of trimmed off, you know? And the student doesn't have much time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And they have like a cap on how many credits they can take, and all that stuff. It's like really short and really trimmed. So I think — I don't think, you know, school can offer much over time of learning about material deeply or like learning about technical things, because no time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like I feel like it's not the maker part will be really — you have to kind of do your own. Or maybe in the future, or, you know — and it's really have changed, you know? So the teaching part of it —

MS. RIEDEL: You work at the graduate and undergraduate?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, I think it's both, because sometimes, like, you know, graduate student, they come to graduate school, and they — if you like to focus on ceramics, for instance, you suffer from lack of, you know, technical things.

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, like if you like to make something large, but maybe you don't know how to make it large.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Actually, like I was like that, too, when I was in graduate school.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And — but through my experience, I felt like when you like to make — if, you know — what do you like to make? And then what do you need to visualize this? Then you just — it's a necessity. So you learn, yourself, very quickly.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But if you don't have — for instance, when I was in Alfred, I felt like I had to make big things. But I don't know what to make because I was just have kind of a pressure about making art.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I really failed with that, you know? And so like I was trying to figure out, you know, well, you know, to make something big and kind of — I don't have my hands for that. Then like I was looking into like, for instance, an extruder to make pipes.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: Or, you know, that would make it easier.

MS. RIEDEL: Large, yeah.

MR. TAKAMORI: But that's not the right way to get into it, you know? So like I was always — even like when I was in Alfred, I was thinking about coiling and stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I never really — didn't have patience for it. So like, you know, after like 40 or something, I finally start to kind of coiling, and it's just because I just needed — I just had to leave from a slab construction.

MS. RIEDEL: And these are all coiled, aren't they?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. So like, you know, I learned very fast then. So —

MS. RIEDEL: So the technique, of course, followed your necessity of what you wanted to make?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. And it's the same thing probably with the glaze. If I really needed this particular Southern glaze, it's a part of like very own component, what I like to make, then probably I can do it. But it's kind of other/or kind of knowledge. It's not necessarily, you need it, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So when we are students, we just learn basically everything. And then in Alfred, glaze, calculations, and stuff — you know does really well. And for the reasoning of something I like to make big, I took a welding class and all this and that. And I don't think — I don't say that was kind of wasting. But you just need, you know, like certain knowledge. But it doesn't mean that would automatically make you better makers.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Just gives you a broader pool of techniques from which to choose.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So do you think there is a particular place for universities in terms of craft?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So that's, you know, good question, because what is craft thing? It's like really turning point. I mean, like, you know, really kind of really wondering where do we go from there. But one thing is differently — craft is something to do with come from a makers, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Material and there's an artist maker using material to make this product, kind of thing, you know? And — but over the years, I especially like — since I start to really become involved in full-time teaching, it's only like, I guess, 17 years, 15 years, or so. But it has changed so fast, you know.

One thing I — first thing I start to notice is like, a lot of females moved in to ceramics area. And they were kind of like — they're sculptors. But they were not really interested in kind of a traditional sculpture materials because that was the kind of time when the female movement or whatever. So they start to kind of bringing in their familiar materials, like more soft materials like fibers and, you know, other — those domestic materials or whatever.

So like I felt like women students, they like to work three-dimensionally. They came to ceramics or maybe fiber area instead of going to a sculpture program, because at that time sculpture program was like elder male, you know, teachers kind of working with stones and steels and stuff like that.

And so like the focus — well, the University of Washington, they always didn't have a strong focus on the functional pottery.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Because you had Howard Kottler, right, and Bob Sperry, and Patti.

MR. TAKAMORI: And Patti, yeah. And also, our school is a university system.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So it's not the art college.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like students come from all over Washington State, you know, directly from high school. So for Kansas City, there were a lot of students that were transfer students. And they were already know what they

like to kind of work. And they know the kind of — they have already kind of a mind on that time of the ceramics is all about.

MS. RIEDEL: They were coming specifically, probably, to study with Ken or to focus on ceramics.

MR. TAKAMORI: Right, right, right. And then also, like that — so like when we were in Kansas City, we have a basic knowledge about the ceramic histories. And we kind of go to museum, see ceramics, and stuff. But our students, they're coming down to ceramics of 3D 4M and doesn't mean they know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, they're just seeing clay to be just the three-dimensional — material to create some three-dimensional things, you know? Tactile way, easy way. So like the female involvement, they kind of are working with the clay to be just material to make three-dimensional form. So those students, if clay doesn't do their kind of pretty — move or pick up another materials, and combine them, or — it's not the kind of — for awhile when we're young we start experiments called the mixed media, kind of who you are — kind of a forceful, kind of a superficial way of working.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: But they are just kind of really different approach. They just are like, if this work doesn't work with the clay, then maybe I work with the light. Or maybe you need some kind of a sense of timing there, you know, what the film might do. Yes. So like that was kind of a shift.

MS. RIEDEL: If I'm understanding, it sounds like what you're saying is that, you know, when you went to apprentice, you were going specifically to work with clay. And when you go to Archie Bray, you're going specifically to work with clay. Even Kansas City, to some degree, there's a real emphasis on clay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But what you're seeing in the students now is they're not coming specifically to work with a certain medium — clay, in this case. They're coming to make sculpture. And it could be in a variety of material. And so you as a professor, then, are facing a whole other series of questions and considerations for them as students.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. And not only us, but like if you kind of look around at some other schools — for instance, if you go thesis show. And you see student work, and you cannot really know always you can guess like which program they're coming from. In the past, we have like an MFA show, none of the painters did the painting. And none of us ceramics students' work was clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How does that affect the graduates, do you think? Do you think it offers them greater possibilities and so the work is more interesting? Or do you think it makes it increasingly hard to focus, or somewhere between the two?

MR. TAKAMORI: Some students, you know, they come to our school, and then during — you know, two-year graduate program, they explore. You know, they touch everything, different things they have never done. And then when they graduate, they take that experience and it goes back to their — where they came from, like I did. And then they, you know, still that two years of experience in the graduate school really gives them good information to, you know, continuously working with clay.

And other people —

MS. RIEDEL: So good basics, they have a good basic foundation.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then, you know, like, actually, the more successful students is like, they came as clay — kind of mostly working with the clay. But when they come to graduate school, they kind of shift off to completely different material. And then, for instance, a recent grad — and his work became all photography. And when he graduated from the school, he was picked up from a gallery right away. And so he's very nationally, internationally successful artist, you know?

And so like, you know, I'm just kind of a — sometimes I don't know if it's ironic or what. But students who shift, changed material, and then they are not in the category of ceramics artists anymore, and they are just kind of — "the artists," right, quotation, then they will be picked up from just galleries in town or anywhere. And they become pretty, you know, successful artists.

So like if you are working only clay, and then — this is like something to do with like kind of a structure of those outside. You know, if the outside world of galleries, they consider if the ceramics is still should be in the ceramics field, or — and it's rather kind of more protected, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Or you be just kind of out there under the category of just art, you know? So you know, this is the kind of things I'm still kind of experiencing in the shifting and changing. And I don't know quite, you know, like — more like questions. But when those students kind of later ask me for recommendation for teaching job, let's say, then like if you stayed in some categories, then they cannot apply for ceramics teaching position. And somebody who is kind of moved out, you know, they usually don't apply for it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So the teaching becomes a little bit more broad. But I don't know, you know, which persons have easier access to teaching positions, you know? But also like, teaching is like now, for instance — well, it has been always, but especially now, it's changing more like you teach ceramics, but you have to teach foundation program also.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then those students who just only focused on pottery, they feel like rather kind of insecure about teaching more broad material basis.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So it's, you know, like — but I kind of came from a different time, and more like I'm clearly kind of working basically my major material is clay. And then I have kind of a fortune to be supported through like a ceramics galleries and ceramics collectors. And — but, you know, over the year, now, like it's — even that is changing, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Let's talk about that a little bit. Let's shift gears, because you started off showing with Garth Clark in 1983, is that right, I think? So it's been 25 years, really. How have you seen the galleries and the exhibitions in this change?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think it's the first thing I was kind of surprised as a younger person was like — you know, '83 and then showing with the Garth, and then like about five, seven, eight years, I realized some of those collectors who collected my work start to pass away. Like because they were all like wealthier retired people were generally the collectors.

So like, you know, also like I'm kind of approaching the middle age kind of thing. So it's like — you know, when I was younger, I was kind of have my goal and approaching it. And actually when you get there, and then you start to really aware about time, you know, you start to see whole thing in a different perspective. And you know, I didn't really think about it, you know? Like — where was I?

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about the galleries and how it's changed over time from the early '80s.

MR. TAKAMORI: Okay. Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: And your career is unusual, I think, in that you showed with Garth almost exclusively.

MR. TAKAMORI: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Or certainly primarily for 20 years?

MR. TAKAMORI: Um-hm. [Affirmative.] You know, it was interesting —

MS. RIEDEL: It was consistent.

MR. TAKAMORI: — because when Garth opened the gallery, he was kind of first-generations, more kind of very



professional serious dealer. And he had the vision.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then — so he started showing the artists' fit into his visions. And his visions, of course, like go along, shifting through the time. And I suppose, you know, I always kind of — you know, I was part of, you know, his — oh, I guess he was comfortable enough to go on with my work, because like his stable artists has been kind of always changing, you know? And that was — at first I didn't realize that will happen. And then someone like new comes, and some people are dropped. And it was interesting like how, realizing that, you know, dealer himself is kind of a changing, growing, or whatever. And then myself is kind of flexible and moving along, or I have my own direction or whatever.

So when he decided to retire, I was — I understood, you know. And then I briefly talked to him. He was talking about like — like when he started and now, the ceramics field has changed so much. And he's not going to reinvent some new vision and then continue his gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he'd rather stop here. And he said some young people should have this job, you know, to come up with a new vision.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I absolutely understand and agree with him. Yes. So like, you know, I always like — when I was younger, I always kind of interest in this ways of life. It's like, how it's connected with time, you know, how I changes. So like I kind of make a time, like 30 would be some point, or like 40 is a point, you know.

Yes. So the gallery things.

MS. RIEDEL: And he went through you, and Garth went through some changes together as your work changed. It was very consistent for the first 10 years almost. Pretty much from '83 right to '93, you were exploring first the slabs as really an almost two-dimensional work. And then that became increasingly 3D and more and more an exploration of form. But still, the work was very much within a particular form and sensibility, and it was all exploration of human relationships, interior, exterior, by oneself, in sexuality, in larger world view.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And then there was the big shift when you left that vessel form in 1993 or '94 and moved into the full sculptural figures. Let's talk about that because that was a huge shift, and it had to do with your going to The Netherlands to do a residency.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like '83 to almost '93, I'd been exhibiting the slab pieces. And I knew — well, when I was approaching my 40s, I started to kind of think, this is the kind of time I should like really look around again, and I should adjusting my life, because if I were lucky and healthy or whatever, I have to — I would like to keep on making, you know, another 30-40 years, you know, if you're lucky, 50 years. So, you know, long time.

And I couldn't see myself continuously pushing this envelope form. So I really set it up, the situation. But also, I really started to feel like I'm less excited about working in this format because whatever I did, you know — ideas became limited because I know working in this format just doesn't fit this format. Or like if I have idea, then forcing me into this format. Just I'm kind of getting less interest in pushing that.

And then, you know, like talking about the Garth was interesting because I kind of — I have a good relationship with the gallery. So like I could talk to them, you know, whatever, how I feel and this and that. He was encouraging me, you know, it's a good thing to change.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But then also like, interesting thing is like, he would also tell me, "I'm not interested in experimental work in my gallery. And I like to show good work." So it's really — he is really professional, you know, dealer. He has to be encouraging me in one way, but the other way, he have to be a really professional dealer.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: And he kind of clearly stated both kind of sides to me. And so like I was kind of — once I start to think about my 40-line, like I did at 30 —

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: I started to prepare for it. And then in between, I have a lot of like work which is like really weird, unsuccessful, you know? It took me — this actually like —

MS. RIEDEL: In general? Or during this specific time of transition?

MR. TAKAMORI: Transition, yes. So like I'm making like still slab piece for the show. But then in the side, I just kind of start to preparing, testing out, timidly, maybe.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Were you beginning to do some coiling or just starting to think about it?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I start to moving with coil. And actually, I started more slip casting first.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because I was thinking like, if I leave slab, slab is a lot more two-dimensional form.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I thought, well, to make it more 360 degree is like slip casting or coil building. And slip casting was — because I was still making vessels, so like teapots was also like salable, really, area. And I — and it's small enough, you know, to play with it. So I would make a little maquette, and then I have to kind of learn how to kind of see three-dimensionally because slab piece is if I draw two drawings and put them together, then I can visualize how they're going to look like.

But a three-dimensional thing is like, you really have to make a maquette to understand. So doing a slip casting really kind of helped me to understand more about three-dimensional forms.

MS. RIEDEL: And were these slip casts — were these a transition from primarily vessels to primarily figures, somewhere in between the two?

MR. TAKAMORI: I'd say figurative, still figurative.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. So figure itself become teapot.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like the figure itself have a —

MS. RIEDEL: Like the teapots. These were the slip cast pieces?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So through the slip casting, I have — I'm start to gaining better understanding about, you know, three-dimensional because, if you make a three-dimensional form, your surface drawing really changes, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because two slab work is like my drawings dictate the form.

MS. RIEDEL: Fairly flat — sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: But three-dimensional thing is like, form itself is description of the figure or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: So the role of like my brush mark to articulate this figure changes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: For instance, like, if I have a — if I make — one is, you draw hand. And another is like the form already have an image of a hand.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. TAKAMORI: Then how I — where I use the linear drawings to describe something?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. How is the line now related to the form?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Because it is no longer defining it.

MR. TAKAMORI: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. So what is it doing?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. So that teapot things kind of prepared me or something. And then I start to kind of working more with coil. But when I went to Netherlands '93 [European Ceramic Work Center, Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands -AT] —

MS. RIEDEL: Went to do a residency?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: For three months?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: By that time I had what I made wasn't quite successful.

MS. RIEDEL: In The Netherlands?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And the second time, '96, I made those group figures.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you make in '93?

MR. TAKAMORI: I made heads. Yeah, I had a head, and then I had a figure standing on top of it. And top is open. So like it's kind of like a vase, very — vessel. [*Clay*, The University of Washington Ceramics Faculty, William Traver Gallery, Seattle, WA, 1996]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I didn't do much brush work because I thought, well, one of the things I might try is some coil, also three-dimensional articulation, and then kind of — I was looking for the possibility of not depending on my brushwork too much. But also, I worked with all those artists from all over, and then their way of looking at ceramics was so different from what I was taught.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was an international residency?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. [International Ceramics Studio, Kecskemet, Hungary, 2007]

MS. RIEDEL: Not just people from The Netherlands?

MR. TAKAMORI: Right, residency.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Anybody else there that was especially significant to you?

MR. TAKAMORI: I have to remember. The first group and second group, I get confused.

MS. RIEDEL: Or maybe it was just being in a completely new —

MR. TAKAMORI: I think like the first time almost — one time I was with Viola Frey and -. But when I got there, they were almost finishing up. But I could hang out with them like about one month. And Viola was really, you know, just encouraging me to make big, big pieces. And that was very nice, to get to know her. Betty [Woodman], I knew a little bit, but Viola, that was the first time I just met her in person.

The [inaudible] you know, the temperature of — how do you decide what temperature you fire? Or the usage of glaze, that kind of things, very fundamental things, were so different there. And I didn't realize, you know, like it's okay not to use glaze, stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Or like I always thought, if you buy a certain temperature clay, then you have to fire for it. But for them, it's like they test fire the clay, and whatever the color you like, you stop the temperature right there. That didn't mind — you know, visual things, because maybe I came from a functional pottery, so that kind of functionality took first instead of like, you know, artistic decision.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes. Aesthetic sense.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. So you know, that I learned first. Then — but why I make wasn't that quite interesting yet. So like when I came back, I stopped what I explore there, and I went back to my old work, you know, slab or whatever, porcelain. And the second time when I went there, I was — I had a shorter kind of a working time because second time I was invited as summer workshop leader. But they gave me one month to work with. So all those figures, I created in one month. [*New Work*, 1996, made at the European Ceramic Work Center, Netherlands]

MS. RIEDEL: And there are 60 or something.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And one thing we discussed — and I can't remember if we talked about it on tape or not, so I just want to be sure that we cover it — you've talked about how important it is to your work to periodically have a change of scene and just get someplace completely unfamiliar so you can just re-imagine or re-vision your way of working. And that really happened during that residency.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I usually — I didn't know if I have any specific kind of pattern. But I went to Hungary. And that was — so like I started to —

MS. RIEDEL: Hungary was recently, right, [... 2007 -AT]?

MR. TAKAMORI: Seven?

MS. RIEDEL: Two thousand seven, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I guess maybe you're right because I was aware of like — I did slab for about 10 years. And those figures, you know, getting 10 years and passing. And I really started to feel some kind of pressure or — you know, and I don't feel like slab is like — I'm getting bored.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And this, I don't.

MS. RIEDEL: The figures.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I still would like to kind of look for some other, you know, changes. And I have like been in my studio, but this like — somehow my enthusiasm, energy wasn't quite there. So I just thought, you know, I'd like to try this again, the residency. And that's how I went to Hungary.

MS. RIEDEL: And just jumping back to The Netherlands for a minute, how did you begin to go to art history to look for figures? How did that come about? Because I don't remember that happening in any of the slab work.

MR. TAKAMORI: Hm. Well, when I start making the figures, and I was — that was like it came out of village piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I keep on making them. Then I kind of shifting from a memory to more historical things, like the McArthur empirical, kind of. So I tried to start looking up photography. I did kind of a researching old photos from the 1950s. So like I'm — I start looking a lot at photography and my image, you know, was taking from there. And then like next like I start to think about making figures, and then the contrasting — well, I

started to including West, right? So like I juxtaposed East and West.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And that time, I was looking at Western paintings, because of like when I was a child, of course, there was TV, most of TV programs from U.S., like Patty Duke Show.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: My high school time is like Bewitched and Monkees shows. But when I was little, we had no TV, you know, at that time. So I guess that was movie, you know, Hollywood movie was probably the image. But somehow, that — I wasn't really looking at — that was America. But it's not like more abstract image of West, you know? That was more like, I feel like it was introduced from the paintings, you know, looking at Peter Bruegel. And that was one of the reasons I wanted to revisit those classical paintings as a reference.

And then number two is, I was kind of, myself, is representing my childhood. And then so I was interested in when the Europeans start to expand to colonize the rest of the world, that was the kind of time like exotic and Orientalism or whatever. And they go there, out there, and then sketches and those exotic things and bring them back So like they start to create their own kind of imaginary or fantastic image, exotic image, of rest of the world.

So I just wanted to have my piece to be known in the '50s, and then I wanted Europe, West, to be exotic. So I just needed some kind of a contrast, you know? Because Europe, you know, they themselves are known. And then the Orient is like exotic. That's the way how they saw.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And to think of it when I was a child was like that, you know, my everyday life, and then Europe was like from paintings. And then also, somehow like I thought the contrast should be more exaggerated than similar.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because, you know, this is that age that we talk about globalization a lot. So like, in some way, in everyday life here, we're looking at like Arabic to, you know, Chinese to Swiss citizens, or whatever. You know, it's all Europeans. But like we're wearing the same clothing, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: For instance, like, you know, those Gap advertisements. Any kind of race wearing the Gap jeans. And then we're all family, kind of.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, that kind of idea. But I think it's actually — my vision is like probably in, I don't know, Tang Dynasty, in the capital of China, those Arabic people, or European, like Marco Polo or whatever — they're kind of strolling down the street, and they look so exotic. It's kind of almost — I kind of imagine must have been look like Star Wars, the scene in the bar, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Everybody is exotic and weird. But everybody kind of thinks it's a positive thing, you know. So there's a kind of progression, you know, inclusive. So that's kind of a circus I like.

MS. RIEDEL: Goes back to what you were talking about earlier about Fellini.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: We weren't talking about it on tape, but yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And your interest in that, this cast of characters.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Didn't necessarily make a linear direct narrative, but are all fragments of a narrative that somehow fits together.

MR. TAKAMORI: Also, you know, that kind of — recently the Arabic country — well, Islamic thing is kind of really dangerous or whatever. So people will talk about those veils and how negative. But I think it would be great if those people, if they like to wear and they can walk around downtown, and then maybe the Japanese, they feel like wearing kimono, they wear a kimono, and they're walking around. And that would be fabulous, but it's not like a causing for, you know, very negative frictions, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so that is like — once if you kind of open up that much, and that would be a true kind of acceptance, to all races and cultures. So each people like, you know, proud of whatever they have, so we don't lose it. We don't kind of suck into a very monolithic kind of weird science fiction future, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because it makes me think of two things. It makes me think of your very layered way of working, always very subtle — well, not always. But it seemed very layered, increasingly. And then also, your background as a young man being very interested and engaged in politics within the idealistic world view. The figures, to me, feel like that really is the emergence of a political and a social commentary in the work, but it's all still very subtle and very layered. But it really does begin to come to play with the figures. Does it feel that way to you, too?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. It does, yes.

[END OF CD 6.]

MS. RIEDEL: And the first, probably the strongest of those groups would be the boat series from 2000, yes?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How does it — it's very different, it seems, to make all these figures, which are sold off as individual pieces. But they're clearly part of a larger piece. How did that affect your thinking about making work?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That came — yes. Once I started making groupings of figures, my narrative is not in one piece, like a slab piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that is kind of a — whereas vessel does, you know? Vessel is like, all the information is in the vessel.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So you can locate anywhere, bookshelves, or pedestals. So like, I send out my piece to Garth, and they can display whatever most effectively in the space, and that was just fine. But once I started making the figures and I started grouping them, it really opened up the possibility for me, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Did you think about chess at all in your placing them or making them, the game chess?

MR. TAKAMORI: No, no, not really, because chess is like the pattern kind of a space, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Sure.

MR. TAKAMORI: I always liked using the gaze. So like a lot of time, like a gaze determined the positions and space.

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MR. TAKAMORI: Do you know what I mean?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. TAKAMORI: Like one figure is kind of looking up this way, and the other is looking up.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I see. Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So that you know where this piece should be. Or like this gaze should be avoided, you know. So like I can kind of create narrative through the figures' gaze.

MS. RIEDEL: I see. That's interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And how did it come about to select these particular figures from Goya and from Velazquez? Such an interesting group that came together.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Well, like when I look at like Goya's *Duchess of Alba*, and then I read Goya's story. And then that rumor about the relationship with Goya and the Duchess of Alba, and at that time Goya was already deaf. And he was middle-aged. And politically, he was in a very precarious kind of a position. And anyway, so — and then the Duchess of Alba was supposed to be — she was poisoned and then had her collection of art taken away, or whatever. But anyway, through that kind of reading a book, I kind of thought about Alba to be kind of a symbol or like something like, because of myself at a certain age, and then sexuality of certain, you know, like older or like middle-aged people's romance or whatever, it was what really kind of made me think about relationships with age.

So I made Japanese old woman, and she is kind of much smaller and very kind of — just not necessarily sad, but it's more kind of looking inside, kind of, you know? So that kind of, that gap between this Duchess and this ordinary, tiny old lady, the contrast, I thought, was make it more significant.

And then some of those paintings, like it's the Madonna figure and pregnancy, you know — and then I put this Japanese man with the child. So it's kind of reflecting upon my marriage. I'm marrying the Western, Caucasian and Asian kind of interracial marriage, and stuff like that. So those are all kind of coming from my own kind of experiment and experience, maybe.

So like for instance, like I made figures from Breugel's because that was like my, you know, favorite book. And so like that little peasant boy wearing the red hat, that was a little boy from a peasants' wedding. And when I was a child, that was my favorite kind of, you know, person there. And then he had this plate of something, and he's kind of eating it. And then I asked my dad, you know, "What is he eating?" And he said — you know, what does he know about that Medieval Dutch diet, right?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So he would say something what he knows about Western food, right? He said, "That must be butter." So we named him Butter-licking boy.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So I made him.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I made myself, kind of, you know? A schoolboy standing next to it. And another Breugel's piece is like, this is a peasant dance scene, and two very small figures up on the front. But they look extraordinarily small compared to the rest of the people. And then also, against the perspective, because, you know — because they are so on the front. So I always thought that was very peculiar and strange, you know. What does that mean to know that?

So then later, I read that was supposed to be both children, that's why they're small. But one little child was like the child size, and the other one is like — that didn't look like a child. Looks like a mother, you know? But that was supposed to be both kids.

So I made that piece really small. And then I made Asian child to be really big. So like, my decisions all coming from like my memories or like my kind of feeling towards to, now there's like I apply experience and what I feel.

MS. RIEDEL: So scale was really flexible, depending on whether it was something from childhood that figured as larger than life, something like that?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You really used that to accentuate the differences and sort of the surreal quality of these other narratives?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I think also, like when I kind of look at those little — more like old paintings, like Asian old paintings, or more like — yes. Then they usually important, significant become really big, like the Buddha is big, and the commoner is very small, you know that kind of thing was kind of — visually it was intriguing for me. So I kind of used that.

MS. RIEDEL: Does it bother you at all that when these pieces are sold, they go off independently and they're never shown in that relationship at all?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yeah. Sort of like that was kind of the time I started to kind of think differently about exhibition. Now, like I start to see the exhibition to be the place where I show my work exactly how I vision it. And then people come and buy a piece, and they bring it back to their house. But I'm kind of thinking that the vision is in their memory, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. That plays into memory perfectly.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That was kind of a rationalization for me, you know?

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And it just adds to the layering of the whole concept of memory.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Another degree.

MR. TAKAMORI: So, you know, I don't feel any kind of problem with like when they take it home and wherever they locate and whatever they do with it, you know, because each person who owns it has a right to add into it, too, their own kind of emotional sense to the piece.

MS. RIEDEL: In 2004, the figures really seemed to change significantly from what they had been before. There was a whole series of sleeping figures. [*Clay Body*, by Claudia Fitch, Akio Takamori, and Patti Warashina, Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, WA, 2003] What prompted that change?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes. That was my reaction to this war in, you know, Iran, Afghanistan, and becoming Iraq. I was thinking about, you know, this — it has been like a mission to complete. They use very forceful [inaudible] to solve the problem. It's very — it's basically aggression. So I want to think about other ways. And then I thought about Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gandhi. You know, they were — they are, not passive, but they tried to solve the problem in a different way. And then myself, I'm not aggressive person. So I think it's the passiveness tends to be taken very negative here. But I kind of want to represent this complete opposite, you know.

So I set up a situation, viewer have more power and looking down, you know. And then those people on the floor, they are sleeping. So they don't recognize you. So you have total control in some ways, which is also evoked that you can really look at them without challenged. Western painting, portrait is like, if you look at them, they're looking at you, kind of. So there's always kind of a tension, a challenge. And I just to create complete opposite of it.

And I don't think it's not necessarily bad thing to be passive. Because, for instance, when you have like, you know, colic baby and annoys you, and finally the baby sleeps, and then you kind of finally take a breath and look at the baby, and then you're kind of emotion and how cute they are, and your love comes back, right?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: It's the same with your spouse. You know, you just kind of have an argument. You know, "I hate you." And then one person fallen asleep, and then, you know, you just kind of regret, you know, this time. So I wanted to kind of bring up that kind of emotion, or like bring up to remember that kind of sense in people.

You know, I think emotionally, I think I was succeeded to that. But, you know, like you said, my work is very subtle in that sense. So that kind of reasoning, where it's coming from, is probably not obvious. So you don't see any kind of — not touching the politics. So like they'd be kind of — because of like last, you know — part of contemporary art is like have to be very challenging and really disturbing in some sense, kind of shaking you that way, I'm just going opposite, I suppose. And then also, it's, you know, in part of like myself, you know, I tend not to challenge that way. It's a personal thing. You know, not decision, but, you know, who I am.

MS. RIEDEL: There is a period where you begin to do a whole series of self-portraits. You're a sphinx. [*Sphinx*, 2002] I can't remember all the different —

MR. TAKAMORI: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: How did those come about?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That's exactly connected to that is because that piece came right after the 9/11. And I was supposed to preparing a show. And like everybody else, like I didn't know where to — you know, what my work is



supposed to be. And so the idea was like, well, you know, 1000 people perished and I wasn't there. And I could be one. So that show's title was "Self and Others" [Grover/Thurston Gallery, Seattle, WA, 2002].

And then I — one of the things really difficult for me is like kind of using others to kind of make — to put some kind of sarcasm or sense of humor or, you know, that kind of a thing is difficult for me. So I was going to poke fun of myself. And so that is kind of — you know, I just wanted to try that, how I can do — you know, because in some way, my work is always kind of — it's like very — not necessarily serious, but the sensuality is part of a very important vocabulary for me.

So I, you know, being cynical, being sarcastic is kind of hard, and especially applying to others. So I used myself, you know, as — for test out.

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: The other thing is, I always kind of wanted to try the vessel again. So I made my head as a pot, you know, in the kind of a little sarcastic way of, you know, myself as just a pot, you know. Pot is like something like really — pottery is really like bottom of work. You know, things, objects, that look — so it's my portrait, but it's just a pot. And body is kind of pedestal, just a stand. So I intentionally put doily underneath.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So that you know that this is just a pot we can move around.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And also, there was time, I'm approaching my 50. And I just felt it was kind of an interesting how much more than I thought like your appearances changes. Like if you look at the picture when you're 21 or something, it looks like a different person, you know? So I take a long time to establish even like a visual sense of who you are. And then like when you, nowadays, you know, like if you can look in the mirror: "Is that me?" And then they have to reestablish the image, how I look like, you know? Which is kind of a funny thing because people, like — for like a catalog or stuff, you know. Long time ago, they just sent a picture when they're much younger.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. I've seen that.

MR. TAKAMORI: So anyway, kind of, I wanted to kind of look at mirror and just portrait myself as an older person, to reestablish my vision, you know, of who I am. And then I'm kind of poking fun of myself. And so that was a kind of time to reflect upon self and then think about others, you know, the separation, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, though, because you've often put your head on all sorts of different animal bodies from all different parts of the world, from all different eras in time.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So it still had that art historical reference.

MR. TAKAMORI: Right, right.

MS. RIEDEL: But then with this wonderful now, autobiography and definitely a huge sense of humor.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because I wanted to put in the situation in the world and also time. I'm part of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Those were fun. In 2006, I wanted to talk briefly about the Westlake project — or not briefly. That project, I think, is really interesting because it's a commission, which we haven't talked about yet. It's not clay. It's aluminum. It's very public sculpture. How did that come about, and how did you choose to do aluminum, and how do you feel about commissions in general?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, how it came about is like, it's a public place project, but it still came from that one specific company [*Three Woman*, 2007, Whole Foods Westlake Center, Seattle, WA]. So it's not public money.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: So they — the corporation have its own kind of people working for, kind of like a curator. And they came to me, and then they said, if you make, you know, your figures, to this place — suggested that.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's outside, too, so that's changing everything.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I was kind of hesitant to get into a public art thing because like, a public art thing is like, you have to understand the location and use of the space and, you know, you need a lot of research. And then you have to come up with something appropriate. But this project was like, they wanted my figures there. So it's not like they're asking me to reinvent myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And I was hesitant about this kind of reinvention, because I'm kind of artist — all my work is basically kind of myself as the resource. And so like — so I thought, well, that will be kind of fun. And also, they were very good at kind of representing me what will be kind of process and what they suggested scale, you know, like how they be built and all that. So like it's very, very simplified, but through them. Like they wanted the figures, and they didn't say exactly how the scale. But obviously, you know, needed larger scale than what I usually do with the clay.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then like they introduced me to the — in company in town called Fabrications Specialties. They are former sculpture students. They set up their own fabrication company for sculpture. And they said they broke into the market through the female artists because they're the — you know, female artists started to kind of coming into this large-scale public art kind of things. But they have a hard time working with fabricator because they always used to work only with men. And the female artists have kind of a little bit of uncomfortableness or whatever, struggle.

So they catered towards to them. And then they started to grow, the company grew. And they are very like wonderful people. I had so much fun working with them.

So anyway, so they suggested the material.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you feel about that? Because it's a complete change.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, because if I had to work with the clay, you know, I know what I'm doing physically, the scale and stuff, which I have never done. And then mostly I really worried about if the clay body is strong enough or how that clay will stand in vandalism, or wet weather like this, because I have seen problems with like water damage in between clay body and glaze or slip or whatever.

So I wasn't sure if I, like, was willing to deal with it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And because of — you know, I'm just kind of linear, but I'm just kind of build next project, next project, I've been working. So like side project to become, you know, taking couple of years off my time, which is — I wasn't sure. But this is kind of a — so I have — I'm — I have to make a presentation. So made a slide show, and I make a maquette, and took pictures. And I'm pulling aside images and then all that. Then —

MS. RIEDEL: And it was going to be installed in a shopping plaza? Is that right?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And anyway, so I — from — I made a maquette. And then the fabrication specialties person made it to scale with the plaster. So I was kind of curious how I feel about it. But I was kind of — I wasn't ready to experience something like that because one thing is, I'm just kind of thinking about, in the future if my work is getting even bigger and how physically I can handle it. And one is like, I have — I have like aware of my physical, you know, limitation of the age, you know? And so like in — looking at like Rudy and Voukos, they have some, you know, studio assistant worked with them. And then Jun does, too. So like I'm just kind of in some point maybe I have to experience somebody else is making your work and how you feel. Or, you know, what does that mean and all that stuff, basically, you know?

And so when they brought in the plaster figure here, and when I'm looking at them, I just didn't feel like that's other people's work at all. I had no problem to accepting it's my work because of like, three-dimensionally forms very unarticulated, it's kind of, you know — to make it my — really kind of make a signature is my drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I made the head with the clay, which was only, you know, like this big. So it was a very easy thing to do. Body, they made it plaster, and the head I made with clay. And they were sent to aluminum foundry. And they came back to the Fabrication Specialty as a little plates. And they welded all together.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: And they ground it. And they put the powder coating, power? Powder coating.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, powder coating.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then they came in here, was just totally just, you know, kind of a light white, kind of creamy kind of color thing.

MS. RIEDEL: How tall are they, Akio?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think it's about between six and seven feet.

MS. RIEDEL: Feet?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So two or three times, twice anyway.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible] working with.

MR. TAKAMORI: My — you know, they have like volume. So it looks much bigger than human. But the height is, you know, just only probably foot or so taller.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But if you go by it, it's like they are much bigger than how it's look. If you see from far away, they look like life size. And then also, body is just kind of flat, one kind of coating color. And then the information is from black epoxy paint and a little color. So it's a linear drawing on foam. So doesn't have this kind of an overwhelming kind of volume, like bronze, you know, that big.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: They look more like maybe flat or just lines. So that's how I wanted, you know, instead of being a big, kind of a heroic sense.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I chose three women because this is rather kind of a wealthy, you know, whole food, hotels, and condominiums or whatever. So I thought it would be like kind of a — Seattle is like a lot of Asian population here. And so I thought, well, I like to put some under-represented kind of figures there. So I chose Asian-looking women, three different generations, a child, young, and mother, and baby. And, yes. So that's what it is. But it was interesting because I cut out paper to be life-size, and I have [... attached a 2"x2" structure -AT] to it. And I'm just looking for the location and compositions.

And then that time it was under construction, and there's construction workers kind of comes by. And there was like a big African American, you know, working man came by. And they kind of smiling and look at my drawings and said, "Hey, they don't look like us." So like I said, "Yeah, you know, they are girls."

[They laugh.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, that was kind of — sometimes I think about, you know, I make kind of Asian-looking figures. And then sometimes I use Western paintings, you know, Westerners. And it was kind of interesting thing is sometimes, when I do slide lectures, it's kind of rare to have African American audience, you know? Sometimes maybe two or three or whatever. And then I was asked about, like maybe three times or something, like after the lectures, you know — they asked me like, "Have you ever thought about doing, you know, black people?" And somewhere in my mind, you know, it would be interesting idea, you know, if I do, how do I approach? So I'm kind of waiting kind of the time. Maybe it's kind of an interesting thing to do.

And I went to a workshop once in Jamaica. And then part of it, like one day school kids were brought in for like kind of an afternoon kind of workshop. So I prepare for them to do self-portraits. So I have like slab and the form and kind of like oval shape so they can kind of draw into the self-image, and they can cut out the edge, whatever they like, and adding other information or whatever.

And the clay is, you know, like usually wet clay. It's kind of a gray color. And then I gave them just a black under-glaze. And then I realized, you know, nobody will paint their face black. You know? Because just like everybody else, you know, which is stupid of me, but — take a brush, and then you describe your eyes and nose and mouth, and, you know, draw hair or whatever, you know. That's how we do with the kind of linear, you know, description.

[END OF CD 7.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija RIEDEL for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art interviewing Akio Takamori at the artist's studio in Seattle, Washington, on March 21, 2009, [mini] disc number four.

And the disk had just run out when we were discussing the possible new work, including African Americans.

MR. TAKAMORI: So for those Jamaican children did a self-portrait. And that kind of gave me a hint to — you know, how I should approach it is like, I work with the, you know, black linear line of the drawing. And then the consideration, the contrasting with the skin color, which I thought kind of changed my view, you know? Probably that's — I don't know yet, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But something — how I solved the problem gave me a hint of, you know, not important than I thought, or something like that, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because I had some black figures. They're up there, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: How I did — I was kind of trying to do —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. TAKAMORI: I tried not to just occupy by the just skin color all over.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So the lower body part is like, you know, just left it white. So in some way I really, you know, just kind of process of trying to figure out, I suppose.

MS. RIEDEL: And you have in the past, when I think about the slab constructions.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You have done black and white figures.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. That was one of the solutions. In one body, you have different darker part and lighter part and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But it seems to me like when I'm doing Caucasian figures and Asian figures, I don't pay much attention to the color itself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: More like description how they look. A little bit three-dimensionally, a little bit like kind of the shape of the eyes and nose and mouth and stuff like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right, right. So color-wise, it would be a whole other exploration.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Because the color thing —

MS. RIEDEL: Features, too.

MR. TAKAMORI: It's like a part of how you looking at the person, you know? So like how much the color has become a part of identifying this person. Is that like the right thing? Or if I'm kind of in a different mind, that, you know — I don't know if "colorblind" is the right word.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But that that — like something, I was talking about clothing, ethnic clothes, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: I like them to be part of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So somehow, like if I come to that kind of way of thinking on that level, probably I've freed myself to approach the African American figures.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That could be a really interesting addition because I think of all the different things it opens up, not only in terms of subtle form, but also in terms of art history and what then you could draw on. Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. You know, living in the United States — or now, like the world, you know, people move around and so not living in a segregated country or community. So it should be a part of me to inclusive with all rest of the people.

MS. RIEDEL: It's true. I mean, I grew up on the East Coast, and you have a much larger African American population on the East Coast than I've seen, certainly not on the West Coast, but here's there's a much larger Asian population and Hispanic, though that was on the East Coast, too. So I can see how that would be an interesting next dimension for you to open.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: The same year that you worked on the Westlake project, you worked on an installation project with the Henry Art Gallery, *Laughing Monks*.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That was also completely a new project for you.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Two thousand six was full of new projects. That was — you were designing an installation as well as making work for it. Would you explain how that works?

MR. TAKAMORI: That was kind of approach from Henry Art Gallery. They had a small two rooms across the hall, kind of identical rooms. And they had been bringing in local artists to exhibit in those spaces. But usually, what they ask is, they have permanent collections. And then artists go in there and look through, and then combining your work with their collection, put together to have exhibition. It's very interesting project.

Then I worked with the curator, Liz — Elizabeth — what is her last name?

MS. RIEDEL: We'll get it.

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, anyway, it's terrible. Sometimes I just forget people's names.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll add it. No worries.

MR. TAKAMORI: It was very nice. You know, she is very enthusiastic and is a very interesting person to work with. And she — so like I — about like more than six months or so, I just go visit once in awhile and look at the collections and then meet with her, and then she asks me where I am, and you know, What are you looking at? So it's all — I really liked it in a way. At the same time, I'm teaching. And then through this project, I'm more like a student's position, you know, like Liz kind of worked like — not necessarily a teacher, but she is kind of really asking the right questions to guide me.

And it ended up, what I wanted to do is, one, this space to be symmetrical, kind of architecturally kind of a symmetrical space. So I knew what I wanted to kind of play with it. Because I like symmetry. And then I —

symmetry is something like give kind of sense of stability in, you know, sometimes music-like. I've heard music is like — Mozart or Bach, they have this structure, you know, like how the repeat or, you know —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And those have like — play with symmetries or asymmetry, that kind of thing. And also like a lot of religious painting, Buddhist or Christianity, they have this symmetry, you know. So that is one thing.

And the other thing is, one day I walked in the gallery. There was a new acquisition, a donation. It was Nan Goldin's photography.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And that picture was, first sight, it's rather shocking because there are two nude girls playing on kind of a kitchen floor or whatever, this domestic scene. And one girl is kind of had like a see-through fabric or something wrapped around her. And the other little girl is kind of on the floor kind of looking up. And later, after the show, there was things like, Elton John collected Nan Goldin's photography. And he loaned it to some museum in England. And that specific picture had complaints. And then the museum asked Elton John to, is okay to take this off? And then Elton John got really upset to take off photo back to him, or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, anyway, so what really interests me is my kind of — how I look at them, how I kind of felt, kind of eased out by revisiting and looking at, you know — at first kind of little shocking things become really not so important. And then I start to be able to see it is just kind of a domestic scene and child, you know, being innocent, just playing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I thought I would like to kind of bring that in because I was working with the theme of the *karako* thing, you know. I was thinking about meaning of children and how should I kind of think about this?

MS. RIEDEL: Just for the sake of the interview, would you explain briefly what *karako* is?

MR. TAKAMORI: *Karako* is historical, like generally about children, as celebrated children is because of — they came in the reincarnation in the Buddhist idea, they came back from another world, coming into this world. So then the *karako* idea has interested me because of my father's Alzheimer's you know? And then basically, myself was a child, and I raised my own children. And then even playing — you know, I just kind of used my memories and stuff.

But it's like, the connection when I was a child and then I am, you know, as an older person. And somehow have a very strange distance. And then feel like that was me, but at the same time, you know — not. You know, that child was gone or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Not. Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I end up choosing children's images from photography and etchings and print and drawings and photographs and all that, mostly just small images. So one room is like children's images, including Nan Goldin's. And then other room, I chose functional pots. Because Henry Art Gallery, to be a contemporary art museum, when they started as part of a university museum, they collected more kind of crafts. And I thought, you know, as kind of potter of the background, I thought it would be kind of nice to bring out those pieces which are never seen anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: Never see the light of day, exactly.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then also I was thinking about this functional pots to be displayed and they become just objects, and then somehow like you lose — viewer loses kind of the connection, idea they were made to be functional. So I chose all those forms of sake bottles.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So one room is all the pots, sake bottles, and then children's images. And then the key to connect those together was, I want to have my figures to be stand between viewer and the work. So the sake bottle thing is like, those figures are using it, like they're having a sake party or whatever. And the other room is, especially the Nan Goldin's images, this monk is looking at them. And then the viewer processes through them.

MS. RIEDEL: Through the monks, the figures?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. You feel like you yourself are confronted with those images. So I chose those Zen monks. Their names are Kanzan and Jittoku.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Those are Chinese monks. And I don't know if they are real people or just legendary, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Like imaginary monks. But they were also like *karako*, there was a genre of painting. There were lots of them in a period of like — I don't know — 500 years or something. It came from China, and then in Japan I saw a lot of them. Growing up, I remember Kanzan, Jittoku, you know, generally it's a pattern, which is usually one guy has a broomstick and then another one has this scroll in his hand. And the scroll symbolized the poetry that one of them wrote. And the broom symbolized, they were orphaned or something. And then they were —

MS. RIEDEL: They were orphaned?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: The monks were?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, they were adopted by the Zen temple.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then they were doing kind of this and that kind of work, and in the kitchen and cleaning up, you know. And they were never valuable. And in some — they didn't really talk or they were just really eccentric. And they were just laughing and playful, just like children. But after they died, they found the cave or something they were living. They left love — one of them wrote love poetry. It was like a really fabulous thing.

So they were kind of the epitome of idealized Zen mind people. And in these genre paintings, their hair is like, you know, crazy, and the clothing is just loose. And they have this eccentric smile on their face. And you cannot — so like when I was a kid, when looking at them, I was kind of a little scared because they looked like really crazy people, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. TAKAMORI: And so like their smile is like evil or like really good thing. You cannot tell. That obscure-ness of that was interesting to me. So those Kanzan and Jittoku looking at the children, you have to kind of take it, you know, whichever the way you think. And that is like your responsibility, the viewer's responsibility. And so that was a kind of idea. And the symmetry part is like, one room, I made display to be in the center, all center. And the other room is just all on the wall. So like symmetrical in a way is just opposite. And the one room, the children's room, is bright yellow. And then the sake room is white.

But both rooms have two figures, Kanzan and Jittoku, and eye height is the same, both rooms. It's about viewer's height, because sitting Kanzan, Jittoku, and the pedestal. In the other room, I made the pedestal goes up to viewer's eye height, but that they were — pedestal is made to be, looks like steps. So somehow, some kind of believable kind of sense, those monks step up there, standing there and looking at — so that.

MS. RIEDEL: And that was interesting. It must have been really interesting because you've done installation, in many ways, with these figures over time. But this was working with completely different material — photos, which have always been interesting to you, and then referring back to the pottery background.

Do you have any interest in doing more of those?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think maybe that led to the show with the children looking at themselves.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah.

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, the Ken Ferguson project?

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And was that also related to the trip to Hungary, to Budapest, or was that separate?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: Like once I started the project, then in the middle of it, I went to Hungary.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then in Hungary, I had like an idea of children witnessing history, like its director did.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then also, this war going on. I just kind of think about how children is looking at now, and then 50 years from now, what kind of a world that will be, those people have memories from the past, like my director did? Like in '56 that happened, and he's now 60 years old. So that was part of it.

And also, connected to the Ferguson to be in Japan in '54, I was four years old. We didn't meet each other, but I could be that child to be taken picture of, that kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right. It's really interesting, too, what you were just saying a minute ago about, at this age in life, feeling that you were the child, that you were and you weren't, both at the same time. Those small — the children figures that you did after Hungary, especially the one little boy that's in that almost — the pose is mimicking the military person.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, socialist sculpture.

MS. RIEDEL: The socialist sculpture.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So interesting because that sets up that exact dichotomy between this little boy in this very un-childlike pose. It just sets up a whole series of interesting questions about time and age and youth and how you look at children and what sort of — what view or what background you bring to viewing the picture and how that affects what you see.

Are you going to show — have those been shown yet?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, at the Frank Lloyd.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, those were shown at the Frank Lloyd. Okay. And did you show them at all with the photos from Hungary? For example, the little boy, was there also a photo of that statue that he was based on?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, all those small ones, like I set up my studio in Hungary was those children mimicking the socialist sculptures.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And some of them are like falling down, because, you know, Saddam's statue — down. And Stalin's, down in '56. So I was just kind of playing with that. And then like children — there is one table, those falling down, mimicking socialists. And the other side table are the children sitting there and looking at them.

MS. RIEDEL: Watching.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Really interesting. Again, that less-subtle politics, but still — yes, isn't.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That, I think, is the most recent — that was the most recent exhibition, wasn't it? Or has there been once since?

MR. TAKAMORI: That's right. That's right. Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And now the next one is coming up in New York?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Shifting gears a little bit, you've worked at the University of Washington now for over 20 years on and off, since you first started.



MR. TAKAMORI: That's true.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've been involved with the Bray for — is there a particular community that's been especially important to you in your work as an artist or your development as an artist? You worked [inaudible].

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. You know, like, for instance, like Bray things is like — they're constantly moving and changing, you know. And I think a really good thing about Bray is like directors and resident, whole thing is always kind of generational. You know, it's not like an old director is leading.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Of course, they have like a committee is looking over. But other than that, it's like basically the young people runs the place, and residents are young.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. It's one of the few places that's actually run by an artist. The director is always an artist, right?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Josh DeWeese is the one that's leading most recently, and I don't know who's there now, but —

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Probably, you know, like each one period when I was a young resident there, that was the most important community. And then all those friends now are all over and still contacting friends. But right now I think the most important community is definitely in Seattle and the university, you know. It's very stimulating. Like I said before, the teaching part is like — we teamwork really well with other faculties. And I learn a lot from them. And then we have very good critique sessions, and they're pretty intense, you know, one student per hour. And we spend two days and go through 10 graduate students, you know, every 10 weeks, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then how we ask questions and how all the participants interact is really exhausting, but it's like really — your brain is very stimulated. And then also, you know, we have like rather kind of a compared to like, you know, Helena, Archie Bray's center, and clay's center, here clay group is not necessarily the strongest one. We have like glass here. And also we have like a young kind of a progressive artist group, and all this stuff.

But I try to go see all the shows, and you know, it's small enough to be able to cover — you know, not — of course, it's not the whole thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But I follow that progression of art change of the scenes and this and that. It's like really stimulating. And also, we have a lot of aluminized — they're kind of succeeding as artists. And those people come visit us and join us in critiques. Or sometimes they come in and teach. It's really a good environment to get going.

MS. RIEDEL: That's wonderful, because it's not always the case. It sounds like it's a very positive and constructive work environment at the university, that you all get along well.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. I feel very — extremely lucky about it. And then I know my weakness, or you know — then like team teaching is, we understanding each other's strengths or weak part or whatever. So good team means, I think, we cover each other.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Instead of attacking each other for that, you know? So it really makes me feel really comfortable and happy, just being in this situation.

MS. RIEDEL: That's wonderful.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. I'm thankful for them. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Have you been involved with any national craft or art organizations over time? The American Crafts Council or NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts -AT], anything like that?

MR. TAKAMORI: No.

MS. RIEDEL: No?

MR. TAKAMORI: But I work as Archie Bray's committee.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, the board of directors sort of thing?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. What is it called? Overlook?

MS. RIEDEL: Operating committee?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, it's — yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Advisory committee?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, kind of, yes. And that was sort of like participate in the meetings. And they tend to be like local art — you know, artists who sell down in Montana, like Sara Jaeger and, you know, those people who are committee members. And then also the local business and lawyers, accountants, and you know, that, and some kind of collectors, like Linda Schlenger was part of it when I was there. And then also, the artists, they experience the Bray, but now it's everywhere. So those people will be nominated and become part of it.

But no, I haven't really worked on NCECA or — you know, it's kind of getting more and more, each area or each school, in terms of ceramics community or ceramics, I think, educational institution — I feel like they start to have different roles. Before, it was more kind of, overall, they have, you know, throwing class, hand-building class, or, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: But some schools are more focusing — I don't know if it's not necessarily our school is not necessarily focusing on figurative, but Doug Jeck and myself, and, you know, our own work is very figurative.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Where you know, some schools is like — teaching is more focusing on pottery or that kind of thing. And then the way they're guiding themselves toward the future seems like different directions, I think. And of course, like art school itself has changed, too. Now — seems like they used to be small component of the program, make school of art. But now they are merging more and more. And in [inaudible] things is bigger. They're encouraged. And so — yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So maybe, if I'm understanding what you're saying correctly, it sounds like there's almost two different things going on. One is that there is more specialization happening in terms of being figurative or focusing on functional work. And the other is, there is more diversity possible, that the focus is not specifically necessarily the media base, like clay, but that you could go in a variety of different directions. That's interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: I think so, because, you know, we talked earlier how financially, students have a short time, and the credit-wise. So what you can cover is rather kind of getting more limited. And I sometimes think like maybe Ken Ferguson's generation is the last one be able to put so much kind of a time into hone their skills, you know, or like focus on the wheel and then really develop that process.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think also — I talked with John Marshall a few years ago. And he thought, to your point, that there was less time available and students were making, or having less time. But there was also, because you have less time, there was less experimentation. And so you felt more compelled to come up with what was going to be your vision or your voice faster, rather than just wandering around, exploring and experimenting for a longer period of time.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Yes. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you feel that way, too?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, I think so, because I remember like when I was under-grad, some students being students for five, six, seven years, you know? Now, like when you get to the cap of credit, if you're ready or not, you're out, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So I remember some students were like professional students, right? [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right. Do you think that has a beneficial or a negative impact on work in the long run?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think work — the appearance or direction of work must be kind of changing. And it's not only that, but also develop of a technology. And some technologies shorten your process. So like they have a short — they have a limited time, and also they have those high technology available to process through much faster.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so it's no surprising that how photography, you know, computer usage, and those high-tech area is like really developing now. But the kind of result, probably, we need to, you know, take time to see.

MS. RIEDEL: Wait a few years and see.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, though, that you have seen that within a very — one limited period of time.

MR. TAKAMORI: And that's, you know, definitely that is a reason, part of it is like, craft is suffering. And then, where the craft will go from here is kind of interesting point.

MS. RIEDEL: What's making the craft suffer? Sorry?

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, because of like short time. And then fast process is available.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then, craft is opposite of that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: Take time. Need a lot of time to develop your skills. And the process is much slower.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. But sometimes, you know, I kind of think like, well, you know, while I'm getting older, I am like — I feel like I should be simplify my life. And then I should have a less position, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: And then I feel like, well, maybe just an image instead of material, might be just good enough for me now, you know. For instance, if I have like a really simplified — I have just one room. And what do I choose to live with me? Then could be like one copy of my favorite small painting. And then just pin up on the wall. Is that enough? So then, what material and object means, you know. But I'm fascinated, though, of find some object. Like earlier I said, I have a desire to possess it, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: Maybe it was like more when you're younger or, you know. So like I really tend to think that, you know, my life from the beginning towards old and death, and then myself, the way of thinking is constantly changing, you know. So if I'm working in my studio, my work changes, that's one thing. But difficulty with teaching is like, you know, I don't — I can't have just one believing system to apply for the teaching.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: Because it's just like — especially like once you have a child, and then you dealing with the children, and the child is like constantly changing. And so you have to approach to them accordingly. So you need this kind of flexibility. And then also awareness of change, physically, mentally, and which puts you on the kind of edge all the time, you know, which is kind of a little exhausting about teaching, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, because you're never quite sure which approach or which perspective or what is going to be most helpful or appropriate.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes. It's sort of like, when I was younger, that was kind of burden for me. It was like really exhaust me. So like I bring back that to my studio, and just sometimes, like I freeze almost, you know. But I think in some way, getting older — and then also like working with such a nice team, which is like I know if I'm going this way. But the younger teachers or other teachers can support that part.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So, you know, basically who I am and what I am — my capability or my area, I cannot do well, you know. Like I just kind of feel like I'm kind of accepting it. And then, yes. Ferguson taught me when I was young, like it's just important to kind of understand your own limitations. And then the limitations are not negative things. Limitations are something like, can be a limitation right now, but that — if you know the limitation, you know how to push it to make it bigger, you know, more possible.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: How have your sources of inspiration changed over time?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, basically, things that I like haven't changed that much, I think, since I was a child. But my kind of world getting bigger, and then being kind of right places, is like really opened up the way to understand things. For instance, like when I was in Japan, I had my kind of — my world, what I can do. Even if I have total freedom, but I already have some kind of traditions or like situation or our social unspoken rules or whatever, kind of make cage around me. And I relocate myself, and wherever you go, they have their own kind of a limitation cage.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: But it's a different shape or different size. So I think it's the kind of — you know, it would be wonderful if everybody have an opportunity to find their own place. And then that place would free the person, and then, you know, you can bring the best out of you, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. TAKAMORI: So you know, I have moved around a lot. And I still can create opportunity to go place and place, which I think is like really helped me to grow, I guess.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because you have moved around a lot. And that moving around has been instrumental to opening up the world.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And for you to progress to the next type of work. Interesting. Do you think of your work as part of any kind of particular tradition?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, I don't think my work is really kind of a cutting-edge and then like expanding idea of art or anything like that. Definitely, my work resources are all coming from the past, you know? I probably, you know, like my liking as to Munakata's prints, or I like those old artifacts, and I like —

MS. RIEDEL: You mean like the old figures from the Tang Dynasty, that sort of thing?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes. And rather kind of earthy. That is probably something, if I choose like folk-art type of thing, must be kind of part of my roots.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, yes. I wouldn't have thought of that until you said it. And then it does make a lot of sense. Do you think — what do you — you've worked with clay for 40 or 50 years now, a long time. What do you think it does that no other medium does quite as well? What are its strengths and its weaknesses as an art form?

MR. TAKAMORI: I think it's like I kind of mentioned earlier, but the process with my kind of temperament and — that is a good match. It's something like, for instance, you [inaudible] the kiln accident. You know, that kind of thing, which is like — I think it's something like really fits into kind of a — I don't know. But sometimes I just feel like it's really become part of your life. It's a clay — it's not like if I have a white canvas and then I just put image on it, and it's all directly coming from me. But the clay, it still have the kind of space. The material itself kind of do their own things, including cracking accident.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] Yes.

MR. TAKAMORI: So I have negotiate. And then — so relationship to the clay becoming somewhat, a little bit personal. You know, it's kind of a little bit romantic kind of notion. But — and also, it's knowing it is kind of inexpensive material. And I think it is in some way that clay to be very in some ways, like I feel like, very anonymous material and very obscure, you know? Can be toilet bowls to dishes, you know. And so they can change themselves into anything. And then they can be look like concrete, you know. They can — so like you can kind of — you have certain kind of easiness, you know. You can do with anything, you know?

It's kind of interesting because when I started ceramics, there was kind of an easiness. You know, you can do with anything, you know. It's kind of interesting because when I started ceramics, there was very specific because we have a tradition. You know, porcelain has to look like this. Stoneware — you know, categorized and historically organized in certain ways. And then it took me a long time, but I kind of got to the point, you know, realizing that clay is actually the opposite, you know. We can project ourselves into whatever the way you like the clay to be. And that kind of a sense of freedom and sense of easiness, I think that must be part of it.

MS. RIEDEL: It also seems to move very easily and fluidly between two and three dimensions.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. Vessels to sculpture, and then a surface to form. And they're not just one thing, you know. They seem inclusive to everything.

[END OF CD 8, TRACK 1.]

MS. RIEDEL: Are there any particular publications that have been significant to you over time in your work?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, I subscribe like *Art in America*, *American Craft*, and I used to have — buy more ceramics magazines. But right now — well, last almost 10 years, one of my most important magazines I subscribe is *Geijutsu shincho*, which is Japanese magazine, which has been, you know — well, I grew up with it, too.

We have like other publications. They have more catered towards contemporary art. But this *Geijutsu shincho*, what I really like is, their cover is really broad. And they have a special issue for, a lot of times, what is exhibiting right now. So like it could be European specific kind of paintings, or Buddhism art. So like time and culturally, really broad.

MS. RIEDEL: So international focus and all media, but specifically art?

MR. TAKAMORI: Right. But, you know, whether you draw the art or not is really open. For instance, there is an issue about tea ceremony to flower arrangement to architecture. And so that inclusiveness is like a really interesting because, you know, I don't know what will be next issue, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Um-hm.

MR. TAKAMORI: And even like some areas which have never interesting, for instance, like major area is sporting ware, you know, what the Japanese craft people started making them when the West — they start to have a notion of, Westerners are going to see it. So like have occasion to run into something I have never paid attention to.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And also that they have like a section showing London and New York City and all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Good gallery reviews?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, very short. So like the balance, you know, is really good.

MS. RIEDEL: Is there anything comparable published in the States or Britain that you're aware of?

MR. TAKAMORI: You know, I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds very unique.

MR. TAKAMORI: And they don't have very strong review or criticism, analyzing. But they're more like kind of — writing is more like the art history type, you know. And the review part is very short.

MS. RIEDEL: And this publication has been around, you said, since you were a child?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a long-lived publication. Well, I think we have done a wonderful job. Congratulations.

MR. TAKAMORI: Well, thank you. It was fun.

MS. RIEDEL: It's been great. Covering what we needed to cover. In closing, would you like to discuss perhaps where things might be heading?

MR. TAKAMORI: Yes. You know, like I always kind of not looking forward to necessarily, but I always kind of accepting time passing and things changes. And then I get older. And so like my friend used to tease me because, since I was younger, I was talking about aging and getting old all the time, you know.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs] That's so funny.

MR. TAKAMORI: But, you know, it's becoming a reality now, you know. And also, like when you're teaching at art school, students is like always young, right? At first, like some students are older than you, you know. Then it's come to time you realize the children's parents is almost younger than you, you know? Now, it's like most of my students' parents are younger than me.

Anyway, on point, like when we are at graduate school, we are very kind of cocky, young artists-to-be. And then, you know, you hear something almost like, by the time when you're 26-27, if your show is not represented at the Whitney Biennial, you're ended.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So like it's really interesting. Like then like I have my own goal. And then when you — you know, finally you get there. And then you realize, this is not really I thought about, you know? And you shift your goals. And then like when you get middle-aged, you know, it's just like — I thought it was kind of interesting. It's very similar to when you're growing up, how you're looking at your parents. So the relationship of student to teacher is. Like first, your parents are great. And you're protection and everything. Then you start to criticize them. And then you look down on them. And then when you become your parents' age, you start to appreciate them again. In some case, like you wish you did better than your parents, you know, like that kind of change of your thinking.

And so like, when I got older, I started to kind of realize I don't have much kind of a role model in like — because, for instance, you know, a Picasso is kind of one period that he was doing this kind of fabulous, you know, paintings of Avignons, and you know, that kind of most powerful era, you know, when he was 30s.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: So it seems like every artist have the period is the best work came out. And then that's a way how they are recognized. But once I get older, I start to see — I would like to see from the beginning to end. You know, how does their artwork have changed? Of course, there's a kind of peak. And when you are young, you only see that peak.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. TAKAMORI: And so like, you know, Voulkos and Rudy's and Ken Ferguson's and all those — our senior teachers and artists, it's like I really start to kind of observe when they are in their 60s, what kind of work they did and, you know, how they kind of continued and how they managed their physical limitations and, you know, aging and all that. So like, still the future is unknown. And you just — I'm sure like my observation to my teachers now take up — died. And sort of like observation to once if you're in that situation, probably would change also again, to look at, think about them.

So now it's like I really think, accepting my age, and as a teacher, as an artist, what is most important to kind of things I should concerning? And what I can do best, you know? Of course, you know, I don't like try to make art to be represented in the next year's biennial Whitney or what, you know, or whatever. So that is I think the kind of search goes on, you know. And I would like — I guess like, I would like to kind of reflect my kind of age or time into my work. It's not — but it's not the kind of sense, necessarily, as a contemporary art, as my, you know, kind of honest, direct best work to come.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds good. Thank you very much.

MR. TAKAMORI: Thank you. That was great. You're a good listener. And I don't have much time to just kind of talking about myself, you know, so much. So that was a good thing to think — you know, to verbalize it is kind of — comes back to me. So that's good.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think you did a wonderful job of pulling memories back from way back, early on, and then seeing how they all tie in. And they run like threads through all the work.

MR. TAKAMORI: Thank you.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]