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Oral history interview with William Morris, 2009 July 13-14

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with William Morris on July 13-14, 2009. The interview took place in Mazama, Wash., 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.

William Morris has reviewed the transcript. His corrections and emendations appear below in brackets appended by initials. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art with the artist William Morris at his home in Mazama, Washington, on July 13, 2009, disc number one. Good morning.

WILLIAM MORRIS: Morning.

MS. RIEDEL: Spectacular view here.

MR. MORRIS: Thank you.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, we're really on a top of a mountain or a plateau or something here, isn't it?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, we're up on a *haut plateau*. This site was actually a gathering site for a lot of the homesteaders here in Mazama. There was a school just down the way, and then up here there was a gathering hall where people would come from up-valley and down-valley, since we're sort of mid-valley.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. And it was a good water source here. And they had some fruit trees around and —

MS. RIEDEL: You can see forever.

MR. MORRIS: You can. The whole valley is all in conservation land now, but there used to be a lumber mill down here, and of course pastureland for cattle and that sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've been coming here, you said, for 30 years?

MR. MORRIS: For 30 years, I've been coming to the Methow Valley and just exploring the area, climbing, hunting, fishing, and it was always a dream to have a home, so now it's coming to fruition.

MS. RIEDEL: Spectacular. I was thinking as I was driving over here that this is really a wonderful time to be doing this interview because it marks a transition period in your career and your life, I'm sure. And you stopped working in glass a couple of years ago, yes?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I think it's been — it's been two or going on three years now? I don't really — I haven't kept track of the time.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's not only [that] you have you stopped working in glass, but you've had time, I would imagine to sort of look back and think about — or maybe you haven't looked back at all [laughs]. But to think about your work and your career in context.

MR. MORRIS: Well, actually I don't spend a lot of time looking back. I reflect once in a while, but to tell you the truth, that was sort of the reason to stop. It was not to look back on it, but was to look to something different. And I've been really fortunate in the fact that the situation arrived where I could actually say, if I could do whatever I wanted to do, what would it be? And it wasn't stopping glass because I didn't like it or I wasn't fascinated by it. It's just something that I had done so intensely for so long that I thought, well, okay, what else is there?

And there's lots of "else" — lots of it. There's all the activities that I love — the hiking and the climbing and the paragliding and the diving and things like that. But all those things were sort of packed in, in between the work. So now they're sort of the main aspect. And now the work isn't really work anymore. It's just dabbling in other materials, whether it be wood or stone or picking things up and examining them.

I liked the aspect of being able to get up in the day and not have to have a schedule or an agenda and that sort of thing. Part of it is, it's great to have the structure, but it was nice to be able to just really ask yourself every day, well, okay, what would you do with it? What is really meaningful to you?

And I was — well, I was amazed, in retrospect to reflect on how driven we become by our identities with what we do. You know — I was "William Morris the glassblower" for a long, long time; had a very, very intense exhibition schedule. I had a crew to run. The work had a standard, which it had to maintain.

You know, the romance of the artistic life is, I think, is overrated in many cases by — and I don't want to call it drudgery, but by the demands of producing work and a body of work and making a statement through the work. So I didn't really realize how engrossed in that I was and how it was dictating a lot of the aspects of my life until I did walk away from it.

So those are the reflections. I don't really look back on the work much, other than now I get to look back on it more as a viewer than as an "ex-maker of."

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting, because it allows you, I would imagine, a degree of objectivity that many artists don't ever have.

MR. MORRIS: You know, that's a funny term, "objectivity," because it's really hard for us to be objective about ourselves and what we do when our identity's wrapped up in it.

And again, in hindsight, as I said, I didn't realize how driven I was by it all. And how, for some reason, we seem to keep ourselves in that place of business through wanting a lot of acceptance, a lot of accolades. My belief is that anybody that's really truly successful with what they do, there's a large degree of dysfunction that accompanies that and it usually comes with the need for approval.

Maybe this is just me, but I look around and I see it in all kinds of aspects of our society, where the identity is just huge. So that exists in myself and in a pretty strong degree I realize it has — because now that I've sort of had to let that go, I realize being a has-been is really kind of humbling. And I kind of like it. [Laughs.]

A good friend of mine who lost all his fingers and toes told me that he was a has-been climber because he doesn't climb to the degree that he did. I found that term very endearing, and so I like the "has-been." And it's a lot — being a has-been, I like it a lot better than being retired.

So anyways, I like that term. But I lost track of where I was going with that.

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about objectivity and looking back at one's work and perspective, perhaps.

MR. MORRIS: Oh, right, okay. Yes, you can't be objective when you're in the middle of something.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, true, but two years, three years out, does it afford you another perspective?

MR. MORRIS: It's another viewpoint. It's another viewpoint. First of all, I can't believe how seriously I've taken so much of that career and the things we've done and aspects about the work. It was very serious. That was great at the time, but I would hate to have to do that to the day I die and never have the opportunity to look at it differently. I mean, I think as we grow older, that changes, but to really step away from it has been interesting on a lot of levels that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And it's especially interesting because we were just looking at — you are making objects to some degree or experimenting — playing, as you said — with making things, but now in stone and wood. So it's not that you weren't interested in making objects per se anymore or exploring art.

MR. MORRIS: Well, I've said this before. I don't wake up in the morning and think to myself, there's not enough stuff in the world and I need to make some more. But I can't help myself as a maker. That's what I've always done. I don't need to adhere to that directly, but it is — it's a process in which I can increase my observation of the world around me.

And if I'm gathering stones to work on them, I'm going to look at them in a certain way. And it's going to captivate my attention. Otherwise, my mind just wanders off on all these different shallow tangents and sort of bounces around. This helps it focus on something. And I need that. I need to be — I need to have some discipline in my mind.

Then all of a sudden, for some reason, my mind — it goes to that area of the stone and then it's able to just sort of be free in that arena of material and aesthetic and quality that's incredibly fun because I've never done that before. I'm not a geologist. I don't know anything about the origins of material, the scientific composition.

But I run through these mountains and I climb and I see different outcroppings of different types of stone, and you know that they've crumbled or done something and then washed down the valley over a millennia through glaciation and rivers. And then they're all this conglomerate in the bottom of the valley.

Basically, they're rubble. People want them out of their yards and out of their fields. They're a nuisance. They bust up tractor blades and they hinder putting in a pipeline or whatever, so people can't stand the damn things.

So they stack them by the side of the road with debris. And I love that. It's a viewpoint. It's all relative. I get to run along and find this treasure trove of gems, to me, and basically it's another man's garbage and it's great. And it's all free.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. That makes me think of Italo Scanga, because I know you've mentioned him as a mentor, and what a collector he was of found objects to some degree. So it sounds like — I don't associate your work with found objects, but the way you're just describing that makes me think of that.

And it also makes me think of John Ruskin, who said something wonderful about painting being a way to just hone your skills of observation, of seeing the world, because if you have to reproduce and paint it, you're going to pay very close attention. And that sounds like part of what you're doing as you're going through the world now, looking at rocks.

MR. MORRIS: Well, to me, that's the epitome of human experience, is "What are we doing here? And what can we do with the senses that we've been given?" Observation and the mind, of course, is such a fantastic tool, and it can get spun off on all these strange, very strange tangents.

To me, the natural world is the magic here. To me, that's why I'm here. I just become enamored by the multitude of facets that it's got, whether it be earthbound or airbound or waterbound. It's just absolutely, utterly amazing. And it's the simplest things that can resonate with us.

If I get into too complicated of a formulation of thinking or putting together things, I can't hold my train of thought. The simpler, the better. That's why I like the natural materials of wood and stone. You start to reveal it and it's just — it is what it is. It's very honest.

MS. RIEDEL: It's form. It's texture, surface, pattern.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. And the kind of work that I'm doing with those things, I'm not trying to create imagery out of it. I want to just see the material for itself. You might want to add a mark to it or something like that — but you're certainly not going to make it better than what it already is.

It's the same thing when I would do any of the animals in the glass. You're not trying to replicate the image of an eland or a buffalo. You just need a caricature of it. And it would resonate that form or that message.

It's the same thing with the stone. First of all, all you've got to do is dig the thing out of the ground and hose it off. That does a lot for it right there. But since I don't have the agenda of making an exhibition or showing the work or selling the work, it doesn't matter what I do. I don't owe anybody an explanation for it. So it's just for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Does that come as a huge relief in some way?

MR. MORRIS: Oh, it is a huge relief, but then it gives me that viewpoint when I look back on how I — one of those things that I took so seriously. And to tell you the honest truth, when it comes to being an artist by profession, you have to take some responsibility for the formula of being an artist, so you can succeed financially. You need to discipline yourself a certain way, at least that's what I believed and that's what I did. Now, it's very much the same thing, but I don't have to adhere to the disciplines of that formula at all.

MS. RIEDEL: When you say the formula of being an artist, can you elaborate?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I mean, you discipline yourself in a field or some kind of a medium, and you become proficient with it and then you express ideas. And you do it in a way that has — it might be a little bit linear, where you can make a statement through a series of pieces or work that captivate people and send a message.

Then you want them to like the work. And then you want them to buy the work. So you can keep making more. So you think about that. And you always have to ask yourself, how honest am I being with myself about what I'm making for me and what the message is, and what am I doing just for the buck?

So that's a big part of being an artist. You get so many people, they come up with one good idea and then that becomes their life and that becomes their identity. And that's scary too. Again, I think that that's more insidious than we are willing to admit.

I think that we end up, again, through approval, which comes in many forms, doing a lot of things that are for — that's the end, that's the goal. Yet we always pontificate about the expression and the creative spirit and living like an artist. And, well, there's a part of that too, but then part of that becomes the shtick.

So you know, I just like to question it all the time. I don't know. I'm still stuck in lots of things, I'm sure. But it's fun having the opportunity to do that through my separation from the art world.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think — I thought that one thing we could is talk about some of the major themes or threads that I think will run through this conversation over the next couple of days. And this ties in nicely to nature, which has been such a — probably the major source of inspiration and influence for you over time, would you say that's true?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I'd have to completely say that's true.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. The other thing that comes to mind is a sort of archaeological reference or sensibility. There was a quote — there are so many — there are wonderful books about you, many of them. So I think they were a great resource in preparing for the interview. I don't want to repeat things that have been said there, but I think there are a couple of wonderful quotes or ideas in those books that might be interesting to use as a springboard for new conversations.

One quote that you said was "I like to think my work reflects my impressions of art as well as nature seen through time." I think that just is such a wonderful summary. It's just a succinct encapsulation of nature, archeology, and time, which to me seems so much what your work has been about.

MR. MORRIS: Well, when it comes to the archaeological aspects — that's what we do. We relate to the natural world. That's how we've evolved because we are part of it, we are nature, we are of that same origin.

But yet we have this ability to interpret the natural world, beyond shelter, food, and clothing. We take it that other step, where there's the sort of the romance, the story, the philosophy and the myth.

That's what separates us in some ways and yet screws us up, too; but I love the way when we honor something and we honor our origin and our relation to it, it makes us all connected. So it transcends any epoch or culture and it binds us all together. And that's what I love.

And this is what frightens me a little bit about our society today with all the technology, when you see people walking along and they're on their cell phones and nobody looks anybody in the eye anymore. I see people sitting in the most unbelievable locations, staring into a computer screen at their laptop. And I understand that that's part of what you're doing, and you do it at home. But you bring it out into the natural world and you buffer that from you.

That skill of living in the environment and feeling the environment and feeling the wind and seeing leaves move through the invisible force of the wind and getting a sense of that is really magical. That's where I love the cultures that have taken that and made — the aspects of their life — take the San Bushmen, for example, considered to be the oldest tribe known as a group of people.

MS. RIEDEL: Where do they come?

MR. MORRIS: They're in the Kalahari Desert in Africa. And you see the way they'll use the sand as a informational process, where they can get up in the morning and they can see exactly what moved through their terrain by just looking at the tracks, and the way the wind has blown, and what's moved where, and what's come here and there.

And so you get up and you assess your day. It's sort of like their Internet. It's sort of like their news. But it's fantastic because it happens. It happens. It's so immediate and it's so real. And it's such a — they live right in the middle of it. I just like that analogy because you just know what's passed. You know what's happened. And then you base your day on that. You base on your day on whether you're going to follow this animal to hunt it.

Granted, I don't want to live like a San Bushman. But I have to honor this and I respect it. And spending time with them, you get to see that that brings this authentic happiness and just reality of their lives. You don't get up and wonder if that's what you should be doing; it's just what you do. It's not a choice. It *is*, you're bound to it on a cellular level. And that simplicity, I admire, and I envy that.

So when you see that in cultures where they use that — there's a tribe in New Guinea that uses sound in the same way that the Bushmen use sand. What they do is they can listen to sound and they can hear what's moving on what river in certain ways and it's all tied to a song that they have. So an elder will hear something on a hunt or witness something and will describe it in song, which will emulate a lot of the sounds of the forest.

It’s just an incredible way. Something — that something to me is way beyond something that I can even imagine. But that idea is being — again, you’re so entrenched in it, in living that sort of lifestyle. I admire that.

MS. RIEDEL: So it’s like an oral history. It’s the history of what happened, but it’s also the sounds of what actually happened, the sounds of the animals.

MR. MORRIS: That’s right, yes. And it’s also — it’s a language, but it’s in the form of sound. But it *comes* to them in the form of sound. And they can actually map their terrain through sound.

It’s unbelievable. So you think of things like these and the way that — the different ways in which we can live and view the world. And you realize how puny we get with those things, even though we have this huge amount of information. It almost makes us a little more distant, a little more abstract.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it sounds like also you’re distinguishing between information and observational information. That there’s something about really looking and seeing or hearing or having a sense of place that doesn’t happen through the technology.

MR. MORRIS: Well, we have these incredible senses. They’re just undeveloped. It’s like what they say, we only use six percent of our brain or something. I think it’s the same thing with all of our senses. It’s the same thing with our smell and our sight and our hearing and our taste.

We get into a certain belief system or certain way of doing something and we just get stuck. I think we all do. I’m sure the San Bushmen get plenty stuck, too, but the point is, is just realize that it’s a human condition. It’s not them and us. It’s all of us.

A friend of mine, Art Wolfe, did a book on adornment — different tribes around the world and the way they would do things to their bodies. You would go to, say, New Guinea, where they would pierce their nose with these long straws, and then you’d go to the Maasai, where they stretch their earlobes down to their shoulders. And you’d show a guy in — you’d show a Maasai warrior, this guy with this pin through his nose. And the Masaai warrior would be going, oh, my God, I could never do that; [yet] he’s standing with earlobes down to his shoulders.

It’s all relative. People say that about — whether they’re talking about plates in your lips or tattoos or breast implants or whatever. It is so funny the way we make these qualifications. So we do it on all levels. And we certainly do it with art.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And that actually leads nicely into the next point, which is, do you think about your own work as being part of the — I think of the art tradition of exploring man in nature and man in relationship to nature, which I’m talking about as two separate things, but there’s a long tradition, going back to prehistory in art, of that exploration. When you think of your own work, do you think of it in that context or — where do you place it?

MR. MORRIS: Well, a question like that is — you’re getting to the point of — for example, the nature of this interview, which is we are — I’m making an effort to elaborate on thoughts about things. And a lot of it — artistically, we come up with this huge language. So this whole thing that we’re doing is — again, it’s like taking a skill or something and then trying to utilize it so it’s a common language for people to listen to.

So when you ask me these things, yes, I think about it, but not unless you ask me about it. It’s not something I ponder in the privacy of the studio. As a matter of fact, I’ve tried [all] my life to stay away from this, but since I was involved in the art world, it sort of summoned me to get off my ass and think about these things. It’s not something that I would normally discuss, but of course we’re doing it in this arena because this is the arena where this all exists. I think that that’s important, but it’s not anything that I take all too seriously.

MS. RIEDEL: When you think about your work in terms of — or maybe you don’t think about your art in terms of the contemporary art field, but I think of certain things that come to mind. I think of your work in terms of installations. I think of your work in terms of assemblage and juxtaposition, certainly in terms of studio glass. But it seems that your work has taken the studio glass movement in a direction that I don’t see many — anybody else doing, really.

MR. MORRIS: Well, again, you look at this field that you’re in — and again, I’m speaking more in terms of this in hindsight because now that I’m separate from it, I can go back to tell you that when I was in the middle of this, I thought that this was the work. But I realized that the work was in response to the arena, okay?

So you think in terms of — your art arena is galleries and museums, critics and collectors. Okay, that’s the art world, and, of course, the artist. But you have this arena where we’re in — and there’s public work and that sort of thing. So these are the niches that we work in.

There's people out there that are making things — Andy Goldsworthy is an interesting example. He's done these quiescent things, but out in the natural world with natural materials. But then by documenting them and bringing them into the art world — so was he making art before it was documented? Was that art — that was out there that you'd have to walk out in the woods and stumble across it to see it? Does that mean he's out there making art?

MS. RIEDEL: What do you think?

MR. MORRIS: You want to get into the debate of it, you leave the art world. It's like the guy in the cave 100,000 years ago painting on the walls. Is that guy making art? This is all semantics as far as I'm concerned. And this is what fascinates me.

This is a funny thing. I'm out there making objects right now but I don't call myself an artist anymore. I don't call myself — I'm not making art, because I'm not making it for the art world. And this is what I —

MS. RIEDEL: So you're associating art with the art world.

MR. MORRIS: Well, you have to. It's sort of like — I don't really know. Again, I haven't thought it all through, because it's sort of a new concept and it's — I'm not trying to come up with some avant-garde concept here. That's not my intent. It just fascinates me to think about it this way.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure. And so is Goldsworthy's work — when he's making the pieces out there in the wild, do you think of that as art or does it not interest you in one way or the other to think about what it might be called?

MR. MORRIS: Well, I've seen his work, of course. I have his books and I've seen his documentaries and everything, I consider him a really great artist. And what he's done bringing that attention to the viewers, I think, is what makes him a great artist, because he's brought that. So, yes, I think of it as art and I think of him as a great artist. But I don't know if you get what I'm saying about the fact that if you eliminated that, if you eliminated the message, the formula of the message, you would never know it was there.

MS. RIEDEL: But it's interesting — I'm just trying to understand what you're saying because those paintings were made in those caves millions of years ago and I think — or hundreds — 50,000 years ago. I think people would agree that those are art, whether anybody intended them to be art or not, no?

MR. MORRIS: Well, I think that's the thing, is we like to think of it that way. So when you're asking me questions about my impact on the studio glass movement and all that sort of stuff, my answer to you is, yes, at the time I thought I was just making things, but in truth, in hindsight, I realize how important to me that message was, how important to me that arena was.

So, yes, I wanted to influence art glass. I wanted to influence installations. I wanted to be a part of that. I wanted to have some resonance, make a mark, however you want to put it. And at the time, I was just doing the things that stimulated me, that motivated me, but I did need to be poignant about the institutions and about the spaces and about the conditions of those spaces where that work would make some sense, where it would — so when you're making a piece, you're not completely free in this sense. You're always — you have an intent about where it's going to go and that maneuvers it. That's part of being creative, is working with those limitations — but it's there. It's more insidious than we believe.

MS. RIEDEL: And particularly when you were doing the larger installations, that certainly would be hugely dependent on where it was going to reside.

MR. MORRIS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. And you want to make something that somebody walks in and goes, wow, it's really cool.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think some of those huge early installations with the giant tusk, *Cache*, and pieces like that, they felt so much, very historical in reference to the past; but here they were made out of this material that also is very ancient, but used in a completely new way, worked a completely different way with the finished look that was not like anything else. It felt very contemporary, and very much as contemporary commentary on the past and where we stand in relation to it. Are those along your lines too?

MR. MORRIS: Those weren't conscious thoughts. What I was thinking of when I was making that was I had my vocabulary with this material and then I had this subject matter that I was very keen on, which was the artifacts. And then I had sort of the space to deal with. And then, I have — probably the most acute aspect is the fact that I get bored very easily. So whatever we make has to be interesting and fun — not always fun in a "whoopee!" sense, but fun in the challenging, struggling, "let's figure this out" sort of thing.

And so that — and also in relationship to my team, which was a huge part of my work because I worked with the same people for years and years and years. And they had influences and skills and that sort of thing, which really expanded my potential vocabulary with this. So with that in mind, too — you try to use everything to its maximum to always keep it all interesting and alive and new. So that's what those things did. That's what aspects of the team and the material and the spaces and my installation guy and the equipment that we would build, all helped foster these projects.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like the team — I'm thinking now in particular of — is it Jon Ormbrek?

MR. MORRIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — who did many of the glass paintings that were there.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, he did all the sand drawings.

MS. RIEDEL: That were incorporated into I think the early Petroglyph vessels, right?

MR. MORRIS: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: That seems like a very much an evolutionary development in the work.

MR. MORRIS: Oh, absolutely and it was a skill and an aesthetic that we shared. Jonny and I, we worked together for 30 — God, what was it — 32 years or some dang thing — forever. And that was a very phenomenal, unusual working relationship that we had. It's hard to even put that one into words because he — everything that we did sort of —

Jonny was just here a few days ago to help me set up the shop. I haven't really seen Jonny hardly at all since we retired, but we get back together again and we wouldn't miss a beat. Our language is still exactly the same. Our way in which we worked was sort of unspoken communication of what needed to be done and what we both liked and what would be fun, what would work, what's functional. It just — it hasn't missed a beat. And that's just a natural phenomenon.

I've used this term with a work before and the series and the teams and that sort of thing. It's called a dynasty. And that's what I always thought in terms of us. The way I define that is you have a certain period of time with a certain dynamic of people with a certain sort of sociological opportunity, and things happen.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: You can call it chemical, you can call it alchemic, whatever you want to say, but I believe that that's what we had. And it was a hell of a combination of these ingredients that it gave us huge freedom. It has a lifespan, as all dynasties rise and then they fall. And then it's just a product of nature. I don't care if it's the Mayans or the Anasazi or Egypt, or whatever. There are all different scales of it, whether it happens in science or art or literature or music. It's these things — there are periods of time when it just escalates and then there are times when it just seems to be void.

MS. RIEDEL: It's run its course, yes.

MR. MORRIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It also — back to thinking of that as a two-point question of the team, but then also another aspect of the work — it seems really to have evolved with it over time was, was the evolution of technological challenges. I'm thinking in particular of the way you described growing the antlers on an animal's head and just starting off with one point or two points and being able to grow that exponentially. I'm thinking about the evolution of textures and patterns on the glass surface itself. It seems like there was an ongoing technical evolution that really ran for years, if not decades.

MR. MORRIS: Well, that was part of the boredom part [laughs]. It always had to be the next challenge. It had to be captivating to keep us there as a process, and just the process — the byproduct of the process is what the objects are. And I've said this before, we're not out there making the objects for the objects' sakes so much as we are out there going through the process, and the objects are the manifestation of that.

That's the funny thing with these series, and part of that happened in a number of ways. One is the way in which we'd work or what we called our work season. We'd work for seven, eight months out of the year and it's almost like a season for a professional athlete. You start your season out and you have to train over again.

So my philosophy is that if you've been out of touch with something for four months and you go back to do it, you've got to go through the training process again. You've got to start slow and you've got to work up.

Well, you've got two choices. You can do what you've done before and you're still going to stumble through — it's not going to look as good as it was before, until a certain period of time, maybe a month, six weeks. Or you go and you start completely different. And you challenge yourself because you know whatever you'll make in the beginning of that season, you're going to be frustrated with and you're not going to like. So it might as well be something different. because by the time you get back to that one month, six-week period or whatever, at least you've got something new.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. MORRIS: So again — it wasn't this thing where it's like — you know, part of it is tactical in the sense that, okay, I want to keep changing the series because it's going to be more fun, it's going to be more interesting, because I'm going to hate that early process anyways. I'm going to hate that early training grounds. I'm clumsy. My hands don't work well. Team's got to ally itself.

So that was one of the tactics that we used. And then also, all of a sudden, then I started getting this reputation for always changing the work. So then you're kind of doing that as well. It's two-fold. And you want to sell the work. And, jeez, you don't want to keep selling the thing you've always made before.

That doesn't work very well. So it just all made sense and it was just what we did. And the team stayed interested. Everybody stayed interested. It was a winning situation all the way along. But it was still hard to do — because you do set these little rules up for yourself.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you give me an example?

MR. MORRIS: Well, let me see when we changed something specifically. I'll try to think of that. Oh, yes, I will. Man Adorned was a really good one. I went in — I don't know — where was that that I got this? I can't remember specifically what object I saw that spawned that but —

MS. RIEDEL: The whole concept of using this three-dimensional human form.

MR. MORRIS: Of using human form, period. I'd never used human form before because I never liked any of the human or figurative things I've seen in glass.

So the first thing I did was make a skull and a pot and I stuck the pot on its head. And I'd been making skulls for years, right? And of course I'd made pots for years. And so I did this and I just looked at it, and I thought, well, this is frickin' boring. This is very unoriginal.

So then — and then I saw — well, maybe I didn't — I'll try this mask thing I never do — and I started doing this mask. I didn't know what I was doing and I started sculpting from the inside and I got these really funky masks, very sort of innocent and naïve.

This is another thing that I've come to realize about the work. Here's a little side tangent, is that whenever you do start something, you'd have to go through the learning process. I don't care how much skill you have in one area. If you're going to move to a different area of that medium and take the skill, you're going to have to let go of a lot of the things. Otherwise, you'll always go back and things will start looking the same.

So if you're going to use a different set of tools and approach the material in a different way, it's going to have a naïveté in the beginning. And that naïveté is priceless because you can't go back and be naïve about something that you've learned about. So whenever we would start a series, there'd be this window of objects that would come early on and they would be funky, but funky in this wonderfully naïve, authentic way.

Because there's nothing worse than trying to be primitive when you're not. It just reeks of — I don't know. Anyways, so —

MS. RIEDEL: Artifice, maybe.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. So this is what would happen. And this is what happened with these early pieces and they had a funkiness about their characters and I started to like them. And then it got to the point where we could delineate any face. You could make a delineation in origin between northern Kaesong and South Korea. It's pretty crazy, because we got so specific with the tools and that sort of thing.

And then, of course — that's the evolution of the work. That's the true evolution. But to answer your question in the beginning there, that's an example of how a series starts but doesn't — you have to start somewhere, but it's going to be — those first starts were so kind of funky and false and you just have to say, okay, this isn't going to work. We're just going to go do this.

And then the complication of how you would display these pieces. This is where Jonny and his work with the

stands became really incredible. He'd done all that stuff with the larger installation, *Cache* and things, but for the Man Adorned series, the way he would have to get these heads suspended up over either their necklaces or their breastplates or whatever, and then to get them to be life-size, to stand up, to be stable, to be functional, where you could take them apart and move them, was phenomenal. So having that freedom to do these pieces was unbelievable.

And to think that that entire series was all produced in an eight-month period. I look back on it; I can't believe how hard we worked and what we got done. Again, it was because of the people that I had. I would make these pieces and I would say to Jonny, can you stand this up? And he would look at it and he goes, I don't think I can do that. And I'd say, well, don't worry about it, you don't have to. And of course then he'd take the dang thing home and he'd figure it out.

It's the same thing with getting the piece cold-worked in a certain way and then all the tattooing that we do in the coldworking process and the things that Rik [Allen] was figuring out. And it just — it was a great evolution. And asking Karen [Willenbrink-Johnsen] to make 4,000 feathers in glass and things like that. And everybody just would rise to the occasion.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting, because I think that ties directly into one of the questions on the list that we have marching — your career is about the working process. And so what I've just heard you describe is a pretty good description of the working process. It sounds like you would work for eight months and then take four off and that you would always start with something new.

MR. MORRIS: Tried to —

MS. RIEDEL: A technical challenge or something that was just not familiar, but that was an essential or an important way to begin.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, and when you say "start with something new," you just basically — it wasn't so much that as not do the same thing over again. That was more the rule, because you could never get attached. You'd go in and you start to do things and you just — they all look stupid. So you might throw away everything you'd work on for the first three weeks or six weeks or whatever.

But the point is, is that you just didn't want to go to that same place again. And then the season would end and that would be the force of nature that would say, okay, well, this is done. Unless — unless — we were really keen on it and we really wanted to go back and elaborate on it more and work on it more and have its life sort of continue. But more often than not, we'd work so intently for that time period that you'd almost burn out on it a bit. So that's what would happen.

MS. RIEDEL: And was it somehow essential to always have those four months off?

MR. MORRIS: Well, it was essential because since I never owned a studio — I used the Pilchuck Glass School [Stanwood, WA] as my studio. When the school would come into work, we were out of there. We had to be.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I see.

MR. MORRIS: So it was mandatory that we stopped.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, so you had a very limited window in which to work, eight months, and then you had to be done.

MR. MORRIS: Right. And we had to pack everything up and move it all away. Yes, you wouldn't have that stuff hanging around anymore.

MS. RIEDEL: And you've said that you never wanted to have a studio of your own. Is there a reason?

MR. MORRIS: Well, no, there was a time when I did want to have a studio and actually I went through great lengths to try to build one very near Pilchuck. And it turned into a multiyear battle over zoning with the neighborhood.

Anyways, we actually won and could have built the studio, but by the time the whole process finished, I realized, why do I want this? Why do I want this empire? It's just going to be like having a rocket ship running in my backyard. I like not working all the time. I like the group dynamic that we have. I don't like duplicating all the resources. It doesn't make sense. This place sits there, I don't. We might as well use it. I know the facility really well. It's a great creative site. It's never going to be — whatever I build is never going to be as good as this.

And what I realized is all the controversy in the neighborhood, everybody was so afraid that they were going to lose their peace and we were going to hire black people and whatever the hell they thought. No, I'm using that as a metaphor, but people get so afraid of, oh my God, he's going to have people hired there. It's going to turn

into a factory. He's going to pollute the environment. Because they don't understand. They don't understand.

So having to go through all that, I just realized, that's a headache. That's not what I mean this for. So, yes, I never had a glass studio; never had a glass studio.

MS. RIEDEL: Then when you were off for four months, would you be here? You'd be in Hawaii?

MR. MORRIS: Be traveling, either here in Mazama or in Hawaii or some place, just playing. I call it play. For me it's just living, just having a really active quality of life.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you find that directly or indirectly that fed back into the work?

MR. MORRIS: Absolutely. Being so interested in nature and man's relationship to it, if I would travel and see things, it would resonate — that language would always resonate back and how others might see the natural world and have it manifest through objects in their lives. So that would, in turn, stimulate me to go and try something, look at something, do some research in an area, and that would spawn a body of work pretty simply, yes, whether it'd be Mesoamerican-based or Polynesian-based or African, or whatever. I was never loyal to any epoch or people. I'll steal anybody's ideas.

MS. RIEDEL: You're in good company. [Laughs.]

MR. MORRIS: I don't believe anybody is the author of anything anyways.

MS. RIEDEL: And your work does have a very multicultural fusion to it. I think it was Tina Oldknow or someone who I think said it so beautifully, it was, it's not in art historical reference to a specific culture or art history, but it is more a fusion or an essence of man and the relationship to nature, something that you just said earlier too, that really comes out in the work. So if there's a cultural reference it's in that aspect, rather than cultural-specific.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, as I said, it makes us all closer because it's a resonance that we all feel. I believe that things that strike us on an intuitive level are always the most profound. I think we think too much. It's nice when we are just captivated and comfortable. I'm not interested in trying to shock people. I don't require people to think outside themselves. There are certain things that people see, whether it'd be an animal or a form or a landscape or something, that creates a level of opening and peace and non-thought. That, to me, is that first thing that has to happen to become receptive. So that's the way I want to live my life. That's what interests me, is those things.

Granted, some of them are associated with certain emotions, like, for example if you're swimming with sharks, there's a very different, intuitive thing that happens there that gets also — it gets bound to learned fears and that sort of thing, but basically it still always resonates on a very deep kind of collective unconscious level. And *that* is the language that I'm interested in. That is why multicultural aspects, objects, ceremonies — that's our language. That's our shared common experiences. Eating, for example — utilitarian objects are so great that way, because we all — the hearth is the center of our lives and so you can walk in any kitchen around the world and you can relate. Some people might have a phobia about a little bit of dirt or what might be on the hearth as far something to eat, but still it resonates. And it always has a space to come in.

So you take something like that and all of a sudden, you've got a great subject matter to work with. You could say to yourself, okay, I just want to work with — I want to work with things of the kitchen around the world. And you could come up with objects. And, my God, it's infinite. It's like there's no shortage of form and material and use. And yet, as broad-based as it is, it resonates with damn near everybody. So you can't lose. It's not rocket formula. It's not the cure for cancer. This is just — this is kitchen. This is cookware.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, because I was thinking about your work over the past couple of days and one other thing that came to mind was functionality. And I thought — when I think of your work, I think of the importance of function, not because the work is in any way functional, but because it somehow references that.

MR. MORRIS: Right. And that's an interesting point, too, because that's one of the things that I — when I started working with the wood in Hawaii, that's what I love. It's, like, oh, man, this is great — I can *use* this stuff. I can make, like, bowls and salad tubs and it's really great. I can bang it around. It's not going break.

Yes, so that's fun to actually have things that we use. Because I love that commonality and it is ironic that here I am, making it out of a material that is about as useless as it comes because it's so fragile on so many levels. But it's the subject matter that we're talking about. And, yes, that was — the subject matters is really good metaphor, utilitarian.

MS. RIEDEL: And I think everybody can relate to it, if not consciously, then intuitively, which probably resonates — works better for you and your purposes anyway.

MR. MORRIS: It does. You tell yourself — it's more funny because you tell yourself, well, this is honest. This is a nice honest subject matter. But then again, we're talking about making this stuff and you put it in these galleries. And you put these ridiculous prices on it. And you want people to stroll through with their — look at the stuff and view it on, again, literally and figuratively, on a pedestal. So it is a little ironic that way.

MS. RIEDEL: I want to circle us back around to — we started to talk a little bit about travel. You've travelled a lot. I think you're in Alaska early on and that was maybe an inspiration for some of the early narwhal and tusk pieces. You've talked about Guatemala. You've mentioned many different tribes already in the course of this hour so far. Are there particular places that you can point to that have been especially instrumental or significant in your evolution or the evolution of the work, if not directly, then indirectly or as a group?

MR. MORRIS: No, I can't because — every time I go to a place — and now when you say that, I think about South America, Mesoamerica, Polynesia, Africa, these places. That's the wonderful thing about them, is they're all — they have their issues of beauty and humanity that's lovely and painful at the same time. You see the details, the details in the sense of what nation or which culture is struggling or impoverished, or riddled with war. And then always amongst that you have that human condition of kindness, of welcoming, of love of life, caring for one another, respect for the world. So you have it everywhere because it's the human condition.

So I've never had a favorite. There's ones that I feel a little more at home with. I'd say Mesoamerica, because I'm very comfortable there. Living in Hawaii has made me much more comfortable with the Polynesian culture, though that's quite a bit different in the sense that it's — there's more of an isolation there. I think the fact that I've got some Mexican in me makes me a little more comfortable in Mexico or South America.

But I — and wherever, people are kind. The whole European aspect is a little strange for me because that's been so civilized for so long. It's a bit more removed from the natural world. And I personally like people that are just open and friendly. I wave to darn near everybody and say hello to everybody. There's cultures where that is accepted and then there's cultures where people go, why is he looking at me? [Laughs.]

So if I go to a place where they're asking why I'm looking at them, I usually don't get along quite so well there. I'll still have a good time, but it won't be a place that I will tend to revisit.

MS. RIEDEL: I think about your forms, though. And I definitely — Mesoamerica comes immediately to mind, I think that's sort of traditional Moche spout from Peru and I think of certainly Mazorca and these pieces. So it seems — and then I think of course of the Egyptian urns. Have you been to Egypt?

MR. MORRIS: I haven't been to Egypt. No, I haven't spent much time in the Middle East at all.

MS. RIEDEL: But the forms almost seem to be related more to the travel, or maybe it's more of an intuitive or indirect sense of that?

MR. MORRIS: We have so many resources, immediate resources, as far as books and documentaries and that sort of thing. Of course, that's all great, but then again, like I said, it transcends that. And besides, whenever you go to a place, you're always going to bring a certain amount of your own self with it. You never get a true, pure view of another culture. It's always filtered. And I realize that I do that. I try not to, but then again, I can't deny that aspect.

But like I said, if it's based on this sort of friendliness, on this welcoming, on this exchange, that's when it really starts to resonate. And if you're with some — if, let's say, you're down in Peru and you're travelling around down there. And the Quechua Indians and the way they related to the land; or Mexico, you talk about corn. They have the *chocl*o down in Peru, which is a certain form of corn. And that was — it was completely honored. It was revered. They would sculpt huge stone monoliths to it.

And yet — and then you go there and you eat it and you share — and of course the *chicha* that you drink, however it's served, in a multitude of ways, whether it's ground or that sort of thing, it just — it resonates through the culture. And it's fun to pick these things out that you can identify with. They transcend the language and they transcend the custom because it's real. You can share in that.

People used to say, do you speak the language? And I go, you know, I'm not really good with languages and to tell you the truth — but don't you want to know what they're saying? I was, like, people kind of say the same thing everywhere you go. They all talk about the same stuff. It's petty gossip in most cases or the weather. [Laughs.] It's always fun to hear about somebody's family history, this and that, but really it's — most conversation is pretty puny and mundane. And then if it gets too philosophical, then it's all bullshit.

Maybe that's my rationalization for being lazy about languages, but I can still go and have a meal with a family and share some real, authentic time. And sometimes the language doesn't — would actually get in the way. But when you're sharing that and you're appreciating somebody's life through a smile and a nod and an enjoyment

of their meal, it's really a great way to honor someone's life. Then in turn, they become very interested in why — why does this guy like that so much? What is it in their culture?

And then you have this sort of rudimentary exchange of culture. And you realize you look for the similarities, not the differences. It's just a great way to bond with people.

MS. RIEDEL: And I would imagine, too, that you, while you're in these different places, you're looking at the objects that they're using, like what they're surrounded by, and you're looking at the natural landscape and how they're interacting with that. So it's not even always what's being said, but what's actually going on.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, and what's wonderful about that is — well, it's sort of like what I would say about the Man Adorned series. We are shaped by the land. We're shaped by our environment, whether you create a stronger eyebrow because of bright sun, or dark skin. These are aspects that when you see the way people live, that's what their lives are. Whether it's very arid or whether it's very tropical, and materials used; and again, it all resonates off of the environment and the natural world. So the type of clothing, the colors, it all somehow makes sense on this really deeper level. And it gets back to the same old thing. You want to be able to experience those because you have, since we're part of the natural world, it resonates within us. Then you can feel closer to it. You can feel connected, not always so separate.

When I go to Burma, I'll wear a *longyi* because that's what they wear there and it makes sense. I don't need to wear my pants. I would rather do that because I want to feel what it's like. I don't want to just go. I want to wear what their costumes there. These guys — everybody wears one. The women wear. The men wear. They fold in different ways. They wrap in different ways. And you can walk through water with it. You can swim in it. You just wrap it up here and there and tuck it in there. And it makes sense. And they go, that's really cool; you're going to wear it. It would hardly fit me because the Burmese are only about five feet tall, but that's okay. They're just a little short. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: When you were young, when you were growing up, did you spend a — well, I don't imagine you did — but did you spend any time in archeological or ethnographic museums?

MR. MORRIS: Not in that sense. Because of the Native American population that lived in the area where I was raised in California, there were artifacts and there were sites. And that fascinated me. That always fascinated me. My mom loved the Indians and so we would spend time — we would go to the mission and — it would be explained about the way they lived beforehand. And there was actually — I did grow up with a museum right there at the mission.

MS. RIEDEL: This is the mission in Carmel [CA]?

MR. MORRIS: The Carmel Mission Basilica, one of the famous Franciscan missions. And they have a museum there. And so — I was raised in that museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, I didn't know that.

MR. MORRIS: And actually, to tell you the truth, I never even thought about it until now, but I can't believe how much time — because I would much rather spend time — the complex was, you had the mission, the school, and the museum, all there in this one complex. And I had to go to Catholic school in the first grade and, of course, I hated it. And I didn't like going to church. So I'd always rather spend time in the museum on the compound. If I had to sneak off and be anywhere, I'd go to the museum.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MORRIS: And they had this great — all the weavings and the stone tools — and then of course the museum would sort of evolve to when the colonials came. And then — this is what broke my heart, is that I never liked that whole colonial Spanish stuff. Then you'd see the way the sort of life got sort of strained out of the Native Americans and then put into this colonialism, the way their costume would change and the way they started to use — eat indoors and build structures and —

MS. RIEDEL: The Native Americans.

MR. MORRIS: The Native Americans. And how they were sort of absorbed.

MS. RIEDEL: This is when the Spanish first came up.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, yes. And, of course, then they tried to convert them to Catholicism.

So to me, I remember in the museum, the way it would take on this lineage — of what was here before and then when the Spanish showed up and I'd look at this in the museum and I'd go, that looked so much cooler the way

the Indians lived before they got here.

So that obviously resonated and then I came up with my opinions and — all that and have lived with that ever since.

MS. RIEDEL: What opinions did you come up with?

MR. MORRIS: Well, basically that there were people that were living here for thousands of years and then you take their lifestyle and you tell them it's no good. And then you don't let them live that way anymore. It's very simple. It's a very simple concept and it breaks your heart because you don't like it being done to you. Basically that's what you get as a kid.

So when you're growing, you ally yourself with that. You go oh, God, I want to be a wild Indian and I don't want — my mom is a frickin' Spaniard, she tells me to wash my hands for dinner. So that sort of thing. Yes, so that sort of stuff sets itself up early on.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. So we'd want to go off — and so my brothers and sisters and I, we'd go off and look around. We knew that there were some little archaeological sites and we'd go play in them.

MS. RIEDEL: What were they? Do you remember there were shamans or were they —

MR. MORRIS: Oh, yes, there were CA Indian sites, and a lot of pestle and mortar sites and there were some old stones looked like they were structures or something like that. And then you'd find artifacts. You'd find obsidian chips or arrow points or that sort of thing.

So you just imagined this great life, this story and all of this abundance. I mean, Carmel, California, is an incredibly beautiful area; Mediterranean climate. And you try to imagine all the wildlife back there then. And the sea is just full of — the river is running full of fish; you know, that whole romance, that you want to believe in paradise.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think we've done a really nice job of an extended introduction here. And this is moving us nicely back into early biographical information. So let's cover that now.

MR. MORRIS: How about we take a little break?

MS. RIEDEL: Let's do that and then we'll come back with the biographical. Good.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: So we were going to go back and cover a little early biographical material. You were born — actually born in Carmel.

MR. MORRIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: In 1957, August?

MR. MORRIS: In 1957, July.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Oh, that's coming up

MR. MORRIS: It's coming up.

MS. RIEDEL: And you had siblings — where did you fall in line — were you oldest, youngest?

MR. MORRIS: Youngest, the baby, yes. I was born on my oldest brother's fifteenth birthday. So that's our spread. So two brothers and two sisters.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And their names?

MR. MORRIS: Starting from the oldest, Tom — we call him Tomàs — my sister Mimi, Michelle, my brother Jimmy, and sister Janet.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were your parents' names? Your mom was Katherine?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, Katherine, K, and I actually called her Mola.

MS. RIEDEL: Mola?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, for sunfish. I called her Mola— and my dad was Tom.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Mola. Is that — that's not "sunfish" in Spanish?

MR. MORRIS: Well, it actually is. There's a large fish that is called the mola mola and it means sunfish. And I don't know I came up with that name, but for some reason Mom, Mola, it just — my mom loved the sun, so.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's perfect. That's perfect. And so you said from really a young age you spent a lot of time at the mission or some time at the mission; and then also sometimes it sounds just like hiking around in the hills over at Carmel.

MR. MORRIS: Well, my father had me — all of us back hiking ever since we could walk. He was a hiker and a climber and a mountaineer. So he had me on the end of a rope when I was 10 years old. And he had me —

MS. RIEDEL: Really, rappelling?

MR. MORRIS: Climbing, all kinds of stuff. I grew up doing a lot of climbing. There was a wall right in Yosemite and climb it all Half Dome, El Cap [El Capitan] all that stuff before the age of 22 years old.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MORRIS: So I was very comfortable in the outdoors, very comfortable in the woods. We'd go on long hikes. I'd go out into the mountains by myself for weeks at a time when I was 15 years old, 14 years old.

MS. RIEDEL: Just in the back country, camping.

MR. MORRIS: The Ventana Wilderness or up in Yosemite or that sort of thing, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And your parents were perfectly comfortable when you did that?

MR. MORRIS: Well, of course, my dad was very supportive. My mom, she was my mom. She didn't want anything to happen to us. I was doing a lot of hard-core climbing. I just kind of wouldn't tell her. I'd just say we're going up in the mountains and I'd call her when I got out and that sort of thing, because she was a mom and she'd worry. But we always grew up doing those sorts of things, surfing and climbing around. So we were regular kids that way.

MS. RIEDEL: And did your dad, did he look at nature the way — did you learn part of that from him, do you think?

MR. MORRIS: My dad looked at nature in a very quiet way. He loved the natural world and he loved plants and he loved rocks. We were the kind of household where we went on a family hike up into the Sierra Nevada. We all got to ride home sitting on top of boulders in the back of the station wagon. So it was how big a rock we could all get into the back of the car as a family. And I just — I hated it, of course, that aspect of it. But he was very keen on that. But he wasn't philosophical about that. He was very quiet that way. But he loved — it was his own little world, his rocks and his plants and going off into the mountains. He loved going off into the mountains with his friends and climbing and hiking, being there.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? And what was his profession.

MR. MORRIS: He's a doctor.

MS. RIEDEL: He was medical doctor.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, internal medicine, cardiology, yes. He and my mom divorced when I was 10. So the separate time that I spent with my father was always in the mountains. If I wanted to see him, it was because he wanted to go out in the mountains.

MS. RIEDEL: Got you. And then, when you were in school, did you gravitate towards art classes? Did you do a lot of art in elementary school?

MR. MORRIS: My mom was quite a good painter.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: I wish she'd pursued it more. She spent a bit of time painting, but it wasn't something that she was doing full time because she couldn't make any money off it. So she worked as a clerk in the court. But I was involved in the arts ever since I started school and was very supported by her, my drawing, painting, ceramics,

that sort of thing. And I had some great teachers that were very encouraging to me.

MS. RIEDEL: In elementary school even?

MR. MORRIS: Even in elementary school. And in high school —

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember their names?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, Ken Wiese was my elementary school art and craft teacher. And then in high school, I had a guy named Lloyd Baskerville, who ran the ceramics department. He was probably the most — one of the most influential people in my life because I hated school and academics with such a passion. And this little ceramics studio that was there at the high school was a separate building from the campus. And —

MS. RIEDEL: So did you say you hated school, but academics was a passion?

MR. MORRIS: No, I said I hated school and I hated academics. But I hated academics *with* a passion. [Laughs.] That's what I said. And they had this ceramics facility and I would — I'd do anything to be down there. So that's where I kind of spent my time. And Lloyd was — he had degrees in English and mathematics, that sort of thing, but he taught ceramics. So I got tutored in the other disciplines, in the academic disciplines because I showed some promise in my ceramics ability and I'd do anything to be down there. I helped him prepare clay and clean the facility and do whatever needed to be done just so I could be there.

That's why he gave me a key of the facility, when I was a sophomore in high school. So from, basically, my sophomore to my senior year, I lived down there. I was his assistant. The way it worked on my academic record was since he was tutoring me, I got to take the classes from him that I could get away with not taking up in main campus, plus being his teaching assistant. So there was my ceramics and then there was what was called an advanced aquatics class for physical education. And between the two, I managed to get As in all those. I managed to escape school with a C-plus. It was great. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So you're either in the studio or in the pool.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. When I had to go up to the campus, it was always — I always failed miserably, but it saved my life, I'd have to say. And he was the one that prepared me. He said, you will want to go to college and you will want to study art. I just thought I didn't. And he's the one that told me. He said, you need to take these courses on how to take these SAT tests, because I couldn't take these tests. He said, you need to learn the skill because you won't get in any colleges unless you do this.

So he really helped. And he would drive us — there was three of us students — myself and these two other gals he took under his wing. One day a month, we would go up to Golden Gate Park and go to the de Young Museum and look at the ceramics up there and have tea in the [Japanese] tea garden. He would take us to certain exhibitions, that sort of thing. And also in the meantime, with every trip, somebody would get to drive the car because we all had our learner's permits and wanted to drive. And he taught us about food. And he taught us about music because we got to listen to music in the ceramics studio. So we were learning all kinds of things from this guy. It was fantastic.

And we talked a lot of philosophy. So I was fortunate to have a mentor like that. And —

MS. RIEDEL: What sort of philosophy?

MR. MORRIS: He was a big advocate of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell and Nietzsche. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. In the school, over at ceramics?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, this is in high school. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you doing wheel work, slab work?

MR. MORRIS: I did both, but I really loved to be on the wheel. But we worked on all kinds of things. And there were —

MS. RIEDEL: Mostly functional?

MR. MORRIS: A lot of it was functional, but a lot of it was decorative as well. I had a group of friends that were graduates from Lloyd Baskerville's high school and they continued to go off and do ceramics professionally. And they had these wood-fired kilns. I would — Lloyd would take me along with him when they would do this what they call Bizen firings, which are the multi-day wood firings.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure, when was that?

MR. MORRIS: This was up in Carmel Valley.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: So we would go out — and the season before, we would find a big bull pine, cut it down, and cure the wood over a season. And then we'd dig our clay. And then we'd stack this kiln. And we fired it and it'd be a multi, multi-day process.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. MORRIS: The preparation took weeks and weeks over a year period to do all this. Then we'd do these firings. And these firings were very ceremonial. They'd go for 70 to 110 hours.

MS. RIEDEL: Were these big pit firings or did you actually build the kiln?

MR. MORRIS: It was a built brick kiln with a dual firebox. So I got to develop these relationships with people in high school. That was phenomenal. And I got to see how these kids had graduated from Lloyd several years prior and how they were living their lives professionally and as artists. So I saw that it was possible. And even when I graduated from high school, I continued to work with them once in a while. I'd go stay with them. We'd do the firings and that sort of thing. But then, I of course went off.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you remember their names?

MR. MORRIS: Yes. Bo and Terrie Kvenild. Kvenild with a K.

And then, going off to school, of course I wanted to emulate that life somehow and sort of tried and continued to try to work professionally as a ceramic — but then got involved in glass.

MS. RIEDEL: And while you were in Carmel, did you spend much time in the Carmel galleries? Were there many galleries at the time?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, there were, but they didn't really interest me very much. Most of the work was the sort of seascape painting and you see that ad nauseam and you just — enough is enough. But then of course, you got great photographers — Edward Weston, I went to school with one of his granddaughters, a good friend of mine. Cole's [Westin] daughter. Carmel is an artist community. So I called it the golden ghetto. There was a certain level of permissiveness there that we had growing up and, of course, the nature is beautiful. So we got to live the dream, traveling. Of course, we complained as kids about wherever we were because you always want to get out. So then you'd ditch school and you'd hitchhike down the coast and you'd surf or you'd hike up some canyon and smoke a joint and whatever. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds pretty ideal.

MR. MORRIS: It was pretty ideal, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did you then end up in Chico [California State University, Chico]?

MR. MORRIS: Well, I — let's see. Chico, first of all was one of the schools that I could get into because of my academic standing. Secondly, I went and looked at several departments, schools, and their ceramic departments.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. What about ceramics in particular was so interesting to you over painting and drawing? Was it the 3D?

MR. MORRIS: Well, it was the all-encompassing process. It was the complete process. I liked working with the clay. I liked having the space to work in. It was sort of a wonderful community of people. So I felt that that's what it was going to be anywhere I went off and worked. I didn't realize that a college department was going to be much more institutional than this was. And I was a little bit shocked by that, little disappointed. But I sought out people and I actually found a group of people up in Chico, where — Dick Hotchkiss up in Green Valley, would go up and did some wood firings with him.

So it was really great. Sort of what I learned there actually found its path out of — into the northern lands of California and that area, up in the foothills of the Sierras.

And there was a man up there, Vernon Patrick, who — a ceramics teacher who was very supportive of me and —

MS. RIEDEL: Did he teach at Chico?

MR. MORRIS: He did. He was an instructor there. And then he ended up — the glass teacher there, who I did not get along with at all, never took the course from him, he wouldn't allow me in his class — he took a sabbatical and Vernon Patrick took over the glass program for a year and let me in. That's where I had my first experience with glass. And I was completely enamored, of course.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: Actually, I shouldn't say — it wasn't my first experience. My first experience with glass was in the Monterey Bay area, a friend of mine who graduated prior from Lloyd Baskerville was running the crafts department at the Fort Ord [Monterey Bay, CA] military base. And —

MS. RIEDEL: The crafts department at the Fort Ord military base?

MR. MORRIS: That's right. The crafts department is mostly attended by the wives. And so they had some ceramics. He was teaching ceramics there. Well, he got his hands on an old glass furnace that came from San Jose State from Dr. Fritz. And he set this thing up and he calls me up and he says, Bill, you've got to come over and try this. I was — I think I was 16 at the time, had a pony tail down to my butt. I hitchhike up to Fort Ord and I'm coming on a base, right? And I have to get through the base and the guys are going, what the — what do you want? I said, well, my buddy Mark is teaching there at the crafts department. I want to go in. Anyway, so I went in there and I blew my first piece of glass. And it was something else. It was amazing, this experience working with molten glass.

MS. RIEDEL: What specifically about it was so extraordinary?

MR. MORRIS: Well, the fact — first of all, there was the fire, which I loved, which you can have with the ceramic kilns. But it was the qualities of this material, this viscosity, and this gooey-ness, and yet there was this excitement and this fear of the material, but there was also the properties of it, the elasticity and the clarity and the crystalline nature of it. It was just amazing. It was very exciting.

And so that was my — I went there twice and did that and that was my experience until — so glass was something that I always wanted to do and then finally got that opportunity at Chico with Vernon Patrick.

I worked there and then realized I wanted to go elsewhere to continue study. And I wanted to go somewhere where they had a glass department. So I —

MS. RIEDEL: What was Chico lacking?

MR. MORRIS: Chico was California and I wanted out of California. I was feeling frustrated and restless. So I got into my car, which is a little 128 Fiat sedan, with my 120-pound dog and drove north to Ellensburg [WA] to check out this facility. When I got to the campus, it sits in the Kittitas Valley. And up behind the valley is the Stuart Range, mountains. I remember getting out of the car. I needed to move my body because I'd been sitting in the car for 10 hours and going out and running around the track and looking off at this incredible range of snowcapped mountains. And being a mountaineer and a climber, I knew that there was a big plus right there for this place.

So that actually probably made the decision that I was going to be there because I just loved the fact that I was out there, it was very — there was a lot of space.

So then I explored the department there and saw that they had a glass department. They had a ceramics department. They had a sculpture department. I just thought, this is new. I don't know anybody. So I ended up attending there.

MS. RIEDEL: Who was teaching there then?

MR. MORRIS: Well, this was interesting thing. It was sort of like what it happened at Chico. The glass instructor had just died. Michael Whitley had been killed in an automobile accident. And Gary Galbraith, who was the woodworking and sculpture instructor was handling the glass department. He knew nothing about glass. So — and I had taken a year's worth at Chico, so I knew a little something.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: And I was eager to be there. I was Joe Friday. I would have done anything to be there. So I started helping him out. Then in the meantime, I was taking my other courses and I was taking some photography and some sculpture and sort of prerequisites. And Gary Galbraith got a call from an ex-student of his, Stan Price, who was the bursar at the Pilchuck Glass School. And Stan said, you got anybody over there that would come over

here early and start helping us with the maintenance, because we need a truck driver for the summer and we need somebody that can do some maintenance, ditch digging, and stuff prior to that? So Gary says, Bill, I got this call. You might be interested in this. And I thought to myself, oh, my God, the Pilchuck Glass School. I've heard about this place. I could never afford to be there as a student. Are you kidding me? I will do it.

So I headed off to Pilchuck —

MS. RIEDEL: This was '77, '78?

MR. MORRIS: Had to be '77, I guess. And I headed off to Pilchuck and I arrived — and of course the school wasn't in session. I was the only one up there, except for this other guy who was doing some work on the furnaces. And I get up there, I meet Stan. He puts me in this little teeny, dilapidated wooden cottage. It's about the size of a large bathroom. He says, this is where you're going to be living. There's no water. There's no toilet, nothing. It's primitive. You come down to the lodge, you get your meals. And then he says, okay, this is your first task.

He hands me a shovel and he says, we're going to put some new propane tanks over here and we need you to dig this 70-foot ditch for the propane. Oh, by the way, the ditch has got to be four feet deep. And it was, like, — [laughs] so for the next four days I dug this ditch. We had — there were roots and stuff cutting through. But I'd worked a lot on doing that sort of thing growing up, so I was pretty comfortable doing it.

And it was great. I loved it. It was amazing.

It was one of those places where you get up on the site, the foothills of the Cascades. It's all green and lush, very different experience for me, a lot of rain, but it was just — I was just thrilled at the opportunity to be there.

And then people would start to come. Other staff members would start to show up, few by few. And I think we had — I got there, I think, three weeks before the session started, so more people started to show up.

My job was basically maintenance, which encompassed cleaning toilets and truck driving, which meant I had to get in the truck and pick up supplies. And I didn't know Seattle. I had never driven in that area. They'd say, you've got to go this and this address. There's no GPS. There's no cell phone. There's no nothing. It's a map. I knew how to read a map. My dad taught me how to read maps. So I could find these areas. And it was also to pick up faculty from the airport.

So that's what I did — a lot of days, I'd be driving off, gone every day, and then I'd come back and then I'd hang around the furnace at night. If I could help somebody, I'd pick up a blowpipe and help or whatever. But I didn't have any blowing privileges, of course, because I was on staff and I was at the bottom of the staff totem pole.

So anyways, I did that for a summer and part of my job was to pick faculty up from the airport. And of course, this is an old story, but Dale [Chihuly] was one of the people I had to pick up. I picked him up from the airport and I'd heard all these rumors about the guy. I had seen a show of his at the Seattle Art Museum a year prior, and he'd done his Tabac series baskets and he'd put them on these metal tables in the Seattle Art Museum.

I thought it was pretty interesting stuff — but it wasn't round. It was all wrinkly and kind of flat. So I wasn't crazy about that, but I'd heard all these rumors about the guy. He was dynamic and — but he had other people do his work. And I thought, oh, what a phony. But I kept my mouth shut. I picked him up from the airport. And we didn't say much on the way up. But we talked a little bit. I picked him up at midnight. By the time we got up to the school, it was about one-thirty in the morning.

And the studio ran all night long. So there were these two really cute girls out there blowing glass. And Dale walks — we walk under the pad and Dale kind of walks over it because he was kind of hitting on these girls and he said, do you need a little help. And he picks up this blowpipe and he gathered some glass. He blows this little piece of glass without using any tools. And I thought, this guy is amazing. This guy knows what he's doing. He's got a great relationship with this material. And I said, I understand that you use help with your work. Is there any way I can help you? And he says, well, I'm going to start work here in about four hours, which means you've got to be on the pad at five in the morning. He says, if you show up, you're on the team. And I showed up and worked with him for 10 years straight, never missed a day of work and never took a dime in pay.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. We had great, an incredible working relationship all those 10 years.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was the right place at the right time.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, it was a phenomenal — a lining-up event and —

MS. RIEDEL: Would you describe that relationship as any sort of apprenticeship?

MR. MORRIS: Completely. That's what I saw it as. That's why I didn't want to be paid for it. I was in a situation where — when I was going to school in Ellensburg, I lived out of garbage cans. My buddy Jonny Ormbrek taught me how to eat for free out of the Albertson's and the Safeway Dumpsters. I didn't really need much of anything and I never cared. I never — I didn't — it was a different era back then. It was cool if you had a car and you could get away with not having insurance. So basically it didn't take any money to live. It was all about the experience. And being up there and involved with the school, you got fed. So you didn't need anything but some clothing. And of course you needed to acquire some tools, that sort of thing. But other than that, there was no need for that. I saw this opportunity as something where —- this was amazing. All this stuff was just unfolding in front of me with this — meeting these people up there, Dale, and being at Pilchuck.

I was just, whatever — I'd go along with anything. For some reason, it just made sense. And then I was Dale's main assistant. Then the crew started to grow. And he started to pay people and that sort of thing. I just liked our relationship. If we traveled off to do a workshop or something, Dale would pay for my expenses. We traveled off to Europe every year and we worked across the country. We'd go back to RISD to work. So he would pay for all my expenses, but I just never received a salary from the guy.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. For 10 years?

MR. MORRIS: For 10 years.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a long time.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And because of that experience, I would think that you, better than many artists, most artists, could comment on the difference or the strengths of learning a skill or a craft, a technique, a way of working in the arts outside of a university setting, working in a school that was specifically focused on craft. What would you say? Do you see particular strengths to that situation or particular weaknesses or —

MR. MORRIS: Well, an institution — any institution is going to set itself up with the structure. And of course, the more established an institution is, the more established the structure. Pilchuck was new. It was just — it was Dale's brainchild. And so it was very open-ended that way. We were really limited on the facilities that we had, but it forced you — you're resourceful.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: I went through the ranks of all the jobs there, and one was learning to be the technician up there. And I had very rudimentary skills in welding and plumbing and electrical and that sort of stuff. You just had to figure the stuff out as you went. And the school didn't have the budget to go buy any of this equipment. You had to always — a lot of problem solving, problem solving. And it was really, really fun and exciting. So you learned a lot of great skills that way.

And, of course, you go to a university and they're not going to tell you to fix equipment. They're going to bring somebody in. So you don't learn this entire aspect of the process of it. And that's what Pilchuck was. It was ground zero. The only thing we didn't do — I even built my own structure to live in. The only thing we didn't do is hunt down and kill our own food. Other than that, it was, you guys, we're on our own. So it was really great.

MS. RIEDEL: And when you say you worked as his apprentice more or less for 10 years, was that just during the summer months?

MR. MORRIS: No. [Laughs.] What happened was, of course, I found this to be far more engaging than staying in university. So I left school. And because Dale was saying, I'm going to be going off to Austria to be working this winter, would you be willing to come to Rhode Island to work? Or I've got to go to a workshop in New Orleans. So I just started traveling and working with the guy. And it got so that I worked with him probably — I don't know maybe four — well, there were summers which I worked for the school, which was four months out of the year. And then another three months traveling around, working with Dale. So that was a lot of time that was taken up by that.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, and then I tried to find little windows where I could do a little bit of work here and there for myself. And then it got so I could do that and making up pieces and just sell.

MS. RIEDEL: So when did you actually start to work on your own? Were you doing that in tandem all the way along?

MR. MORRIS: Well, when I started working in Ellensburg, I actually made pieces and I think I sold a few of them

there, 20 bucks here, 20 bucks there, sort of thing. I had actually sold some ceramic pieces prior. So I had sold some work. And that was my goal, was to make work to sell for a living.

MS. RIEDEL: And were these at little art fairs, were there little galleries?

MR. MORRIS: I did some art fairs. There were some galleries in Carmel that purchased some work. So yes, it just — it took a very natural course. Yes, exactly. I remember having a booth at my first art fair. I think it was in Chico. And sitting there and tussling off a vase or a bowl or a little sculpture or something.

MS. RIEDEL: And these were ceramic or glass or both?

MR. MORRIS: Ceramic pieces, there.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting. Okay. Let's see. If you were thinking about some of the really significant things you learned during that time as an apprentice, what would come to mind?

MR. MORRIS: I would say how to work with people. I would say how to keep people excited and enthused. You get a situation where there's a dynamic where you've got somebody that has a certain amount of power or ability or character, charisma to them. And it's magnetic. And you want to be around that. And you don't know what it is, so you come in with a very open mind. And you learn that that is the best thing to capitalize on, is that open mind with someone.

So when you work with other people, you — enthusiasm is worth its weight in gold. It produces creativity, dedication, contentedness, lots of things that you can't get with money. So that is something that needs to be kept abundant, is that enthusiasm and that excitement. And trying to assess aspects about people that they might not even know for themselves and you watch — you become really observant about, did the person like doing this project? Were they frustrated? Did it stifle them? Did it provoke them to challenge? And then what does a person need as a human being? What do they need to feel whole? What do they need to feel respected? Things like that, that's what I learned from Dale.

MS. RIEDEL: So that would have been, then, incredibly helpful when you began to assemble your own —

MR. MORRIS: Absolutely. Well, because as I worked with Dale, I started to get people that worked for me for Dale because the team grew. And I was his main gaffer. So as his main glass blower, I had to get more assistants. Then you would assign and I'd have to do that and then Dale, of course, would do it. Dale would oversee everything. But in being so close to him, we would talk about this and we'd work with it. And it was just — it was phenomenal. It was really great. He was really just naturally gifted with it.

MS. RIEDEL: So you could also begin to discern who did what especially well. And then when you were assembling —

MR. MORRIS: Yes, but he not only did it with the people that worked with him. He did it with the institutions that would show his work or educational facilities, or that sort of thing.

Dale would say to me — he would say, Bill, if you want to apply for a grant, he says, don't apply for one that's already out there. Write your own — and be sure to get it. Because first of all, you come up with something really interesting and it's something you're really good at and you will never have competition.

So those kind of philosophies were just — they were just pearls of wisdom. And just like I said — and this was where I saw — it wasn't so much, again, what we made, but it was the way we were living. We had this quality of life and it was incredibly free. We would make what we wanted to make. We'd experiment. We'd try this.

He had this great courage and he would — he would just say, just gather this up and just do it this way. And I would never do something like that; every gather was precious. He'd just say, no, no, no, throw that out. It was just — it was great to see it. It was really courageous. And I never saw anybody with that much courage that was allied with that much discipline to get something done.

I see people go out there and be cavalier and carefree, but that doesn't really amount to much. But with Dale, he was an opportunist. And during that experiment, he might catch some little aspect that would spark something that he liked and then all of a sudden he'd capitalize on that. But unless you were willing to be sort of unattached, you couldn't do it. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like there was a boldness and an experimental quality combined with a real rigorous discipline and technique.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, which he carried through every aspect of his life. Of course and he's still doing it today with his exhibitions, these crazy things he does, the bridges over Venice and all that sort of — the citadel in the

Middle East that he did, just all the things he keeps doing — projects in Dubai or Vegas or whatever, let's put it all and make a glass ceiling. He just — there are no rules. He just wrote his own book. He wrote his own grant.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. [Laughs.] Who do you point to or who do you think of as other influences as significant, along the lines of Chihuly?

MR. MORRIS: Well, he has a really amazing relationship with Italo Scanga and — [laughs] — these two guys were so amazing together and so — being that close to Dale, of course, I got very close to Italo. I remember being with him. We'd be working. Easter Sunday, we'd stop work and cook this great meal, and learning how to cook from Italo and Dale. You know, the great stories about different kinds of pasta and where they came from and grilling of a huge filet mignon and then drinking wine and go into museums and picking up girls. It was just — it was a whole life. And so as influences, they were huge.

And as I said, it wasn't just about the work. But when they would work and when I would look at their work, what resonated to me was not the object, but the manifestation of their lives through the objects. And that's what I loved. That's what I loved when Italo would start, like his Fear series. And he'd go out and he'd start cutting down all the branches that were for, to make these bodies for the stick figures. And to see that process and how it would excite the people that he was working with, to look for these things, and all of a sudden, everybody's looking around, oh, God, Italo, I saw this great branch for you. That sort of infectious enthusiasm that would grow out of this with these guys when they'd work with people.

Then we'd have these huge meals with all the crew, and the creativity in the kitchen was just as much as it was in the shop. And the way we'd clean the dishes. It was just all — it was all great. It was really a lot of fun. It was all fantastic. And it was just an amazing way of life.

So Italo was a big one, but other artists that — they were the most dynamic when it came to that sort of group work. But there were always artists that had very sort of, eccentric, strange ways of working with people, like guys like Dennis Oppenheim, who was manic-depressive and on his lithium and coming to the shop all moody. But these guys were like gods. They were big deals. And you watch how they approached to work and you watch them going through their sketchbooks and what they were thinking of and — it was amazing.

So another great mentor I consider is Judy Pfaff. All these people that I got to work with, I worked as what was called gaffer-in-residence or master gaffer at Pilchuck Glass School, which was a program that I actually kind of — well, me and Dale kind of started it because what we realized was we liked having these artists come that didn't have any relationship with glass. And yet we needed to give them some technical tools to work with.

So we created this program with the artists-in-residence and they would come and we would facilitate them in any way, shape, or form we could. And here it was, was trying to bring these ideas to glass that had never been looked at this way.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Like master printmaker idea —

MR. MORRIS: Completely, but bring a master in that had never printed in his life, never worked two-dimensionally, which we did the same thing with glass plates. We created that printing program. But this was so brilliant because the whole idea was to bring people to the material with a whole new set of ideas and explore the qualities of the material through their own ideas and not have to worry about the technical aspects, because glass is *so* technical.

So in working with people like these, you could see the way they would approach things. And it would be so left-field sometimes.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you give me an example, maybe with Judy Pfaff, was this one of the experiences that really —

MR. MORRIS: Well, yes — Judy came and she knew nothing about glass. She was more excited about going and finding giant driftwood roots, okay? That's what she was keen on. But then she started seeing the way these root forms would be suspended and she wanted this glass to sort of reflect this root quality up in these installations she was going to do. So she would say, well, do it like this. Blow this form and then can you split it open here?

She wasn't sure what she wanted because she needed to see how things happened. So you'd have to go out there and you'd just have to say, okay, I know how to blow this way, this way, and this way. But she wants something that I never made anything like this before. So I have to approach the material with a whole different feeling.

Let's say you go at the material with a certain tool, you're going to get a certain effect. So I would start using tools I'd never used before for different effects. And it would just have to — it would force me out of my box. It would really challenge me.

MS. RIEDEL: And you liked that.

MR. MORRIS: Well, it was a love-hate relationship, because you had a certain amount of loyalty or a certain amount of discipline with the material and you wanted it honored a certain way. And these people would come in with no respect for the material. And you want to be somebody too. They're the hotshots and you're just the lowly gaffer, right? So you want to throw your weight around a little bit too. So you needed to say a lot, Jesus, that's a bunch of bullshit. What are they doing, blah, blah, blah.

And yet sometimes the results would be quite astonishing and quite exciting and go into areas that nobody's ever seen before. It's, like, wow, it's really cool. We should do that again or we should do it like this. And so it was phenomenal. It was phenomenal.

And it really spurred — I think that that has done more for the glass movement than just about anything, because with this program going on during all the classes, you'd have the students and the instructors from all over the world that were glass artists, they were seeing this — this strange creative prostitution of the material that gave license for all kinds of things. And it would seep into the other disciplines. And not to mention they would see these other artists that were so dynamic and so interesting, real artists from the art world, not just glass people that wanted to be artists. We're talking — these people lived the life. They were the *capo de capo*.

MS. RIEDEL: Who else came, and when did the program start? Do you remember?

MR. MORRIS: I'm not very good with the dates and all that sort of stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: We can find that out.

MR. MORRIS: Like I said, Dennis Oppenheim, Donald Lipski — I'm trying to go through a list of names and I forget it. God, it was the guy who has the bunnies in the paintings, a New York guy. Jeff, he's really good. He'd been back for years. God, there're so many of these names and I don't know why they're all sitting in my mind.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm sure there's some way to find this.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, look them up. But it was a long, significant list — Maya Lin, a lot of people here. There were some really, really great people.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this when you first started thinking about installations?

MR. MORRIS: Well — I always — Judy did some amazing installation work and her installation work, probably I admired; her early installation work that I saw was something like I'd never seen before. And then for her to be able to actually start using some of that components in there, I saw, oh, my God this was a real installation work, truly.

And, yes, that made a lot of — it really had a big impact. But — why am I thinking of — see, I'm just — I'm so drawing a blank right now, but I'm trying to think of her name.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll take a break.

[Audio Break.]

MR. MORRIS: … and she kept coming back.

MS. RIEDEL: Kiki Smith, yes. Okay.

MR. MORRIS: Okay, yes, so Kiki kept coming back for years. And Kiki — she's big as it gets. And she would come in and she had this approach that was so impressive — she was off in her little world and she couldn't give a shit about who Kiki Smith was or — what she was — she just was enthused by the material. And she came in with that high voice of hers and she'd start, well, I want to make this embryo in this fluid because this glass is so fluid-like. But she's really, really provoking in what she comes up with and that sort of thing. And she came back year after year after year and worked and she just loved it.

And to be kind of endorsed by somebody like her, the material being endorsed, and to say this is a really great material, and really transcending the fact whether it was glass or anything else, it was just something that she loved to work in or something that she was keen on. That did a lot for us, all of us.

And, again, to be around other artists like that because really you don't get that opportunity in a lot of other materials. Let's say you're going to go work in bronze. That's very specific. You don't get very playful with bronze.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] I imagine not.

MR. MORRIS: The process is really, you've got to have some order to it. Glass was much more playful than that, at least in the beginning. It's so exploratory.

MS. RIEDEL: There certainly has been an ongoing art/craft bias in this country. You've traveled a lot. Did you find that as much in other cultures or is glass much more accepted as a medium — as a valid artistic medium, in Italy perhaps or —

MR. MORRIS: Well, in Italy, it has so much tradition. I used to say this thing to Dante Marioni about how the problem with Italian glass is it was steeped in tradition. And I think that that was a little bit of their shortcoming because the masters would come over here with their tremendous skill and they would see our — just fearlessness of the material — and it was sort of pathetic in our technological approaches, but once we saw what they could do and we coupled that with our exploratory aspects, they wanted to come back over. And there was tremendous exchanges in all of that with the Italians and the Swedes and the Czechs.

And again, Dale was really the one that got all that going, bringing those guys over and just exchanging all that tremendous information. And it really worked both ways because then the Italians realized, well, I can break away from this tradition. I can work along these lines. I can get the support from the American galleries and the recognition. But then again, they'd go home and it was like they're all Benedict Arnolds. They'd all betrayed their country and let their secrets out.

But that made it exciting. That made it — God, they don't want us over here. We're going to go over there and I'm going to tell them I'm a librarian and maybe they'll let me in the glass factory. So that's what I would do. I would say, well, I'm a historian, so let me into your factory. Otherwise, if you told them you were a glassblower, they wouldn't let you near the place. So it was really kind of fun that way.

MS. RIEDEL: You did study over there, though, a little bit.

MR. MORRIS: I would go over every year and I never actually worked in attendance at a facility, but developed relationships with the people and brought them over and worked with them here in the U.S. So I would go over and spent several weeks at a time in different factories, basically observing and studying.

MS. RIEDEL: Where in particular?

MR. MORRIS: Well, Pino Signoretto and Loredano Rosin studio, Venini, Livio Seguso, others.

MS. RIEDEL: And who did — was anyone in particular especially influential in your own work?

MR. MORRIS: I would say that Pino Signoretto was the most influential. I actually brought Pino over to help me work with some ideas and to show me how to do some things I couldn't even imagine. And he did. He was so gracious with that. And the guy could do anything.

MS. RIEDEL: That was really a very, I think, unusual moment in time — the exchange with the Italian glass artisans at that time, really who'd just been working on this incredible technique and fabulous glass work that had been going on for hundreds of years, but then allowing that technical skill to be let out and shared.

MR. MORRIS: Well, it started out when — the first — I'm trying to remember his name, a guy that came over actually first. Marvin Lipofsky brought him over. I'll think of his name as I go through this. But Ben [Moore] — Jamie Carpenter went over and Dale went over and studied and Ben went over and actually brought back Checco Ongaro, who didn't speak a word of English, came over here and brought tremendous techniques. And then his brother-in-law Lino Tagliapietra, of course, was the one that came and really developed this relationship with the school, with Dale, and flourished over here.

And then — so they were the glassblowers that came over. I was more interested in the sculpture. So I was going and spending time with Loredano Rosin and Pino Signoretto. And I brought Loredano Rosin over here first and then Pino. They were both sculptors and they had a rivalry with each other. So this was very difficult with the whole Italian political system because I would have to invite one every other year. And these guys were best of friends. They had lunch every day together, but they were incredibly jealous of each other. This was a dynamic that I didn't really understand, but existed. So I was trying to juggle this thing and of course not speaking hardly in Italian at all, and not even really wanting to in this case, because these guys were just complete backstabbers.

Anyway, so it was really great. I have to say that Pino was really, truly, so incredibly versatile and so enthusiastic. He was the one that ended up — well, and, of course, Loredano died after coming over for several years, in an accident in Italy, so then Pino was sort of the main guy that just came over and did that and came

over every year for a decade or two.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you decide eventually to begin working on your own and then it seems — to make that transition, one of the major ones it seems, from more vessel-oriented forms to, I'm thinking, for example, the stones, the sculptures?

MR. MORRIS: Well, I was a bit forced to work on my own. Of course, I wanted to. I had ideas, but I needed to sell work for money, so any opportunity I'd get, I would try to work on pieces. And of course, the first pieces I did were very influenced by Dale and they were soft, organic forms with threading on them, that sort of thing. And then they moved into these stone vessels that were reminiscent —

Dale and I would take these trips — he loved Ireland. So we'd travel to the Orkneys and Outer Hebrides and Stonehenge and all that sort of thing together, in between our workshops abroad. And these stone sites were so fascinating to me. So I started — I wanted to make these standing stones in glass. It's ironic because some look a lot like the stuff that's out there.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. MORRIS: Which is — duh. [Laughs.] I don't care. Whatever, it's just —

MS. RIEDEL: That is very interesting.

MR. MORRIS: So I was pretty enthused by that and wanted to express my enthusiasm over these sites and these artifacts through the glass somehow. So we just sort of started out at it and figured it out and through Jonny Ormbrek, with his skills in the mold making, I was able to figure out how to get these forms with this structure that was more stonelike, more monolithic than I could by any other way.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the first time you'd really worked with molds as well?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, and trying to figure out the mold wood and the density of the wood and the moisture level of the wood and all the things that came from it. It was really fascinating and Jonny's expertise with the wood and having to break these things off the glass so you didn't crack the pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: And they were enormous, too.

MR. MORRIS: Well, for that day and age they were. By —

MS. RIEDEL: Three feet?

MR. MORRIS: Oh, three to four feet. Some of these things, but yes, for that era that was huge. That was monolithic work in glass.

MS. RIEDEL: And you did those in the mid-'80s, yes? Eighty-four, '85?

MR. MORRIS: I think so. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But they were all still shiny, weren't they?

MR. MORRIS: They were shiny. That's right. Everything had to be shiny back then because we had no — we didn't know how to cut the shine or the glare.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm going to pause this here because this disc is almost over. And then we'll maybe pick up with the petroglyphs.

MR. MORRIS: That's fine.

[END DISC 2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art with William Morris at the artist's home in Mazama, Washington, on July 13, 2009, disc number two.

So we were talking about the Standing Stones when that last disc ended — and that group of work. Did those come about after the trip to Stonehenge?

MR. MORRIS: Yes. I'm trying to recall. Dale and I took numerous trips to pre-Celtic sites. So I can't remember — actually, I don't think Dale and I ever visited Stonehenge together. Maybe we did. I don't know. You know, it's a blur. We have done so many trips. Outer Hebrides is where I think the first major introduction was where we met a friend of Dale's, Ricky Demarco who used be head of the Edinburgh Arts Commission. And Ricky sent us

on this tour of these sites, these great stone sites.

And he was so funny because he had this — he is a nut, fantastic artist and academician. Him and Dale were old friends. So we went off in search of these stone sites. And in so doing in northern Scotland and then out to the Orkneys, which is a small archipelago in the North Sea and then over to the Hebrides. And Ricky wanted us to do this whole tour in about 10 days.

Well, we got up to the Orkneys and I think we spent about — I don't know — three weeks there.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MORRIS: I mean, it was just fantastic. There is an isle there called the Isle of Hoy. It has the highest sea cliffs in all of Great Britain. Spectacular stone sites. And so we had a great time there.

And then there were other trips that we took, for example, to the Scilly Isles off the southern tip of England, Cornwall, that has other sites as well. It was a number of trips where we explored these particular types of pre-Celtic sites.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. And was that the inspiration, then, behind the stones?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, it was. The stones were interesting because they were — these places that you would visit were very bare and exposed. In most cases, there would be nothing higher than knee-high heather growing on these sea cliffs in these islands. And yet, they would erect these huge stones. And in some cases, the stone was quarried from areas miles and miles away and moved. And, you know, they are several thousand years old and there is all the mystery about how the stones were erected and what they signified and who did it.

So they were fascinating sites. They were the first time I had experienced exploring these really poignant mysteries. They weren't just artifacts. They were beyond that because of the mystery that they were shrouded in. So that had quite an impact on me.

MS. RIEDEL: Those pieces are spectacular. To this day, I just really can't think of anything else quite like them. They really seem to stand alone.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I don't know. Again, it was so simplistic, because look at something like that and it's just a vehicle. And you say, okay, how do you express this character, this quality? It was nice to do it in conjunction with the Stone Vessels, which had the Stonehenge images on them and then the Standing Stones.

So you could kind of work different aspects because you could do a little bit of the illustration using the vessels and then, of course, the actual objects were the Standing Stones.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you always worked in series?

MR. MORRIS: It has evolved that way, where it has to be interrelated; where one object spawns the development of the next object. And you do it through creative development and also through the technological aspects. You want to further it through your knowledge on both levels.

It makes sense to work in a series that way, because if you were just to do singular pieces, you wouldn't get the depth of it. And whatever the series is, it usually can have a relatively broad base of a format, which makes it more fun to work in different scale, different color, different texture.

MS. RIEDEL: You worked on the Standing Stones for a year or two?

MR. MORRIS: I'm not very good with years. It was several years, I think, we must have worked with those because they really did — there was a lot to be learned, especially with the mold techniques. And they were a funny piece, too, because when we would go and do demonstrations, they were always a great show thing to do. They were big and there was fire and there was smoke and there was all this stuff, the bravado and the road-show stuff that we did so much of back then. So I think they went on for a few years.

MS. RIEDEL: There is that theater and that performance quality to glass.

MR. MORRIS: Oh, there really is. And, you know, we capitalized on it. In Dale's crew when we traveled around, we really called it a road show. The blowpipes would come out and the music would start pumping and the beer would start flowing. It was a lot of fun.

MS. RIEDEL: The Petroglyph Vessels, I think, started in '88 or so. They are really interesting, I think, and I think they actually demark an important part in your work. It was the transition to a more narrative style. It was the emergence of the first figures, yes?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, the imagery.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: There actually was a transition from the Stone Vessels to the Petroglyph Vessels, because what we would do with the Stone Vessels is we would break these little shards to create the Standing Stone images on the vessels. And then what happened was Flora Mace started to work with me on the shards, doing the small petroglyphs on these little shards that would go on the vessels, the standing stones.

So, actually, there was a relatively seamless transition, in a sense, of trying to put these image. What happened is then Flora was doing the thin cane drawings for me of the petroglyphs for the vessels and then, in laying them out on the plate, we started to incorporate little bits of sand and chips and images that way.

Then I couldn't have Flora doing these things forever; she was doing her own work. So Jonny started to manipulate the sand. Then the sand started to become the image rather than the thread glass drawings that Flora was doing. So then the sand became more and more elaborate. And then we started to realize that colors we could use and the reactions we were getting with the surface and then that took off to the full-blown Petroglyph Vessels.

But there was a logical transition or lineage from one to the other.

MS. RIEDEL: With the Petroglyph Vessels, too, it really feels like the arrival of a narrative quality in the work.

MR. MORRIS: Well, we could start to actually reproduce images and scenes that we could think of, real hunting stories and particular animals and delineate a particular animal on there. And that was a big deal. And I was doing a lot of hunting at the time, a lot of bow hunting. So of course, it was very significant that way. That's when I became very keen on the cave paintings at Altamira and Lascaux.

MS. RIEDEL: Had you been to visit those sites already as well?

MR. MORRIS: I had seen Altamira and I, of course, couldn't get into Lascaux. There were other sites that we would see in the French hills and that sort of thing. Then there were the things that we would see in Africa and Australia. Those, of course, were the classic ones. But then all the petroglyph images were from all different cultures.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you think about any of them as autobiographical?

MR. MORRIS: The pieces?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: Oh, sure. I mean, I remember when I shot my first elk with my bow and that sort of thing. And, it's like, okay, Jonny, we really need to do a great elk scene here. Yes, very much so.

And you know that is completely the same thing that any hunter would have done, recording that monumentous [sic] moment. I mean, those are the things, those are the — beyond pseudo-puritanical rituals that — from a boy to a man. I mean, those are significant events in our lives. They were for me.

MS. RIEDEL: When did you start hunting?

MR. MORRIS: I actually didn't start hunting until I was in my early 20s. And it was because I moved to Washington, because hunting in California was sort of politically incorrect in the area we were in. And, of course, as a boy, just the idea of it — not that I didn't shoot birds and things with a BB gun and did hunt with a bow and arrow, squirrels and small game. But the idea —

MS. RIEDEL: Even as a boy?

MR. MORRIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Where did you learn that?

MR. MORRIS: But that's more mischievous slaughter. You know, you give a kid a weapon, he's going to kill something with it. It's pretty — you would call that really transcendental. That's a natural thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Communing with nature.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, it's either that or you're going to shoot your baby sister. One or the other. So better, I guess, a

squirrel.

But yes, I remember doing that. Going through all the angst of killing and it is sort of — there are sometimes when it was very thrilling and then times when it was very shameful. So I was fascinated by it, but I always loved the idea of eating what I did shoot and, of course, the idea of killing a larger animal was mythic and something that I just wanted to do.

And when I moved to Washington to an area where there was an abundance of game and that is when I pursued it.

MS. RIEDEL: And why bow and arrow?

MR. MORRIS: I just loved the primitiveness, the purity. Somehow, when you use a rifle, once the animal is within your sights, it is not a matter of hunting; it is just a matter of getting. I like guns — I mean, I've shot guns my whole life. But they are violent and they are not very fair. You know, I don't think it is as respectful.

But I think it's a great way to learn. To do something disrespectfully is a great way to learn something. And I went down that road. I mean, I did start out hunting with a rifle and I remember the way it felt. When that disrespect lingers in your psyche and in your marrow, you kind of get to reflect on it and then you take your next step. And you either stick with it or you go on and do something else or you never do it again. But whatever reason, you have to be — I think in a lot of ways, if you have been a jerk, you become a better gentleman — you know?

It's like being a reformed smoker. If you can be honest with your own relationship with it, you can be more understanding and you get a better handle on it, the whole secondhand smoke thing. It's like that with anything, especially for somebody to sit outside and bark judgment at someone that they have not experienced themselves is a little bit weak, I think. It's not quite fair. I think hunting is a really good example of that because I remember during my lectures, I would talk about that.

And people would say — I would have anti-hunters in the bunch. I would just say, I'm not up here to debate this. I'm just telling you my experience. But they would want to debate it. I found that fascinating.

And I would say, well, have you ever hunted? And they would say, well, no, I would never. And I said, well, you really don't know then, do you? You really don't.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: That actually seems like a nice opportunity to bring in one of these other questions, which is, do you think about a sense of spirituality or symbolism in your work at all? I mean, however you interpret that. But does that come into play?

MR. MORRIS: I think I used to more so when I was doing a lot more reading and studying about — I'm trying to make distinction between specific forms of religious and spiritual approaches to things. Now I don't as much. But at the time, I think there was.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that during the — what period of time?

MR. MORRIS: Well, as I said, growing up in high school, we read a lot of philosophy then. But I want to say, you get into aspects of Buddhism, or studying people that were animists. That resonated with me very much when I was working a lot with animals and that sort of thing — not that I would adopt that viewpoint entirely for myself. But I would — I felt like anytime I ever got involved in a series of work, it gave me permission to explore those aspects a little more personally, a little more closely, like I had more of a relationship with it. I didn't seem like such an academician.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], more intuitive, more emotional.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, that is exactly right. It is like —

MS. RIEDEL: Experiential.

MR. MORRIS: If you're working with animals, you are observing them. If you have hunted them and you have seen their character and you have witnessed them and you have, you know, tasted their flesh, not that you become an authority, but there's something tangible about your thoughts and feelings about them. And it resonates with something real. And that's important to me on anything. That's one of the reasons why you pick a series, or a series picks you, is because of that relationship.

So with any of those things, if that's what I was doing at the time, it made more sense to me. Or if I was

interested in a work, then I would start doing whatever was associated with it, whether it be visiting the stone sites or hunting the animals or traveling to Mesoamerican sites or whatever.

MS. RIEDEL: That was just an interesting point you made about picking a series or a series picking you. Can you give me an example of what you mean or a particular series?

MR. MORRIS: Well, yes, sure. Even Standing Stones, I could say I picked it or it picked me, but it was something profound that came up in my life. I don't know what came first, the chicken or the egg there. But the point is that there was a resonance there and it wasn't that I went out and picked it. I have to say that in that case, it was like that was such an impact on me that it sort of chose me for that.

I think that's the way it is with a lot of things. I don't really try to debate exactly which came first.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure, sure. Just a final thought on the Petroglyph Vessels — I can't remember, but in one of the books that I was looking at, one of the curators described that really as your first mature series of work, very independent and on your own. Did it feel that way to you at the time or not at all?

MR. MORRIS: Oh, I don't know. I thought the Standing Stones were fairly authentic, too.

MS. RIEDEL: I thought so, too.

MR. MORRIS: You know, whatever they write, that's fine with me. I don't debate that. If he saw it as more authentic, or she, or whoever wrote it, that's fine. I know that the more time you spend living in relationship to making objects, that language gets more efficient and gets truer. So I can see that. But then I can say, well, the Man Adorned series or the whatever was a better series later on in your career.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: So I don't know. But then again, there's something that happens when you've done something long enough where you — we talked about it — that naïveté, that confidence of innocence that you have early on. And you lose that as you get more proficient. And that is living the life of an artist, too, and coming up with work. You get a little more savvy, a little more confident in it. And that's not necessarily a good thing.

One of the things I would tell students is I would say is your first show is your best show. You will never have — you only have a first show once with that work. I said you might have your show at the Met, but it's never going to be the same as that first show at your gallery, you know, where you put together an exhibition.

It's really interesting, because my manager, Holly [Lyman], who has been such a huge part of my life and is such a huge part of my career, is doing her own work now. So she's having her own shows. And her viewpoint — we talk a few times a week — and her viewpoint of how this is now that she has that experience it is a benefit, to her. She scheduled just umpteen shows for me and now she goes. oh my God, Bill. I can't believe what I did every time I scheduled a show for you. I didn't realize what —

MS. RIEDEL: You had a phenomenal exhibition schedule.

MR. MORRIS: It was insane. It was just insane. You know, we're talking six, seven one-man shows in a year.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it's unbelievable.

MR. MORRIS: And producing all that work in a seven-, eight-month period. I don't know how we did it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I don't either.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, it's just like — it was insane. Yes, but we did it. You know, it all worked out.

MS. RIEDEL: But it's interesting what we were just talking about, about that language, and you were saying how it evolves as you develop experience. And I think there is that interesting tradeoff between what you called that "confidence in innocence," which I think is such a nice way to describe it. Then I think of, at the other end of the spectrum, that succinctness and eloquence that one can get, that brevity over time, because your language has been refined. I'm thinking about that great Oscar Wilde line about if I'd had more time, I would have made it shorter.

And I think there is that tradeoff between the two.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, there is definitely a tradeoff. And that's what is so funny. I'd have to say the best part of the tradeoff — people would say, well, does it get easier? And I would say no, it never gets any easier. The only advantage is that you develop more faith. What happens is you develop faith in you and in the process. And if

you throw yourself at it, it will work out.

My mom had a saying. She said, Bill, no matter what happens, sooner or later, it will all work out. Okay. And you can apply that in so many metaphorical ways. But in essence, it's the same way with when we work. And what would happen is when Italo would say to me, he said, Bill, change your series as much as possible. Try anything. Do everything. Just experiment. Do this and that, he says, because the older you get, the more stuck you're going to get. I was just a kid and he would say — he would say these things. It was like these are messages from Moses.

So I took this all to heart when he would say things like that. And he would say, be brave, be brave, be courageous, just do it. When I talk about the faith, what I mean by that is that if you just go in and just do the series, the trend is going to be based on the previous trend and the previous trend and the previous trend. It's like mutual funds — not that I know much about them. But a guy talked to me about them one time. He said it's not the day-to-day. It's not even the month-to-month. It's the long projected flow.

He asked me; he said, what's the trend in your life been? He said, has it been like this, like this or like this? I said, well, it's been like this. He says, then do it. Then he says, your trend is good. He says, whatever you invest in, whatever you throw yourself into, that's going to be your trend. So that's the faith, you know. And that's the advantage of working over a long period of time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. And that's what gave me the courage, I think, to just stop, is that, you know, the work is just the work. I mean, it's my life. So it doesn't matter. If I stop the work, I should still be able to do this, shouldn't I? I hope so. That's part of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Thinking about the Artifacts series, which was such a significant series — I think you said something about it that was really interesting, again, in one of those books. You said the biggest jump was moving into artifacts. They didn't have anything to stand on and so they didn't hold together as a single object. The associations became more important.

And I think about that in terms of the narrative. The narrative became a little bit more fragmented and a little bit more poetic, putting together all these dissimilar elements from dissimilar places. You had animal forms. You had vessel forms. You had very sort of biomorphic references to tools or abstractions. It's such an interesting series.

MR. MORRIS: You know, this is the thing. This is what cracks me up. I mean, you can't get any more broad-based than artifact. If that wasn't the luckiest thing to capitalize on at the time. It's like, okay, I want to make anything that I want to make. What am I going to call it? How about artifact? That covers that.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Okay.

MR. MORRIS: It's, like, oh, I just give myself a license to just do whatever. That's what I did.

MS. RIEDEL: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] But then you started composing —

MR. MORRIS: I know, I did. And I didn't do that consciously at the time. I'm looking back on this and I'm musing about it now because, of course, you are always looking for a title and something that sounds interesting. And, you know, if you can't be brilliant, dazzle them with bullshit, so what's the cool word?

But, you know, that was part of that. But yes, it was like, all of a sudden, there was this whole area of interest in my life now was opened up. All it came down to now was what I could do technically and what the material — how the material would resonate with the quality, with the characteristic of some other material.

So this was, as far as exploring glass and its properties, this was the thing that just completely opened that up. And I was, just, I don't know, in the right place at the right time or how it all worked out. But yes, that first — I don't know if it was a bone that we made or something like that, a hand — I can't remember what it was — some simplistic little object and it just — this light went on. And then we just played at this intensive level. Yes, that was a big deal.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes — I mean, in many ways, there were very simple elements and then they went very complex, animals, heads, and things like that. Just thinking — also the surfaces now, were all opaque, yes?

MR. MORRIS: Well, they started to be because what happens is glass — and I didn't even realize this at the time — but if you're looking at a piece of glass, you don't see the glass, of course, unless it's color. Let's just start with clear glass. It's transparent, so you're not seeing a material. You are seeing a reflection. So reflections delineate the form in a very abstract way through all these strange curves that your brain doesn't really make

sense of. So it takes bits and pieces and extrapolates it. But it sees all these other things.

And you don't really see the form. So then when you cut that shine, you lose the reflection. So all of a sudden, the form becomes clear. But then there is another quality that happens with glass, like the way the material is, that when you cut that shine, but it still has a translucency. The light actually enters the piece, bounces around, and reilluminates. And then you have this very interesting source of energy that creeps out of the piece, that seeps out, that you're not even consciously aware of in most cases.

So again, it arrests your attention. And there is a quality about that that you just go, well, now what *is* that or why am I drawn to this? You might not even know. But light is energy. And glass deals with that in so many fascinating ways. That's part of its seductive quality. But I find reflection very confusing. It can be fun to a point. But it can be like the strong wind out there right now. It can become annoying after a while.

I look over at that print that I love and sometimes I just get really irritated by the reflection. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Was there an intentional effort to replicate the surfaces of other materials? Or —

MR. MORRIS: Not an intention to, but realizing that that was — the qualities of the material could go to these parameters. And I didn't realize it. We would do something and go, God, that looks like zebra skin or this looks like — this is leather. This looks like granite. This looks like bone. Or you say to yourself, I want this to look like bone. How are we going to do that?

MS. RIEDEL: So was it playing with a sense of almost 3D trompe l'oeil?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, you know, you wouldn't say so much trompe l'oeil, because there are characteristics to the glass. So what you would do is, you would take a certain characteristic that I had seen, whether working with another artist or something like that. And then I would say, okay, but if I just do this to it, that will give it that bone quality.

If we take that white and we add a little bit of this beige and then plus a little bit of copper fleck, it'll look more like bone. So let's do that and then we cut the shine, that sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Had you seen anybody working with powdered glass before or doing a lot of these things that you started doing?

MR. MORRIS: Well, yes, I had actually. I worked a lot with Bertil and Ulrica Vallien. And they were the first to use — they used the powders more than anybody I had seen. But it was still relatively shiny. Bertil — I was blowing into these sand molds for him, and he would sprinkle the powdered dust right into the mold. And it would get on the surface, plus the sand texture.

And I thought, now that's really a neat way to use it — not that we ever used any sand molds, but using the powdered crushed glass on the surface and then reheating it into different levels to get different amounts of sheen or buildup or texture.

MS. RIEDEL: And that artifact idea was, it seems, incredibly versatile because you were able to work with that for a long time.

MR. MORRIS: Years and years.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's in so many different formats. I think of the Shards, which were relatively flat, almost like canvases. And then the tooths and the pouches that were so three-dimensional, then the installations, which were — did those follow much later?

MR. MORRIS: Well, the installations as far as — *Cache* was all artifact-based.

And then there were the wall panels, which were the multitude of little pieces, where you take a scale of something very much like you would butterflies or a butterfly collection, and then you just start playing with form and color. So you give yourself parameters as far as the scale goes. Then you use the advantage of the multitude for variety. And again, there is a playfulness there because the you have 700 objects on a wall. And people walk up and they start looking and then everybody has got to find their favorite one.

That's basic. You would do that if you looked into a butterfly collection or a flower collection or anything. You look at them and then you go, God, I like that one. You can't help it. You can't help but be drawn into that by making a choice, by becoming involved in it. And that's the thing with the artifacts. You're dealing with that sort of objects of common ceremony. We talked about the hearth, whether it be a scoop or a spoon or a comb or something like that. Everybody's used one. Everybody's had one. And everybody has seen them in museums and that sort of thing.

And you can't help but have some sort of personal relationship to it. Or even a bone; everybody sees the bones, whether it be — you've walked through the woods and you've found the bone of a particular animal and you've always — or when you were a child, you said, oh, this must have been the finger bone of the crazy man that lived down the street.

You know, it just goes on and on and on. It's free-range. You're tapping into that collective unconscious. You're throwing a pebble into that pond. And it's going to make a ripple and it's going to hit. So it was great.

Not that I had the intent on doing this for the audience, but I had the intent on doing this for me. It had to be fun for me. And you start to realize that when you take one object and you put it next to another, then the association of the story begins. So then you've got that whole thing, which changes the dynamic again. And whether you stack it or lean it or suspend it or have it facing or turning away, those are all little, subtle — it becomes very playful. And that's, I think, the key word, is that it had to be playful. It had to be fun.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that true pretty much throughout your series? Is that sense of play an important concern?

MR. MORRIS: It was a huge amount of concern because it was so much work to do some of these pieces. They were so agonizing technically to do that it had to be rewarding somehow. I mean, some of the pieces were downright heroic to make. We would spend days and days on a singular piece. Some things we would leave in the oven overnight and had to be picked up and worked on the next day and other components added and put together, and it was all done hot. There was a lot of investment of time and energy into these things.

And once you start one of those, you've got it on the pipe, you know, you just don't walk away from it. If you're going to stop, you have to do it at a certain time and a certain way. You're always stressing about the temperature and where it is. You've got somebody sitting there turning the thing for hours. Some days, it was just very fatiguing and exhausting, and yet, you wanted it to be challenging. You wanted it to be exciting. But it had to be fun. It had to be something you felt good about at the end.

MS. RIEDEL: Those artifacts, were they the first panel installation?

MR. MORRIS: You mean, the wall panels, we call them?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, those were the first panels I think we had ever done.

MS. RIEDEL: Those were interesting because shadows became so important and composition — well, composition had been important, but this seems especially. And there was also sort of a reference, and was it conscious, to museum installations? Classifying —

MR. MORRIS: Well, again, a lot of it — for example, the shadows were a byproduct. Once we started pinning them up and putting them up — oh, it was really funny the way that happened because my buddy, Graham [Graham], who does all the installations, he was always a very significant influence to me. And he said to me one time, he goes, God, you know, Bill, you're always making all this big stuff. He says, what if you just made a bunch of really little things? And I kind of, you know, I just threw that in the hopper. I didn't really think much about it.

Anyways, I started making these little objects. And I said, Jonny, can you make a little bracket that will just stick this on the wall? He started doing it. He would stick it on the wall. I would walk in and I would look at him. And we would sort of associate these things. And then, we had this — it was funny because it was the same kind of show at the American Craft Museum that caused me to do *Cache*. They said, here's a room. What are you going to do?

And, of course, my first thoughts were, oh, big, big. It's got to be better than *Cache*. What's it going to be? And then it came back and it was little, little, little. Let's do something really small. And then this panel thing came on. And it was, like, let's just cover the wall with little tea things.

Then we had to figure it out, the presentation, the color and the bracketing, blah, blah, blah. But that's what it was. It was a combination of having the space and trying to do something different, trying to keep it interesting.

It was that same old formula I had talked about earlier, where you're using the art world, or the art world is using you, to tweak it, to push it a different direction, to rise to the challenge.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Do you think of Judy Pfaff or Don Lipski, in particular, as influences when it comes to installations?

MR. MORRIS: Oh, very much so.

MS. RIEDEL: I read this great description of a Judy Pfaff installation, which I thought was so wonderful and actually made me think of some of your work, too, how it grows in a way that's both unplanned and highly engineered.

MR. MORRIS: It is. And that's the way Judy works. That's what's so cool about getting to know somebody like her, is that you would see that.

It's so funny. The first time I met Judy, she goes, I'm looking for these stumps. Do you know where? And I said, well, yeah, I know a place. It was this place where I would go duck hunt. And it was these big marsh flats with these huge cedar stumps that had been washed up in the high tides and then left to bleach in the sun for years.

And it's not parkland, but it's conservation land. Anyways, we walk up there and she says do you think we can get some of those? I said, well, yeah, let's get my chainsaw. And then I drive a truck. It actually might have been that black truck out there, that old truck. And we go out there and we're just carving away on these huge — and this game warden shows up [laughs] and he goes, what the hell are you guys doing?" And I'm just going, well, she wanted some of this wood for some art. And the guy just shakes his head and he goes, where are you from? And she goes, I'm from New York. The guy is just going, oh my God, who are these people?

I've got my old Carhartt coat on and my shotgun is hanging in the back of my truck. And he goes, this is a really weird combination. Anyways, he goes, all right, just fill your truck up and you can leave, but don't come back here and get any more, okay? But it was so cool because she was so excited. And it was, like, well, this is stuff I hide behind when I kill small defenseless feathered birds.

And she is just going, oh my God, that installation. And I can see — because I had known her work, I could see how she would take this thing and suspend it, you know, 40 foot in some public space. But it was just — it was a cool, fun association of, I don't really need to know specifics. I just know that she's excited. And I know where this stuff is and let's just go do it. That's kind of how it all started, the whole relationship, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's a great story.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, it was pretty fun. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: That's a great story. [Laughs.] I don't think I've heard anything quite like that before.

Another part of that review said that she talks about — where she gets order and disorder working for her at the same time. And that made me think somehow of your work and especially the installations, because there is such a huge sense — I'm thinking now of *Cache* and pieces like that. There is such a huge sense of things just sort of having been thrown together, but at the same time, it's so clearly, highly organized.

MR. MORRIS: Well, and that's hard. It's hard to not be pretentious about that. You know, when you say, okay, we're going to make this row of tusks, but then we're going to break it in this particular area and then we're going to become random. It's always a funny feeling when you lay something down like that. You want to stand back and just throw it at it. It's sort of like the way this cabin was built when they put the siding up. They didn't try to do any order. They just took it off the stack and put it up and it created its own chaos.

It's the same thing when you're doing that. You want to walk down the row and say I'm going to be deliberately random. And I don't think you can really do that. I think you have to let it go and you have to say I'm going to put that up there. And you put it up and you go, I don't know about the way that looks. Or you say to somebody — I love this one — you say, what would you do? I say well, Jonny or Trumaine [Mason] or Ross [Richmond], just take one and stick it up there. Let me see what you do.

Then you'll know something from that. And that will truly become random because they'll either try to be random or not. But the point is it will be a random act on your part if they're doing it. So you'll either say, well, somehow that resonates or somehow it doesn't. So you'll either leave it or you'll change it. But the point is, at least you started that randomness to it.

I've seen Judy do this with assistants. I've seen she uses people that way in a really, really wonderful way. She would do it out on the floor where we worked. She would say, well, break that thing. I don't know how, but just break that edge somehow. So you start breaking it the way you know how. And she would just say, well, I like that or I don't. And the same way with Dale. Dale would do the same thing. He would say, I want you to just twist that, just twist it. Just twist it. So you would do it. And you either like it or you don't. Very simplistic, again, not rocket science, not brain surgery.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like that can be one of the real benefits of working in a team or working in collaboration, is that you have the opportunity if somebody brings something in that you would not have thought of yourself.

MR. MORRIS: You're foolish not to take advantage of it. Otherwise, you might as well have automatons working, machines. It doesn't make any difference. Unless you're going to use a human condition, a human quality — it only makes sense to me.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems that also so much of that era — I'm thinking of John Cage and his whole love of chance and Merce Cunningham and chance dance. And it was very much part, I think, of the zeitgeist of that era, too.

MR. MORRIS: Well, that's always run through art and especially performance art. You know, any intuitional thing has to be that way. Pollock was a master of that, just the whole thing of chance and randomness, yet sort of trying to control it somehow. It's the way we are. It's what our lives are basically. We try things and then we respond.

MS. RIEDEL: The Burial Rafts, were these happening at the same time as the artifact pieces?

MR. MORRIS: Well, yes, I mean, they were considered — they're artifacts. You know, the Burial Urns and the Burial Rafts — I mean, the whole idea of burial was a fascinating thing to me. And that came from seeing very specific objects. I remember seeing these burial urns —well, you see them all over the place, but you see them in South America, where they take the body and they have to cut certain tendons so they can fold it tight enough to shove it in these little urns. The body would have to take on a form and a relationship of overlapping and folding that you would never see it in otherwise.

MS. RIEDEL: In Peru?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I see these — God, I've seen them in so many places. I think I saw some in Malta that were pretty interesting and I saw them in South America somewhere, might have been in Peru. But the specific ones I'm trying to think of were a couple of these urns where the sides had been broken out and you could actually view into the urn the configuration of these bones.

MS. RIEDEL: So the body was actually cut and placed?

MR. MORRIS: Well, the tendons would be cut. So if you were to try to fold this up here, you would have to get everything close. So they wouldn't dismember the body as much as they would just get it in such a way — of course, because they would have to be dealing with the rigor mortis, too. And how to get the arms in a way to just fit it into this tight, tight, tight space. And, of course, they would bind it and then get it into the urn.

MS. RIEDEL: And it wasn't cremated, it was just stored that way?

MR. MORRIS: It was stored that way. So it was a slow deterioration. So when these things would open up, you could see this, especially if they were broken from the side or that sort of thing.

So the glass urns were great because you would actually be able to see through the images, the windows into the piece and see the configuration. Then you'd do that when you would stack the bones in. So whatever form you made, since I was not, of course — my bones were all separate. I would never do the entire body anyway, just suggestions of it. That idea of glimpsing through that was a great use of the material. It made sense to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. And that death theme definitely ran through a lot of the work; it seems more early on.

MR. MORRIS: Well, I remember being asked this question a lot during lectures. People would say, you seem to have this propensity with death. And I would never think in terms of death. It wasn't about death at all. It was about the artifacts. It was about the remains. And I never — this is the irony — I never explored the concept of death until I did the Cinerary Urns.

That was about death. All the other bones and things were not about death to me. They were about the remains. They were about the objects. They were about the artifacts. And they would resonate aspects about humanity, not so much about people as humanity, and these remains and how we reflect on remains. But I never thought in terms of objects of death.

MS. RIEDEL: It was just man as part of the natural process.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, yes. And these are what is left. And as I said, when you're walking through the woods and you find a bone, do you think about the death or do you think about the object? I suppose you could think about, well, what might have killed this person or that sort of thing. But you don't think in terms of — death to me is a very — it's a very poignant, distinct moment or state or ethereal transformation. And that never accompanied me. So it could be a matter of semantics or delineation or denotation of a word. But I never thought in terms of death.

MS. RIEDEL: Got you; mm-hmm. Then the jars, the Canopic Jars, they were not about death at all either?

MR. MORRIS: No, they were the artifacts. And they were more about the story and the myth of death. I mean, that was about a belief system that was so profoundly interesting. The Canopic Jars were a commission.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, they were?

MR. MORRIS: That's how they started.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: That was a commission by George Stroemple.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. MORRIS: He came to me and he said — he purchased a lot of the installation work. And he said, "Bill, I want to commission you. I want you to make me, like, a tomb." "George, can we just shorten the order a little bit and make it something not quite so elaborate? Could we pick an aspect of it?"

So anyways, we got these books. He was just crazy about this Egyptian stuff. We were going through the books and we saw these jars with the images on them. And he goes, I really like these. I said, well, these are cool and these we could do ourselves because Jonny can do drawings, that sort of thing, but I don't know about sculpting these heads because I'm not very good with that sort of thing.

So anyways, we did the first four jars. And of course, we were not replicating the jars we had seen, but we wanted to stick within the format or the idea of the jars, which were the four particular gods. There was — let's see if I can remember this. There was Imsety, which was a man. There was Duamutef, was a jackal. There was Qebehsenuef, was a hawk. And then there was a baboon. I can't remember the baboon.

Anyways, what this was all about was that the body, certain intestines, organs, parts would go into each individual jar.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, a liver went one place and the intestines the other.

MR. MORRIS: Right, exactly. Then they were under the guise of these gods and then reassembled. But the one thing that they wouldn't put in any of these jars was the heart because that had to go to [the goddess] Maat to be weighed. And if the heart was heavy, you didn't get to go to the afterworld.

The point is this, is that this whole religion and this whole belief system only lasts for a certain period of time and then it all went away. But it was fantastic because, you know, who came up with this stuff? So then I figured, well, this is a long time ago, I'm not going to offend anybody here. I can make the jars to be whatever is significant to me. And I was actually right up the road here, about 20 miles up in Hart's Pass, I had shot a deer and I was eviscerating it. And I'm going, okay, I got the deer, I've got to get these guts out and I've got to get the meat back, keep it fresh.

And I'm thinking to myself, where is my ceremony here? Where's *my* — where's my religion with this? Where's my belief system here? And I had done these jars and I thought I can do — I can do my own jars with this. I can do whatever I want.

So I started doing the jars, the animals that I had hunted. Then it was animals that were significant while I was hunting that I had seen. And that whole kind of animist thing where you find maybe a guardianship there or something. Then it opened up and it could be anything. And then all of a sudden, it was, like, wow, I can honor all these different animals. Whether I had even seen the animal or not; some of the animals I made jars that I hadn't really seen. I had seen their distant cousins or whatever. But it was just a great series to work on.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. MORRIS: And all of a sudden, one thing led to another and that's how I got to do those.

MS. RIEDEL: And it all came out of this initial commission?

MR. MORRIS: The Egyptian original four jars.

MS. RIEDEL: That's so interesting. So George Stroemple has been a patron for years.

MR. MORRIS: Years and years. Yes, yes, he has.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you done many commissions?

MR. MORRIS: Not very many at all, mostly with George. I've done a few others. But George is unique because he just — whatever I did was fine. I mean, he liked it. He loved it. His enthusiasm was just unparalleled. He was like a kid when he would come up and we would work. He would just sit there and smile and laugh to himself and get a kick out of it.

MS. RIEDEL: How great.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, it was really good.

MS. RIEDEL: So why would you accept certain commissions and not others?

MR. MORRIS: I had done a few where people would go, oh, well, that's not really what I had in mind. And I realized that and then I would just say, okay, well, obviously, you don't want the piece, so I'll just sell it or do whatever. I just realized that's the way it was with most people. Most people had too many preconceptions or they all wanted it in blue or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. It's interesting, because I used to think that most artists were not in the least interested in commissions. But then I've found over time and over conversations that they will occasionally — in the experience of you with the Canopic Jars — find that they're an interesting catalyst for something they might not have done otherwise.

MR. MORRIS: Exactly, exactly. that's what I liked about it, is that there were opportunities to do things that I had never done before. So in that case, it worked out. Native Species with George was a great one. And I never continued doing any of those pieces. I just did that for him and it was done.

But I'm trying to think. Well, the Medicine Jars didn't really have anything to do with Native Species at all. That was actually through these medicine jars that I found during travels.

MS. RIEDEL: Where were they?

MR. MORRIS: That was in Burma, Myanmar. I was traveling there with a friend, a photographer. We were studying — doing photography of the Moken, the sea gypsies. They'd take these seed pods and fill them with the medicine. Then the stock would be carved into a certain effigy or animal or symbol. And that would hold the little jar. They were very small. They were just wonderful little artifacts.

And I thought, again, metaphorically speaking, this idea of medicine — what cures what ails you kind of thing, and complementing it with some kind of an image that has power or you give power, whether it be one of fear or one of tenderness or align yourself with it. What quote, "the disease" or the ailment might need — it's just a wonderful metaphor. And it all came down to that.

My very dear friend, Joey Kirkpatrick, said one time — she says, really, the only thing I give a shit about anymore is metaphor. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: Yes. It was great to hear her say that, because that's what it's all about these days for me, is metaphor.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MORRIS: Which I really like.

MS. RIEDEL: That made me think — I wanted to run this by you because I was reading something about Don Lipski. There was something written actually about his work that made me think of yours. And I knew he had been an influence. They were talking about his work being less metaphorical reference than a recasting of the commonplace and finding the sublime in that transformation. And that was making me think of your work and that the resonance in it was in that the — your subtitle for the Mazorca series, which was the ceremony of common —

MR. MORRIS: Common ceremony.

MS. RIEDEL: Common ceremony of — what was the exact?

MR. MORRIS: I can't remember.

MS. RIEDEL: Celebration of common objects? Ceremony of common objects? Celebration of common objects? Oh, Objects of Common Ceremony.

MR. MORRIS: Oh, that's it, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: There we go. But there was something about the functionality and the non-formal aspect of the work, your work, that seems to me part of its essence, is that there is not a big — while there may be a metaphorical reference, that that's often not how you are coming at it, but you're coming at it from a transformation of a common object, or somehow the reexamination of a common object; reframing it, re-examining it in a way that allows you to see it in a new way, whether it's the containment of that particular object in a new form like glass, whether you are juxtaposing it with other forms in a more formal composition. But that just seems very much at the essence of your work.

MR. MORRIS: Hmm, well, I don't know what to say about that. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Fair enough. [Laughs.]

MR. MORRIS: It sounds like you said it better than I would have. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: The Rhytons are interesting because — correct me if I'm wrong here, but that's the first time when the vessel really becomes an animal form.

MR. MORRIS: Well, those were funny pieces because that was the great excuse for me to do little animals, which I swore I would never do little animals in glass — swore. That was really funny. I saw this piece. It was at the Seattle Art Museum, I believe. It was really cool. And Pino had come to visit. I was just really captivated by this little animal. It was a little stag.

I actually had it cast in bronze, the original one. It was from the Amlash people around the Caspian Sea. It was about 4,000 years old, done in ceramics. It was a little beaker that was shaped like this stag. And I thought, well, I want to show this to Pino and see how he would approach it, how would he make this.

And I said, Pino, I want you to make this out of one piece of glass. So anyways, he starts sculpting this thing and he sculpts the back legs. And then all of a sudden, then he adds the two front legs. And I went, well, Pino, I wanted you to make it out of one piece of glass. He says well, it's one piece now. [Laughs.] I laughed. He's adding the horns and this and that.

But the way he approached this form and the way he blew it was so incredible. It was, like, that's some real skill. That was really amazing the way he pulled that off. So I thought that was an interesting piece. And I got a call from the Seattle Art Museum. They said, we're doing this artist lunchtime lecture series. They just finished the new museum and they said, would you come down and talk? It's just basically, it's casual. People sit on the steps inside the foyer of the museum with their bagged lunches and you can talk about anything you want. You don't have to talk about your own work.

I thought, well, that's cool. I'll just talk about art. I said, I know what I'll talk about. It's a museum. I'm going to have them bring down the original rhyton and I'm going to bring down the little glass one.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, interesting.

MR. MORRIS: And I thought this would kind of a cool interaction here. So what I did was I brought — I put the original rhyton — this thing was worth, it was priceless — right on a pedestal there. And then I had the glass one. And I said, okay, we're going to talk about this piece and museums and what it means when you come and see these things and what objects mean to you and how it resonates.

I said, I'm going to pass this glass piece around to you. I said, it's not something you would usually be allowed to touch, but here you go. And it wasn't precious. You know, Pino just whipped it out. So I thought, well, whatever.

So there were probably — I don't know — 120 people or something there. And it's on a stone floor, so if anybody dropped this thing, it was history. I said, now you guys should all pass this around and check it out. And we were having a dialogue about what people thought about it. It was kind of like kindergarten show-and-tell kind of thing. It was really fun. I would have liked to have blindfolded everybody. That would have been really great.

So anyways, they passed the piece back. Finally, everybody got through it. I got the piece and the piece was all warm in my hands. It was really interesting. And it had kind of a neat patina from oils of people's hands because it was a very rough, matted surface. Anyways, I put it up there next to the one and I said, well, anyone have some questions? And one of the questions was — the second-to-last question was, so is this a new series of yours?

And I said, it hasn't been, but it probably will be. [Laughs.] And there was something about the way everybody loved this little animal. There was no artspeak. It was just pleasing to them. Just a little animal. And it was all that stuff about little animals that I hate. So I said, well, shit, I'm going to just go back and start making these

things. And then, of course, the idea of the rhyton, the fact that these were decanting certain wonderful liquids for ceremony and all that. I just love that idea.

But the fact that you bring out this essence of the animal. So it was another kind of no-brainer. And then, how many animals can you make? What they are doing and the sizes and their little activities and all that. It was just a lot of fun and a real challenge. Really difficult to make.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet, I bet.

MR. MORRIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I know you work in series. Do you work in simultaneous series?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I have to sometimes, only because of the tedium in certain things. For example, if I'm working on Rhytons, I commit to make a rhyton in a day. That's a huge chunk of the day. And then there are other things that I might make that are more simplistic or more multiple-day processes; like let's say I make a rhyton. Then I'm going to make a blank for either another rhyton or a vessel that might have animal imagery on it or something like that, that would complement it, because I would think in terms of myself: Well, if you're going to have an exhibition, that would allow me to stop — not make the same thing over again.

It's like how many different ways can you make a certain theme, rather than just saying how many different colors can you use? How many different ways can you approach this idea? So I try to do things, because of the nature of the material that would give me a bit of a break from the tedium of a certain way of doing something. These Rhytons — you still have to start the same way over and over again. And that gets boring.

Then when you get towards the end of the piece, that's where things change a bit. But you have to break up that tedium in the shop for everybody. So, yes, I would do different things. It might be a simple vessel. It might be an urn. It might be — I don't know what.

MS. RIEDEL: Tiny artifacts.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, tiny artifacts, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], that makes sense.

What sort of work have you been looking at over this time? Is there someplace that you go to look at either contemporary art or ethnographic pieces that have been inspiring to you?

MR. MORRIS: You know, mostly ethnographic. Contemporary art, I never subscribed to *Art in America*, *American Craft*, any of that sort of stuff. I'd get their periodicals; for some reason, they'd come to the office. I'd flip through them and see what was going on. But I wasn't a student of art, really.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: Really, I wouldn't consider myself that. I had a huge collection of books on anthropology and animals and that sort of thing. And we had an intensive working library. These were books that would go out in the shop and get scuffed up and marked in and burnt and that sort of thing when we needed visual references to a certain character of an animal, say, or — you travel to Africa, you're going to see a lot, but you're not going to remember it. You're not going to take photographs of everything. So you get books on Africa and then you start to flip through them and you look at things. And then you went, oh, yeah, I remember that. But look at this example of it. This is pretty great.

And it's, like, hey, why don't we try to make it like this one over here? So we would use a lot of resource material for that. So there was always tons of books.

There were days when I would get into the studio, and I didn't know what the hell I was going to do. I would sit there — because I always had my cereal with the crew every morning. And I've got six people staring at me like, what are we going to make today, Bill? What's going to be brilliant today? And it's just like, hmmm. Then you just open up a book. We're going to make that.

I mean, literally, that's — but at least it would get something going.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: It would get something on the canvas to start with.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. I mean, it was a lot to do every day. We did. We put our feet to the fire every day.

MS. RIEDEL: And when you're saying "these books," were they books of actual wildlife? Or were they books of objects depicting wildlife?

MR. MORRIS: All of it.

MS. RIEDEL: All of it.

MR. MORRIS: Because we needed a thorough resource. If you were going to make a certain kind of gazelle, you want to know a little bit about it. So you'd read a little bit about its character. You know, God, this thing can jump 11 feet? Wow. We'll make the legs a little longer. Things like that. It's just, like, oh my God, this is amazing. You want to say, I see this horn, but what am I seeing here? You don't want to just make them all because they all start looking the same, so you're looking for a characteristic or a quality that you can apply to that animal that no other animal's got.

So you need good visual references for that. And it's quicker than flying off to Africa every time you've got one of those suckers down. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Are there particular writers — we're talking about visual imagery. Were there particular writers that have been influential to you over time? It doesn't sound like art critics, it doesn't sound like there's going to be a whole lot of that. Artists writing about art?

MR. MORRIS: Not so much. I was a big fan of Joseph Campbell and, like I said, Carl Jung. But there was — who is that guy? He was a Spanish guy or South American guy that I used to like. I'm trying to remember his name. Ruiz, Miguel Ruiz.

MS. RIEDEL: Non-fiction, fiction?

MR. MORRIS: It was kind of fiction-y. You know, I read, but I wasn't an avid reader. I didn't devour books.

MS. RIEDEL: I know you mentioned Joseph Campbell. Did you read anything like *The Golden Bough*, James Frazer kind of comparative mythology things?

MR. MORRIS: Not much of that. Not really.

I liked reading mythology, but I liked the original — I liked the interpretations of Homer and that sort of stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: John Muir at all?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I read John Muir. And my dad was a Muir fan. I would walk the John Muir trail, and camp where he camped and climbed the stuff he climbed. Yes, so sure, he was a — that relationship with nature.

MS. RIEDEL: How did the first panel installations come about? Was that those small artifacts that you just decided to put up on the wall?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, those were the ones that we, as I discussed, we were just — that whole idea of just trying to work small, just trying to take things small and then, of course, it really happened with the invitation from the American Craft Museum for that installation. So that's really how those happened.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. The Crow and the Raven series is interesting in the sense that birds really arrived in a big way in the work, yes?

MR. MORRIS: Oh, yes. Well, that was —

MS. RIEDEL: Did you think about the mythic quality of them at the time, or was it informal or all of the above?

MR. MORRIS: It's very transcendental in the sense that the artifacts, certain symbols were very powerful. And, of course, all cultures — the Native Americans and then the corvid, which is certain types of birds. All the species of crows, ravens, jays, have incredible intelligence.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that I believe.

MR. MORRIS: You know, they're second only to primates. And they're the only birds that use tools. So they're really fascinating in that sense. And the myth that surrounds them is fascinating. Everybody is —

MS. RIEDEL: Across so many cultures, yes.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. And if you watch them, which I spent a lot of time watching crows and ravens, you see how animated they are and how much character they have.

MS. RIEDEL: Mischievous and smart.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. And they can be downright evil.

MS. RIEDEL: Can they? Oh, I haven't seen that.

MR. MORRIS: Oh, my gosh. They can be so mean to other birds, yes. So they became a great format to use as caricatures. There's a difference between caricature and character. And they crossed over those two areas. So all of a sudden, I got the caricature of the crow and then I got to make all these characters, in different aspects, doing different things, relating in different ways.

And they're so wonderful the way that they're so solid black. They have no detail. They just have a shape that you can recognize, in the blink of an eye.

MS. RIEDEL: A sheen, a color somehow. Yes.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, they really are fantastic birds. Again, I wouldn't say anything new about them that I have already said about any of the other things. It's just, again, another animal that resonates with us. It's very common for people to attach to, align themselves with, and get some intuitive relationship with.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You made an interesting distinction between character and caricature. Do you think about your work as having a sense of humor to it?

MR. MORRIS: [Laughs.] You'd better have a sense of humor about any of that sort of stuff because you sure as hell can't take it seriously. If you could be a fly on the wall in the shop sometime and hear some of the crap we talk about the work, you would just die.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I can imagine.

MR. MORRIS: You know, the nicknames that come up and that sort of thing. But it doesn't usually go beyond the shop.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, well, I imagine five hours into it —

MR. MORRIS: We don't want to disrespect it.

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, yes. Oh, it's not the time that goes into it; it's the money people pay for it. [Laughs.] But then again — it was like one of the first pieces of stone that I carved out there. You know, if you look at the profile, it looks just like a head of a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle. I can't tell you the laugh my son and I had over that.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that the start of your new series?

MR. MORRIS: It's just that kind of stuff. You just have to laugh at it. And it was all after the fact, but there it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. And then we had to list the names of the turtles. I don't know if you remember: Donatello, Leonardo, Raphael — oh, you didn't have kids; that's right.

MS. RIEDEL: I remember hearing about them, but not by name, not by first name. This made me think of something else and now I've lost my train of thought. Maybe it will come back.

[END DISC 3.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art interviewing the artist, William Morris, at his home in Mazama, Washington, on July 14, 2009. This is disc number three.

I think we stopped a little abruptly yesterday. We'll pick up pretty much right where we left off. That should make it fluid. I think we just finished talking really about the Canopic Jars and the Rhytons. I wanted to pick up today with Man Adorned, which was 2001, because that was a huge shift in your work at that time.

As we touched on briefly yesterday, it was the first time that you had really done human figures in your work, very three-dimensional human figures. Did you think about it consciously as the first time you were working on

portraits or did you think about the other objects as portraits as well, too, the animal pieces?

MR. MORRIS: I never — I didn't really even think about the Man Adorned in the beginning as portraiture at all. It was more just incorporating somehow the human figure, not remains of the human figure. And I didn't really know how to approach it. I saw it as something I might — again, it was early in the season of our starting to work. So I was just out there kind of fooling around and did a very safe thing where I made a skull and put a pot on the top of its head. I felt that was pretty unimaginative on my part, and needed to do that and look at it and realize, well, this is very uninteresting for me. And I'm sure it would be for others as well.

So that's when we — I knew I had to address the flesh, which I had never done before. And I wasn't sure if the flesh was going to take on the form of a mask or if it was going to take on the form of a head because I didn't really know how to approach it. I know that I had seen heads and bodies done in glass and never liked the result. So I didn't want to go down that road. And yet in my interest in archaeology and anthropology, you see so many cultures that use masks. So that was my first approach, was to try to create masks. And that gave me the license to not be necessarily accurate, to be sort of loose with proportions and size and characteristics.

And that was great. It was a great way to go because they did have a facial quality. But then again, you had these faces and then it was, okay, well, what do you do with these faces? Do you just hang the mask on the wall? That didn't really seem very interesting to me at all. So I wanted to associate it with some sort of adornment that might delineate a little bit about this particular person or persona, whether it be with a place or a time or a certain climate, somehow like that.

So it was this association between the face and the object that led it into what we called adorned, Man Adorned. Well, as we worked and made more and more masks, they became more and more human. And all of a sudden, it became skin instead of maybe some other material that a mask might be formed from. And a face is actually — is actually skin. It's landscaped over bone. So it really made sense the way we worked these things from the inside, and working with Jonny and having him make these particular tools where I could reach in, different configurations of tools and learning how to delicately heat and move things out.

Then I started to study facial structure more and more and started to realize the difference, culturally, these different — completely different bone structures, from Mesoamericans to Asians to Africans. It was really phenomenal when you start to realize how sculpted we are by our environment.

So that was interesting, because the idea of Man Adorned — you know, man becomes adorned by their own environment and their own time. So the idea of adornment worked both ways. The land wears its animals and it wears its people as an adornment of its own structure and quality. And then we do that as well.

Then the aspect of the way we adorn ourselves and why we do. It's really a fascinating thing socially what a huge deal adornment is, what we are trying to say to society through how we might decorate ourselves and our hierarchy and all the rest of it. There's so much to it. So it became a really exciting series and it just developed really quickly, and with Jonny reinventing this whole stand system and getting the human scale and the association with larger objects and —

MS. RIEDEL: And that seems somehow important to have a human scale.

MR. MORRIS: It did. It was a place where you could stand face-to-face — not that they were all that way, but it gave us a situation for installation that made it a lot more engaging.

MS. RIEDEL: Those pieces, too, more than any other I can think of, feel like such a fusion of different cultures, different times, different places. Was that very intentional? Was there something that you were working at by that fusion?

MR. MORRIS: Well, I didn't want it to be an academic, anthropological study of different cultures. I would take things — of course, it's very inaccurate in a lot of ways. But there are certain qualities that you want to see come out. There is a character, a quality to, say, a North American Indian or Eskimo that would be very different from Plains Indian. And you want that quality to come out.

You can do it through the facial structure and you can also do it through the association of other objects, whether it be hanging baleen or narwhal tusks or the visors that they would wear because of the sun from the glare from the snow. Things like that — they were fascinating. I mean, if you want a cultural cross section of the world at large, you can just go to the subways of New York and pretty much see that.

And in a lot of ways, you'd find yourself sort of staring at people, looking at their face and their profiles and trying to get a handle on where they're from.

It was funny. For the longest time — God, my poor kids — I'd just embarrass the hell out of them because we

would sit down to eat somewhere and there'd be a waiter or somebody like that and you would be kind of staring at them. And then you'd have to go through this whole thing — you know, where are you from? And they kind of look at you, like, what the hell does this guy want? And you've got to say you're an artist and you work with faces. It was always — it was pretty interesting. The kids would just roll their eyes: Oh God, here it comes; just going to go through this again.

But it was fun. It was a really fun series to work with. And it was amazing what we ended up producing in a season.

MS. RIEDEL: And did the Rattles follow that series? Or did they happen at the same time?

MR. MORRIS: The Rattles kind of came out at the same time because they were — as I said earlier, I can't just work on one thing, one thing, one thing. The Rattles made sense because I got to work with the faces more in the mask form. They got to be these kind of wild departures.

The faces were incredibly tedious. I mean, if I was to sculpt your face, I would really have to be in a certain state of mind because the movements were so subtle. So it's nice if you can make these grosser gestures with the mask images, like with the rattles and sort of play with things. But there's not a lot of room for play when you're dealing with the real formulative structure of a face and then just trying to do the subtle variations of structure that might delineate character or region.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] The Rattles do feel very mythic. They feel almost from myths or from fairy tales rather than a specific culture. But some of the Man Adorned pieces, while I can't point to a specific culture, they still do have very much of a cultural feel in reference. They are more rooted, I think, in portraiture or some sort of representation of man in nature, whereas the rattles — many of them anyway just feel like they are completely out of mythology.

MR. MORRIS: Well, they can be very whimsical. Just the idea of standing there and rattling. I mean, you love doing that. Anybody would.

MS. RIEDEL: Some of them feel — you began to use rope and twine in your work. I'm thinking of pieces like Mazorca, certainly in particular. But I think of the cinerary urns and I think of the rattles sometimes. What I saw is hair or head adornment. And that got pretty interesting.

MR. MORRIS: Well, that came from Trumaine [Mason]. She's the one who wove the closures on the cinerary urns. Her and Timothy Ringsmuth did the closures for the cinerary urns. The incorporation of the different fabrics and materials, whether it be leather, hair, some kind of a twine — I like that dimension because when it was functional; we needed it on the cinerary urns — but secondly, you could add this other dimension. You brought somebody in with a completely different aesthetic and you would sort of give them a little direction and then they'd just kind of go off on this tangent.

So very much like any artifact, where you have anybody that's going to make a mask or something, they might not necessarily do the weaving on it themselves. They might give it to the tribe's master weaver who would tie the strap on or adorn it or hang things from it. That might happen generationally where something is added and added and added through the generations.

So that was a nice thing to be able to do to start passing these objects off. It wasn't just with the Rattles. It also happened with the, of course, the Medicine Jars and with the Fish Traps and other things like that, where I would create these holes, these things where we could actually weave these sections together, actually weave pieces together.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, yes. Since we're talking about Man Adorned and adornment, it seems a good time to talk about the collaboration with Donna Karan because that seemed like such a departure from anything you'd done before, but so much in keeping with the spirit of the work at the time. How did that come about?

MR. MORRIS: Well, I knew Donna through my association with Sun Valley in Ketchum, Idaho, where I was living for some time. I knew Donna and I knew her husband, Stephan [Weiss], who is an artist — [knew] a bit, not well. But I had met them and we had a lot of mutual friends. And Donna was in Sun Valley and went in and saw one of my shows at the Friesen Gallery. And she said, well, who is this guy? They said, well, it's that guy, William Morris, that you know, Diane's husband.

And she went, oh my God, yes, I know the guy. Donna called me up and said, I had no idea, blah, blah, blah. I want to come and talk to you. So she flew out to Pilchuck and we met. She said, I want to collaborate, are you willing to do it? And I thought, well, this is something I would never normally do. And I said, what the hell, sure.

So she started coming up with these kind of componentries, because Donna uses fabric the way I use glass, to

sort of emulate certain things. She goes all over the world and has great connections with fabric and a great eye. And she likes the way the fabric lays across the body and that sort of thing. So she needed these kind of fasteners to tie it all together. Trumaine had been working with me for some time, so Trumaine was sort of our go-between between me and Donna as far as trying to facilitate all these things. Then we would weave these elements and Donna would use some of the glass for accessories as adornments on the pieces on her clothing.

MS. RIEDEL: So was each of the pieces that you and Trumaine were working with to go with a particular piece of hers?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, as a matter of fact, the way this got set up is that she does a major fashion show in New York every year. And she usually needs about anywhere from 20 to 30 — we call them “looks”; each piece is called a look. So we had to work on about 25 looks. We would come up with a componentry or she would come up with a fabric or we would meet somewhere in between. So we got most of this together. And then, of course, the crunch time came. It was about the week before the fashion show.

I flew out to New York and we started working with these directly on the models, which was really fascinating because these women were like genetically engineered creatures that just stepped off this spaceship from some really wonderful planet. They’re all about six feet tall and just stunning European women. There were a dozen of them, but they were very mannequin-like in their demeanor and their energy. And you just work with them. You just work with them, draping and fastening and all that sort of stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: And what were the glass elements?

MR. MORRIS: Some of them were maybe a belt closure or it might have been a huge — almost like a brooch, but the fabric laced through it, so it would connect, and then maybe a pin to close it.

MS. RIEDEL: And were you making these?

MR. MORRIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But you weren’t blowing them?

MR. MORRIS: No, they were sculpted.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, they weren’t blown elements. They were just sculpted elements. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And had you done that before?

MR. MORRIS: Well, they were like elements that we had used in the other pieces, because when Donna first came, she saw what we call the boneyard, which is this table of all these spare parts, just extra stuff that doesn’t get incorporated. And we would talk about it. She would say, I really like this and I like this color, and blah, blah, blah. And then we would have to change the bend on it or the hole size or something to facilitate the fabric and that sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, so it was really great. It was a great, great project.

MS. RIEDEL: And how was that received?

MR. MORRIS: I think it was pretty successful. I mean, it got great reviews. I really didn’t —

MS. RIEDEL: Was it pretty wild to see —

MR. MORRIS: Well, it was the whole scene. I mean, my god, the whole New York fashion scene was all new for me. And it’s not my cup of tea. It’s quite full of itself. It really is. But there’s a lot of creativity. There’s a lot of energy there. And I like the idea of fashion —

I mean, I’m a shorts-and-T-shirt guy, so I’m not — I have a pair of flip-flops and some tennis shoes. You know, it’s not my world. But it was really wonderful to get a glimpse into it. But after the week was over, I was ready to get out of New York.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet, I bet. But how interesting in this period of Man Adorned to be in a position of doing something that’s rather adorning.

MR. MORRIS: You know, one thing is working with other artists, people like Donna. Donna is tremendously effervescent and creative, has a huge amount of energy and she's very charismatic with people, very much like Dale. So you can see why this sort of empire has been built based on her and her vision. It's really a cool thing and I admire that. It's just that we just live very different lives. But it's great to get a glimpse of that.

MS. RIEDEL: And [you] in no way felt interested in doing any further adorning of the human form through your work?

MR. MORRIS: No, that was enough. I really liked that series and I just felt like moving on.

MS. RIEDEL: Within this concept of adorning and man, do you think about your work as having any direct or indirect social commentary?

MR. MORRIS: Not really. I think there is, as a byproduct, but that's not the intent of the work. I don't care to make a statement. No, not at all. Statements get made after the fact. *Cache* was a great example of that. If you deal with any ethnic thing, like Mazorca was an example of that, too, the statement sort of comes after the fact. But I don't have a political agenda or anything like that with the work.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there a hope after — when you say after the fact, did you see something in it afterwards that you weren't even aware of? Or did you —

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I did. Well, any time I get involved in a series, I do a certain amount of research. I mean, I'm certainly not an academician. But it gives me insights into cultures and I find out things that I really didn't know anything about. Ignorance is defined as contempt prior to investigation, as far as I'm concerned. So I have tons of contempt about things that I know nothing about.

So one of the great things is when you do start a series, to go to work at Fashion Week, you know, you go, okay, there's a lot going on here, a lot more than I thought. Sometimes you dismiss your old contempts and sometimes you get new ones. But at least they're based on a little more information.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, interesting. So you have no particular interest in people walking away from your work with particular new ideas or new thoughts?

MR. MORRIS: Or some message?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: No. I do not believe in trying to talk anybody into anything. It doesn't work.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you think about the Man Adorned especially as having any sort of, if not commentary, then thoughts about race or ethnicity?

MR. MORRIS: Yes — I mean, I did. But I thought of it more as sort of a bringing us together. But I remember one time I got sort of accosted a bit by somebody in an audience during a lecture because I was white and I was working with black images and a black persona. And it was like I didn't have the right to do that. I found that so fascinating, that sort of edge or prejudice, because I didn't really think about it. It's just a beautiful facial structure. I don't care what it is. But I can see the way we get really attached to something like that.

In a lot of cases, I find our angle structure quite boring, as opposed to a lot of other ethnic characteristics.

MS. RIEDEL: You mean bone structure —

MR. MORRIS: Bone structure, skin, eyes, lips, that sort of thing, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you look at any portraits of, you know, of any Edward Weston or along those lines, beautiful portraits of Native Americans or —

MR. MORRIS: Oh, sure, absolutely. That was really important that I had a resource of facial structures. A lot of times what I would do is I would have several portraits and I would just sort of blend characteristics. Because that's what was more interesting; because what would happen is I might do a move that might go past something that I intended or not go far enough or throw me off. And then all of a sudden, I had to change it. So all of a sudden, I might have to skip a couple — from one side of the continent to the other or maybe even change continents altogether, just because I had screwed up or for whatever reason.

So then you start working with something else. There were times when I could get accurate, I could get bang-on. But there were times when things just wouldn't go right and I would end up with some blend, like what so many of us are. And you can't necessarily delineate it. But then you can do that with a title or, again, an object

assimilation there.

MS. RIEDEL: A shield or —

MR. MORRIS: Yes, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: Whatever tools or objects they might be accompanied by. Sorry, I meant Edward Curtis, not Weston.

You made a comment a couple of times about your working process and the importance of not knowing exactly where you're headed as you're working and the importance of, if you know exactly where you are headed, it's coming from a conscious place and the importance of being — I think you described it as the victim of a mood. Can you say any more about that?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, and there are two facets of that. The biggest one is being attached to any particular idea. If you get attached to it, you know, the world doesn't work that way. And certainly, the process of glass doesn't work that way. It's not a mathematical science that is defined with real rigid parameters. It's very facile and loose and subtle. The nature of the material is that way.

So as skilled as you become, it's not necessarily the best thing. And then because you have an idea or a sketch or a plan, it doesn't mean it's going to look good. If you get attached, that you want this or that. I've done pieces. I've started on a series with these really great intentions. You know, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. And you all of a sudden look at this stuff and go, as wonderful as this intention was, this stuff looks like crap. It just doesn't look good. I don't like it. Throw it away. Get rid of it. Break it, whatever. I don't like it.

Then there might be some little aspect or some little character that you like, so you sort of follow that down the road. And then all of a sudden, you know, the old happy accident where you just go, goody, here we go. It's just so much more fun that way. Again, I go back to that because it's a big part. It has to be fun. It has to be interesting.

Another saying that I have is, it doesn't matter how good somebody's cooking is; sooner or later, you're going to get sick of eating it. I get sick of my own thinking, my own cooking, my own way of seeing things and that sort of thing. That's another reason why I keep the crew around me, is because they bring that in. So I'll ask somebody. I'll say, well, what do you think of this? And they'll just go, you know, I really don't — I don't like it that way. It would be nicer if it was softer on this side or that color would change.

How attached do you want to be? Try it. You won't know until you see it. You can think through something. But thoughts have no substance. So you have to have an object or something to ally itself with. And by being unattached, you get that.

But then again, there would be things that we would get attached to and that was great. But more often than not, it was always, always, just always willing to sort of let things happen.

MS. RIEDEL: Glass also seems like such an extraordinary material in and of itself, just not like anything else. How much did the material itself intrigue you and develop the work? Just the sheer demanding quality of the material, the possibilities of it, and really a lot of untapped possibilities that it seems you sort of worked out over time?

MR. MORRIS: I would say that was 80 percent of it, was what the material, how it would inform me or surprise me or delight me in a way it moved. It's so funny, because when I would work with other artists in the artist-in-residence program, they would want to do things and it just wouldn't lend itself. The material — if you're going to work in the hot shop molten, you just don't want to do right angles. It just doesn't make sense. Go do that up in the cold shop.

But you would get people that would get stuck on this and they wouldn't just go, okay, let's go soft corners because we can't get — I mean, you can try and try and try, but it's, like, God, just hand it to the cold worker and he'll grind it out in no time. And I would watch people fight this and fight it and fight. And I would just go, it doesn't make any sense. What a waste of time. I mean, use it for what it will do.

And then not knowing what it will do, you're always playing with it. You're always trying to do this. A lot of times, I would have Karen or somebody just spend a day working on tests for me, color tests, surface textures, that sort of thing. I said, you're going to spend a day just experimenting. I want you to use this white powder and I want you to put it on as many different ways as you can. I want you to quench it. I want you to squirt air on it. I want you to stab it. I want you to just do as many different kinds of tests as you can do.

And then I would get all this information. And if I had Karen do it and I had Ross do it — I would have them both do the same thing, I would get completely different results.

MS. RIEDEL: Fascinating.

MR. MORRIS: We did that a lot. We spent a lot of time doing that on — it was just that quality that we were after. We always kept playing with the material and playing with it. And it wasn't just about making those objects. It was about seeing what this material would do. And that, in so many cases, would dictate what the object would end up being.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. So it comes back again that word "play," in terms of experimenting.

MR. MORRIS: Right, and opportunity. Huge opportunity with the material. We were in this at an amazing time because we had the facility and fortunately, I was in a situation where things were going well enough where I could take a crew and just say, you guys are going to do this for a week. I don't know what we are going to get. But we'll just see.

Then again, that's where the faith comes in. You just realize that if you don't — if everybody is in the shop giving it their whole heart, it's all going to work out.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. And arguably, that was one of the finest shops available in the country, no?

MR. MORRIS: Well, it was, but it wouldn't have been the same shop without Jonny O. building it. I had the best equipment builder in the world at my disposal. And he is the one — I mean, basically, most glass shops in the country now are based on what Jonny has done at Pilchuck. So he spawned this whole thing. Because of our working relationship and his ability to work with any material — steel, wood, all these different things to facilitate — and his understanding of the glass material, although Jonny was never a glassblower, he would spend so much time around it and our communication was so good, that's what really enabled us to do so much of what we wanted.

And he was very unattached. He'd spend weeks working on a series of texture plates that I might only use once, you know. Or I might use them every day for three years. But you never knew. And if I didn't use one of his tools, he never took it personally. So it was really extraordinary to approach all of this with so much, just, faith in the fact that we have to go here to get there. You know, we just can't — there are no shortcuts.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative], that's really interesting, just continual experimentation.

MR. MORRIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there particular either traits or tools or things that you needed, absolutely found essential in order — working in the studio for your own working process?

MR. MORRIS: Well, there were certain tools that I used every day. And then there are certain qualities that I use with the work. I don't know if they were my signature, but I just liked them. With the quenching and the crackles; all the work has little cracks running through it. I just love those cracks. I can't get enough of them. So everything has got little cracks on it, you know.

But it's like you almost don't see it anymore. It would just be a way to add a color or a quality of line to the piece that was just — I don't know, it just took it away from that newness. I just liked them. So that ends up on damn near everything.

MS. RIEDEL: And it seems like it brought in also a quality of the randomness, which we talked about a little bit yesterday.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, it does. It's almost like taking that first — making that first mark on the canvas or that firs line on a piece of paper. You've got to start somewhere. And this would always be that way with color. And then, of course, picking the colors. Sometimes that would get very random. But I almost always did the quenching and the cracking.

MS. RIEDEL: And in the studio itself, you always started really early in the morning. Was that just specifically because of the heat?

MR. MORRIS: You know, it was a funny — it was a tradition. First of all, it was sort of the Italian tradition and we always adhered to that a little bit. But Dale, we always started early because it would get hot during the day. You'd want to get done before the heat of the day. I don't know, it was just kind of a nice tradition. And what it did for you is it also set up a bit of a discipline for our workweek. It meant you went to bed early to get up early.

So when you worked, that's all you did. You didn't go out and have a beer with the guys. You didn't go out and party. You didn't do anything. You went home and went to bed and you got up early and you made sure you ate the right thing and all that sort of stuff because when we went into the studio, it was serious stuff. You couldn't

work at a half-measure. You know what I mean?

And we always showed up. I mean, you didn't want to go in there sick as a dog. But that was very rare that somebody couldn't make it. Really rare. It would have to be a pretty severe illness or injury for somebody not to show up in the shop. We all took it very seriously.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. MORRIS: Nobody was ever late.

MS. RIEDEL: And you started at four? Five?

MR. MORRIS: Well, that depended. With Dale, we used to start early. We would start at four. Actually, when Jonny and I were working in Tucson, I think we were up at three a.m. because it got so dang hot during the days. But that wasn't always the case. But we were always in the shop by around six. We liked that. I don't know; it might have gotten a little later. It might have gone all the way to seven when we were in our last days — but still you'd have to get yourself up early.

It was funny. I used to be able to just get up and wander in the shop when I was young. And then I'd have to get up and give myself, you know, an hour, two hours to loosen up my back, wake up, and be able to focus my poor vision and that sort of thing. [Laughs.] You might not start on what we call on the stick as early, but you were still getting up early.

MS. RIEDEL: And so was that pretty much five days a week —

MR. MORRIS: It was four days a week.

MS. RIEDEL: Four days a week.

MR. MORRIS: Our work schedule was four days a week for three weeks a month. And then that would be either for seven, eight months out of the year.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And how long did that go on for?

MR. MORRIS: Well, on my schedule, at least 20 years. Yes; I think about like that.

MS. RIEDEL: That's an extraordinarily disciplined schedule.

MR. MORRIS: It is. But then we had all that time off. And we would take a month off usually in the middle of winter, Christmas holiday time. We would take a month off. Everybody could do their family thing — or at least a couple weeks. And what was amazing is that that would be my schedule. And then, of course, after work every day, I would go to the office and work with Holly on business things and that sort of stuff. But on the weeks that I didn't work, that's when I let the crew work because I let the crew use my facility to produce their own work.

So sometimes they would work straight through the entire year and then they would work at Pilchuck in the summer. So they were all going at it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. And have any of them gone on to have —

MR. MORRIS: They all are, all of them. They are all artists in their own right. They are all still producing their work. Many of them are still working up at Pilchuck in the off-season and exhibiting and doing quite well. It's great to see.

I would say that Dale handed me what I call the keys to the kingdom. You're around the guy. You watch what he does. I have a saying: If somebody does something better than you, you have two choices. You either do it the way they do it until you can do it better or you pay them to do it for you.

There's no reason to reinvent the wheel, so I watched Dale work. I watched his career. I watched the way he handled things. And it's, like, all I've got to do is do this. I could be successful. You don't bitch about it. You don't complain about him. You don't criticize. You do it that way. You know, you don't spit where you eat.

So he handed me these, what I call keys to the kingdom. It's, like, okay, this is what you do. To be successful, you do this. Well, I gave those keys to these people. It's sort of like if you want this, just do this. You saw me do it for a decade or more; it worked. Where is the brain surgery here? You can do it your own way; but if you want a relative success in this field, here's how it goes. That's all there is to it. Granted, there are degrees of, you can call it talent, you can call it opportunity, you can call it luck, you can call it timing, you can call it all these things. But basically, the basic fundamentals are there. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting because it much more closely resembles really a traditional apprenticeship than any sort of university program. It sounds much more like a traditional apprenticeship that one would go through for a number of years learning from the mentor and then continuing on and taking that to the next generation.

MR. MORRIS: Well, the problem with the institutions is, of course, the artists that have been through all of this, they come back and they *talk* about their careers, which is completely abstract. They don't get to see it in practice. A lot of artists don't want anybody in their studios. They work alone or they work with one assistant and they're very quiet about it, that sort of thing. The nature of glass, where you use a multitude of people, is very inviting for people and for spectators and that sort of thing. So a lot of people can participate.

I had a special program. If somebody wanted to work for me, they got their room and their board paid, but they didn't get any money. And they had to do that for a year. And it wasn't the talent that I was interested in. It wasn't the skill, because skills are learned. It was that hunger, that passion, you know. And they had to be nice people. That's not too hard to figure out. The agenda becomes very clear. It's almost like they can't help themselves, you know. You find them at your doorstep and it's not because they're trying to break you down. It's just — it's like a force of nature.

And that's sort of the way it worked out with everybody that I worked with over the years. That's why I never really went through a lot of people. The problem is I'd get somebody and then they'd just sort of move up the ranks, but they really wouldn't go away.

You'd bring people in that didn't have too much time. And, you know, they might spend the time opening doors and closing doors or cleaning up at the end. And they might come and go. But the true help, that was consistent. We never really went through many people unless they went off and decided they wanted to do their own work and develop their own careers. And that, of course, happened. But often, they had enough time when they worked for me to do their own work.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like you really instituted exactly what you had with Dale because, as you said yesterday, I think [you] worked with him for 10 years in that sort of situation, yes?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, but my crew, I paid. And I paid them very well.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you did?

MR. MORRIS: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So after the first year, they were paid?

MR. MORRIS: They were paid. And as I said, they were paid well, because all their own shop time was free, as well as their salary. I think I treated my crew quite well.

MS. RIEDEL: And you had some of them — how many years were many of them with you?

MR. MORRIS: Well, Jonny [Ormbrek] is a whole different deal. I mean, him and I worked together for over 30 years. But I would say, I guess, the longest-standing other person with me would have to have been — was it Karen [Willenbrink-Johnsen] or Randy [Walker]? I think it might have been Karen Willenbrink. And that was — I don't know — it was like 16, 17 years? Randy was like 15, 14 years? Something like that. I can't even tell you. I'm just really bad with dates. But it was a long time.

Ross [Richmond] worked with me for, like, 10 years, I think, and Rik [Allen] for 10. Yes. That main core.

MS. RIEDEL: And it seems that was very successful for you to have that crew and sometimes make it larger with different projects. Sometimes it would shrink —

MR. MORRIS: Exactly, and that was important that I had other people to draw from at certain times. But the rule is this, is that it's always going to be something with somebody. There is always going to be an issue. I mean, there has always been times when I would have fired everybody 10 times. But what would I have done? I wasn't going to find a better friend and I wasn't going to find anybody that knew me better and that sort of thing.

I mean, sometimes you want to bring in an interesting person just for the mix. But in basic things in the shop — you know, I'm not always the easiest guy to work with. And I come in with my moods and that sort of thing. And they know what they are and they just deal with it. And they've got theirs and I can deal with it. So it really makes more sense to just get along.

MS. RIEDEL: It almost seems — I don't have any technical understanding of the actual process. But it seems like there is a real theater-dance component to it, where just when you are watching people who have worked together for a while, there's just an understanding of what happens when. It almost feels like you're watching

dancers moving together.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, there's a choreography that's pretty consistent with certain things. But the problem with that is when there is a consistency, there can be a complacency. The trick with this is that you would be a consistency, but you would want to make a little change. So everybody would have to be really alert. Like Randy, who was basically my extra set of hands and always running the pipe because a lot of times I would not be sitting at the bench. And even if I was, he would be carrying the piece, which would expedite the heat.

He would have to know just how to heat this piece. And I can't tell him every time how to heat it. So if I'm working on the horns on a head of a piece and I've got to stretch these, that heating is so crucial to the next move. And if I've got a feeling that he's not tuned in, I'll go up and take the pipe or, sometimes, I'm too distracted and he actually has to take the pipe from me because I'm so preoccupied by what I'm going to do with the form. I just can't keep it all. You can't be all things at all times.

So that was the thing, is that these people were so focused and so dedicated. That's what I was talking about earlier with this kind of concept of a dynasty, where it's just a — it's a formula, a chemistry that's almost alchemic the way it comes together. And that was — it had a life of its own. It just had a life of its own. It really did. We were just along for the ride.

And that's why — you want the piece to be a certain way and you want it to look a certain way. But you know that if you are out there, everybody is focused and giving it their all, it just doesn't get any better than that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes. And again, that material just seems unique in that nothing else requires that kind of absolute immediate attention or skill or knowledge.

MR. MORRIS: Nothing. There's nothing unless you are dealing with kind of a — I would imagine working with atoms and, you know, nuclear weapons, maybe. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: So we'll talk briefly about the bronzes, because you did do some work in bronze. Were you ever drawn — have you been drawn to any other material? Or glass was really just what commanded your attention, what held your attention?

MR. MORRIS: No, ceramics was my spawn, in ceramics, which I loved. And I did a little painting and drawing. But the glass was all of it at once. It was the whole kit and caboodle right there happening immediately.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you mean? Would you elaborate?

MR. MORRIS: Well, you had the forming, you had the firing, you had the glazing, you had the drying, you had it all happening, instant — second stacked up against second. It was all there.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, yes.

MR. MORRIS: So you talk about a choreographed design of the nature of characteristics, the plasticity, the rigidity, the heat, all that, just all together just racing around at one moment. It was thrilling. It was absolutely thrilling.

MS. RIEDEL: There is a group improvisation quality —

MR. MORRIS: It is, it is. And I like multitasking. I like my mind to work as fast as it can because it's very unsettled. So this was completely and utterly captivating to me. It completely arrested my attention. So that was great.

And as far as bronze goes, I remember I worked a bit with Nancy Graves and she was such a fantastic artist. She invited me out to the Walla Walla Foundry where she was doing some stuff out there because she was — these great artists were so — it was just so nice working with them because you develop this really wonderful relationship. I got to visit and hang with these kind of people and go visit Nancy at the foundry and see her working with the bronze. That was very intriguing with me.

And it did open that door to wanting to do the bronzes. So that's where, when somebody approached me and wanted to produce a series of bronze, I said, well, yes. It was almost kind of like an honor with Nancy, just because Nancy did it and she wanted me to make bronzes, so yes, let's just do it.

MS. RIEDEL: And the bronzes were done in 2006?

MR. MORRIS: Well, they're actually still being produced. The last one just got done.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, basically, but that wasn't so much me working directly with the bronze. You know, what we did was we just cast certain pieces and then produced them in bronze. And you try to pick pieces that would lend itself, where you could get a quality to the bronze that wouldn't come from other materials. You can cast bronze from anything — wood, clay — most of it's done with clay or wax where it's pointed up. But in this case, we tried to cast — we would cast directly from the glass. And we would capture textures and quality of the pull in that elasticity in the bronze that you can't — it's really difficult to do with clay.

It's like when you duplicate anything, you lose a little bit down the way. And you get too many steps removed and all of a sudden, the quality is sort of lost. But that's why it was nice to just do these molds directly from. And these guys were so skilled, the Wright foundry out there. You know, Peter Wright and his foundry in New Mexico. It's in Santa Fe.

MS. RIEDEL: And you didn't feel compelled to design something new for bronze. You went and looked at past series and shows?

MR. MORRIS: I did, because, what was I going to do? I was going to go sculpt something out of clay or find something. I would be more compelled to do a bronze now than I would then because people would — they would always say, why not other material? All I can do is this — glass is enough. I mean, my God. It's a full-time job.

Yes, bronze, you're always — it's relatively static, except for the patinas, which are more painterly. But it's a relatively static process. I'm sure there are a lot of cool tricks and there is a lot of art to knowing the process. But the material itself is not a dynamic one — that, of course, glass is.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And you chose — is this correct — one piece from six different series in order to cast? Something like that? A jar or a rhyton?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, rhyton, jar. We did actually two rhytons. Man Adorned, Medicine Jar, Idolito, and Idolo. So seven, I guess, pieces have been done so far.

MS. RIEDEL: And what did you think?

MR. MORRIS: Well, actually, and then we also did — we did that one rhyton bull [that] was pointed up to almost life-size.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, interesting.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, so that was done, too. And that was a really great piece. I don't even know where that's now. I went to Santa Fe to work on that a little bit. They pointed that up and they did a fantastic job.

MS. RIEDEL: So one of the small Rhytons was this one right here.

MR. MORRIS: That bull, yes. The original piece has a whole stack of tusks strapped onto the back. And that's what the large one was.

MS. RIEDEL: And how did you feel when you saw these in bronze? Were you pleased?

MR. MORRIS: I was excited by it. I thought they were wonderful. And I loved having them around because, of course, then you don't have to worry about the dog knocking them over.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] There's that. The Cinerary Urns, I think these followed in 2002. These were a total change.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, this was a total change. I was actually supposed to be taking a sabbatical that year. I was going to be doing some traveling — yes, I decided to take a year off to do some traveling. And then some issues happened at home with my kids and I needed to be around. And I thought, well, okay, I've told everybody I'm going to take the sabbatical off, but I'm here, what am I going to do?

So I would go into the studio two days a week. The way it happened was this: It was in the summer that my mom passed. And that's when I made the first cinerary urn. And then — God, people started dying. I mean, friends of mine started dying, you know, mentors, Scanga and John Hauberg and Stanislav Libenský. So I made these other urns because it just sort of made some sense and was asked to or whatever the reasons were.

And then 9/11 happened. And it was sort of like this whole thing. And I thought, God — I was talking with my friends, Flora Mace and Joey Kirkpatrick — and Flora, of course, is the one I did the original — she did the cane drawings for me. And I said, can we do a — I would like to do a couple of these urns. I'm really compelled to do these really large cinerary urns with the 9/11 on them. So we did a series of these four urns that sort of

represented the multitude.

I really loved the way these urns were. They were really pleasing. I was working with my own process with this whole idea of death because I had never had anybody that I was — dear friends or family members die. So I was kind of processing this. These urns, it was so nice to go in and make these things, because it wasn't art. It wasn't anything. It was just making these urns for something that I didn't know anything about. They were just going to be lovely objects that would rest with these individuals. That's all there was to it. It wasn't — you know, I didn't have to think it through.

MS. RIEDEL: Was the team all gone? So you were working pretty much by yourself?

MR. MORRIS: No, no, no, no, no. Well, it was interesting because the team were up there doing their own work. And then I had to come back to them and say, hey, you guys, can I borrow the shop for a couple of days a week? [Laughs.] And by the way, would a couple of you guys help me? I didn't need a whole team. I just needed a few people to work with me.

So for two days a week, I would go in and I would make urns. And I just started making these things. And they were just very simplistic and just time to go in and reflect. I didn't have them scheduled for any show or anything. It was just — I had the year off. I didn't have to do anything with them.

MS. RIEDEL: The first in a very long time.

MR. MORRIS: First in 20 years I didn't have some kind of a show scheduled. So that was great. We worked away. And Trumaine was working on the closures and they were fun to do and they meant a lot to me. We would sit around. We could look at them and talk about them and really address this idea of death for the first time and what it meant.

I was doing some reading and some writing at the time on that aspect. And then —

MS. RIEDEL: What were you reading? Do you remember?

MR. MORRIS: There was one book that was most significant to me. I was kind of studying it. It was Rodney Smith's, called — wait, no, was it Rodney Smith or Rodney Taylor? — either/or — *Lessons from the Dying*, an incredible book. He was in a seminary for a while and then he worked in hospice for about 14 years or something. This guy knew about death. He had a wonderful sense about it and he could write really beautifully. So that was a really great tool for me at the time as well.

And then — I was, like, what are we going to do with all these urns? And then Graham [Graham] and I were talking. He said, God, wouldn't it be great to do an installation with these things?

So we put some shelves up. We started stacking them up and this and that. And then it was just like, let's keep them all together. Let's build this room and just keep them in this room. It will be like a little mosque.

Yes. So that's what we did. And it turned into this great piece. But that wasn't the intent at all. I didn't even think the things were ever going to be sold. It was like, well, I'm going to do something with them.

And then I thought about it. I thought, you know, whatever. We'll sell them. And that made it nice to make them because then you knew that no matter what, sooner or later, they were all going to get used. And you knew what they were going to get used for. And it's functional. It makes sense. So that's how that series came to be. And it just — there was something really sweet about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, such a quietness to it.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, rather than, you know, trying to be something else. And it was really nice because the way Trumaine would wrap them. I mean, every lid was wrapped in wax — thread and wax, so it sealed really nicely; and then the closures. Even doing the closures was sort of a fun little ceremony.

MS. RIEDEL: And that emphasis, again, seems like it became, again, very formal, simply about form, texture, surface pattern.

MR. MORRIS: Subtle variations, just like the people whose remains they might embody. Yes, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: And the wrapping — there is a very wonderful poetic quality, I think, to the wrapping as well.

MR. MORRIS: And my belief now is when a person dies, first of all it's not — death is not for the dying; death is for the living. We're the ones that make the ceremony out of it. And it's so hard because when people are alive, they're this and they're that and the other thing. But when they've passed, the simplicity takes over again. The

distillation happens. And you go back to that soft point, you know. This is where I find — like, for example, this whole Michael Jackson thing is so stupid because, you know, you don't want to make somebody bigger. You want to get smaller.

The problem with our lives is they're too big. That's what drives us crazy; you know, our lives are never big enough. And everything that gets in our way is trying to make our lives bigger. And then when we die, they just get — they just distill down to — what? A little pile of ashes. That gets honest: no drama, no nothing. It's all, that's it. It's, like, whew, finally you're over with it. You can take a break.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's interesting because the series that followed the urns is Mazorca, correct?

MR. MORRIS: I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds about right: 2002, 2003?

MR. MORRIS: Yes. Can we take a little break? That would be great.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RIEDEL: So we were just talking about the Cinerary Urns and I was thinking that I feel like that simplicity and that focus on form really came through in Mazorca somehow, and then what we talked about also yesterday, as a second thread running through, was a sense of that functionality, again in terms of the objects.

But that Mazorca series felt like an interesting fusion of this quiet and this focus on form that came from perhaps from that experience, the cinerary urns, but then also everything that had come along up till that point through new filters.

That's completely my interpretation of it. What were you thinking? How did that come about?

MR. MORRIS: Well, as you were asking me that question I was really trying to think of what started that and I — let's see. Okay, I know I had an idea for a piece, a suspended — for some reason I was thinking about beads and things hanging.

Oh, okay, I remember how this started. I remember when I was traveling I was spending a lot of time in Mexico.

I was going down to a lot of places, different, you know, year after year and I was spending a lot of time doing some spear fishing down there and then paragliding and traveling down through South America and Central America and Mexico, and I remember looking at places and I remember seeing all these things hanging from buildings and things like that and I just love the way that you just — people would hang stuff up.

MS. RIEDEL: Like plants tacked on the insides of —

MR. MORRIS: Well, plants, tools, a decoration, peppers, just things hanging. I just sort of loved it and then they would dry things out, crops.

So, I don't know, I just thought I'd like to do something like this. And I was working again, working a lot with Trumaine and the fabrics and that sort of thing; and I thought, well, it'd be nice to incorporate these old beautiful hemp ropes and maybe we dye some of this rope to give it some tint and some color, and thread these things together.

So I was thinking about all these things you could hang, and then, of course, drawing on the reserve of the artifacts and yet associated with this idea of hanging. Not suspended, the suspended were done across a bar. But I'd never done anything hanging from, say, a line or a rope or cord.

It was a different association, and I don't know how it all worked out; since I was spending so much time in Latin America, that was the flavor that it had. So I thought I'd start working along those lines.

So I thought it would be nice, how would you make corn? Because I loved all the association with all the Latin cultures with corn and how that's such a mainstay for life and abundance. It truly means abundance down there. If the corn crop is lost, you've really lost your — well, you could lose everything.

So there's a lot tied to it and I like the simplicity and the purity of the metaphor for corn, as well as the image itself. So the Mazorca just became the title and the word — I like the word because it's an odd Mexican, or Spanish, word. You don't hear it in passing.

MS. RIEDEL: No, I'd never heard it.

MR. MORRIS: People always say — they would always say *maize*. And that would be the term for a more refined form of corn, as an ear of corn or ground into a flour, or however. It would just be maize. That would say *corn*. But *mazorca* was more in terms of the crop or the rougher, farmers' term and I like the sound of that word and that it's kind of odd.

That coupled with making the corn, realizing, my God, we can make this corn in so many ways. You take this corn and you make it in all these ridiculous scales and you'd see — you'd come to a little village and you'd see this statute of this corn cob that was 12 feet high.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: It was just beautiful. This is all about corn here. That's the god.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, yes.

MR. MORRIS: And I'd just think, what a neat statute, what a neat effigy, sort of a goddess, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I never saw anything like that. Was it contemporary or old?

MR. MORRIS: Both. Some of them were made out of — you'd see new ones that were made out of tinfoil and plaster, and then you'd see old ones that had been carved out of stone.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, it was fantastic.

MS. RIEDEL: In Mexico?

MR. MORRIS: Well, you'd see it in Mexico but you'd also — I saw it more up in some of the little villages up outside of — in South America and —

MS. RIEDEL: In Peru?

MR. MORRIS: I'd see it in Peru and Bolivia; again, I even saw some beautiful images for it in the Himalayas, of all places. Wasn't that interesting? So I'm just trying — I took photographs of all that and now I lost all my photographs when my hardware crashed so I can't tell you exactly where I saw them.

So that was a lot of the beginnings of it, and then, of course, when you start opening that door of the whole Mesoamerican culture, my God, with the Mayans and the Incas, it just gets really big.

And at the same time I was doing that, that's what started the Idolos and the Idolitos, because they were all part of that and that language, I had the opportunity to do the main Mazorca piece, I had a show at the Palm Springs Museum of Art and they gave me this huge space. So I got to work on a piece for that specifically.

MS. RIEDEL: That was the first big installation in a long time, wasn't it?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I think it was. I mean, there'd been a few years since we'd done kind of a major piece like that and I'd never done anything that was suspended like that before.

So that was a lot of fun and just figuring out the armature and the association of the draping and then working with Trumaine on all the fabrics and the weaving, and Jonny was dyeing the ropes and all the different sizes that we'd use.

It was just — it was a lot of fun, that piece. We really enjoyed it — because we realized that there was just a huge possibility of association there, with objects.

MS. RIEDEL: You immediately start thinking of the sea, too, the moment you see all those different ropes and all that knotting.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I think so. For us it wasn't so much that as it was — just when you start hanging things up and it just becomes almost addictive. You've just got to keep hanging more and more and more, and layer after layer, and, you know, peeking through it. Then I like the idea of hanging this glass, too, because these pieces would touch and, of course, they'd make that prohibited sound of clanking.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes, glass, there was just enough danger involved.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, just enough danger. If the wind really blew, it'd be all over. But that had a life of its own certainly, that particular piece did.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that was 2003, yes? Yes, when you look back on — then there was the Native Species in 2006. That felt completely different. That was again — we talked about that briefly yesterday, the commission from George Stroemple.

MR. MORRIS: Right, well that came from left field. That was, again, a commission coming from George. George is a dear friend and he approached me on that and what happened was I went and visited him down at his ranch.

He has a couple ranches down in Oregon, one in central and one in southeastern Oregon. He had got some land down in Steens Mountain, which is down in southeastern Oregon, which I had been to long before I knew George and explored that area.

It was just fantastic; and then George and I took a motorcycle trip down there years ago before he had this ranch and he'd always talked about as a kid he would just crawl all through the deserts and the hills there and loved it. And then he ended up getting a piece of land down there.

So I was down there, I don't know, 20-some-odd years ago. Then I went down there with George about 12 years ago or so on the motorcycles; and then George got a place down there and I went down there with my daughter Jackie and spent a week or so down there with him on his ranch, which was right there on the edge of the Alvord Desert with the background of the Steens Mountain right there just rising up.

You could hike right up the side of the mountains, and George had this very interesting situation where he had actually owned land within the wilderness there, so we could access it. The washes with the artifacts and the remains and just the wildlife.

Steens, if you look at a map of the United States at night for the lumens, the light, this is the darkest place in the country.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, this is less population — George would have to drive about 70 miles for a loaf of bread.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. MORRIS: So it was really isolated.

And he got this great old place and it was really cool, because he's the kind of guy that he didn't need to go and tear it down and build some big old empty place. He just put in some new carpet and painted the place and tore out all the barbed-wire fencing and just left it open and it really great. He's got a great sensibility with the land.

So he approached me. We were hanging out down there and he just said, you know, my God, I love all this stuff down here. I love all these kind of animals and plants. He says, you know, is there anything we could do that would sort of be this way? George had this love of Japanese and Korean ceramics that were painted, these traditional forms with these elaborate images on them. Of course it was a little bit like the Canopic Jars. It was so funny, I think he might have sent me a box full of juniper berries and branches and twigs and seed pods and rocks and crap.

He just sent me this box and I'm going through this stuff and we're looking at it; so we started sculpting some of the little animals and parts, and then I thought, well, what am I going to do with these? And we started sticking them on the sides of pots and then started doing the drawings incorporated, so you'd actually do a two-dimensional drawing on the side of the pot and then have an object coming off of the pot.

Or, like, the drawing of a falcon on the pot with a three-dimensional leaf with some dead rodent draped over it. It became really fun to do this and then we finally thought, okay, well, this is great. We're just going to do a series of these vessels that delineate aspects of the Northwest. Flora and fauna and nature studies, but not trying to be too accurate, that sort of thing, just had a certain feeling, different wild grasses and things like that.

So that's what the series was. We worked on that for several months and produced the body of work Native Species. Then George had a beautiful old classic case system designed sort of like the old natural history museums like the Field Museum, where you go in and these beautiful wooden cases that were lit from within.

We had a lot of fun with that project. It was really a great one.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting too, because listening to you talk about it reminds me of the way you described many years earlier [that] you'd work on tandem series, and one would be sort of three-dimensional renditions of

particular objects and then another would be a drawing of that object on the glass. This seems to have incorporated both of those ways of working into a single object.

MR. MORRIS: Well, and again, part of that's the fact that you just want to vary it for a sense of variety, but then also you want to break up your day and do different things. The tedium of the sculpture is one thing but then sort of the quickness of the — of course, Jonny would spend the time doing the drawings so I got to just quickly pick them up and make a piece.

Then also Rik doing the engravings on the vessels of certain grasses or leaves or plants. Then we did a whole series of graal works, which I'd never done before, where we had taken layers and layers and layers of color and built them up and then cut through them like the old [Émile] Gallé pieces, and that was really fun, too, for the Aspen Groves.

Then we were actually making shards and cold-working the shards into the shapes of oak leaves and then making the acorns and building those onto the pieces. I mean, we were playing.

We were still playing; we sort of used some new techniques but we took a lot of older techniques and incorporated them with some of the newer ones to just give us a variety of forms and textures, colors, and to delineate these plants and animals.

MS. RIEDEL: As a series, it seemed especially different, too, to have a different quality about it. It didn't have that same sort of contemporary cutting edge. It almost had a reference to pieces from an older time.

MR. MORRIS: That's what was kind of relaxing about it. It was great, because George — those are really timeless, those beautiful old forms. I've always been a pot maker from way back when, so I could totally relate to pots and jars, and I love that you put lids on things, and George loved those things too.

So it was sort of a no-brainer because we both liked them. It's just a nice format to work with. It's not unlike the wall panels, where you limit an aspect of the ingredient so then the variety has to come through in another way. If we had been sculpting forms each time, then you have to deal with this one thing.

But the pot — that's your canvas.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: And there's something very simplistic about that, whether it be the Cinerary Urns or the wall panels with the size and the scale. The pots just really — they're just a great canvas to work with.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that series was 2006. Then not long after that, about a year, year and a half, right, you decided to stop working in glass. I'm curious as to whether there was a particular series or a particular group of pieces that signaled to you that you were done, or was it something else? That you just decided you weren't done but you were just going to stop.

MR. MORRIS: There wasn't something that signaled that. Actually, after that I started a series of work based on more Polynesian kind of imagery. I called them Fish Traps. Of course, there were other pieces than fish traps. Again, they were very artifact-oriented and they dealt with an ethnic regional flavor to them, and it was just more about Polynesia.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you spending a lot of time in Hawaii at this time?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, this was when I was spending a lot of time, I'd been in Fiji and Tahiti and Hawaii, different parts of Polynesia. And it was all centered around the sea and the aspects of fishing and the relationship with man and fish and that sort of thing.

Of course, I love to spearfish and be in the water. But some of these old traditional netting methods and the beautiful old fish traps from even Burma, or any peoples that lived on the sea, developed these elaborate farming or trapping methods for fish.

So it was just another challenging way to explore that with the material, and we were actually weaving hot glass together, adding these bits where it would create almost a netting over a bubble with images on it, with fish on the bubble, so they were like fish trapped.

Then you would blow it a little bit and you'd have this sort of tension where the glass would come out through the netting and the image of the fish just packed into the trap, kind of wanting to spill through the little bars or constrictions.

It was a fun process. We'd not worked along those lines and it gave us some really great images and pieces that

we all enjoyed.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did you decide to just — how did you decide to stop?

MR. MORRIS: You know, I'd been contemplating the idea of it for some time. I was posed that question during the filming of *Creative Nature* [2008]: What would you do if you didn't blow glass? I remember saying, well, the world does not begin and end on the end of a blowpipe.

You say stuff like that, so you've said it, and you take it to heart: What does that really mean? Does that mean that you could not work? Could you really entertain the idea of never blowing glass again? I thought about it and I thought if I could do anything I wanted to do, what would it be? And I really didn't know but I thought I could stop and we'll see what happens. So I made the decision and it was really frightening in a lot of ways, of course, because I thought how do you — you don't just stop something like this. What do you do? How do you step away from it?

It's like Paul Simon's song, there's 50 ways to leave your lover. Well, there's 50 ways to walk away from a glass shop. There's really — you can pick any one of them to get there but you're still going the same place.

So you just walk away. I went through all 50 ways in my head and it was still just walk away. And I did. I did. The hardest part for me was telling my crew that I was doing that and then once that was over, I realized I'm okay with this, I think. I could always go back if I wanted to and I was curious how I'd feel about it; and I haven't had a desire to get back into the glass shop, other than if I was going, I'd just go in and poke around a little bit.

But I've kind of kept myself away from that because I kind of made a little rule that I just wouldn't do it because how can — I call it the hokey-pokey. You know that dance when you were a kid in school, I've got one foot in, I've got one foot out?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: Right, well I didn't want to hokey-pokey with this. I wanted both feet out. And I wanted to see how my life would take shape; and time has a way of giving you a clear perspective.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly.

MR. MORRIS: So I knew it would just take a few years and it's still interesting for me. I mean, here we are talking about my career as a glassblower. So it's not over.

I'm actually surprised I did this, because I don't — I haven't done anything else associated with that. If people say, will you come do this, and I just say, nope, I'm retired. [Laughs.]

But this is different because now if anybody asks, if they want me to come and do this, I'll just say, well, buy the tape.

MS. RIEDEL: Read it online.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, read it online. So anyways, this is kind of a little bit of a last hurrah for that. I mean, that's a little bit what *Creative Nature* was. I felt like this is a great opportunity for this.

MS. RIEDEL: How did that come about, that documentary? That was pretty unusual.

MR. MORRIS: I was just approached on that. I mean, I was very honored, but it was kind of weird because, as I said before, there's so much with personality in our culture.

Everybody seems to put personalities first and principles behind, and this desperate hanging onto; I thought about that with this idea of retirement. I thought, you know, you see yourself sort of fading out as sort of the guy that's sort of still doing it.

I mean, I look at Mick Jagger playing that same song — he doesn't skip around the stage quite as high as he used to and — it's cool, but it's, like, I don't want to sing this song anymore. I want to sing a different song. I mean, I don't know what else I'm going to do. I'm doing it. I'm carving a little bit. I'm making a few little things, but I don't have to worry about what they look like. I don't have to take them to fruition.

I can explore all those little things I've talked about or thought about and also I can just, like I said, look at things. That's what I love to do, just observe nature, be a part of it.

MS. RIEDEL: I do remember you saying that. Maybe it was in the documentary and that called out to me.

MR. MORRIS: And is that really enough? I don't know. I mean, I've said it. We all talk a great talk but can we really walk it? I'm incredibly fortunate to have this opportunity to do this, so I am [doing it]. I don't have anybody to emulate. I don't have any mentors on this one.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I'm trying to think of people who just stop and take a clean break and walk away.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I think if you do, you don't know that they walked away. They just sort of quietly disappear and I kind of like that idea, too. It's sort of, like, whatever happened to that guy? You remember that really interesting musician and I haven't heard any of his music in a decade. Where is he? What's he doing?

It's kind of like that. It's like — that's okay, that's nice.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting, because your life seems to have always been a real balance between doing things outside the shop, traveling, or being out in nature, and so it's not as if there was nothing to fill all those hours or fill up your time.

MR. MORRIS: Well, I think this is something that I've been really fortunate about is that I have so many passions. I have so many things that I love to do and to actually have the time to do them and also to be — to reflect. I mean, to reflect and do it out of choice, rather than out of a mandatory debilitation through age. Where your body doesn't work anymore so you sort of have to sit and reflect.

I don't want to do that. I like the idea of doing it through choice. But no, through all my flying — and I'm not going to be able to do those. Those are things that require a certain amount of athleticism and that goes by the wayside. It's just a natural course of things. I can't dive as deep as I used to and I can't run as far and as fast or jump as high.

But I can still get out and do those things and I can have a great time doing them and that's what I want. I want that in my life. I want that to not just be the desperate vacation between shows, between commitments. I really pushed that rock really far, really hard.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, you did.

MR. MORRIS: And it's got a lot of — it still has momentum.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: It's still off rolling somewhere.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that exhibition still —

MR. MORRIS: Yes, it's like the Freddy Krueger — "Myth, Object, and the Animal" — it's like the Freddy Krueger of exhibitions. It just will not die.

MS. RIEDEL: How — that's been running for — it started in '99, didn't it?

MR. MORRIS: Something like that, and we changed — the idea of the whole thing was to be able to change it, which we've done. Now I think the Medicine Jars are sort of the newest series in that and a number of the pieces have been sold off and that's fine. I'm willing to let all that stuff go.

I'm not attached to that anymore. I'm not attached to that exhibition. That's a whole different life and era and — yes, if I were to put a sign on there — yes, "William Morris, 1985 through 2005" — it's sort of like your epitaph. That's it. I don't need to be the guy out there living and doing it. I don't need to go see it. I don't need to lecture about it. Yes, it has a life of its own.

MS. RIEDEL: I was looking at the list of your exhibition schedules during that 20-year period, 30-year period, and actually even earlier, and it must have been thoroughly exhausting. I mean, the number of one-man shows that happened in a given year is pretty staggering.

MR. MORRIS: It was, at times.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, you showed with Riley Hawk, you showed with Habatat, you showed with Heller, and it seems any significant glass gallery you were there. You were also in a number of small museums. You had a piece at the Met, yes?

MR. MORRIS: Oh yes — now and since then, the resume, it's — I don't know, 22 pages.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: It was so funny, because I remember — I'll never forget — today it's clear as yesterday, when I asked Dale, I said, Dale, I need to make a résumé but I don't have anything to put on it, and he says, okay, the best thing you do is make a statement. That takes up a lot of the page. And I just — I look back at that and I just shake my head. That's how it started. It was just — it's so funny.

You realize, you know, it's really great. All that stuff is really great but, you know, it's really not that important. In the scheme of things when it's all said and gone, what's important? Your friends and your family.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: You made all this stuff and it was great and we had a great time doing it; and, again, it was all about the friendships that we developed and the things we figured out and our challenges and passing those experiences on to the kids. And that's really what matters, and the rest of the stuff and where it goes now has a life of its own.

What people write about it, how they view it, how society perches itself to embrace it is way out of my control.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: What I like about that is, as I said, the objects are just a manifestation or something and the way that's interpreted is going to change over time — and how that changes, I can't hang on to that. I can't. I don't want to build a museum for this stuff. It's not a holocaust museum. It was just a bunch of guys getting together solving problems and having something to do.

MS. RIEDEL: It does seem as if it was a record, if it's a record of anything, a physical manifestation of anything, that one of the things that it absolutely was an embodiment of, was the evolution of the glass movement, the studio glass movement, as you were part of it for that period of time, and that seems like to have been a very dynamic part of the studio glass movement, done at the right time for it and at the right place for it.

MR. MORRIS: That's true, and that has a lot to do, literally, the timing. I was in the right place at the right time with the right people.

MS. RIEDEL: If you were going to sum up how you've seen the glass movement change since from the beginning of the time you started your career until now, how would you describe the change?

MR. MORRIS: Well, that's a tough question. I get asked that periodically and it's a hard one to answer, because I was so immersed in it and now I'm completely separate from it that I don't — to tell you the honest truth, I don't think I have a very accurate sense of where it's now.

All I know is that it was so dynamic and we were all so captivated by the material and there was such a buzz of enthusiasm about it, critically and financially, that it was just a phenomenon of the time. It was coming out as something that was entirely new.

Is that something or what?

MS. RIEDEL: What is it?

MR. MORRIS: I thought it was something suspended, and it's just sitting there checking you out. Anyways — to be swept away by something like that. Again, it's like being in love. You're swept away by it and you're just head over heels and you're just going for it and that's what we did.

There's a great — Rilo Kiley sings a great song called *The Slow Fade of Love,* and that it's sort of an insidious thing that you're not even aware of; and you know when something fades away, where it's the sense you get up in the morning, you go do something, and you go, I don't even like doing this. I didn't want it to get to that point.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. MORRIS: I didn't want it to get to that point. I didn't want it to get to a point where it was, like, I've got to do this because I don't know what the hell else to do — you know? I don't want any aspect of my life to be that way. I'd like to have — because then you start to hang on to something out of fear.

And we do that anyways, but you think about the way you put your life force and where you put it and maybe that's okay, maybe that's a laudable thing to do. You might as well stick it out. It almost says it doesn't matter what we do.

Well, if it doesn't matter what we do, then why not just walk away? Stick with it, walk away, whatever, but make a choice and do it and don't be afraid to look it in the eye.

MS. RIEDEL: We talked about American glass and Italian glass a little bit yesterday and the really dynamic fusion that happened, or how they fed off of each other and fed each other.

If you're thinking about American studio glass in relation to international craft or glass, can you think of anything, other than what sounds like a real commitment to experimentation and exploring, as distinguishing American glass from other cultures?

MR. MORRIS: Yes — I can and part of it is this — well, first of all we don't really have any tradition. So there's no loyalty.

Which in some ways is very freeing but in many ways it's very disrespectful. It makes us — that's why we're the gross Americans when we travel. We're full of arrogance. We're very pretentious — and yet that can be courageous when it comes to the material.

There's a lot of crap made in America. There's a lot of bad sculpture, bad glass, bad art, and that's okay. You need to have a certain amount of that to get some good.

And then you also — it needs to be okay to make bad stuff for a while before it can be good stuff, sometimes. Otherwise you'll never get past that place. You'll get stuck in that traditional fear. So there's advantages and disadvantages to it, and I think that those are advantages, is that we have that bravado, that cavalier approach to it, and like I said, I'll take anybody's idea. I'll steal anything.

MS. RIEDEL: By "cavalier," do you mean a willingness to not — to stretch the material in a new direction and not necessarily adhere to the way it's been done over time?

MR. MORRIS: Yes — see, you're making it sound respectable.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Sorry about that.

MR. MORRIS: No, and I'm going the other route. I'm making it sound a little more deviant than that where just like, you know, they do it this way. I'm just going to do it that way because it's just been done so much that way. Let's just throw it out. I remember when Susan Stinsmuehlen would say technique is cheap and she would just say, throw the technique out the window.

Smash it, drag it through the mud, spit on it, make it — just disrespect it. And this woman had a lot of discipline and she had a lot of technical skills, but she used that as a tool for herself and as a professor and it was good. It was a good tool. It worked.

MS. RIEDEL: So are you saying, then, that it's important to try, for example, to make right angles in a hot shop or at least be willing to —

MR. MORRIS: I think it's like anything. You need to try it to know.

Ideas, theory, you need to practice it. You need to walk down that road or come very, very close to it to really be able to know something. You have to walk in those shoes, and with glass, the thing with that is it's such a hugely demanding technical material. I don't know what is more diverse as far as demanding the skill from the worker.

As far as you have to develop this sense of timing and fluidity, and just so many little things and you have to be on your game. It's not like you can — there's no way I could walk back into a glass studio and do anything near what I've done. It's just gone. It's just gone.

For me to go in and try to do a Man Adorned face, I mean, I don't know if I could ever get to that point again, let alone walk in and do it in a week or a month. I don't think — I don't know if I'd ever do it again.

And that's fine with me. It was what it was. But I don't ever want to disrespect that. That was where the tradition was for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, a skill level and a discipline.

MR. MORRIS: It was, and part of me stopping, it's, like, God, whew — because I just couldn't keep it up anymore. I couldn't hold that attention anymore. I just don't want to.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems in many ways that with the studio glass movement there was a new emphasis on sculpture and on idea or content-driven objects as opposed to pure, more functional focus. Do you think that's true?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I do. I think there was a lot of that. I mean, I liked a lot of the functional things that were done

in glass because they were very honest.

There's a lot of work done to try to be art, just to try to be sculpture. And then you'd have people talking about it in some way that was, you could tell it wasn't authentic. They were making this crap up and it's just because it's a new material.

I would have to say some of the glass artists were some of the worst speakers I'd ever heard. I never heard the word "um" more during lectures than glass lectures anywhere else in my life. It was either "um" or "this is something."

We'd listen to these lectures up at the Pilchuck Glass School and it was like, wow, these people don't — that's why people that were brought in like Judy Pfaff and Dennis Oppenheim. These guys thought about what they were doing. They weren't out there just slinging hot stuff around the room.

You'd listen to them and that was almost the other extreme. It was, like, wow, it was pretty verbose. But I think that early on there was a somewhat pretentious side to that, trying to sound clever when really we were a bunch of neophytes that didn't know what the heck we were doing and we were just making "something."

This is something, because the movement was that new and it hadn't been used in this form of expression. And the people that were doing it were into it not because they had some great message to say. They just loved working with that hot, gooey stuff. They were just seduced. We were all seduced by the material.

And that's part of the difficulty with the material, is that you don't have to be brilliant. You can just dazzle them with the glitter. It's tough. It's like working with gems.

MS. RIEDEL: But you decided fairly early on to take a lot of the glitter out.

MR. MORRIS: Well, I did, and it wasn't because I was trying to be more prophetic or braver than anybody else. It was just stuff that I liked. That was just what I liked.

I was a mountain forest guy, whereas Dale was more of a shiny water guy and he was doing it better than anybody else and I thought, well, there's no point in doing what he's doing. He's got the shine and the color down. I might as well go to the other end.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: But it wasn't so reactionary. I just gravitated towards my own personal little thing. I wasn't trying to make a big statement, never.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Did you concern yourself about whether you were making craft or making art or what that distinction was?

MR. MORRIS: [Laughs.] You know, it's so funny, when Dale was — I was spending time with him, it was so great because I got to go to New York with Dale and had meetings with Charlie Cowles. When Dale got a show on 420 West Broadway, that was a big deal and I'll never forget sitting down and eating at this great Italian place.

I think Charlie was having calves' liver or something and Dale goes, so what do you think about this whole craft and art thing, Charlie? and Charlie turned to him and he said, well, you know, the best of any craft becomes art.

I loved that. And it was, like, man, let's just get over this debate.

And if Charlie said it, that was good enough for me. [Laughs.] I was just a kid and he was the king of 420.

MS. RIEDEL: So that happened fairly early in your career. It sort of settled that right then and there.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, yes, even though — and then it got feverish. People really wanted to debate it and I just wouldn't go there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, not of interest to you.

MR. MORRIS: No.

MS. RIEDEL: You did a little bit of teaching, a little bit of workshops, some at Penland primarily. Did you teach at Pilchuck too?

MR. MORRIS: I did teach at Pilchuck, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, some at Penland. Did you teach at Haystack?

MR. MORRIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And then you made a decision that that really wasn't something you really wanted to pursue?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I just — I didn't want to show people how to start a bubble. That just wasn't interesting. I did some demonstrations; Dale always believed that demonstrating was the best way to learn. But the problem with that was that you'd go to a place and of course the facilities were always inferior to what you had.

So we taught all over. We taught in Japan, in New Zealand, all over Europe. We taught all over the place, and we'd go and do it and it was cool.

MS. RIEDEL: These were short workshops, two days, two weeks?

MR. MORRIS: Yes, several weeks at a time and you'd go mostly to travel, to experience a new place, a new way of doing things. You'd want to see what was going on there, and it always felt good to go in and be the hero.

MS. RIEDEL: Is that how it felt?

MR. MORRIS: Well, sure. I mean, they ask you to come all the way. They were paying your way, so you were hoping you could eke a first-class seat out of the deal and then it was really something.

Yes, it was an honor. It was a big honor to go there and do that and we had something to offer. We were good at what we did.

Like I said, the people were hungry. Everybody was so feverishly hungry. You'd go in and you'd walk in and these people — walk in to people who would look at you like you just walked on water.

Well, I remember when Ben Moore came and did the first workshop that I'd ever seen. He walked on water. So it's the way we shared the knowledge and it's the way — there were no secrets. I love that.

I remember there was this one guy who made people who came into his shop sign some kind of a disclosure waiver, and I just thought, what an idiot. What is that all about?

I felt Dale went through that thing with the whole lawsuit thing because somebody was making his work and this is, again, we're all — we're not authors of truly anything. I mean, granted, we might be exploring some new techniques but, you know, we don't own them. You don't copyright that sort of thing, I don't believe.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, though, because coming from the ceramic background that you mentioned, there was among potters for years a real protection of certain glazes and that sort of thing. And the Italians had their secrets for centuries.

MR. MORRIS: With glass, if you escaped from Venice, if you were caught, the glassblower was executed and the threat was that if he did escape, his family was executed. So it was a very real deal that they were trying to keep secret and, of course, look, it didn't really work.

But I like the workshops. The teaching per se, I didn't like to explain things. I like the sharing of the enthusiasm. That was the best part.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, was there something in particular that was important to communicate during those workshops?

MR. MORRIS: Again, it wasn't how to make objects. It's the way, it was the lifestyle that we had, the way we worked together, the way we problem-solved, equipment that we'd come up with that would really work. It really worked, glory holes that got hot evenly at the right height, a bench that you could address properly, shears that cut, simple little things that, they were huge.

We went to Italy and we took from them, the Swedes, the Czechs, whatever made sense to us we would take and adopt. So it was only right, it was only fair that we would go and pass that on wherever we'd go.

MS. RIEDEL: And primarily technical skills and then also a sense of collaboration?

MR. MORRIS: Well it's all tech- — what you pass on in the sense of how to communicate ideas.

I remember this one trip to Japan. We were out on Niijima teaching, and I remember there was quite a language barrier so we had a lot of interpreters and that sort of thing, and it was really interesting to see how so many of the Japanese students were always interpreting their tradition through glass, which I thought was great.

It was almost a game, because you'd say — you knew that everything they did was going to be an interpretation

of their own tradition and their own aesthetic and so you could give them assignments: Go out on this beach — and you knew there was nothing out on this beach but rubber baseballs that had been thrown from the stadium and washed up on shore, and you knew everybody was going to pick one of those up and then you see what they were going to do with them.

So it was almost, like, fun to see what these people would do and the cultural difference on how — it's wonderful. They had such a loyalty to their tradition and to their aesthetic, and yet you wanted to see them spit on it, tear it up, throw paint on it, whatever, break out of it.

So there was a lot of that. It was fascinating on many levels to see the way other people worked and how they would interpret your approach.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds like working with an extended team almost.

MR. MORRIS: It does. It kind of becomes that way and in some cases that's the way you'd feel. I mean, you really did want to capitalize on that because it would be a great way to incorporate new series.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. MORRIS: Just bring that aesthetic into the work and it would be really interesting. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely, a way to incorporate something unexpected and seemingly random.

MR. MORRIS: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you see your career in terms of distinct periods of work or do you see a thread of continuity connecting the different series?

MR. MORRIS: I don't see it as distinct periods. I never — that was part of the description for me, was always this multitude of series. I don't see it that way at all. I just see it as just work and my work. I don't look at it — it's not compartmentalized at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Even though you had a very serious break each year and then began again?

MR. MORRIS: Still the same thing. Every year, I was in the glass shop slinging silica around the room.

That's what I was doing and we went at it as a team and we all — you pretty much picked up a blowpipe every day and you rolled it through your fingers all day long and that's what we did. That was sort of the main thing and all the little variations were just forms of keeping you interested, keeping you alert, keeping you awake, having fun, challenging yourself, trying to learn more about other things.

That always made you a little more respectful about other things, cultures and subjects. It was always good.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you think the sources of inspiration changed over time or was that fairly constant all the way through, which is nature and man's relationship?

MR. MORRIS: Nature and man's relationship to it; I'd have to say that was pretty consistent. That's, again, why I don't think it really varied much. It was fun to look at it in the form of different series but those differences were just a byproduct of the way we needed to do it to keep it stimulating, to keep it fascinating, to keep it functional.

I mean, you have to do it simply to survive. I know too many artists that they can't sell any more bowls. Everybody's got one.

Or they've got two. But you just — I'm sorry, it just doesn't work that way. I'd say the biggest reason why my financial success was, is that there was multiple series.

That was a motivating factor. It wasn't the reason. More of it was the biggest reason was to keep me engaged. But boy, I was sure lucky at the other end.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting when I think about that, too, because that might be one reason why it was not impossible to walk away, is if the source of inspiration was man and his relationship to nature, that's not something that has to happen in a glass shop, for sure.

MR. MORRIS: Exactly; that's exactly right and that's still what it's all about for me. So I don't need that anymore and then, like I said, I have a choice to walk away from the responsibility of the crew and the schedule and all the rest of it. Not like I didn't do it for —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, full out for 30 years. How has your work been received over that period of time?

MR. MORRIS: Unbelievable.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems it started off and really gained.

MR. MORRIS: I can't even believe it. I watch Dale with his — I watch all the tremendously critical acclaim that he got and sometimes he got depressed over it.

MS. RIEDEL: Got depressed over the critical acclaim?

MR. MORRIS: Yes. I felt like I was just absolutely blessed. I felt like I squeaked by with a guardian angel working overtime. Yes. But then again, I watch things that were really kind of suspect — well, not suspect, suspicious as far as the public were concerned that he did, because I think the way he worked was very honorable.

As I said, I made his work and it was all *his* work. I never felt like *I* was making his work. I worked *for* him and I always kept my hand in it and I always made my stuff. Of course, I had other people making the smaller components here and there but I always felt like I was pretty involved that way with the aesthetic.

That kept a limit on it, on the number of pieces. I think that was a big part of it, too. We were very prolific but still, it's nothing in comparison to Chihuly, Inc.

MS. RIEDEL: The group of collectors that came together around studio glass seem to be especially enthusiastic and supportive and seem to really fuel the marketing and the growth of that.

MR. MORRIS: Amazing. Yes, they were a feverish group and they were incredibly dedicated. It was phenomenal, people like the Saxes and the Benaroyas [Jack and Rebecca Benaroya]. George and Dorothy Saxe were fantastic in the way that they were supportive. I remember early on when they said, "Glass, it saved our marriage."

They said that because we didn't have anything in common and we found this glass and it was just so cool. And it was nice, because they liked us as people, too. They were interested in us and the way we lived — because we were these permissive kids and they didn't get in there and pass judgment or that sort of stuff and they supported us. It was fantastic, just amazing.

The Benaroyas were fantastic. Jack — I've got a story I've got to say about Jack. This guy — huge businessman in Seattle — and Jack's known me ever since I got involved in the glass world, ever since I was a kid.

He's watched me grow up and he's watched my kids grow up and I remember walking down Seattle one time and I bumped into Jack on the street and he was just in the middle of building Benaroya Hall; my son was, I don't know how old at the time, 12 or something, and he'd been playing the violin since he was about seven.

I had mentioned that to Jack, I don't know, a couple of years prior and Jack says, well, Roy, it's nice to meet you. I understand you play the violin. I'm going to have to have you come over to the hall when it gets built, right? He's like, yeah, sure — you hear this stuff.

But lo and behold, the hall gets done, opening frickin' night, we get two tickets to sit in the Benaroyas' booth with him and go down and my son gets to meet Itzhak Perlman and Gerard Schwarz and it's, like, these are real gentlemen. These guys are really something.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MR. MORRIS: That's extraordinary stuff, and stuff that's a big deal. It's a big deal. That's really honorable, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It does seem that certain of the glass collectors did get very involved in really helping to very actively support not only particular artists but the entire glass movement.

MR. MORRIS: Yes. I always appreciated their support but I never got it because I don't do that. I mean, I don't collect anything. I've got some bones and stuff in the house but it's not that I would go out and buy a bunch of art. I can't imagine. I can't imagine spending the amounts of money they did in supporting that. It is. It's fantastic.

Yes, my hat's off to that and to them. That was another phenomenon.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you feel a down side to that in any way or was that all pretty much just positive?

MR. MORRIS: You know, you can make a down side to it. You can get grumpy and self-righteous about this or that, and, oh, people would say, oh, the shallow collectors. And now I just say, shut up. Those people, if it

weren't for them, we wouldn't be here. So you go ahead and get critical if you want, but I'm no good but you're no gooder [sic]. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: We've talked about your team, I think, in great — in good detail and covered how important that was to the development of your work. Is there another community of people or group of people that you also think of as being significant to your development as an artist? Like GAS or anything along those lines? You weren't really involved with GAS. You were —

MR. MORRIS: I didn't really like GAS very much. I think it was a great place. Italo had this great saying. He said, "Artists should never go to auctions or art fairs. It's like taking the cow to see the butcher shop."

Everybody would say, oh you've got to go to GAS, you've got to go to SOFA, and I went to these things — and I did, I felt like the frickin' cow at the butcher shop. It's, like, get me out of here.

So I did my perfunctory few years of attending those and after that I never went again. I would send people in my stead, like Holly, and that sort of thing. But I could only do so much grip-and-grin — it's kind of that way.

I think the conferences were good. I was never a conference kind of guy. I remember demonstrating for a couple of GAS conferences and there's nothing more nerve-wracking than demonstrating glassblowing in front of 400 glassblowers.

I'm sorry, I was too nervous. I hated it.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MORRIS: Oh, yes, I hated that. I'd crawl out of my skin.

MS. RIEDEL: So when it came to actual — we've talked about it as performance art because it's so much in the moment when there's actual performance and people watching — that was not something that was of interest to you?

MR. MORRIS: Well, if they were laymen that would be fine. But you have your peers out there and you know they're just going, I hope he drops it, I hope he drops it. At least that's what I thought they were saying, anyways. [Laughs.] I don't know.

I spent my time working up at Pilchuck, which was relatively quiet and we'd have visitors, but we never did — the dog and the pony show was more fun when we were younger with Dale but as I got on and I had to do it more for my own work it became more and more difficult.

I didn't care about demonstrating working for Dale. That was a different thing because that was him working. It wasn't me.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I think we've done really a pretty good job here. I can think of a couple kind of closing questions but I think we're coming in on that twelve o'clock hour.

MR. MORRIS: Okey dokey.

MS. RIEDEL: Given that this two-year break that you've had from working, can you summarize what you think of as really the importance of glass as a means of expression that's just different than anything else, for you, clearly?

MR. MORRIS: Well, for me I'd have to say I realize — I had a more poignant view of the difference prior. I have less now.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. MORRIS: It's like anything. When we're immersed in it, when we're in the middle of it, we feel like that's what it's all about and that's where the center of the universe, and again — I don't see that now.

I've sort of stepped away from that and I think that's wonderful because, again, it's like being in love. It's like that passion. But it also is a bit myopic and it's all you can see around you.

You can't see the forest for the trees kind of thing. You really do think you're just the only one, and now I realize — I don't know. As I said, I'm very suspect of the ego and we just thought we were — the top of the heap, man. We were just going after it. It was new and exploratory and you realize every material's been through this and there will be others that will go through this.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, but you were there when it was something —

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I got to have my little taste but you realize it's just — you know, the volumes are vast and this was just a little chapter. So I was really just part of a little chapter.

MS. RIEDEL: A sort of a dynamic chapter in the history as far as the material.

MR. MORRIS: Well, yes, it is that — and being asked to do this interview is a huge honor; to be put into the archives of the Smithsonian as an artist is a really big deal, so I don't want to diminish that.

But I also don't want to say, this was better than anything else; this was more significant. Glass was more significant than wet painting or when you think about what film's going through or music or all these other things. And there's a lot of courageous people doing a lot of courageous things out there.

Starting in this field now, where a lot of the glitter is past, that's pretty darn courageous. That's got to be tough. I don't envy those kids that are just getting into this. But I'm so glad they are because you'd hate to see — you don't want to be like an Anasazi Indian that all of a sudden was there and then it's not.

So in hindsight I don't feel like it had quite the bravado that I like to think, but that was okay at that time. That's what stimulated us. So it was a good thing. I don't think it was a delusion. I just think it was enthusiasm.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. How would you characterize your career? What really came to matter to you about it?

MR. MORRIS: Showing up. Just showing up, just giving it our best shot every day, just realizing if we were going to go in the shop and make stuff, just be there because it meant something. Try to keep those days interesting.

Like Dale would say, if you're going to show up, then show up and make it and be creative. Do the best you can with it. You can't will creativity into your being. You walk into the shop and the days that you just, God, I didn't want to be there, I didn't want to be there, you just go through the motions.

The next day you open up the lid of the annealer and you go, oh my God, where did that come from? And then there's days when you walk in there just higher than a kite and you're just ready to rip a new one to the world and you put it in the annealer and you say, I can't wait to see that and you walk in the next day and you open up the lid of the annealer and you go, God, the air, just what is *that*?

So it just goes to show it doesn't matter what I think when I go into the shop. It doesn't matter what my intentions are. The only intention is very basic. It's just do the best you can every day.

And you can't rush it. You can't expedite experience. It's like when we fly paragliders. Nothing will kill you faster than trying to fly beyond your ability. Nothing will kill your career faster than trying to create beyond your ability, to try to be the artist that's the flash in the pan.

Have the one good idea and that's it, I've arrived — it's never like that. It never gets any easier — never got any easier to put a show together, never got any easier to come up with something or solve a problem or that sort of thing. As I said, you just develop more faith. So I would say that's pretty much the answer to that question, is just showing up.

MS. RIEDEL: Great. Well, I think we've done a really good job of covering all of these questions. I'd like to thank you for really being so generous and so present for the interview.

MR. MORRIS: Wow. Glad to do it. The whole thing has been a big honor.

MS. RIEDEL: It's been a pleasure. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]