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**Oral history interview with Judy Chicago, 2009
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Judy Chicago on August 7 and 8, 2009. The interview took place at the artist's home and studio in Belen, New Mexico, and was conducted by Judith O. Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Judy Chicago and Judith O. Richards have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JUDITH O. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Chicago on August 7, 2009, at her studio in Belen, B-E-L-E-N, New Mexico, for the for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc number one.

So I just wanted to begin by saying that, as we've discussed before - because you've published two autobiographies, many other texts; there's a wonderful biography by Gail Levin; you've been interviewed extensively by Henry Hopkins at the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum, Los Angeles, CA] fairly recently. This interview will depart from the usual approach for the Archives, which is reviewing an artist's entire life and work, and instead will begin in the recent past, while adding questions that weren't raised in the previous interviews.

And I wanted to start by asking you about the interview with Henry Hopkins, and say that somewhere, maybe it was the beginning of that interview or elsewhere, it was noted that you were interviewed by Henry at the Getty in the '90s.

JUDY CHICAGO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: Is that correct? I couldn't find -

MS. CHICAGO: Well, there should have been two interviews.

MS. RICHARDS: So the two I found -

MS. CHICAGO: Yes?

MS. RICHARDS: - and so I wanted to clarify, too: one disc said, "December 2003."

MS. CHICAGO: No, that's not right.

MS. RICHARDS: And one said, "December 2007."

MS. CHICAGO: No, that's not right.

MS. RICHARDS: They were in 2003 and 2007.

MS. CHICAGO: I was sure they were in the '90s, those interviews.

MS. RICHARDS: The Henry Hopkins interviews?

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

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. That's good to clarify. So those discs - I thought they were marked incorrectly. Should have been '06, '07 because they were almost seamless from one to the other.

MS. CHICAGO: Right. I think Henry did the first interview at the time of the "Sexual Politics" show, which was 1996 ["Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History." University of California, Los Angeles, Armand Hammer Museum]. And then I think he did the second one a year later. But certainly wasn't '06, '07.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, they were very close. There were four discs from one series, and three discs from another. And the same visiting scholar was present at both sessions.

MS. CHICAGO: The only person who was present was Andrew Perchuck, who is now the deputy director of the [Getty] Research Institute [Los Angeles, CA].

MS. RICHARDS: With Henry?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. And he already worked at the Getty, then.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so it could've been a year apart; he'd still be there.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, he was there then, and he's still there.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. Well, all right. I'll tell them to look at the dates.

MS. CHICAGO: Also an earlier piece that I didn't really read very much about was the International Quilting Bee, which was started in 1980.

MS. RICHARDS: Could you - would you like to talk about that project, and what it was and why you did it and what's happened to it since?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, when The Dinner Party [1974-79] started, was premiered, and started traveling, people used to, you know, complain about why it hadn't included this or that person.

MS. RICHARDS: Woman.

MS. CHICAGO: Woman, yes. So I got kind of aggravated, you know. So when it was coming back out after the tour collapsed, and Mary Ross Taylor organized the first grassroots exhibition in Houston -

MS. RICHARDS: In 1980?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, in 1980. I can still remember that I was running in Benecia, in Northern California, where I was living. And I thought, I know, we'll just come up with - we'll just do something where people can make their own quilts, you know, to celebrate the reinstallation of The Dinner Party. So between 1980 and 1996, while The Dinner Party was touring, Through the Flower [a nonprofit, feminist art organization founded by Chicago in 1978, Belen, NM] got hundreds of quilts. We now have 700 of them. And in fact, our next show -

MS. RICHARDS: Between 1980 and 1996. And how far away did these quilts come from?

MS. CHICAGO: All over the world. They come from all over the world. In fact, Through the Flower's next show is going to be the International Quilting Bee. Some years ago, a scholar named Marilee Schmit Nason, who was then -

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Marilee?

MS. CHICAGO: M-A-R-I-L-E-E. Schmit, S-C-H-M-I-T, I think. Nason, N-A-S-O-N. She was the registrar at the Albuquerque Museum [of Art and History, Albuquerque, NM] then, and she mounted this huge volunteer effort in which she catalogued the entire Quilting Bee. So there's phenomenal documentation of the creators of the quilts.

MS. RICHARDS: That was post-1996?

MS. CHICAGO: It was - no. No, it was actually during the period we were living in Albuquerque, which was between 1993 and 1996. What she did was fantastic. She actually compiled all of the written documentation, which is a kind of oral history of these quilts. I mean, they come from all over the world. So now Through the Flower owns them, because people sent them to Through the Flower. So they are the guardian.

MS. RICHARDS: Are they actually here at Belen?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, they're in the storage room, storage facility. And so our next exhibition in the fall is going to be the International Quilting Bee.

MS. RICHARDS: In here?

MS. CHICAGO: In Through the Flower.

MS. RICHARDS: How will 700 quilts fit into this space?

MS. CHICAGO: Actually - well, I don't think they'll use all 700. But what we normally do, the backs of them have Velcro on the back. So we have this huge piece of Velcro. That's how it was originally - I don't know how Susannah Rodee, the executive director, plans to mount it. But what we used to do is we would just take this five-foot roll of Velcro and just put it all over the walls, staple it to the walls, and then just mount them.

MS. RICHARDS: Hmm.

MS. CHICAGO: And then you'd have this continuous quilt.

MS. RICHARDS: Wow! The fact that these interviews were conducted in the late '90s - '96 and not 2007 - answers the question I had, which was why your work wasn't discussed.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, unless I'm crazy, I don't think it was. I mean, I don't think I did one in 2007. I'm almost positive it was in the '90s. Maybe I'm wrong. I guess I'll have to ask Andrew. But I don't think it was that recently.

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

MS. CHICAGO: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: So going back to you -

MS. CHICAGO: Although what Henry was interested in was my California days. That's what the Getty tapes are, about California. And so -

MS. RICHARDS: And The Dinner Party.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, because I did The Dinner Party in California.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. CHICAGO: And Henry premiered it [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, 1979]. He didn't even actually get to the Birth Project, which I also did in California. But people really don't think about that very much. The tapes specifically are about California, my California years. So whenever I did the tapes, they barely go up to, like, 1980, the early '80s.

MS. RICHARDS: Actually, tape four talks about the installation, the permanent installation, of The Dinner Party at the Sackler [Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, NY].

MS. CHICAGO: Oh, yes, well, because Henry, I think, wanted to complete the story of The Dinner Party. Oh, so that had to be at least 2007. Maybe it was 2006-2007. In my mind I keep thinking it was in the '90s. But maybe it wasn't. Maybe it wasn't. I could've sworn it was earlier. But okay. It must have been 2006-2007. Isn't that funny? I think they're so long ago. It seems like so long ago [laughs]. We'll have to ask Andrew.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to - this is possibly going on an offshoot because we were talking about printmaking recently. What part has printmaking played in your work just recently, let's say from 2000, the last seven or eight years? I know you did a print series at Landfall Press [Santa Fe, NM].

MS. CHICAGO: I'm still working with Landfall.

MS. RICHARDS: And -

MS. CHICAGO: I'm doing a three-year project at Landfall.

MS. RICHARDS: You've used so many different materials and art you've introduced in your work. But just thinking about printmaking - I think maybe mainly lithography, has it been?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, no, I've actually worked in everything. I've done etching; the Fragments of the Delta of Venus [2001-03] are etching and aquatint. Song of Songs [1997-99] are etching and helio relief. I've done cast paper. I've done silk screen. My first prints were serigraphs; I've done a lot of serigraphs. The first print I did was a serigraph. Then I did lithographs at Tamarind [Institute, Albuquerque, NM]. I did a combination of litho and serigraphy at Cirrus [Los Angeles, CA]. I did cast paper at, I think, Magnolia [Editions, Oakland, CA]. I mean, I've done -

MS. RICHARDS: Everything.

MS. CHICAGO: - a whole array of. I'd never done aquatint and etching until I did Fragments from the Delta of Venus, which I did at Seguro in Arizona. And, you know, I didn't really realize what a big body of prints I had done. It was really John Bullard who is the director of the New Orleans Museum [of Art, New Orleans, LA] who also went to UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles].

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Bullard?

MS. CHICAGO: B-U-L-L-A-R-D. He also went to UCLA. He was there at the same time as Henry Hopkins and me - and I. And he was the one who initiated this idea of looking at my prints. Doing a print, sort of, retrospective. And that was the first time I ever actually put my prints together. And I remember that he came with his curator of prints at that time. This was before [Hurricane] Katrina [2005] so - because there was a big change after that.

MS. RICHARDS: Who's Katrina?

MS. CHICAGO: It was pre-Katrina.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh!

MS. CHICAGO: When they first came. And Katrina kind of interrupted this plan, although it's resumed now. But it took a - kind of put a little crimp in the plan.

But his print curator came with him. And when we had looked at all my prints, you know - this was before Landfall - I had done over 80 prints. And I said, "Is that a lot of prints?" And Dan Piersol [then curator of prints and drawings, New Orleans Museum of Art; now deputy director, Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson] looked at me, and he said, "For somebody who's not a printmaker, that's a lot of prints." And with the Landfall prints, which are going to be seven, there'll be over 90 prints in the archive. So I think - I mean, I'm looking forward to having it in one place, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: And so the archive's going to be in Florida?

MS. CHICAGO: No, New Orleans.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. CHICAGO: New Orleans Museum of Art.

MS. RICHARDS: And were there any conditions or aspects of their proposal to you that were important, that were really key, to your deciding to give the archive to them?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, it's part of this whole extensive estate planning [husband, photographer] Donald [Woodman,] and I have been doing. And, you know, I did a lot of research on what's happened to women's work. I know a great deal about what's happened. And since I do not intend to repeat history, I feel like it's really important to be informed.

Like, I was at an event that was honoring women artists of my generation, and one of them stood up, and she said, "But my art! My art! What's going to happen to my art? I have no children." And, you know, even though my heart went out to her, I thought to myself, get in line, honey, you know. You think you're the first woman artist whose work has been in danger of erasure? *élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun*, the 18th-century court painter, produced more art than any woman artist prior to her time, and was famous and celebrated beyond what most women artists could even dream. Here we are over 200 years after her death, and her work has never been catalogued.

So, you know, because I understand what the history is, I do not have faith in the institutions as exist now to take care of my work. And so I have made really extensive plans in terms of what's going to happen to my body of art. And one of the things I also learned in my studies is that some women artists' work is difficult to exhibit because it's scattered. And so what I'm doing is I'm giving

discrete collections to a number of museums. So different museums will have -

MS. RICHARDS: Can you go through that?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. Well, the Brooklyn Museum will have The Dinner Party. And then my -

MS. RICHARDS: The Brooklyn Museum has The Dinner Party now. But you're talking about archives.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. They want other work, but we haven't yet agreed to what that's going to be.

The National Museum for Women in the Arts [Washington, DC] has been working for a long time on establishing a significant, representative collection of my work through bequests, donations, and gifts. And they have asked for my archival material. And we have worked out a plan for work that they're going to get that will supplement what they've put together. And they've been working on this for years. And one of the reasons that I agreed to, beside supporting the museum, is that their mission is to preserve women's art. So there is nothing in the nature of their mission that would make them want to get rid of my art, as, for example, the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York, NY] threw out Jo [Josephine N.] Hopper's work. And since they are the only institution in the world with that mission, I feel secure that my work, the body that they will have, the representative collection and the archival materials, the core of my work, and, sort, of the overview of my work will be safe in their hands. The New Orleans Museum will have my print archive. My weaver and her husband, we have made -

MS. RICHARDS: And what's her name?

MS. CHICAGO: Audrey and Bob Cowan. We have made an arrangement where -

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry. Cowan is -

MS. CHICAGO: C-O-W-A-N. We've made an arrangement for them to have - they will have the entire tapestry collection and all of the developmental materials that relate to that. And they will give that to a museum. They've been talking to a couple of museums. They haven't actually made up their minds yet.

MS. RICHARDS: The Cowans?

MS. CHICAGO: The Cowans. Then, sort of, the New Mexico collection will go to the Fine Arts Museum, New Mexico Museum in Santa Fe [New Mexico Museum of Art]. Like they'll have all the cats and the Belen Hotel [Chicago-Woodman residence]. So that, you know, the cats at the Belen Hotel will always live in New Mexico. And they will have a lot of New Mexico-related work. The Albuquerque Museum has the Birth Project core collection, and they will get auxiliary materials related to the Birth Project. And then the Chicago-Woodman Foundation will get the rest of the work. Donald's archives - he's also working with a single museum for his archive.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the archives that went to -

MS. CHICAGO: The Schlesinger [Library for the History of Women in America, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA]?

MS. RICHARDS: The Schlesinger.

MS. CHICAGO: Those are my paper archives. They have my paper archives.

MS. RICHARDS: Covering all periods.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. They will have everything. I mean, they have - when I made the arrangement with them, I sent - they got almost 96 boxes. And, you know, we send them material every year. And then they got a grant to catalogue their '70s holdings, which included mine. So my archive is in exceedingly good shape. I know this because there's a scholar who's doing a new book, and she's been at the archives quite a lot recently.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the archives for the Holocaust Project?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, those we haven't actually worked out yet. We haven't actually worked that out. At this moment, they'll go into the foundation.

MS. RICHARDS: And you mean Through the Flower?

MS. CHICAGO: No, no, no. Donald's and my foundation.

MS. RICHARDS: So in addition to what you've been talking about, you have a separate foundation?

MS. CHICAGO: We will have our own when we're dead. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And what will be the function of that foundation?

MS. CHICAGO: The mission of the foundation will be to protect our legacy as artists, and the resources of the foundation - to place the remaining work. And then the resources of the foundation will be - like the different institutions that possess major bodies of work can apply to the foundation for money for exhibitions, scholarships, conservation. And the mission will be to educate about our work.

MS. RICHARDS: Going through this process, were there other - were there models, other artists who you feel really did it right and you can learn from these models?

MS. CHICAGO: Actually, that's one of the things we saw, that a lot of these estates have gotten tremendously, you know, in trouble. A lot of artists' estates have really gotten into trouble. And one of the challenges we had was that, because we have no children, we had no - that's usually what happens, you know. The children -

MS. RICHARDS: Sometimes children don't want to do that.

MS. CHICAGO: I know. Sometimes children don't want it, and sometimes it's a terrible burden for them. So we had to figure out what to do. I mean, you can only do so much. You can't - you can only do so much. But our trustees tell us that if other artists had spent as much time thinking this through, you know, maybe their estates wouldn't get into so much difficulty. It is horrible to do. It's really time-consuming. But I kept saying to myself, if it was worth the time to make the work, it's worth the time to protect the work.

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking also about the future in this way, you founded Through the Flower in 1978?

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

MS. RICHARDS: It's a nonprofit feminist art organization.

MS. CHICAGO: I never thought it would - when it was founded, it was like a nothing, you know. It's just amazing what's happened to Through the Flower.

MS. RICHARDS: And it's a nonprofit organization, has a broad mission. Have you discussed how it will function when you're no longer involved?

MS. CHICAGO: I think that the board - I think this is something we're coming close to now. I think one of the things that happened was that Through the Flower is a board-run organization. I'm not even on the board. Through the Flower really operates -

MS. RICHARDS: When did you transition? You were on the board.

MS. CHICAGO: A long time ago. When The Dinner Party was debated in Congress in 1990 - if you could call it a debate - it really shocked all of us. And it was like a wake-up call for the board of Through the Flower, because I don't think any of us realized how dangerous The Dinner Party was, I mean, what it seemed to represent, that, you know, the House of Representatives spent an hour and 27 minutes trying to prevent its permanent housing. And at that point -

MS. RICHARDS: Was that because it was going to be in Washington, DC [at the University of the District of Columbia]? That's the only reason they had -

MS. CHICAGO: Right. But you'd have to ask them.

At that point, what happened was the board became sort of serious about turning Through the Flower into a real organization. I mean, it had no infrastructure; it had nothing. It was just people who didn't want to see my work be erased. That's all. I've been very fortunate. If it weren't for that, I wouldn't have gotten to where I am - wherever that is.

But anyway, [laughs] they started working then, the board started working, to build the organization. Now, I'm not good at that. People think I am. I've never been good at that. I'm not good administratively. I've always had people, you know, like Diane Gelon, The Dinner Party administrator, there; Mary Ross Taylor, the Birth Project administrator. So I don't remember at some point when they decided it was better if I wasn't on the board. But it just happened somewhere in that period when the board - when Through the Flower began to try and become an actual, functioning organization.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that a conversation with you?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, I think so. You know, they probably just -

MS. RICHARDS: "Judy, you know, we've been thinking - "

MS. CHICAGO: No, they probably just said, "We think it's better for you not to be on the board." And I remember I said, all right. It was probably that simple.

MS. RICHARDS: It wasn't a difficult -

MS. CHICAGO: No. Because I wanted Through the Flower to have a life apart from me. Now I don't know whether it will. I don't know whether we'll decide that - in fact it's a conversation Mary Ross Taylor and I have been having. Because she's been involved in Through the Flower since 1980, and she's the president of the board now. And I think we are very close to a point where we're going to have to make this decision. Are we going to decide Through the Flower is going cease to exist at a

certain point, you know, upon our deaths, at a point we decide; or is going to be - does it want to try and continue? I think that's a decision the board has to make.

MS. RICHARDS: Or merge with another organization or foundation -

MS. CHICAGO: Or merge with another organization.

MS. RICHARDS: - with a similar mission.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. I think that's a conversation the board's going to have to have rather soon now. But we haven't had that yet. But we have definitely created an infrastructure for Through the Flower. I mean, it operates really independently of me now. Susannah Rodee is a wonderful executive director. It definitely functions apart from me, although I still raise a lot of money for Through the Flower.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that's one of the big changes that would be happening if you wanted to step down.

MS. CHICAGO: Right. That would be a big change. Right.

MS. RICHARDS: I guess your foundation could be connected in some way.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, of course, if Through the Flower still existed, Through the Flower could apply to the foundation. Yes - yes, that's right. But the thing is that what I think is - I'm more focused on actually - because that's not my decision; that's a decision for the board to make. But what I'm focused on is establishing the K-12 Dinner Party curriculum and the workshop program that we're building. And shaping it in such a way that it can have an ongoing life, even if Through the Flower ceases to exist.

MS. RICHARDS: For example, be adopted by the Women's Museum in Washington.

MS. CHICAGO: Or some institution. It's already evolving that way. It's going to have an institutional home.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you kind of a separate set of questions that I don't think were covered about very basic studio practice and techniques, and what your studio practice has been like in recent years, just with the basic sense of going into the studio.

Do you have a certain - you used to have a very structured time every day to work.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, I still do.

MS. RICHARDS: Does that still go on? Do you give yourself time off? Is your studio door open to Donald at all times? I mean, all those kinds of questions.

MS. CHICAGO: I still have a very structured studio schedule. Like, I'm about to start next week the next, the fifth, print in the series for Landfall. And, you know, I have like a block of time every - I have to have a block, uninterrupted weeks to do the drawings.

MS. RICHARDS: And what will you be doing the drawings before you draw on the stone.

MS. CHICAGO: No. I don't even draw on the stone. The drawings are on Mylar. And I do the Mylar drawings, and then they're transferred to plates. And, you know, I'm doing this project called "A

Retrospective in a Box," seven prints surveying my career. Four of them are done. And so I'm about to -

MS. RICHARDS: Hmm. I don't know about that. Do you want to talk about that?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. It is - I call it a starter set for collectors. Because like my Santa Fe gallery, they always complain that a lot of collectors who are interested in my work say they don't know where to start because I've done so much [laughs]. So it's a little survey, you know, of different periods of my work, seven in the box.

MS. RICHARDS: And are they all lithographs?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, they're all lithographs.

MS. RICHARDS: New ones that you're doing at Landfall.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. And they're, like, sort of reinterpretations of images. The first one is based on the Through the Flower image. The second one comes, actually, from the Rejection Quintet [1974]; it's a butterfly, the emergence of the butterfly. The third one is the only print I've ever done related to The Dinner Party. It's based on one of the entryway banners. The fourth one relates to the Birth Project. The next one is going to relate to Powerplay [1982-87]. And then I'm going to do one related to the Holocaust Project [1985-93] and one related to Resolutions [1994-2000]. And then the last one's going to be an image from, sort of, Jewish identity, which there's this show traveling around called "Judy Chicago: Jewish Identity" [various locations, 2007-10]. And it'll be, kind of, a more personal image.

MS. RICHARDS: How big will that edition of boxes be? There's an actual box?

MS. CHICAGO: Half of it will be boxed. There are 50 prints in the edition, and half of them will be boxed, and half of them will be available as individual prints.

MS. RICHARDS: And what's - how did you decide on the fact that they would all be lithographs in the thing?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, part of that has to do with Landfall. I mean Landfall is a litho shop, and that's their - I mean, they can do etchings, and they can do linoleum cuts and stuff like that. But primarily, they're a litho shop. They're incredible. They're an incredible shop. I've worked in a lot of shops, and this is the best shop I've ever been in.

MS. RICHARDS: Why is that?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, you know, in a lot of shops it's like, oh, well, you can only have this many runs, and that's it. And you know it's going to be too expensive. And you know you'll just have to - as Jack Lemon said to me, "You're a maniac." And I said, "Yes, and I've met my match."

MS. RICHARDS: Is he Lemon, as in -

MS. CHICAGO: Jack Lemon, L-E-M-O-N. He's the founder, you know. Landfall's been in existence for 40 years. It started in Chicago. Jack's like a legend. And, you know, we would make a plan for how many runs there'd be. And we'd be proofing, and it wasn't right. And they'd say, Well, you have to do another drawing. Or, You have to do a touch plate to cover these edges. It's the only shop I've ever been in in my entire life where the shop encouraged more plates. But if it's not right, it's not right.

And like the last print didn't come out right. And we re-proofed it. So they are like me. I mean, they have a standard that they will not fall below. And so it's fabulous for me; it's just fabulous.

MS. RICHARDS: Is this series giving you an opportunity to experiment in any new ways with lithography?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, it's very challenging. It's exceedingly challenging, this series, to try. It's just technically incredibly challenging.

MS. RICHARDS: Because of the number of plates?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, some of them. Like some of the prints are as many as 10 runs, and the registration, the tightness of the registration, and the quality of the drawing, which has to really the overlay is, like when you overlay blends, it's very difficult. And you know, blending color is, like, one of the hallmarks of my work. So in order to get a graduation from, like, a dark red to a pink, you have to have three plates. And you have to draw the blends so that they intersect. And you do it in black. So you have to be able to visualize the way that texture of the drawing, how they'll intersect, texture to texture. And bandwidth to bandwidth. So I have to concentrate really, really hard when I'm working.

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

MS. CHICAGO: I can't be interrupted. So it's like, I came back from Italy. I had this pile of stuff to do, which I spent this week doing so that I could start on Monday and have uninterrupted days. Because I still have -

MS. RICHARDS: And then you'll go there for all the proofing.

MS. CHICAGO: Then I'll proof. Well, actually the next one I'm doing slightly differently. I'm actually doing the key image. Each one totally analyzed about how you do it. Like on The Dinner Party print, Donald photographed a piece of Belgian linen, and then printed it on acetate. And that was transferred to the plate, to create the surface, to give a sense of the texture of the weaving in the banner. It's gorgeous. It just came out fabulous.

MS. RICHARDS: Are all your prints on the same paper?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. And actually, the more the restraints, the more challenging it is. In other words, same paper, same width - I mean, same size. Like even if, you know, it's like 20 by 20. So even if it's a vertical -

MS. RICHARDS: They're square?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, the paper isn't, but the images are square. But not all of the images are square. They just have to fit with 20 by 20. So some of them are 20 by 16. One's 16 by 20. It has to fit in that square. So there's this restraint. And there's also trying to get all the images resolved visually at the same level.

MS. RICHARDS: Because you intend them to be all seen at once.

MS. CHICAGO: Right. And so they all have to work together. So like this one print wasn't good enough. So we had to re-proof it to bring it up to the level of the other three. And the farther along you get, the harder it is, because the more you've got to reach.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you envision them being framed and hung in separate frames horizontally?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. They hung them already. They hung the first four and showed them at the Santa Fe Art Fair [Art Santa Fe, 2009] right before we left for Italy. So I mean, it's challenging.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

So you're talking about your studio technique - I mean, studio practice. And you said you keep a very regular schedule. And do you work five days a week, six days a week?

MS. CHICAGO: I used to work seven days a week. When I was young, I worked seven days a week. In fact, I can still remember the muralist, the California muralist, Judy Bacca, telling me that she had to take the weekends off. And I said to her, "What on earth do you do?" [Laughs.] Now that I'm 70, I have to have Sunday off. I just have - if I don't have Sunday off, I get very exhausted and grumpy. And Saturdays, I usually do the - I write in my journal. You know, I do all the kind of things that you have to do every week, you know, like as you get older, maintenance.

MS. RICHARDS: When you're in your studio, are you listening to music, talk shows, silence?

MS. CHICAGO: No. I spend a lot of time in silence in my studio. But if I listen to music, I can only listen to a certain kind of music. It has to have a certain emotional tone. Like my favorite music is Leonard Cohen, who I've listened to all my life, since I was a young artist. And in fact, Donald, for my 70th birthday, took me to hear Leonard Cohen at one of his concerts on his world tour. But the level of emotional reality in his music is similar to my own. And so I can listen to that endlessly. And I can even remember specific songs from specific periods in my career. Like I must have listened to "Everybody Knows" a gazillion times when I was working on the Holocaust Project.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever been tempted to write him?

MS. CHICAGO: Actually, I almost met him in Montreal when The Dinner Party went to Montreal, because I knew his cousin, and she set it up for me for me to meet him. And then I got sick. So I missed the opening. And I really didn't care about missing the opening, but I was really just upset that I missed meeting him.

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe another time.

MS. CHICAGO: We'll see. But a lot of times - so there's like we have XM. There's a folk music station that I listen to that I like. If I don't like the music, I just turn it off. And I have, you know, CDs. But it has to be a certain kind of music or I'd just as soon be in silence.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you don't work with assistants in the studio with you? Or do you?

MS. CHICAGO: No. Well, I used to. My God! But although that was a huge adjustment for me during The Dinner Party days. Because when I was young, I couldn't - I never showed anybody anything until it was done. I couldn't; I just couldn't. I didn't feel - I felt too vulnerable. And so when I was working on The Dinner Party, it was a huge adjustment to have people actually in my studio.

On the other hand, it was amazing because, you know, I would do the simplest thing, and somebody would say, "My God! That's incredible." And so what it did, it gave me more confidence in my direct impulses. And then in the Birth Project, even though I had my own studio in the building in Benecia - because we had this 11,000-square-foot building, you know, and I had the top floor - the

needlework supervisor used to come in and out of my studio. But by and large, nobody else did.

MS. RICHARDS: And since you've had the studio here, since 1996 -

MS. CHICAGO: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - that's 12 years, 13 years, you've been working on your own without assistants?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, since - Resolutions was the last big collaborative project I did. But it's so interesting about collaboration. Because, of course, I'm collaborating on prints, and I'm collaborating on glass. But people don't call that collaboration. It's an invisible part of the art world.

But one of the things - I joke all the time, when we moved in here, to Belen, and I turned 60, I got something I'd never had in my life and had never wanted: a mortgage. And that, in a way, changed my whole life, because I couldn't live the way I had always lived, which was with no regard for my financial well-being. That's how I lived. I lived on this rent-paint-and-store system. I would live in, you know, wherever I, you know, studios - like my first studio in Pasadena cost \$75 a month; three of us shared it, 5,000 square feet. My studio in Benicia, Mary Ross Taylor and I put up the money to renovate the building. I don't even remember what the rent was. It was not that much, you know. In Santa Fe, Mary Ross, when I first started going to Santa Fe, Mary Ross let me have this house that was empty, for no money. And I would store work - I had storage all over. I like to start over; I like to have nothing around me to remind me of anything I'd done before.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that still the case? You really don't want your past work in front of you?

MS. CHICAGO: No, I'm in a different place now. I can't do that anymore actually. I tried.

MS. RICHARDS: You don't want to, or you -

MS. CHICAGO: It's not that. It's that I can't anymore, because my - you know, there's a point at which - it's not anything that's really talked about, but when you have a career as long as mine, past and present and future are constantly overlapping and colliding. Because all of a sudden, after 30 years, there was interest in my minimal work. So all of a sudden my minimal work started being shown again. And then, you know, The Dinner Party is permanently housed. And then there's always these other shows. There are shows surveying this and surveying that from the past. And then there are shows of my new work.

And so you're always going back and forth from the past to the future. And in a way, your whole body of work is the present, in a way. I mean, you can't really get away from it unless, you know, your whole body - as long as you're alive - your entire body, if there's interest in your work, I suppose is the caveat there, but there is interest in my work, fortunately. It's very unusual. Even though the Holocaust Project isn't traveling anymore, this show "Jewish Identity," which has elements of the Holocaust Project, continues to travel.

And that's something different from - I don't know if it's different from other artists. But my bodies of work seem to have very long lives. And so, unless I'm going to repudiate half my life, which I'm not going to do, I have to now deal with that. And try and figure out how to, going forward, while dealing with all this other work I've done, and so - but what happened, what I was saying, was that I had to start - and also I was getting older - so I actually had to start thinking about securing our future, you know. And this is a big operation. So for the first time in my life I had to start thinking about money. I just never cared about money. I mean, as long as I had enough money to keep working, that's all I cared about.

MS. RICHARDS: And since you have a mortgage -

MS. CHICAGO: Well, that's had to change now, hasn't it? [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: And this very permanent kind of situation with the hotel and storage. Even if there weren't a mortgage, there's upkeep and there's -

MS. CHICAGO: Right. It's a big overhead.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. CHICAGO: The mortgage is the least part of it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. One question, when looking through *Through the Flower* [Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist. New York: Doubleday; 1975], you reproduced works by artists from the past. And some of those artists you might have known. And I was wondering - and possibly had relationships with. For example, Louise Bourgeois, Lee Bontecou, Niki de Saint Phalle, Marisol.

MS. CHICAGO: I met Marisol.

MS. RICHARDS: She might have been in New York when you were there.

MS. CHICAGO: She's the only one I ever met. I remember very vividly meeting Marisol. I met her at a bar in SoHo, and she sat down - we were sitting next to each other at the bar - and she said to me, "The men hate me."

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a conversation?

MS. CHICAGO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] She told me what a terrible time she'd had.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you been in touch with her since?

MS. CHICAGO: I'm sure if I saw her, we would be able to talk immediately.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the other artists?

MS. CHICAGO: No, I never met Bourgeois. I never met - I'm a huge admirer of Niki de Saint Phalle's work; I love her work. I'm very happy that the National Museum for Women in the Arts has just secured outdoor sculpture space, and they're putting her out there.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever visited her big installation in Italy [Gardino dei Tarocchi, Garavicchio]?

MS. CHICAGO: No, but I saw this huge show of hers that was in San Diego. It was wonderful. Who was the other person you asked me about?

MS. RICHARDS: I just threw out - Bourgeois, Bontecou, Niki de Saint Phalle, Marisol, just some -

MS. CHICAGO: I met Alice Neel. That was also interesting. She was 80. It was a party for, presumably, Kate Millett, who was an artist as well as a writer and theorist.

MS. RICHARDS: A party in New York?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, in New York. And Alice Neel pulled me down on her lap, and she was supposed to -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what year this was?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, you can probably find out by figuring out when she would have been 80, right? It was somewhere in the vicinity of the - I think it must have been around the organizing to bring The Dinner Party to New York; it must have been.

Anyway, she was supposed to introduce Kate Millett, and she kept forgetting and launching into little anecdotes about her own life, you know. But I remember one story she told me that came back to me when I read this Art in America article about Alice Neel, valorizing her, you know, and conveniently forgetting how she was treated. Because she told me this story about Henry Geldzahler, who was the curator at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY], the contemporary curator who organized this show "Paintings Since 1945" ["New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970," 1969]. And Alice went to the opening, and she walked up to Henry, whom she painted, if you remember. And she said, "Henry, why am I not in the show?" And he said to her, "Alice, you want to be an artist?"

See, I have a whole relationship with the art world, because everywhere I go, everybody tells me everything. Like I went to the opening of this show at the Norton Simon Museum [Pasadena, CA] some years ago. This young curator had done this show, and she told me all about how she had been, I think it was, Bill Viola's assistant, and how he'd sexually harassed her. And how every male artist she had in the show, she had invited to this show, came on to her. And she said to me, "Judy, I thought" - you know, she's young - "I thought we lived in a postfeminist world. Nothing has changed."

I mean, I'm there five minutes, and everybody tells me everything. It's like TMI sometimes, you know what I mean? But it just happens; I'm like a lightning rod. So because of that, I have a different view of the world because of what people have told me.

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

MS. CHICAGO: And what I've experienced myself. But also what people have told me.

MS. RICHARDS: I want to ask some questions about the art world.

MS. CHICAGO: So my studio practice. So the thing is that I used to work 17 hours a day. And now I don't have to work that much to accomplish a similar amount. Because even though - and I'm too old to work 17 hours. I can still do it if I have to, but I don't like it, and I don't want it, and it makes me grumpy, and there's no reason to. So, you know, now my normal day is seven hours. I go to in the studio, I work all day, then I exercise.

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

MS. CHICAGO: And then Donald and I hang out with the kitties at night, watch movies. On the weekends, we do something, go see friends, visit something, you know. Have fun.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't think I remember hearing about your life here in Belen. And I know you talked about how it came about that you landed here. But are you involved with the New Mexico art community or the Albuquerque art community? Or is there such a thing?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, there's a very big - Santa Fe is very small, but the art community - Santa Fe's only 70,000 people, and the art community's small. But I would say, yes, I'm probably involved with the Santa Fe art scene, you know. I mean, I know everybody. There are people I work with. But I have always separated myself, isolated myself. I've always had to, I've always had to be apart in a way. So I've always lived kind of on the fringe. You know, I lived in Pasadena, not in LA. I lived in Benicia, not in San Francisco. I need a lot of time by myself.

MS. RICHARDS: Does that connect some way with why Through the Flower and you are here in Belen? Besides the practical and the financial, finding such a space, do you particularly like the fact that this is all here, a half hour outside of Albuquerque, a thousand miles from LA, two thousand miles from New York? Or actually ideally you would rather have had this kind of situation closer to a major art center?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, there are positive and negative things to being in a major art center. First of all, I travel a lot. It's not like I don't go to New York, I don't see a lot. I see a lot. Have I minded being so isolated? Sometimes. But I wouldn't have survived if I hadn't separated myself. You know from my career; you've studied it; you know how much hostility, what kind of vitriol that substituted for reasoned discourse was directed towards me. I couldn't be around it.

And also I wanted to think in ways apart from the mainstream. And it's very hard to be in the mainstream and think apart from it. The pressure is daunting, and I didn't want that pressure. Like, for example, I could never have started the First Feminist Art Program in LA, much less in New York. So I had to separate - on the other hand, you know, Diane Gelon always used to always say, "You want to be accepted in the art world." Well, of course, I want my work accepted in the art world. But I've had to forge my own path, and I've had to be apart in order to do it.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, certainly there are lots of other artists who have done the same thing.

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

MS. RICHARDS: Have gone outside. I think of Bruce Nauman, for example.

MS. CHICAGO: Right. Bruce has always been apart from it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. CHICAGO: Even in Pasadena, when he was in Pasadena, he was not part of the Pasadena scene. Because we lived not that far apart. But he was very disconnected from it. He's always been apart from it.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to studio for a moment and technique, you've used so many different approaches to artmaking. Have you ever done fresco painting? And if you haven't, would you have if someone commissioned you? Because I think of it as -

MS. CHICAGO: I've never gotten a commission in my life.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever thought about that?

MS. CHICAGO: I'd love to -

MS. RICHARDS: I think about the artists who have -

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. But you have to understand. I mean, a lot of - I haven't - oh, I got one small commission - that's not true - to work on, to do some pages in a Haggadah [book of reading for seder service] for a family. But I just haven't had those kinds of opportunities. So I don't know what I would've done if I'd gotten them, because I haven't had them.

MS. RICHARDS: When I think of your work and the broad impact -

MS. CHICAGO: But, you know, women weren't allowed in the mural movement in Mexico.

MS. RICHARDS: Hmm. There was a woman who did a lot of work on the frescos, a New York artist.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, but not during the Mexican mural movement. Edward Lucie-Smith told me that. I didn't know it. In fact, he said Frida Kahlo didn't care because, you know, she worked small and had her own personal drama. But Maria Izquierdo was very upset about it. She wanted to work on the murals. Edward told me that.

MS. RICHARDS: Hmm.

MS. CHICAGO: He's an expert on Latin American art, along with a lot of other areas. But he happens to be an expert on -

MS. RICHARDS: Which Ed? Sorry. Edward -

MS. CHICAGO: Lucie-Smith

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes. You wanted to talk, I think, about, in general, why you developed your own path and turned your back on the elitist art world, as you said. [Chicago laughs.] And how this path has changed over time and how your expectations have changed. And I have a lot of other questions related to that. But why don't you start just by talking about your ideas on this subject?

MS. CHICAGO: But you know I was a very - how can I say this? I was interviewed in Toronto by this CBC guy, this CBC-TV guy, and he was asking me a question about, you know, like, well how do I view my young self? And stuff like that. And I said, "You know, there's a practice in yoga where you look down on yourself with affection." So that's how I try to look at my young self. Because, I mean, I was really - ugh!

Like when I was in my 20s, right, and being treated badly by the art world, I assumed that it was entirely because of my gender. Because it was outside my capacity to imagine that all artists were treated like that, and that the male artists put up with it. Okay? That was just entirely outside of my ability to imagine. So I figured, okay, I'm being treated like this because I'm a woman. I'm going to make - I'm going to go a different direction. I'm not going to be treated like this. I just do not want to be treated like shit. Well, yes, there was definitely a gender component in it. But what I didn't understand was the way artists are treated. And that, you know, it's a buyers' market. And that there are way more artists than the distribution system can handle. And so, you know, one artist is troublesome? There are plenty of artists who'll come along who won't be. Right?

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Regardless of their gender.

MS. CHICAGO: Right. Okay. So that was just outside of my [laughs] realm, completely. It's like when John Copeland sent me to meet Harold Rosenberg in New York. And I went - 25 years old - with my slides under my arm. And he made a pass at me. I mean, I want you to know it never even crossed

my mind to think I would do that. It never even - the possibility, Oh, I'll go to bed with him and he'll do something for my career never even entered my mind. I just was like, You've got to be fucking kidding! And I was out of there. I mean, that's the kind of young woman I was. Okay. And I had this sense of destiny from the time I was very young. I was going to be an artist, and I was going to become part of art history. That was my goal in life from when I was really young.

MS. RICHARDS: You use the word "destiny." That kind of implies a philosophical -

MS. CHICAGO: I'm not telling you it was rational or it relates to any other part of my world view. It was kind of apart from that. I'm not like that at all.

MS. RICHARDS: Because -

MS. CHICAGO: I just -

MS. RICHARDS: You really, when you use the word "destiny," it sounds like it was predetermined.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, actually, my cousin - I have this cousin who's not alive anymore, but she said something about, in a way, given my childhood - like I remember being in my studio one time listening to Woody Guthrie and just starting to weep and thinking to myself, you know, who I am, I have no choice who I am. Given my childhood and my upbringing. That's what I mean. I don't mean some supernatural destiny.

MS. RICHARDS: But it's the becoming part of art history. It's the becoming recognized for what you were doing, not the, yes, you were going to do it, you were going to do it because of who you were. But the recognition part, that's what I'm asking about.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, that probably came from fact that, when I was little, my father just loved me to pieces, and I just expected the world to do that. You know how character is formed. I'm not saying that some big God directed this. No, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about, given my life circumstances and my upbringing and all that stuff, that I felt I had a destiny, you know, to fulfill, to make a contribution. That was what I was on the earth for. That is what my father made me feel: that I had to make a contribution. I had something to offer.

MS. RICHARDS: I have to change the disc.

[END OF DISC 1.]

This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Chicago on August 7, 2009, in Belen, New Mexico, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two. Okay.

MS. CHICAGO: I'm going to pick up about this thing about how I don't mean this in an egocentric way, because it was the opposite. I felt like I was in service. I always felt in service to this - I suppose "responsibility" is a better word than destiny - to this responsibility. That's how I felt in The Dinner Party days, too. And still feel around The Dinner Party. In service to the information I discovered, the unknown information. So it was like my own personal needs or my personal comfort or my personal satisfaction or ego was irrelevant. I think responsibility is probably a better word. I had a responsibility.

I have a responsibility as an artist and as a person to try and make a difference, to try and make a contribution. I think that's what has been at the base of both my life, my work, and my decisions. So whatever I did, where I lived, how I lived was all a consequence of that, in order to accomplish that.

MS. RICHARDS: And coming up to the present, do you still feel that your approach is the same?

MS. CHICAGO: I think now since I've, you know, made a contribution, I feel like I can enjoy the process of artmaking a lot more. I just feel - I've always loved to make art. I mean, I've always loved to make art. And in fact, when I was getting nothing in terms of reward or recognition, I made my studio work my reward. As long as I could work in my studio, that was enough for me. So I didn't have any money. So, you know, my life was really difficult. As long as I could work. I mean, I'm still the same. I'm happiest when I'm working. I'm still the same.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you - in the past or in the present - feel that you're part of a long tradition of, this may not be exact, social protest work, including Mexican muralists or American Ashcan School or Ben Shahn or African-American artists like Jacob Lawrence? Did you feel that you were part of that tradition, that merging of serious artistic intent, aesthetic, the importance of aesthetics, with that mission to -

MS. CHICAGO: I believe art has to have meaning.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think of yourself as connected in any way with any of these or others that you've mentioned?

MS. CHICAGO: I think of all of the American artists, I think of all of them, you know. When I saw Jacob Lawrence's - it's called Migration [The Migration Series, 1941]?

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

MS. CHICAGO: You know, telling the history of a people like that, I really connected to that. I really thought that was phenomenal. The Ben Shahn and the stuff I get and even the Mexicans muralists, their work is very time-bound, and I always wanted my work not to be time-bound. And I've tried to make it not time-bound. In other words, it's not the height of the women's movement anymore, but people are still going to see The Dinner Party and being moved by it, not because it's about - it's connected to - a political movement, but because of its, I hope, beauty and meaning, which I think has only come into visibility to the art world after the end of that particular political period.

MS. RICHARDS: And works that were done by African-American artists, you could certainly still say that there are issues unresolved and unaccomplished in terms of that struggle.

MS. CHICAGO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, yes, I think -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever meet Jacob Lawrence?

MS. CHICAGO: No. I think Elizabeth Catlin is a great artist and very unrecognized, a great artist.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a chance to meet her?

MS. CHICAGO: No. Never met her. You know, people want to meet me all the time. I never understand why they want - that's why I don't feel that way about wanting to meet other people. Like, why do they want to meet me? You know, my life is in my work. I'm boring. What's so interesting about me? It's my work.

MS. RICHARDS: I was trying - these other artists in the past who - Jacob Lawrence, others -

MS. CHICAGO: [Francisco] Goya is the one I probably relate to more.

MS. RICHARDS: When you think about relating to them, did you - on what level? Was it an inspiration to have the ambition to use subject matter that you're dealing with?

MS. CHICAGO: It has to do with - yes. Yes, it has to do with ambition. The ambition to make work of meaning, that could transcend the time in which you lived and could speak for the unspoken for.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there 19th-century painters, [Jean-Francois] Millet and -

MS. CHICAGO: Well, no. I think, actually, I grew up looking at the Impressionists in the Art Institute [of Chicago, IL], you know. So in terms of their use of color and light and so forth and that. And also level of aspiration. One of the things I think is really confusing, you know, at least for my generation, is that aspiration is tied up with male achievement. And so then it's confusing because, well, I wanted to be able to achieve, too. That's why I get so furious with that whole period in feminist theory that announced that desire was male; genius was male. Why should men have a corner on the market of any aspect of human aspiration? Why shouldn't women have the right to any aspect of human aspiration?

MS. RICHARDS: You make a statement - I think this is the quote I want - "Art ought to be connected to human value and meaning."

MS. CHICAGO: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: One could say that all artists of a certain accomplishment want that. Even [Kasimir] Malevich and artists who don't take on specific social issues want to be connected to human value and meaning, because of their belief in art in a pure sense.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, it's like Henry Hopkins. He bought into the modernist idea that a visual form could be a universal language. Which it isn't, actually. It isn't actually a universal language. It's the language of privilege. And only those in the know can read it, can read that language. And also what does form and shape and color and line have to do with most people's lives?

MS. RICHARDS: Are there artists who you feel somehow bridged, found a place in between that managed to - well, obviously your own work - managed to combine the joy of pure line and form and color and the philosophical or more -

MS. CHICAGO: Oh, we just saw the Venice Biennale. So I saw Bruce Nauman's work. Now, sometimes Bruce achieves through a minimum of means a maximum of meaning. And in two of the pieces - two of the works, installations - I thought he did. Installation of bronze hands and the recent sound piece he did, which was really simple. You know, it was just a series -

MS. RICHARDS: Days of the week [Days and Giorni, 2009].

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. And that could only be done by a mature artist, because of the fact that not only was it hypnotic in terms of the sound, but it was an experience that anybody who's lived any length of time has had, which is the way time keeps moving, how you can't stop it; you can't intercede in it. How you get the days of the week mixed up. It was, I thought, a really accomplished merger of means and meaning. Simple, too, these just white sound pearls, you know. What do you call it? Speakers held on with binder clips. I mean, really simple. I admired that.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You've talked about your work, your desire to have your work more in a public sphere, seen more in a public sphere - that in addition to being seen in the public sphere as well as in the art world.

MS. CHICAGO: It's not that. It's that, you know, one of the things I learned -

MS. RICHARDS: In an elitist kind of context.

MS. CHICAGO: Part of it is because I think art is so important. I think that the connection between art and society has so diminished that, you know, it's one of the reasons there is so little art in our schools, because people have forgotten why art is important. And to some extent that's a function of, in my opinion, the proliferation of M.F.A. programs all around the world that have produced, you know, gazillions of young artists who have learned to talk in tongues. And who are repeating and regurgitating ideas that once had tremendous meaning, and have become trivialized to the point of like, oh, how boring is that?

And so I'm a great critic of the university art curriculum, studio art curriculum. A great critic of it. I think it has not been good for artists, who have become increasingly disconnected from the audience. And here are these museums who are having all these problems with audience. And so what are they coming up with? Oh, let's do multimedia digital things. Let's do interactive things. Let's - because all the kids like video games. How about let's talk about what you're showing? And maybe it's not sufficiently meaningful to people that they want to come to the museum. No. We're not going to have that conversation. We're going to have gimmicks.

MS. RICHARDS: When you think about, though, placing your work, for whatever reason, outside the sphere of the museum, do you feel that - and we all recognize that the general public, the American society, doesn't respect art and value art as much as they ought to. But do you find more respect and more receptive audience outside the art world when your work is shown?

MS. CHICAGO: I have the same experience everywhere I go. Okay? In fact, this has been what's been so entirely confusing to me. In 1997, I was in a show ["The International Ceramic Public Arts Exhibition," Banchyao, Taipei County, Taiwan, 1998] and had a show [Hanart TZ Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan, 1997] in Taiwan. In 1997 my career was in the toilet. The Dinner Party was in danger of being erased. I was, you know - Donald and I had ended up, had finished the Holocaust Project, \$55,000 in debt. We were desperately - we'd just gotten into Belen. We were trying to get our life in some order. This has been the story of my life since The Dinner Party opened in San Francisco. And from the outside, everybody thought I was a huge success. And I lost everything, okay? Had nothing. Started all over again.

So here I am in Taiwan in 1997. I have openings, and I lecture. And everywhere I go, it's mobbed. Mobbed! So I say to this young woman who works at the gallery, "I can't believe this! I just can't believe! I mean, Taiwan?" And she said to me, "Judy, you're taught all over the world. You ought to get out more." Okay? So it has been unbelievably confusing to me.

When I had a show, when I had my glass show in Waterloo, which is outside of Toronto, they hired a police guard for the opening because they had gotten so many e-mails and letters that they filed in a file they called "Crazy People Who Love Judy." So here -

And this happens everywhere I go. I was just in Venice; there were people from all over the world at the conference. And my plenary was the most attended of any of the plenaries. It doesn't matter where I have gone in the world, this has happened to me. Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Asia. So I have an audience all over the world that has not translated into institutional acceptance in the art world. And it has been exceedingly confusing to me.

MS. RICHARDS: And it's so confusing because in general the non-museum audience cares less

about art and artists than the museum audience.

MS. CHICAGO: Right, right. So it's exceedingly confusing. "Judy, I love your work!" "Judy, your work has changed my life!" "Judy, I followed your work for years. I followed your career for years."

MS. RICHARDS: Is there any parallel to any other artists -

MS. CHICAGO: I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: - present or past that you've -

MS. CHICAGO: I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Moving a little bit, a different and more personal aspect of the art world, could you talk a little about -

MS. CHICAGO: In fact, I want to tell you something. I'm sorry to separate.

MS. RICHARDS: No, no, great.

MS. CHICAGO: This scholar, Jane Gerhard, who teaches at Mount Holyoke [College, South Hadley, MA], this historian, she -

MS. RICHARDS: Gerhard?

MS. CHICAGO: G-E-R-H-A-R-D. She is actually doing a book called Straight From the Heart: Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party and the Power of Popular Feminism. Because she sat in the Schlesinger Library, and she read hundreds of letters from people saying my work had changed their life. And then she read the art world criticism, and she read the feminist theorist criticism. And that is what she's working on. She's writing a book about it, about the discrepancy between the impact of my work and the resistance to it.

MS. RICHARDS: This is a little off what I was going to go on, but you talked in the, I guess it was the Getty, about that's changed in attitude in the New York Times, voiced by Roberta Smith, in 2002. It was a breakthrough from what you described as a kind of institutional set against your work at the New York Times. Have you seen other art world - have you seen criticism in other parts of the art world make that kind of shift? And in fact, it's just a matter of time?

MS. CHICAGO: Don't know yet. We'll see.

MS. RICHARDS: Hasn't happened yet.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, we'll see. I'm still working; I'm still putting out new work. It's interesting. Like my fiber work, you know, the survey in Toronto ["When Women Rule the World: Judy Chicago in Thread," Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto, 2009], according to the people up there, has perplexed the Canadian art world. They don't quite know how to approach it. I'll tell you, when I had this big commercial gallery Dinner Party show, didn't do well.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was that?

MS. CHICAGO: I had two. I had one at ACA [Galleries] in New York, a big huge show at LewAllen [LewAllen Contemporary, Santa Fe, NM]. They were blown away. They were educated. They actually - I've heard from the salespeople, you know, they just assumed after -

MS. RICHARDS: LewAllen in Santa Fe?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. They just assumed that there would be museum interest in The Dinner Party-related work. And they heard the most incredible responses, "Well, it's not the real Dinner Party." Which they didn't want! Okay? But now all of a sudden that they can't have it, now they can say, "Oh, we would've wanted the real Dinner Party. We don't want Dinner Party test plates or drawings or studies, or the banner cartoons or the historical material that underpins the creation of that work. We don't want that." They were completely blown away. That's when they learned about the institutional resistance.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Moving a little bit -

MS. CHICAGO: I'm sure Carolee Schneemann must have talked about this, didn't she? I mean, because she's - I know she's faced it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MS. CHICAGO: And then she's - you know, it kills me, the way history's being rewritten to write her out as the origin of feminist performance.

MS. RICHARDS: Instead, who is being written in as the -

MS. CHICAGO: It's just being rewritten.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you spoken to Carolee about that?

MS. CHICAGO: No, but I've seen Carolee. I followed her career.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. CHICAGO: I know somebody who knows her really well. I just have - I admire her, I admire her work.

MS. RICHARDS: You've mentioned LewAllen Gallery, and I wanted to ask you a broader question about your relationships with commercial galleries. And how has that evolved? What have you wanted from the gallery? What's been the best gallery relationship? Why do you find that this gallery director needs to be a woman?

MS. CHICAGO: No, actually, you know - no, at one point I had five galleries, and they were all guys who owned them. Men have been much more willing to take a risk than women. It's like Edward Lucie-Smith. It wasn't a woman historian who wrote the first monograph on my work; it was Edward, who's like, "You know what? I'm taking this on." Because he, I mean - uh-uh [negative], women have not - women in the art world have not generally gone to bat for me. Because they work inside a system that, in order for them to succeed in, they have to go along with the program.

MS. RICHARDS: What have been the hallmarks of the positive relationships you've had with galleries? In other words, what have they given you that you wanted? And what did they [inaudible] that you didn't want?

MS. CHICAGO: I had a wonderful relation - my first dealer was Rolf Nelson [Rolf Nelson Gallery] in LA, and, you know, the galleries were very different when I was young than they are now. I mean, galleries believed in their artists. Exhibitions were shows; they weren't sales. They didn't drop you if

you didn't sell. It's changed so much, the art world. And so that was my idea of what a dealer was supposed to be.

MS. RICHARDS: Someone who's loyal?

MS. CHICAGO: Someone who is loyal, right. And I only have two galleries now. Although I sell in galleries, you know. Like I had commercial gallery shows in Toronto [Rouge Concept Gallery, 2009], and later I'm going to have one in Calgary ["Surveying Judy Chicago: 1968-2008," Weiss Gallery, 2009]. But generally those are kind of -

MS. RICHARDS: And do those shows come about because they've spoke to you or to the other two galleries?

MS. CHICAGO: No, they tend to come to me, by and large, although ACA tends to organize. ACA tends to get me into a lot of shows. Now ACA, I've had a long, on-and-off relationship with. They were my first New York gallery, 1984. And in 1990 - you know, ACA is a family-owned gallery. And they're much more like the old-time gallery dealers. And even though I've gotten very frustrated with them over the years, which they know -

MS. RICHARDS: What are the qualities, the positive qualities, of the old-time galleries?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, loyalty. And a long-term commitment. And, you know, not being put off. Like Jeffrey [Bergen]. [Laughs.] I remember Jeffrey after my 1984 show, when Ken Johnson, who's had a vendetta against me since 1984, wrote this vile review of my first New York show at ACA. And Jeffrey said, "I just went home, and I made myself a bunch of buttered popcorn. And I put my feet up, and I ate the popcorn, and I read the review, and I laughed." Now that's a perfect story for a dealer. [Laughs.] That's kind of dealer one would want, right?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. CHICAGO: But anyway, in 1990, my brother - we were in the middle of the Holocaust Project, you know, struggling for money. You know this from [inaudible]. My brother was diagnosed with ALS [Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Lou Gehring's Disease].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. CHICAGO: Jonathan Bergen, Jeffrey's twin, was diagnosed with throat cancer. My exhibition designer and close friend Steven Hamilton was diagnosed with AIDS. And the woman who had been at ACA, who had been responsible for selling a lot of my work from that first show, left. And the gallery was in disarray because Jonathan was ill, and it was too much, just too much for me. I just, you know Sidney -

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry. What was Jonathan's last name?

MS. CHICAGO: Bergen.

MS. RICHARDS: B-E-R-G-E-N.

MS. CHICAGO: G-E-N, yes. Sidney, the father, was putting a lot of pressure on Donald and me to show the Holocaust Project work before we were done, and we didn't want to do it. And so I left the gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: Because they thought they would sell it?

MS. CHICAGO: I don't know why. Maybe. I don't know. It wasn't a period where we all were communicating really well. I mean, it was a really terrible period. Just terrible. And I was talking to my brother every week. And it was just terrible trying to keep it from my mother, trying to keep it together, you know, working on the Holocaust Project.

MS. RICHARDS: He was in Japan?

MS. CHICAGO: He was in Japan. And the material for the Holocaust Project - it was the most daunting project. It was just so dark and so difficult. And so I left the gallery for a while. And I didn't have a gallery for a long time.

MS. RICHARDS: When you left the gallery, does that mean you took all your work?

MS. CHICAGO: No, I didn't. I left it all with them. I just left.

MS. RICHARDS: This meant that you told them that you didn't want to have a show?

MS. CHICAGO: No, I just left. I said, "I'm leaving." I didn't ask for accounting. I didn't ask for an inventory. I left them with a lot of work. I didn't care. I just left. I just did whatever I had to do to be able to keep working. And I couldn't work under the circumstances. It was too much for me.

MS. RICHARDS: The relationship was too much stress.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, too much stress, given, you know, Jonathan - it was just too much. It was just too much. So years went by. Jeffrey would show up. After Jonathan died, he would show up in my shows, you know. Like when Resolutions ["Judy Chicago: Resolutions: A Stitch in Time," Museum of Art and Design, New York, NY, 2000] opened in New York, Jeffrey shows up. "Hi, Judy." So then in 2005 -

MS. RICHARDS: That's Jeffrey Bergen.

MS. CHICAGO: Bergen, yes. In 2005, you know, when things were - The Dinner Party was going to be permanently housed, and "WACK!" ["WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2007] was going to happen, and all this stuff was happening - I needed a New York gallery. And so I went back to ACA.

And actually I'm very glad I did because, you know, ACA's a family-owned gallery. It's going to continue. The boys, the sons, are going into it. They handle artists' estates. I'm actually, even though we had a big blowup because they weren't doing enough, they just weren't doing enough, and they actually acknowledged that. And so since then, things have been better. Also my expectations of galleries have become more realistic.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever view galleries as people, someone that would take care of you in a sense of keeping your archives and fostering your career versus a place to sell your work?

MS. CHICAGO: I think when I was young, I had more of a sense of that. But, I mean, very few galleries do that anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: Want a gallery as a place of community among the artists who are shown there?

MS. CHICAGO: I never had that, because I never lived in New York, you know. Maybe if I'd lived in New York. Although when I had my first show at ACA, an artist from Santa Fe named Fritz Scholder, who used to show there, flew out to meet me from here. And actually, he became, he and his wife, who lived here, became kind of my entryway into the New Mexico art scene. That was one of my few experiences like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you saying that one of the reasons why your experience with ACA is positive is because you can view the gallery owners as friends, not just business associates?

MS. CHICAGO: Oh, yes. I mean, I think -

MS. RICHARDS: There's a family feeling for you.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, I think they were very upset when I left because I think they felt that I was like part of the family. And, you know, Sidney flew to London. He was my date to The Dinner Party because he had never seen it. And I used to stay in his great apartment on Central Park West when I went to New York. They had that kind of family, and that's why they were upset, I think, when I left, because I was part of the family. And I think I have some kind of feelings about them like that now. And I think I appreciate, more than anything else about them now, is, because of how the art world has changed, I appreciate the loyalty. I'm a very loyal person, and I think - I appreciate that in them. And the fact that they are not deterred if a show sells or doesn't sell. In fact, all the art of mine they own they won't sell. They don't want to sell it.

MS. RICHARDS: Hmm. Do they come to you and say, Judy, we'd like you to have a show in six months or in 18 months? Or do you go to them and say, I want to have a show.

MS. CHICAGO: I don't know; it just evolves. Like my last show there was in 2007. And, you know, with the downturn in the economy, we just had a conversation; we all felt the same way. Nobody had any other feelings. It's ridiculous to show in America in 2009. I said, I don't want to do it. They said, we don't want to do it. You know, we're doing something else. Because they've been through this so many times, you know, they know how to get through it. They just dug in their heels. They had longer shows; they had group shows; they had, you know - and I'm like, I don't want to have a show in 2009 because, yeah, right. I mean, that's kind of a halt to the conversation. It wasn't complicated. So, yes, so I'm having a show in 2010; I'm going to have a lot of shows in 2010.

MS. RICHARDS: There are artists who don't have a gallery affiliation or who have one that they're not satisfied with; would you imagine introducing another artist to them?

MS. CHICAGO: I did! I did! I introduced Audrey Flack to LewAllen. She seemed very surprised. I didn't understand why she was surprised.

MS. RICHARDS: She who?

MS. CHICAGO: Audrey Flack. I don't know why she was surprised. I thought -

MS. RICHARDS: In a positive way?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. I don't know. She was just surprised when I saw her at the opening. I went to the opening; I know her. I admire her work. And LewAllen wanted a couple of things. They wanted some other mid-career feminist artists, you know, because -

MS. RICHARDS: To represent?

MS. CHICAGO: To represent. And I suggested Audrey Flack and Joan Semmel. Now, I was disappointed they didn't take Joan. I think they felt, you know, is they couldn't sell her work or something in Santa Fe. I think they felt it wasn't the right market. But I was thrilled when they gave Audrey a big show. I thought it was wonderful. But she comes from New York. You know how the New York artists are. Maybe they don't do it like that there. I don't know. I didn't understand why she was surprised. I was happy to do it.

I got a gallery for one of the Fresno girls. That's so funny: "Judy! We're 50 and 60 years old, and we're not girls anymore." "You'll always be girls to me, honey." But anyway, I got one of them a gallery in Santa Fe, and her work is wonderful. I love her work, Nancy Youdelman. She's just wonderful. And she shows at Eight Modern. She's doing really well with them.

MS. RICHARDS: Her name is Nancy -

MS. CHICAGO: Youdelman.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

MS. CHICAGO: And she's one of the Fresno girls. Still lives in Fresno, in fact. Wonderful body of work, you know, and completely outside the art world.

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

Switching a little bit, while you've talked about the negative reviews, there have been so many art historians and doctoral candidates who've written about your work and researched it. And I know you feel there have been wrong conclusions drawn. But I wonder if there are any of those incorrect assumptions or incorrect conclusions about your work that art historians or critics have put out there that you'd like to address and set the record straight?

MS. CHICAGO: Oh, well, one of the things I've come up against a lot, which has always kind of irritated me, is that because my work has aroused controversy, many people have made the assumption that I have courted controversy. Or set out to be provocative. Which is really not me at all. That's not how I operate. And I don't - it's like reading backwards. Because of the result, they've attributed the result to my intention. And that has never been my intention.

In fact, it goes - I mean, I can still remember - I think I told this story to Henry, too - about when The Dinner Party opened, and Susan Stamberg from All Things Considered interviewed me, you know, and I was really halfway scared to death at the opening. I had risked everything on this piece. And 5,000 people came to the opening. And I was being covered in flowers, and people said, you know, "You changed my life."

MS. RICHARDS: This is the first opening.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, San Francisco. And Susan Stamberg interviewed me that weekend for All Things Considered, and I'm telling her, "I set out to see if a woman artist, working at the same level of ambition as male artists have worked, would meet the same level of acceptance and support. And my God, I was so nervous, and I thought it wouldn't be happening. It's just incredible. You know, I was wrong, and it's so wonderful. And, oh, my God! I just can't believe it. I'm so relieved." And she said, "But, Judy, what will you do when the controversy starts?" And I said, "Controversy? What controversy?" [Laughs.] I had a different - like when I was saying before about I was focused over here. Like I had this responsibility, and that's what I was focused on, my own path. So I had my own goals with The Dinner Party. I had my own purpose with The Dinner Party. And when all this stuff

started to happen, it was like a complete shock.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't recall - maybe I should - if you responded in writing to any critics.

MS. CHICAGO: No, never, never, never.

MS. RICHARDS: And had a dialogue.

MS. CHICAGO: Never.

MS. RICHARDS: You never felt you could change their mind if they would only understand.

MS. CHICAGO: No, never. I don't believe that. In fact, Amelia Jones sat on the stage with Griselda Pollock - she's one of the origins of the anti-essentialism theories in feminist theory. And she - this was after the "Sexual Politics" Show. And Griselda then repeated the inaccurate accusation about my exploiting people in The Dinner Party. And Amelia, on the stage, in public, said to her, "Griselda, I have interviewed 30 different Dinner Party people. No one feels like that. Griselda, what are your sources?" Silence. So, no, reason does not change prejudice. Or the world would not be the way it is. That's just an argument I had with Gloria Steinem. She believes that facts and reason will change people's minds. Not if they're invested in a particular belief system.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Was that conversation with her awhile ago?

MS. CHICAGO: It was around the time of The Dinner Party permanent housing.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, just a few years ago. That's interesting.

MS. CHICAGO: Don't get me wrong, I admire Gloria. It's just an area of disagreement between us.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

You talked about, at one point somewhere - this is about inspirations and references outside art - poetry, Emily Dickinson, and we talked about music. What have been the significant influences of those kind of, you might say, extra-artistic parts of your life? Poetry, maybe theater, music, travel.

MS. CHICAGO: Discovery, I think. Just discovery.

MS. RICHARDS: And certainly history has been a huge -

MS. CHICAGO: That's what I mean. Discovery of history. I think that's really probably the core word in my work and in my life, is discovery. Discovery of this unknown history; discovery of this unexpressed human experience, birth; discovery of how immense the Holocaust was and how immense its effect was all over the world; discovery, technical discovery - I love it, you know. Discovering a thread can be like a brushstroke. Discovering china painting, which, because it was done by women, was not taken seriously. Discovering the potential of glass, the expressive potential of glass to see through the surface, to look behind appearances, to express fragility and strength, vulnerability and passivity. I think discovery about what materials can do. Discovering aspects of the human condition that have not been adequately represented. Discovery. I think that's the biggest, most important word in my life. It's what inspires me, actually. Discovery inspires me.

MS. RICHARDS: When I read about your past, your major past projects, it seemed that when you did

The Dinner Party, it was obviously discovery. But it was education. It was informing the world, and especially other women, of the accomplishments of women, of women's history. When I read about your developing and executing the Holocaust Project, it sounded more like personal discovery.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, I -

MS. RICHARDS: And less - and not as -

MS. CHICAGO: No, they were - personal discovery and aesthetic expression, like, I can't even separate them. It's kind of like the -

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But it wasn't like educating the world because you -

MS. CHICAGO: It was actually because, I mean - in fact, that was one of the things that got people upset, was that - I mean, that's what Gail Levin has concluded, is that our effort to educate, you know, through art was one of the things that got people so bent out of shape - in the art world - about the Holocaust Project. But, no, we definitely were trying to educate in the Holocaust Project; that's how it was structured. Because that was one of the reasons we made this decision to include the audio tour as part of the exhibition; because people, most people, could not read the imagery, a lot of the imagery, in the Holocaust Project. Because, for example, in Four Questions, most people aren't familiar with the T-40 euthanasia program. The T-40 euthanasia program, [Adolph] Hitler's sterilization program, or what the underpinnings of - the V-8 rocket program and the expunging of the Nazi scientists' records in order to get them to work on our space program. I mean, there was so much -

MS. RICHARDS: Werner von Braun.

MS. CHICAGO: Right. There was so much sheer information where -

MS. RICHARDS: Especially younger generations.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. But even people who - also like in the Jewish community in America, they are very focused on the Jewish experience of the Holocaust. They're less knowledgeable and, in fact, were resistant for a long time, to acknowledging, for example, the persecution of homosexuals. Because when we were at Dachau, there was a protest. It was a Day of Remembrance. So there were a number of homosexuals there who were very upset that there was no commemoration of the homosexual - of torture of homosexuals and branding of them, and the humiliation of them. So I mean, there were many aspects of the Holocaust that were unknown to different communities. And that's always what I would try to do, is cross communities.

And also when we started on the Holocaust Project, you could go to any - most - major contemporary museums, you'd never even know the Holocaust happened, there was such an absence of imagery. And what there was was Anselm Kiefer. And that was a particular perspective on the Holocaust. And so, yes, there was a very strong educational impulse in the Holocaust Project.

And in the Birth Project. I mean, that was one of the reasons there was all the documentation that went with the Birth Project. Although it's interesting because now, you know, the subject of birth is nowhere near as shrouded in mystery as it was when I was working on the Birth Project. Even the way women, young women, dress when they're pregnant. I mean, the woman who took my blood this morning at the lab, she's pregnant. She's wearing this tight T-shirt, just a regular T-shirt. In the '80s, women covered themselves up. That was just the history of maternity.

There's been a big change in terms of the ability to read the imagery. And also there's been generations of men who have been in the birthing room. That was a real big generational gap in the audience when the Birth Project was first premiered. Older men had no idea if those images were based on reality because, you know, they went to the hospital, went in the waiting room, and then they had a kid. They didn't have the slightest contact with the birth process. Whereas younger men just flipped, because they saw represented in the Birth Project something they had witnessed and participated in. And so they were much more able to embrace the work. But now that work is shown often without its documentation, and that's all right with me because the documentation was necessary.

So, yes, and even in Resolution, those technical panels are an effort to educate people about the techniques. Because most people in the art world don't know that much about needlework. And most needleworkers don't know that much about art either.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. CHICAGO: When the "Jewish Identity" show was done, I realized, I think, really began to make the connection with my, sort of, rabbinic background, and teaching through art. I think that comes more from that than the connection to, like, the mural movement and stuff like that. In fact, when I went to Mexico City and saw the murals, I went because I was interested in that impulse to teach through art, and I wanted to see how they had done it. And actually, I found them very time-bound and dated. And it's really interesting that it's Frida Kahlo's work rather than [Diego] Rivera's work that has transcended the times and the locale. And that's very curious and interesting to me.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. You did a project, the Autobiography of a Year.

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

MS. RICHARDS: June '93 to November '94.

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

MS. RICHARDS: Could you talk about that? And also you mentioned that in your studio, after you finished working, you write? Were you talking just now? I was going to follow up, follow up that point, but I forgot. Were you talking about writing in journals or -

MS. CHICAGO: Saturday morning, I write in my journal.

MS. RICHARDS: So I was going to ask you about the keeping of a journal. And then I thought I wanted to talk about this autobiography, which is not a journal; it's a notebook of life.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, it is. It's sort of a visual journal.

MS. RICHARDS: And if you can talk about how - I know that you started doing that when the Holocaust Project was over as a way of transition. But talk about that project and if you had ever done anything like that before - or since?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, that's one of the reasons - actually Donald, you know, when I was talking about the last images for the Landfall prints, Donald was really on me: You should do something more personal because there's this other aspect of your work. It's not just the Autobiography of a Year; it's the Kitty City [1999-2004], you know -

MS. RICHARDS: Let's talk about that.

MS. CHICAGO: And the images on cats. I mean Kitty City: A Feline Book of Hours, which is a sort of meditation on our life with our cats. And I think Autobiography of a Year was motivated by a lot of things. You remember I told you about this thing that was happening in '97, this difference between my life and my myth. Well, I think that was part of it. It was already happening, this discrepancy between my life and my myth. And I wanted to assert my humanness. And the fact that, you know, just like everybody else, my life was full of ups and downs. And I also wanted to reclaim my hand and the direct gesture.

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

MS. CHICAGO: I think there was that, too. Because a lot of my work since then has been much more - even if I work in a print shop, it's still my drawing. And even though I'm working in glass and casting in glass foundries, it's still my hand in the carving. And so I think that one of the things that happens in designing for needlework is a generalizing, except for embroidery. And again now, this was a sort of stupid criticism about how I can't draw that came out. Part of it is a lack of understanding. For example, when you draw for needlepoint, you're drawing for a grided canvas, and you have to realize that the forms have to be somewhat generalized in order for the stitching to be able to follow the form - and also there's that jagged edge. Same thing in weaving, if you design for weaving. There's a pictorial weaving. There's the warp and the weft, and so there are certain limits. And also in stained glass in Rainbow Shabbat. In order to do the leading, there has to be a generalizing of form.

So it's the opposite, in a way, and I can sort of draw. In fact, they laugh at Landfall about this because they just marvel at my drawing. So but, you know, after doing a lot of work for techniques that require a generalizing of form, I wanted to come back to the precision of my hand, both in the series I did, Thinking About Trees, where there's a number of renderings of trees, and also Thinking About Trees, thinking about our relationship to trees.

And that's what Kitty City is, too. It's a meditation on thinking about our relationship with other species. And a lot of that came out of the thinking I did in the Holocaust Project. Because, you know, what I began to see through my study and my discovery in the Holocaust Project was the linkage between the Holocaust and larger issues of our conduct on the planet. And it was very interesting, you know. Like in one of the images, Treblinka Genocide, which links the genocide of the Jews to cultural genocide and the extermination of certain species of animals. And it got a lot of people in the Jewish community upset, making any linkage between the treatment of people and the treatment of animals.

But there's been this book since that time - there's been a lot of scholarship since we did the Holocaust Project - that has actually pushed some of the ideas that we were exploring. And there's this book called Ultimate Treblinka, and it's about the fact that the Nazis actually studied factory farming methods. And see, I saw this at Auschwitz, because Auschwitz is like a big processing plant. Except instead of processing people - I mean pigs, which were the first things on the assembly line - the processed people they defined as pigs. And so it was there - and that's when I stopped eating meat. I mean, I can't eat - just my whole consciousness shifted.

So I began to see these linkages, you know, between our scorn for the other, whether that's applied to lesser peoples or other species, the earth, our use of the earth. And so a lot of those ideas I took into some of these other, personal meditations, like about our relationship to nature and ecology and thinking about trees, our relationship to other species in Kitty City. And I don't think anybody

has really understood, yet, that work. But, you know, look how long it took with The Dinner Party. So you know, that's one of the reasons I'm focused on trying to make sure my bodies of work will be there for study in the future. Because I believe a lot of this will be understood.

MS. RICHARDS: The Autobiography of a Year, again, you were doing a drawing every single day.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Seven days a week,, or five days a week?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. Although I didn't use all of them because there's only 140 drawings. Because I was after a pure impulse, you know. And some unmediated, emotional -

MS. RICHARDS: So you eliminated some of the drawings.

MS. CHICAGO: Some of the works that I didn't feel had that purity of impulse. I wanted a un - because I mediate my impulses through all these techniques and all these - from the beginning, from, you know, my [inaudible] Southern California Finish Fetish[California minimalism]. And that's very mediated artmaking, where the surface and finish and technique, you mediate your aesthetic impulse through all those. And so I wanted to go the other way and have an unmediated impulse.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were doing those, did you, from the beginning, think you'd be displaying them? Or were they very, from the beginning, private expressions that that you were kind of -

MS. CHICAGO: I actually, now that I think about it, it was actually - I can't remember. I think it was -

MS. RICHARDS: Like a diary.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. No, I mean - I don't. I just, I'm an artist. What I do, I'm going to show, although I didn't think about showing it.

MS. RICHARDS: These are totally unmediated works, somewhat different than your past work.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, what I found interesting - I think it was Doug Flanders who first suggested showing the whole of Autobiography of a Year. And what I found interesting is that when it was up, people spent hours reading every single image. I found that fascinating. I didn't think it was that interesting. You know what I mean?

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

MS. CHICAGO: We have to stop.

[END OF DISC 2.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Judith Chicago in Belen, New Mexico, on August 8, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

Judy, I wanted to start with going through, as one by one, the works that you've done since about where we left off yesterday, since about 1994, after the Autobiography of a Year, the evolution of your work from then to now.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, see, I did - in '94 I started Resolutions: A Stitch in Time, which was my last major collaborative project. I started it with a group of needleworkers with whom I'd worked dating

back to the Birth Project, and in one case to The Dinner Party.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you decide to do a collaborative project with needleworkers?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, again, in order to understand some of the decisions I made in terms of work that I did, it's important to realize the challenges I had and the lack of support. So in 1993, when Donald and I finished the Holocaust Project, and Donald was starting to work on Belen, and we moved into this little house in Albuquerque while he was working on it, it was the smallest studio I'd had since I was 21. We were in debt. We were trying to scrounge money together to get the Belen Hotel done. Donald kept running out of money. I kept wanting to forget about it and go back to LA, and we'd build our finances and get in some better situation. But Donald was just intent on making a place for us. And that we had to have a place of our own. And that had never been a priority for me. And in fact, I'd had, as I said yesterday, I had not wanted a mortgage, because I wanted my freedom. And so I had - I didn't have very many options in terms of what I could do other than what I could do with my own hand, like *Autobiography of a Year*. But I still had the same impulse to work in a bigger way.

So I did what I had done, in a way, after the collapse of The Dinner Party tour, which was, I turned to what support I had, which was primarily among the needleworkers with whom I had built relationships during the Birth Project. A number of them had stayed connected with each other. It was very different, in a way, from The Dinner Party. In The Dinner Party everybody scattered, and none of us really spoke to each other very much for many years because we were all so devastated by the collapse of the tour and the collapse of all our hopes. But in terms of the Birth Project group, there were - a number of them I'd become quite close to during the course of the Birth Project, and they had become close to each other. And I, you know, maintained some relationships with them.

So that, coupled with the fact that I was interested in a couple of things: going farther with something I had started in the Birth Project, which was this combining the painting and needlework. And also I had been somewhat aesthetically dissatisfied with some of the work in the Birth Project, because I couldn't - there were so many projects going on, and the demand had been so intense in terms of people who wanted to work with me. And I had started so many different projects at, kind of, different levels intended for different audiences. And I couldn't bring all of it back -

MS. RICHARDS: Different levels of sophistication?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, and for different audiences. See, when I first started the Birth Project, it was in some way a response to the resistance of the art distribution system to my work. I used to say The Dinner Party was the piece that everybody wanted to see and nobody wanted to show. And I had decided, I was intent on achieving its permanent housing so I wouldn't break it up. And I had no idea how long that was going to take. But I certainly didn't want to do that again, be in that kind of adversarial relationship with the art world, you know, where I couldn't get my work seen or shown.

So I had conceived the Birth Project in this entirely different way. First I thought, the hell with it! I'll just make these quilts and hang them on clotheslines all over. They'll just sprout up all over. Nobody will be able to stop them. And I did - what happened, of course, was that the development of the images made a lot of them too precious to be hung on clotheslines. [Laughs.] But in the early stages, when I was taking one image and developing it in different - sort of like a kit in different forms, different scales, you know, some of the works, was very kind of casual. It was intended for a very casual distribution. Kind of, roll it up, send it out, and get it shown. As a result, I couldn't exercise my usual level of aesthetic rigor on all the pieces.

And I wanted to revisit that one aspect of that collaborative process, particularly this combining of painting and needlework, which I really got interested in when I was working on the Birth Project. I mean, at the beginning people worked on top of my images, and they covered them. But slowly I moved into this kind of more visible merger of paint and needlework. And so I wanted to continue that. And I wanted to bring it to a higher level. And I had these ideas for - that kind of came off of Rainbow Shabbat in the Holocaust Project, which were these images for the future.

I often comment about Resolutions as an antidote to William Bennett's Virtues, you know, Book of Virtues [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993], which really aggravated me. Because, you know, it's not like the right wing has a corner on the market of seeing that there's a lot of problems in our society. It's just that their solutions are so antiquated. And so I thought it would be fun to kind of try and counter that reactionary impulse with a more progressive impulse of re-visioning traditional proverbs with an eye to the future.

So because I was interested in issues related to social values and the future, I thought it was important to start that project differently than I'd started others. And that was actually bringing my needleworkers together and discussing the future and discussing the breakdown of social values. Because, you know, contrary to public opinion, a lot of those "middle-class women," ordinary women that I worked with, many of them had very strong feminist values, even though a lot of them wouldn't have called themselves feminists. But in certain ways their values were akin to my own. So we all got together. I contacted a number of them, and then they contacted each other, and we kind of put together a working group. And they all came together.

MS. RICHARDS: When you brought them together, did you have, from the onset the concept of how many would be involved and the scope, rather than a more open-ended -

MS. CHICAGO: No, I never - I mean, I don't usually do that. I usually start - when I talked about discovery yesterday, I start with an idea, and I see where it takes me.

MS. RICHARDS: So those who attended the meeting, or tried to, weren't necessarily all the participants.

MS. CHICAGO: No, it ended up with more, but they were certainly the core group. And at a certain point I had to add some pieces, but I'll get to that. So, and actually, that was a problem when I brought in new people.

The other thing I wanted to do was, you know, there hasn't been a lot of study yet of the processes that I used, the collaborative processes I used, and which make evident some of the reasons so many people wanted to work with me and continue to want to work with me, even in the face of a lot of criticism that they had to endure. And some of it had to do, as one of them said, "Well, Judy, you empowered us, and we're empowered." Which meant that they were at another place when we started working together on Resolutions.

And I think they'll all say that Resolutions was the highest level of collaboration any of us had ever experienced, including me. Because they all knew me. They had already gone through whatever issues they had. They had learned how I worked. They liked the way I worked. They wanted to go farther with the processes that we had been involved with in the work that we had done before. They enjoyed the process of moving technically beyond where we had been before because it was a big challenge for them.

And so we started - I told them I wanted to work on proverbs. And so I asked them to look at

proverbs, bring proverbs that they particularly liked.

It was interesting actually doing research on proverbs. There was actually a guy who is like, the world's leading expert on proverbs. And it turns out - it's another way of kind of backing into subject matter - it turns out that this guy, after studying proverbs, concluded that proverbs are like the society's glue. They are handed down from generation to generation, and they reflect the values a society shares. And that way, when the younger generations no longer know the proverbs, it's a kind of indication of the breakdown of the fabric of social values. So it was interesting, you know, kind of backing my way yet again into issues of values and ethics and morality and stuff like that. But I wanted it to be a little more playful and somewhat less earnest than some of my earlier work. And it was challenging to select proverbs that could both be visually interpreted and also be manipulated in terms of a larger global vision.

So we set out to work on it. And at a certain point when, I think, David McFadden from the Museum of Art and Design got involved, and I started planning it as an exhibition, then I looked at the overall series of pieces, which we had grouped around seven basic values, and decided there were holes, and there needed to be more pieces. So then I advertised for local needleworkers, because everybody else was from all around the country, but we were bonded by the work we'd done before and the processes we'd been through.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you assign each needleworker the proverb you wanted them to do? Or did they select?

MS. CHICAGO: No, it actually doesn't work like that. Some of it has to do with designing for their skills, since I knew all their skills.

MS. RICHARDS: So you created the images.

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

MS. RICHARDS: And conceived what needlework techniques would be most appropriate for those images.

MS. CHICAGO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And who had those techniques. For example, you know, Audrey Cowan is a weaver. So I did a design for weaving. In some cases, and I think some of the best work, we actually combined people's skills. So that more than one of them would work on it. Like, for example, Hitch Your Wagon to a Star. Okay. Jackie Moore Alexander has just exquisite appliqué skills. She invented a form of appliqué, which she called "Mary's Appliqué," after one of the other needleworkers, in order to make the fabric lay completely flat. Because in Hitch Your Wagon to a Star, there's a blurring of the boundaries between painting, appliqué, and embroidery. So that you don't actually quite know which section is done how. And so I did, of course, the painting. Jackie did the appliqué. Mary Ewanowski did the embroidery.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it in that order?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. No, actually because Mary had to do the embroidery on the band on the bottom separately. And so then it all became assembled. And then there was a little group that did cording together, which is a way of edging. They made the cords.

And so then, you know, it's funny because what we did - what I did in Resolutions - is the needleworkers and I owned the piece half, 50/50. And when they decided to get other people to help, like when one of them would say, Well, I want you - will you do the embroidery? Or it worked

out that when Mary would do the embroidery, well, then they would divide up their section. I said, "I don't care if you want to give some percentage to Mary or some percentage to Jane. But I don't want to have to be responsible for divvying it up if the piece sells," you know. So like - because they came up with the most bizarre scheme. Okay. So so-and-so would get two-and-a-half percent of the 50 percent. And somebody else would get one-and-a-half percent because she only did a little bit of work. I'm like, "Fine, however, as long as you do it, if it sells, I'll give you the money; you divide it up. And if they've moved, you find them." Because otherwise it would be a nightmare.

But the other thing I asked them to do, which was something new - in The Dinner Party a lot of focus is on the creative process. So when the permanent housing opened, there was a panel with the - I remember it was in '96; I can't remember if they did it or were going to, but anyway, they certainly did it in '96 at the "Sexual Politics" show - they had a panel with The Dinner Party workers, some of the floor workers. And even in that there's a kind of mythology about The Dinner Party. Four hundred people worked on The Dinner Party. Yeah, right. You know. There was kind of a core of 20 or 25 people, and there were other people who came and did a little of this or a little of that. But we credited everybody in the "No good deed goes unpunished" category. [Laughs.]

Anyway, when the piece was done, and the tour collapsed, I was left with all the responsibility for the piece, of course. Okay? And as I say, the creating of The Dinner Party was the fun part and the easy part. The hard part came then. Salvaging some exhibition tour. Keeping the piece cared for, stored until it could be permanently housed, you know.

And so by the time I got to Resolutions, I had the responsibility of all this work I had created already, The Dinner Party and subsequent projects. So I asked the needleworkers this time to become involved in other aspects of not - if they were going to own that 50 percent, then I wanted them to take 50 percent responsibility. And that means being responsible for more than just the creative part. You know, being involved in talking about the exhibition tour, planning for it, preparing the work for exhibition, all that stuff. And so they did. And like they said, they learned a lot. They had to actually learn about all the other aspects of what it means to make art.

And again, I think they were very empowered by it. Recently there was a talk by one of the Resolutions and Birth Project needleworkers at Through the Flower, Pat Rudy Baese, about collaboration with the -

MS. RICHARDS: Rudy?

MS. CHICAGO: Rudy, R-U-D-Y. B-A-E-S-E. And she - it was very interesting for me to hear her talk about the process from their point of view. She actually consulted with the other needleworkers before she presented her talk. And they kind of came up together with the points they wanted her to make on their behalf in terms of, you know, what the challenges were, what the pleasures were, you know, what their sense of achievement was, how they had to learn all these other aspects of the artmaking process which opened their eyes beyond just stitching. As it turned out, they could only do so much with this. But at least psychologically they feel a sense of ownership in the work beyond just having stitched.

Anyway, so then the Museum of Art and Design organized the tour. It was the first time in my life I didn't have to do it myself. It was a great pleasure. And they toured it to eight venues. It was a big success. But, of course, Ken Johnson was the one who wrote about it in New York for the Times. And of course, he savaged it.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me just ask you one quick technical - you did the paintings. Was that acrylic?

MS. CHICAGO: Which?

MS. RICHARDS: The painting part of the -

MS. CHICAGO: Some acrylic, some oil. Usually a combination of both.

MS. RICHARDS: Just based on what image - what the image required?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. But, you know, by then I had some, both from Powerplay and from other works, developed this sort of under-painting with sprayed acrylic and an over-painting with oil. Although I didn't really like oil painting all that much. But I wanted that precision that you can get. I actually prefer china painting, because the color is fused to the surface - so it's no wonder I'm going back to it - in a way you can't get with oil painting. But anyway, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So go back to the tour.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. One of the really nice things that happened on the tour, the - I can't remember which venue it was; I can't remember if it was the second. But anyway, somewhere in 2000 - well, it opened in 2000 at the Museum of Art and Design. And it went, at some point, to the Fort Wayne Museum [of Art, IN]. It was right after 9/11 it was supposed to open - it did open. And we were in Kentucky [Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY] working on the At Home Project [2001], because by then I had gone back to teaching to make money. And I thought that they would want to cancel the opening or postpone that. But actually, they didn't want to do that. What they did instead is the whole staff of the museum went down into the exhibition. And they used the exhibition as a meditation on healing around 9/11. It was really quite moving to me. So, you know, as usual, I had a big audience and all that stuff. [Laughs.]

By then - so between the time I started at '94 and 2000 when it was done, because, you know, needlework is slow, needlework is slow, I was invited to work at Graphicstudio, and I did Voices from the Song of Songs, which was - I'd always been interested in the Song of Songs [from the Hebrew bible].

MS. RICHARDS: That's the Graphicstudio in -

MS. CHICAGO: Florida.

MS. RICHARDS: Florida. In Gainesville?

MS. CHICAGO: No, in Tampa.

MS. RICHARDS: Tampa.

MS. CHICAGO: At the University of South Florida. It's a very good shop. Although everybody used to refer to it as "Dysfunction Junction." For all kinds of interpersonal reasons. But it was - I was very fortunate with the printer I had, because a lot of people started projects there, and they never got printed. But I had a printer who was very determined to finish the project. I was very lucky.

MS. RICHARDS: What year was that?

MS. CHICAGO: I think I worked between '97 and '99. I'm pretty sure they were done by - yes, they were done by '99, because they were in the works on paper show that Viki Thompson Wylder organized called "Trials and Tributes." Which also had a big tour.

MS. RICHARDS: Viki Thompson -

MS. CHICAGO: V-I-K-I Thompson Wylder, W-Y-L-D-E-R. And the printer at Graphicstudio is Tom Pruitt, P-R-U-I-T-T, who deserves a lot of credit for the fact that that project was completed.

And I had decided to sort of start seeing, since I can both write and draw, if I could bring together my two abilities, because they had always been separate, in some work. And I've always vaguely been interested in the Song of Songs. But then there was a new translation by a feminist Biblical scholar named Marcia Falk, who happened to know the head of Graphic Art.

MS. RICHARDS: Marcia Falk?

MS. CHICAGO: F-A-L-K. Marcia, M-A-R-C-I-A. I think it's M-A-R-C-I-A.

MS. RICHARDS: Falk.

MS. CHICAGO: Quite by accident. She'd gone to school with the guy who ran Graphicstudio. So that was funny. And there was a funny coincidence there. Because he was very interested in combining words and images, too. So it was a good project for us. Although I had said I didn't want to go to Florida; and I didn't have to work there in the summer. Well, guess when I worked there? In the summer.

So my memories of working in Graphicstudio, they put you up in a hotel. I was one of the few artists who actually worked in the shop. A lot of artists just send them drawings, and they produce the work. But that's not my style. I want - I have to be involved in the process. So my memories are walking from the air-conditioned hotel two blocks to the air-conditioned gym. Walking back to the air-conditioned hotel, taking a shower, walking to the shop, and walking back to the air-conditioned hotel. And I would go down there for, like, weeks at a time, you know. But that's - I just lived like, I said, like a nun for weeks on end. [Laughs.] But anyway, so I did Song of Songs.

The other reason I was interested in it was because, from the beginning of my career, I have been interested in creating images of female sexual agency, which don't exist very much. There's very little. Like when I went back to teaching in 1999, I started at IU-Bloomington [Indiana University-Bloomington], which is the home of the Kinsey Institute [for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction]. So I had a chance to look at the Kinsey Archives.

MS. RICHARDS: As an adjunct visiting professor?

MS. CHICAGO: No, it was a sort of artist-in-residence, a semester. I did semester-long gigs, five of them. I did the first two myself, IU-Bloomington. And I had the cats. The second one was Duke [University, Durham, NC] and University of North Carolina [Chapel Hill], and Donald had the cats. And we solved the problem of not liking to be separated and having to decide who gets the cats: from then on we started teaching together [laughs]. So then we went to Western Kentucky University, where we did this project called At Home, which revisited the subject of the home 30 years after Womanhouse [California Institute of the Arts, CalArts, Valencia, 1972, but this time with both male and female students, which was very interesting. And then we did a semester-long residency in Pomona [CA], in the Pomona Art Colony, which was a really big public/private partnership with multiple universities involved. And the business community. And 70 participants.

And then the last one was at Vanderbilt [University, Nashville, TN], where we were the first artists, chancellor's artists-in-residence. And we did another big project. In all of those, they were project-oriented classes. But when I was at IU, when I was at the Kinsey Institute, I had a chance to look at

their archives. They have a big art collection, and there's very, very little erotica by women. Very little. And so from the time I first got out of graduate school and I locked myself in my studio for a month and tried to make comparable images, an active phallic form and an active vulva form, and discovered that there was - as you know, art builds on art - there was a long tradition of, like, flying phalluses and, you know, male agency, male potency, sexual activity, active sexuality. Whereas there was just an absence in terms of comparable images of female, active female sexuality.

So it's been a theme that has come and gone in my work, from that early days to the first, probably, erotic I did, which was Butterfly Vagina Erotica [1975]. Then the Song of Songs. And then later, when I did - and we'll talk about it - my tribute to Anais Nin, Fragments From the Delta of Venus. And, you know, then my cat erotica, which I still am very fond of [laughs]. Anyhow, so I did Song of Songs, and -

MS. RICHARDS: Let me just ask you about the teaching.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your and Donald's teaching technique? How did you approach the teaching? And what was the role of the teacher and the student in that?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, I went back, when I went back to teaching, I went back to the principles, the pedagogical principles, I had first developed in Fresno and at CalArts, where the teacher functions as a facilitator, and helps the student find her voice, her own voice. And then helps her find the appropriate expressive and technical means for articulating her subject matter.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were, in all those cases, teaching studio art classes?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, yes. And when Jane Gearhard, who I mentioned before, who's writing this book Straight to the Heart, when she interviewed me, she asked me something that nobody had before, but it, right, very much on the money, which was, how had the pedagogical principles I developed in the early feminist art programs influenced the way I organize my collaborative projects? Because there was a direct correlation. I took that kind of empowering pedagogical methodology into the studio structure. That's what the needleworkers meant when they said, "Judy empowered us. Now we're empowered." And so I picked that back up.

And apart from needing to make money, I was interested in seeing what had happened to studio art education in my 25-year absence. And I was also interested to see if my pedagogical methods were still relevant, and could they be applied to male students as well as female students? And could they be applied to a diversity of student body as opposed to just white students? So I was interested in that because, you know, there had been all these changes in terms of, well, some amount of changes, in terms of sensitivity in universities to gender and diversity.

So then Donald - Donald and I have collaborated quite a bit, and it's very easy for us. And it was sort of easy for us to be able to do that, and Donald pretty quickly understood my approach. And it was interesting to see what the presence of a nonsexist male role model would do in a mixed-gender class. So, you know -

MS. RICHARDS: What did it do?

MS. CHICAGO: I think it was very helpful for a lot of the male students. Although in Pomona, there was some of his students who were as old as he was - because we had a mix of students and local artists. Some of his students got into authority struggles with him. And that was less than optimum,

you know. But in Vanderbilt, it worked fantastic. And in Pomona, one thing that happened in Pomona that was great, was quite unbeknownst to them, a sister and brother, who were children of Holocaust survivors, got involved in the project.

MS. RICHARDS: So they were mature adults?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, because we had, as I said, a mixture of students and local artists. Just like I did at Womanhouse. Because then students get exposed to and work with practicing artists. And they learn a lot from that.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that a stipulation?

MS. CHICAGO: But not in an apprentice situation.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. When you discussed your residency, did you stipulate to each university they include these others?

MS. CHICAGO: In Kentucky and in Pomona and Vanderbilt, we definitely did. At University of Indiana - at IU - the class was open to students from the whole IU system. So there was already - and they had a lot of returning students. So there was already a range of age from 20 to 60 because of that: from young students to returning students. At Duke and University of North Carolina, I didn't have to because they were different kind of classes. One was a graduate class at UNC. And at Duke, the whole Duke experience was fabulous. But it was a student class. But it wasn't really - wasn't intended to be a studio class, because they didn't really have too good a studio department. And so it was a class that ended up doing a big exhibition because they were so motivated by the subject matter they worked on.

But in terms of Pomona, what I was going to say was this brother and sister who were children of Holocaust survivors, they actually came into it not realizing that Donald and I worked on the Holocaust Project. And the guy worked with Donald, and I think had a fabulous experience, because Donald was, you know, knowledgeable enough about the subject matter that he could really help him handle it. The guy had a lot of skills. He was a filmmaker with a huge amount of skills. But he was just bollixed by his life experience. And I think Donald really helped him through that. So there were some pretty great successes in that project, along with some pretty spectacular failures. But, you know, that's the way it is. Anyway, so after Resolutions, they - oh, in 1999, I started working on the subject of cats.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to the Song of Songs -

MS. CHICAGO: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How many images were in that series?

MS. CHICAGO: There were six diptyches. And one of the things I liked -

MS. RICHARDS: And what was the print medium?

MS. CHICAGO: It was a lithography and helio relief, which I'd never worked in before. And helio really fits, basically, wood, you know, and incorporating wood and wood grain. And one of the challenges of that - and this is where Graphicstudio's technical [inaudible] sophistication was really essential. Lithography is a texture-free technique. And helio really fits that texture-heavy technique. And to bring them together, what we actually did was we selectively filled the wood grains. So that, in the

same way I blend colors, we basically blended from texture to no texture, so that it fused with the lithography.

And then I wanted to use the wood grain expressively. My favorite part was - there's, in one image, which the director, he didn't like it, but everyone else loves it - it's called I Am Black and Radiant. And I made this little vulva image, and it's teak [laughs]. It was really great to use the grain of the teak in that area. I really loved doing that. And then there's a tulip in another one, where, again, the grain works just perfectly with the veins of the flower. So that was a lot of fun to do.

But one of the reasons I was attracted to Marcia Falk's translation was that it did something that very little erotica does, which stresses mutuality of desire. Now mind you, this is right at the height of feminist theorists' assertion that desire is inherently male. And I'm like, Excuse me! What about mine? It's huge! No, I'm not buying that! But I like that because, I mean, almost all the erotica in the Kinsey collection is decidedly from a male perspective. And female desire plays very little role in the imagery. And so I have really wanted to intercede in that which is one of the reasons I've gone back repeatedly to the whole subject of erotica from a woman's point of view.

MS. RICHARDS: When you did that, how many in the edition of Song of Songs?

MS. CHICAGO: There are 30, 15 boxed and 15 unboxed. And they are diptychs. There's a sort of translucent page which has the text. And I selected from the lyrics. I mean, they're unbelievably evocative, just unbelievably evocative. And then the text is set in both English and Hebrew.

And we actually had to go to Tel Aviv for a font for the Hebrew, because there was a visual problem which had to do with the weighting, the visual weighting of the fonts. You know, the English had to look, had to weigh visually on the page the same way the Hebrew did. And we finally found a font. But the only place you could get it was in Israel. But what I loved was it was called the Miriam Font [laughs]. That was like a little present.

But anyway, so then there's this kind of translucent page where the text is in Hebrew and English. And then there's the image page, the analogue image page. And in the box suite, the translucent text page sits on top of the image page so you can just barely see through the text page to the image coming through.

MS. RICHARDS: If it would be nice if the Kinsey bought a set. Did they?

MS. CHICAGO: No. I think what the Kinsey bought is - I think they did buy a copy of Butterfly. They bought Butterfly Vagina Erotica.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. CHICAGO: Which was one of my earliest. That was from '75, which I printed at the University of Minnesota [Minneapolis, MN] in their print shop.

MS. RICHARDS: So the Song of Songs seems to me to merge your interest in feminism with Judaica.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. Well, yes. Well, sure.

MS. RICHARDS: And the text with the art, as you said.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, right. And, of course, I have now - this is post-Holocaust Project, in which one of

the subtexts of the Holocaust Project is, what does it mean to be Jewish in a post-Holocaust world? And also for me personally, how did my - an investigation of how my intensely Jewish background and intensely absence of knowledge about my Jewish background affect my work, which was examined in the show that Gail Levin and Laura Kreuger did called "Judy Chicago: Jewish Identity," which is still traveling around the country.

And then in '99 Viki Thompson Wylder did this show called "Trials and Tributes: A Work on Paper Retrospective." That traveled around, too, to, like, nine venues.

So I've been really fortunate in terms of the amount of exposure my work has gotten and continues to get. But again, that's, you know, this confusing thing about this big audience that my work has. But still, I'm very gratified and happy about that. I'm glad I have been able to build a big audience for my work.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So as you ended the Song of Songs, what was next?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, then, as I think I told you when we were giving you the tour, there's a watercolor - in '96 I taught myself watercolor; I forgot that. When we first moved in here - I can't remember what prompted me to decide to learn how to watercolor. But anyway, it was very funny. I enrolled in a class.

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about this in Beyond the Flower [Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist. New York: Viking/Penguin, 1996], didn't you? Maybe not.

MS. CHICAGO: No, I couldn't have, because Beyond the Flower was published in '96. And there was just -

MS. RICHARDS: I thought I read it somewhere.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. But anyway, I decided to teach myself watercolor, which I'd never learned. And I did it by painting this hill, the Los Lunas Hill, which is not far here; it's a beautiful - very beautiful. And now you couldn't do what I did because it's being developed. There's houses creeping up. But then it was completely pristine. And I looked at it from multiple points of view. This is the first time in my life - when the show opened at Arlene LewAllen's, when she still owned LewAllen Gallery in Santa Fe, it sold out on opening night. I still remember going in and seeing the dots. And I'm thinking, I have, like, a case of some kind of eye problem. [Richards laughs.] I couldn't believe it.

But anyway, so I taught myself watercolor. But the thing is, I started out, because I didn't know anything, not even about the basic tools of watercolor, so I enrolled in a class at the University of New Mexico, Valencia, the local branch, under a pseudonym. And my professor kept saying to me, "What's your name again?" And I said, Pat whatever it was that I had come up with. And then I had a big show in Santa Fe, and he walked into the opening. So that was the end of that. My cover was blown. But I didn't want any pressure on me, you know what I mean? I just didn't want to be [inaudible].

MS. RICHARDS: Or expectations.

MS. CHICAGO: Or expectations. I wanted to be able to muck around, because watercolor is very challenging. So then I got invited to be in this show in New York of women self-portraits. And I had not really done very many self-portraits - a couple over the years. So I did this self-portrait of myself and my six cats. At which point I got very interested in cats because -

MS. RICHARDS: Was that in watercolor?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, this is watercolor. So because I have lived with cats since I was 21 years old, and some of them I've been besotted with, some of my cats. But I really didn't know that much about them. So I decided, again, to merge -

MS. RICHARDS: This was '99, 2000?

MS. CHICAGO: This is '99. I decided to merge my interest in writing and my interest in drawings, you know, visual and verbal, and do this project, which I worked on over the next years. It turned into a five-year project that I worked on over the years. I had a moveable drawing studio, which I'd take to wherever I taught.

MS. RICHARDS: What comprises a moveable drawing studio?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, a breakdown, you know, like a drawing table, a caddy for my paints, lights, so I could break - shelves. I could break it down. I got it first for IU; and then when we got to IU - Donald is handy as anything - and so, like in three days, he would set up my studio. And then -

MS. RICHARDS: This is something you can put in the trunk of a car?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. Or no. We'd put it in that trailer that we towed with the car [laughs], along with all my other things, because I had to go for six months or four months or whatever.

So I started researching cats, the history of cats, which is really fascinating. Cats are the only domestic creatures we didn't domesticate. Which is one of the reasons they retain independence, which drives people crazy but what I love. It's because we have what's called a symbiotic relationship with cats that started in the early agrarian days, when there began to be agrarian surpluses, grain, which cats were attracted to. And because there were rats and mice. And so they wanted to be around us because it brought them access to the rats and mice. And we thought this was a good idea because it kept down the rats and mice. And that is the origin of the bond between human beings and cats.

Also, the cats' hypothalamus, which is the seat of emotions, is very similar to a human being's. So there's also an emotional connection and similarity. But anyway, so I got really interested in that. And I did this whole series of watercolors. This was very challenging, you know, because cats don't sit around for you to draw them. In fact, I would get up in the middle of the night to observe their habits and photograph them. And then I would have to construct these graphite drawings in which I would reconstruct what I had observed them doing, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were drawing from life, as well as drawing from photographs.

MS. CHICAGO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And then I would translate the graphite drawings into watercolors, which were then collected in this book called *Kitty City: Feline Book of Hours - A Feline Book of Hours*, which was based on devotional illuminated manuscripts, which I've always loved. Except instead of being devoted to religion, it was devoted to cats, my love of cats. And it chronicles a day in the life of our household, Donald's and mine, with our kitties. And although it kind of expanded, because then things happen, you know. One of our cats died. And then we brought in two new cats. And so it kind of expanded beyond the 24 watercolors. I think there are 36, actually. And then I collected them in a book, which was published.

MS. RICHARDS: So you - did you predetermine that this would be a series of all the same size?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, yes. I decided it would all be on watercolor paper, 22 by 30 [inches]. And at first I thought I would do 24. But, you know, slowly it became bigger than that because these things happened. So it became a kind of compression of a year into a day, into 24 hours of the day. And then I published it with HarperCollins when they were still doing - HarperDesign. HarperCollins then became HarperDesign. And now I don't think it even exists. But anyway, when they were still doing the illustrated books. Then I did a series of book signings.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you - it's not so easy to develop that kind of relationship with a major publisher. How did that happen that that book was published?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, I've published 11 books now already.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have an agent?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, I have an agent. Actually, my agent was my editor. She became an agent. She bought *Through the Flower*. She was the head of Anchor, which was Doubleday's softback house. And *Through the Flower* was published in hardback in '75 by Doubleday. And then Loretta Barrett bought it for Anchor. And then she published *The Dinner Party* book, both parts of it, *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage* [New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1979], and *Embroidery in Our Heritage: The Dinner Party Needlework* [New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1980]. She published that.

And then she - did she publish the *Birth Project* [New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1985]? I can't remember if she published the *Birth Project*, if she was still there when the *Birth Project* book was published. Or if she'd already gone off to become an agent. But anyway, then she became my agent. And then she subsequently sold my books.

So then she sold *Beyond the Flower*, the *Holocaust Project* book [*Holocaust Project: From Darkness into Light*. New York: Viking/Penguin, 1993] - *Beyond the Flower* and the 1996 *Dinner Party* book to Viking/Penguin. Then - I mean I have these longtime relationships. This is one of the aspects that I like - our discussion, we haven't gotten into yet - you know, my needleworkers, my literary agent, my editor who worked on all those books at Viking, then went freelance, and now has edited as a freelance editor every book I've done since then.

MS. RICHARDS: What's the editor's name?

MS. CHICAGO: Her name is Mindy Werner. So I mean -

MS. RICHARDS: Werner, W-E-?

MS. CHICAGO: W-E-R-N-E-R. And then the publicist at Viking was my - I hired him independently. I maintained my relationship with him. And then he became my personal publicist in 2007. I mean, I've just had these relationships with people over the years. This is what has sustained me.

MS. RICHARDS: So you went to Loretta with your cat book of hours?

MS. CHICAGO: Of course, I went to Loretta with my cat book. I mean, she'd already - she'd sold all those others, and then she by then - let me see what happened. I had *Harriet* - oh, God! At some point Loretta sold - oh, I know, it must have been - don't ask me. All I know is that I somehow ended up at HarperCollins with a very fine editor who got really interested in my work. And she was supposed to do *The Dinner Party* book, the 2007 *Dinner Party* book [*The Dinner Party from Creation to Preservation*. London: Merrell Publishers, 2007]. But then she got sick and anyway - you know, I've had all these - I just can't remember exactly the sequence. But, yes, Loretta has sold and

handled all my book projects. Oh, I know where I met Harriet. I met Harriet -

MS. RICHARDS: What's Harriet's last name?

MS. CHICAGO: She's dead.

MS. RICHARDS: What was it?

MS. CHICAGO: Pierce. P-I-E-R-C-E. I know when I met Harriet. It was when I did the Women in Art book with Edward Lucie-Smith [Women and Art: Contested Territory. New York: Watson-Guption, 1999], which was done by a packager, an English packager, named Ivy, for Watson-Guption. And Harriet was at Watson-Guption. And that's how I met her. And then she went to HarperCollins, and she took me with her. She wanted me to go with her to HarperCollins with whatever new book projects I was going. So -

MS. RICHARDS: Have the books been complete labors of love? Or you actually realized income that could support your work?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, I haven't - when I sold the books to HarperCollins - to Viking - when I sold Beyond the Flower and The Dinner Party book for the 1996 show, at that time publishers were still giving big advances. And I was making money for the hotel. So one of the reasons I wrote, again, was to make money. So like I said, since I have a mortgage, I have to think about making money. So it stood me in good stead.

I didn't set out to curate my own shows and write my own books about my own work. It just, nobody else would do it. So I had to do it by myself. So it ended up being good for me, because then I had different outlets for my work. And different ways, you know, like if - I mean, that went back to The Dinner Party. When the art world stopped the distribution of The Dinner Party exhibition, The Dinner Party book was doing gangbusters. And it was bringing, The Dinner Party, all these people who were like, well, I want to see it. I want to see it. And then they would organize. I mean, it was an unbelievable, unprecedented - I don't if there's any precedent for the grassroots tour that brought The Dinner Party all over the world. I have no idea. But, you know, that's an art historian's job.

But anyway, and then the same way with the film, Johanna Demetrakis's Right Out of History: The Making of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party, you know, that was shown all over: on Swedish broadcast, Canadian broadcasting. London, BBC, CBC, Swedish Net Broadcasting. It was shown all over the world. So people learned about The Dinner Party and its dilemma. So that was one of the ways in which I was able to bypass the art world distribution system: through my books, through these other distribution channels. And through the major media. Because, as you know, there have been like gazillions of things written. So that showed me that the art world wasn't the only distribution system there was for ideas. Which was very fortunate. Because if it had been up to the art world, my work would not have been distributed. It would've been blacked out. Can we take a bathroom break?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MS. CHICAGO: And I'll shut the door here.

[Audio Break.]

So in terms of your question about whether my books have been successful, The Dinner Party book, the first Dinner Party book sold 70,000 copies.

MS. RICHARDS: That's huge.

MS. CHICAGO: For an art book? The new Dinner Party book, in a very diminished market, is the best - selling art book in the Brooklyn Museum Bookstore.

However, now what I am is kind of a midlist author, you know, which is not the best to be in terms of the publishing world. Because now what's happened to the publishing world, and the bottom line, is if you're not a celebrity author and if you can't sell in six weeks 50,000 books, your books are dumped in the remainder bin, which is not how it used to be.

And in fact, like, one of the reasons I value Powerhouse Books, who published *Fragments From the Delta of Venus*, that as long as you sell 60 books a year, they keep your book in print. So, you know, it took years before there was this really, really interesting, in-depth article on Delta. I forget. It came out of some university press, you know, magazine. It was really interesting. And I was really glad that they had kept the book alive, because a lot of times it takes a long time before what my intentions are become apparent to others.

MS. RICHARDS: Chronologically, is it the right moment to talk about that book? Or wait?

MS. CHICAGO: No, no, because it came after *Kitty City*. So in 1999, I started *Kitty City*, which took five years because of the construction of those graphite - carefully drawn graphite drawings. So there were, I think, 24 of those or 36 of those. There must have been 36 of those. And then 36 watercolors. And then the book. And watercolor is slow - at least the way I do it.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were doing those while you were at your teaching residencies -

MS. CHICAGO: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: - as well as here in Belen?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, yes. So when I taught, I taught in the afternoons so I could work in my studio in the morning. So, you know. And I kept up my regular routine: get up in the morning at six o'clock, be in the studio by eight. Work till one. Go teach, go exercise, come home. Talk to Donald on the phone if I was away. Go to bed. Live like a nun [laughs]. Which I really ended up doing for short periods of time [laughs]. And then we'd have to have emergency conjugal weekends. We figured out how long we could stand to be apart. Donald doesn't like it at all. He doesn't like being apart. I myself don't mind so much. But, you know.

So then, okay. So I'm teaching, right? I'm working on *Kitty City*. Resolutions opened and starts touring. The works on paper show is touring. So I'm busy, right? So early - sometime in the early thousands, 2000s, I think that's what it was - I can't remember when she came to visit me, the woman who was writing a book on Anais Nin. But she interviewed me. And you know, Anais Nin was my mentor in the 70s. It was because of her I started writing. And I remember really -

MS. RICHARDS: I'm going to just change discs.

[END OF DISC 3.]

This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Chicago in Belen, New Mexico, on August 8, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

MS. CHICAGO: Oh, remind me - tell me if you want something to eat or something.

Okay. I remember this very, very vividly, because after this woman interviewed me, she said I was the only person who talked about Anais in terms of her work. Everybody else talked about her mythology and her sexuality and her, you know, everything but her work. Now, you know, Anais and I talked a lot about this because I remember, you know, in *Beyond the Flower*, I talked about this dream she told me about, where her work was being eclipsed. And so I started reading some of the recent criticism about Anais.

There was a book about a number of women writers, I think called *Women Writers and Their Work* [Janet Sternberg, ed., *The Writer on Her Work*. New York: Norton, 1980], or something like that. And there was this piece about Anais Nin that my hair stood on end! I mean, this woman just tore her to shreds. She had absolutely no understanding, no sympathy, and no interest in discovering what it was like for a woman of Anais's generation to stand up to what is now called the construct of femininity. And to slowly, painstakingly, by herself work her way through it and out of it in her diaries. I mean, she just savaged her! I was furious. I was just beside myself about it. Really upset! Because I understand the whole historic context. And it's like, women do it to women. It really kills me, okay? And women are women's worst enemies a lot of the times. I mean, oh! It just took my breath away. I was so upset about it. So I can't remember why I decided to read *Delta of Venus* [Anais Nin. New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977]. I'd never really read it.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't communicate to this writer your feelings?

MS. CHICAGO: No. You know, you asked me this before, Do I ever do that? I don't know. I just never do it. I just never did it. I don't think it does any good. I think in the long run you just have to let history sort it out. Instead of getting into a pissing contest. Because, you know, you say something, you stand up for yourself, or you say something, and they just come back, and they say, well, the same thing that they said. And you just square off and don't get anywhere.

It's like this woman Lisa Bloom, who wrote in her book on women and Jewish identity that I had changed my name in order to disguise the fact that I was Jewish. Well, Gail Levin had just spent all these weeks in the Schlesinger Archives reading my letters to my mother, in which I used all these Yiddish expressions. And she interviewed, like, a lot of people in California where I came up, and she said, "Do you think Judy denied being Jewish?" And they all said, "What, are you out of your mind? We all knew she was Jewish. She was very proud of it." So Gail wrote to Lisa, and she said, "I'm challenging what you said. And Lisa changed it in her book. Now that, I think, is a much more effective way of correcting historic inaccuracies than for me to try and do it myself. I don't think that's an effective way.

Anyway, so I was really, really upset about this. I don't remember what made me pick up Anais's *Delta of Venus*. Maybe I thought, you know, never read it. I'd finished *Song of Songs*. I was still interested - I'd done cat erotica. Maybe it was just kind of -

MS. RICHARDS: You hadn't read it when you were having a relationship with her?

MS. CHICAGO: No, I hadn't read it when I was young and I was reading her work. And maybe it was because of after the Kinsey Institute, seeing the absence of erotica by women. So I read Anais's *Delta of Venus*. And the introduction to it - she wrote it when she was young; she wrote those when she was young, when she and Henry Miller lived in Paris, and they wrote erotica for a dollar a page. And a lot of the stories are really silly. I mean, they're very silly. But it was interesting reading Anais - it wasn't published till '77, I think. And Anais read it then. And she was wondering whether she'd feel embarrassed about it. And whether, you know, she had just imitated men's erotic writing. And she said something that I felt myself when I read it, which was, embedded in it are some of the

earliest written accounts, of erotic accounts, from a woman's point of view.

So I decided that I would extract those, and I would do what I had done with the Song of Songs, which was make visual analogues to her written passages. So it's called Fragments from the Delta of Venus. And I did a series of 21 watercolors in which the - same thing: text page, image page. In this case the text page is also watercolor. And, you know, I've got Palmer method of writing. So I wrote them out by hand. And then I tried to make visual analogues to the imagery and in the fragments. And those were collected in a book of the same name that was published by Powerhouse. It was very beautiful. They do very beautiful books. And then my Minneapolis dealer, Doug Flanders, published - offered me the opportunity of doing a suite -

MS. RICHARDS: What's the name of the gallery?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, it's closed now.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, but it was Doug Flanders's?

MS. CHICAGO: It was Flanders - it was just Flanders Gallery in Minneapolis.

Anyway, he offered me an opportunity to do a suite of aquatints and etchings which - so then I pulled one line from each of the fragments and made these tiny little aquatint - oh, actually reverse aquatint. Which is when you draw a negative negatively; it's unbelievably challenging. But the woman who supervised the project had been at Graphicstudio, so she knew how much I could draw and how much I liked to draw. Because I drew 12 hours a day on these little aquatint plates. Again, living like a nun in Phoenix and Mesa, Arizona - in the summertime! Renewing my little hotel - gym-shop, hotel-gym-shop routines. And they were really interesting and challenging to do.

Unfortunately, the edition is not as good as the proofs, because somebody else printed them. But anyway, they're collected in a heart-shaped box. And they were published on Valentine's Day, like a noncaloric treat for your loved one. And the prints are very little, in a little portfolio, that sit inside with a gold ribbon. I loved it. I loved them.

Anyway, so those were done, I think in 2005, I think they were done. Again, it took a couple of years, you know. There are nine prints in that edition. So then again, I had some shows. But that's when I also went back to ACA; my first show back at ACA was a show of erotic images. Kind of a survey: the Song of Songs, Fragments, both the watercolors and the prints, Butterfly Vagina Erotica, you know, some of my earlier works. Cat Erotica. And that did okay. Not a knockout, but it didn't do badly.

MS. RICHARDS: But there were sales?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, there were sales. One of my early porcelain pieces, because I did some porcelain erotica. One was called Sex From the Inside Out, which sold. And some of the prints sold. So it didn't do too badly. It wasn't a home run, like Jeffrey said, but it wasn't bad either.

So then in 2002, for reasons I cannot altogether explain, except that I had seen a show by Nicolas Africano of his cast-glass pieces. And I thought they were really - the cast glass - I got really interested in the cast glass. Really interested.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember which show that was?

MS. CHICAGO: It was in Santa Fe. It was in a gallery in Santa Fe. I think it was in Aline Lapidis, but I

don't think - she's not in business anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Aline?

MS. CHICAGO: A-L-I-N-E L-A-P-I-D-A-S, I think. It was up on Canyon Road. I remember going in and seeing - they were very beautiful, the pieces. They were cast figures.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I know. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. CHICAGO: Now, of course, I had had my first encounter with glass in the Holocaust Project with the entryway logo and Rainbow Shabbat, was the first time I ever worked in glass. But I had a knowledge of glass painting from my study of china painting in the 70s because a lot of the china painters painted in glass.

And just like the ceramics world knew very little about china painting, the glass world knows very little about that type of glass painting. And a lot of the glass painting that's done in the glass world is very crude, where it's fired in. It's quite crude. It's very high fire, and it's not - it isn't painterly. And then some people just use oil paints. So, you know, I got my master's in painting and sculpture, and I've gone back and forth from two to three dimensions throughout my career. And in my opinion, some of my best work is in the fusion of painting and sculpture. And so I got interested in that again with glass. Because I knew that there was this possibility of painting glass, although I didn't know if you could do it on cast glass.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you speak to Nicolas?

MS. CHICAGO: No, I've never met him, actually.

But then I had this other experience in the middle with glass, because sometime, I can't remember, I think it was 1997, I spoke at a women's music festival. And there was a young woman who came up to me there and said that she worked in a technique, a glass technique, that she thought would lend itself to my images. And she wondered if I would be interested in working with her to reinterpret some of my images in glass. So I didn't know anything -

MS. RICHARDS: Where is that, the music festival?

MS. CHICAGO: In Indiana. I think it was shortly - I'm pretty sure it was shortly before this. I think it was '97 because I think it was shortly before I went to teach at IU. Anyway, her name was Vicky Leon - is Vicky Leon, V-I-C-K-Y, I think. Y or I, I can't remember. Anyway, Leon. She works in San Diego. And she introduced me to glass etching, which I didn't know anything about. And she kind of presented it as if she had invented it. Because she had a particular thing that she had developed that she trademarked, which was etching laminated and mirrored glass and then painting it. But she painted it with, like, acrylics and oil paint, not with glass paints, because the lamination would make it impossible to put the glass in the kiln. So we started out reinterpreting a couple of my images: Through the Flower and the Sappho plate for The Dinner Party.

MS. RICHARDS: When you say we, who do you mean?

MS. CHICAGO: She and I.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, together?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, together.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to San Diego to do this?

MS. CHICAGO: Oh, yes. I mean, I worked here; she came here; and I went to San Diego. We went back and forth. I'd go with her; I'd paint with her over there, you know. We worked that out. So we did a couple of small editions. And I became sort of educated about etching. But then I got a course

MS. RICHARDS: So she was not a publisher. But she was a collaborator -

MS. CHICAGO: She was just a little -

MS. RICHARDS: - in the sense of co-creating these pieces. They were yours.

MS. CHICAGO: They were my images.

MS. RICHARDS: She helped you technically.

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. But we co-owned them and stuff like that, just like - so and she had a little distribution system of her own. So she offered them to her collectors. And she sold quite a few of them. And then we did a much more complicated reinterpretation of my iconic image Peeling Back [1974] from the Rejection Quintet. And that was really deep etching; it was really complicated to do. And I learned a lot about the process. So then, of course, I was interested in designing for it, not just reinterpreting old images.

Yes, it had to be '97, because in 2000 I was invited to be in this show in New York on female bodybuilding, called "Picturing the Modern Amazon," at the New Museum [New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY, 2000]. I remember being really excited about this, you know, because I remember that early female bodybuilding contest in the 1970s. Oh, my God! you know. Female power! So they put you together with bodybuilders, and so we brought in a bodybuilder, and we - Donald photographed her. I drew. Then I used the photographs.

But we learned more about female bodybuilding than I ever wanted to know. And also about the shady and dark side of it. So I did this multipanel piece called Arcanum in Shades of Gray [2000]. Arcanum being knowledge available only to the insider - in this case the female bodybuilding world, when female bodybuilders began to develop their bodies to the point that it started to challenge the idea that only men could build muscle.

The backers of female bodybuilding pulled out their backing, and the bodybuilders, the female bodybuilders, were left without support. And so they turned to something, a kind of international network of crazy men who have fetishes with female bodybuilders, where they fly them in from all over the world so that they can do something called muscle worship, where they touch their muscles or they do something called lift-and-carry, where the women pick them up and carry them around, which is apparently particularly appealing to Jewish men; that's what they told me. I don't know, I'm not - and some female bodybuilders are very clear about the line: yeah, you can touch my muscles. Yeah, I'll pick you up. That's it. Some let the men go in the bathroom and jerk off. And in some cases it kind of segues into prostitution. So it's kind of the dark side of bodybuilding.

So then because, you know, now I'm designing for etching, and we're painting it, but we're painting it with a color that isn't fused on it in the kiln and can't be because of the lamination process. I, of course, want to try out actually painting the glass and firing it and arriving at the kind of effects that I could get in the china painting of porcelain. And so I'm like, I think I'd like to see - go farther.

Well, I have a friend in Santa Fe who's a glassblower named Flo Perkins. And I decided I wanted to go to Pilchuck [Pilchuck Glass School, Seattle, WA], which is, you know, the big glass school outside of Seattle that was started by [Dale] Chihuly. And I applied and was accepted as an artist-in-residence for the summer of 2003. And in the meantime, Flo organized a party where she brought - invited all the people who worked in glass in and around Santa Fe so that I could kind of, you know, educate myself. And I met this couple, Norm and Ruth Dobbins, who had this huge glass etching studio.

MS. RICHARDS: Dobbins?

MS. CHICAGO: D-O-B-B-I-N-S.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Etched glass studio?

MS. CHICAGO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] In fact, they trained half the glass-etchers -

[Side conversation.]

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. CHICAGO: Okay. So at this party that Flo organized, I met Norm and Ruth Dobbins, who have this huge glass etching studio. In fact, they've trained half the glass-etchers in America. I mean, it made Vicky's little shop pale by comparison, in terms of scale and knowledge and all that stuff. Norm himself was a fairly expert etcher. And so I told them I was going to go to Pilchuck. I was interested in finding out if you could fire glass paint onto etched glass, and whether you could fire glass paint onto cast pieces, which nobody knew. And so Flo advised me to go to Pilchuck prepared, which was really good. She said, "Because what happens is people go there and, you know, they start, and they only have three weeks. And by the time they get, sort of, to the point they know what they want to do, it's over."

So at the end of 2002, I made this series of life casts of hands. I started out very sort of interested in a fairly simple idea: about how one hand gesture can mean a lot of different things. And so I did some designs for etching, and I had molds made from the hands.

MS. RICHARDS: When you thought about these hands, did you already conceive of whether they'd be on the wall, on a pedestal, on another structure?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, I was working already two or three dimension, because I designed some etched pieces which were on two-dimensional glass. And then I made these life casts, which were three dimensional, and had molds made. So I was already going back and forth right away from the beginning. And I took all this to Pilchuck.

And as I say, in three weeks I was on the outside edge of the technology. Nobody knew if you could do what I wanted. Okay? And in fact, I discovered that you could fire onto etched glass and in fact this was a huge technical discovery: that when you etch glass, you take away some of the strata of the glass. When you fire paint onto it, it's re-annealed and actually strengthens the glass. So that was interesting. So that solved that problem. Yes, you could do that. And in fact you could do that multiple times. But in terms of the casting, I brought my little airbrush and sprayed paint - they didn't know that much about the paint - but I basically fired away \$150 worth of paint in about 20 minutes [laughs]. Oh, well.

Anyway, so I came back with some casts. I came back with some etched pieces. And with some contacts about how to go farther. And then I started down another path of discovery in terms of how to get these pieces. And Flo put me - suggested I contact a woman named Karen LaMonte, a glass artist, and her husband, Steven Polaner.

MS. RICHARDS: Karen, K?

MS. CHICAGO: K-A-R-E-N L-A-M-O-N-T-E. And Steve P-O-L-A-N-E-R. Karen had moved to Prague [Czech Republic] in order to cast there because they had some of the best casting facilities. And I like bronze foundries, and I've worked in bronze. As part of Powerplay, I worked in bronze at Shidoni [Foundry and Gallery, Tesuque, NM]. And in contrast to bronze foundries, of which there are many where artists can work in America, there are, as far as I know, almost no glass foundries where an artist who isn't a glass artist can work. A lot of glass artists set up their own foundries for the production of their own work. And so Flo suggested that Steve and Karen might help me be able to cast there, because she said the best casting was going on in Prague. And, yes, they did help me a lot. I was very fortunate. And otherwise I couldn't even have my casting. So I did a whole series of casts: hands. I went to Prague twice to supervise the cold work. Became friends with Karen and Steve. Donald and I became friends with Karen and Steve. And I had this big glass show at LewAllen in 2006. And then started -

MS. RICHARDS: And what was in that show?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, there were - oh, then Ruth Dobbins and I set out to figure out, what about the paints - because in order to fire glass paints on cast glass, especially these large pieces that I wanted to cast, the paint has to hold up in the kiln for a very long time, because it could take a couple of weeks to re-fire a big piece. So we started small, where it took a week. So then we had to investigate different types of paints to see which could hold up in the kiln, because they just fire off, being in the kiln that long.

MS. RICHARDS: It would just turn to ash, you mean.

MS. CHICAGO: They just disappear. Not even ash. They just fire off. They vaporize. So we spent a year and a half testing paints and oils, firing temperatures.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you at that point just commuting, driving from Belen to Santa Fe?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. She'd come down here, or I'd go up there. They had a B&B, so I'd go up there and stay to work up there. She'd come down here and stay in the guest suite. So that far, as about an hour-and-15-minute ride. So Norm was etching, and we were firing. And then we decided to try some fused pieces in etching and firing, and that worked okay. And meanwhile, we were struggling with the casting and the firing. And so we got a number of pieces out of that, etched and painted and fired, fused and etched and painted and fired, and cast and etched and painted and fired. But we hadn't successfully done any of the really large ones. In fact, the first large one we put through the kiln with paint cracked. Which was kind of a heartbreak because there was a lot of money in the kiln. But anyway, that's what happens. So we did a show at LewAllen, which did really well.

MS. RICHARDS: So the show at LewAllen that you had, there was one show that was just the works you did in Prague?

MS. CHICAGO: Prague and with the Dobbins.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, together. I wasn't sure.

MS. CHICAGO: And it also had one of the pieces that I had done with Vicky, Peeling Back. And I had never really been satisfied with the Sappho plate piece that I had with Vicky. So Ruth and I did another one, and I had it etched, and I fired the color on it, and it came out fabulous, just fabulous.

So the first show at LewAllen was all the hands. It was called "Chicago in Glass." And David McFadden, from the Museum of Art and Design, wrote a beautiful catalogue with essay, photos. Really nice, really good. I thought. I thought it was great. And then I had a show - by then we were working on the bigger hands.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you devoting 100 percent of your creative time to glass at this point?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. Glass is very time-consuming, the carving of it, the painting of it. Very time-consuming. But we hadn't successfully gotten the big pieces, and then we wanted to expand even more.

MS. RICHARDS: How big is big?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, the big hands are, like, 29 inches high, solid.

MS. RICHARDS: A hand? Or an arm?

MS. CHICAGO: Arm.

MS. RICHARDS: Forearm?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, forearm. And they're, like, cast and etched and painted, or cast and etched and gold leafed. So my first glass show was really - I mean, it was a fabulous response, just fabulous. Then I was continuing with the Dobbins and continuing with the casting in Prague to get the bigger pieces of the hands to complete the hand series. And then I was invited to have a show at the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery [Waterloo, ON] outside of Toronto, which was in 2007. That was a really big show, too, which was - I mean, the show at LewAllen was a 5,000-square-foot gallery, their whole top floor. And the show in Waterloo was also a big show. That was where they had a police guard.

So by then I was feeling like I was coming to the end of the limits of Norman Dobbins's skill. He was very good at carving negatively, in terms of etching into a flat piece of glass. He had no art training. And so he couldn't conceive of how to carve positively. And I was already having new ideas. And by then I had met this little team of people here, Bill Weaver, Kelly Johnson, and Brad Neighbor.

MS. RICHARDS: Bill Leaver?

MS. CHICAGO: Weaver, W-E-A-V-E-R. Kelly Johnson, J-O-H-N-S-O-N. And Brad Neighbor. Weaver is just an all-around brilliant fabricator. He works on a lot of people's sculptures. And, in fact, was at Shidoni running Shidoni when I was there, although I don't remember meeting him. And Kelly does enlargements and waxes, and Brad does molds. And you get one of them, you get them all.

MS. RICHARDS: Where are they based?

MS. CHICAGO: They're all over between Santa Fe and España. And they had been helping me. Like I said at the opening of my LewAllen show, I said, "Weaver helped me at the front end, and then I needed him again on the back end." Because he came in and did the carving that Norm couldn't do. Like by hand. He's very adept. You know, glass is a collaborative process. You just can't do glass

by yourself, unless you work on a very small scale, because it requires so many skills, particularly what I'm doing; it just requires so many different skills. Well, it just happened, fortunately - I mean, it's terrible for Ruth - but just by complete accident, just as Norm had finished the last pieces, he dropped dead. So it was kind of good that I wasn't strung out hoping I was going to go on with him. Because I would've been really hung up, right? But, I mean, it's terrible for Ruth, just terrible.

Also I had done the same thing with them that I did with so many other people, which was to split the profit on the pieces. Now, in glass there's not a lot of profit. So like, okay, a piece sold for \$70,000, okay? \$35,000 would be my half. It probably cost \$10,000 to make. So \$35,000 minus \$10,000 is \$12,500 to each of us. That is not a lot of money on a piece that you worked years on, okay? So Donald's like, "You've got to stop this! You've got to stop this! You know it's like" - so actually I have stopped it. I just pay my guys, and it's much better. Because then I don't have to split my pathetic half with anybody else. Although I have to raise money to create -

MS. RICHARDS: Could you make an edition? Would that be economical?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, I hadn't done that. I made small series. But I'm actually, in the next series, I actually am making a small edition. I'm making one small edition of three. But I'm also making a small edition of small pieces. Because, yes, I have to - I mean, glass is so expensive, I've got to figure out a way to - in order to keep going, I've got to be able to sell a lot of work. So I've got to make it more affordable. So, yes, I've been working on it. So now I'm working on another series.

In the meantime - so Norm died. I didn't want to do anymore etching, actually, because I had evolved to a different place, where I wanted to do all the carving myself. So I'm doing a new series, which I started, now, two years ago. They take about five years. Like the series I started the end of 2002 wasn't done until 2008, by which time I had just started a new series. I started a new series in 2007.

And next year I'm having four glass shows. One in Corpus Christi at the Museum of South Texas ["Judy Chicago in Glass," Art Museum of South Texas, Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, 2010], which is the Philip Johnson museum. One in Santa Fe at LewAllen ["The Toby Heads," 2010] because, as I said, I wasn't going to have any shows in America in 2009, and not commercial glass shows. A big glass show in Montreal ["Chicago in Glass," Musee des Maitres et Artisans du Quebec, Montreal, 2010]. And a glass show at ACA in New York titled "Judy Chicago in Glass."

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like you'll need a huge amount of work.

MS. CHICAGO: Oh, I have a huge amount of work. Because the Corpus Christi show - the only show that's only new work is the LewAllen show. And the Corpus Christi show is a, sort of, both series, will be both series.

The show in Montreal will include Rainbow Shabbat. It's in that converted church. I'm really excited about that. They're going to install Rainbow Shabbat underneath a traditional stained-glass window. That'll be nice: Jewish and Christian points of view, fighting it out! [Laughs.] Side by side, that'll be great. And so that's a bigger survey, you know, of glasswork.

And ACA will also be, since I haven't had a show - I haven't shown any glass in New York yet except for that piece from the bodybuilders show. So I'll show both series. So I have quite a bit of work - I'll have quite a bit of work. So I'm really excited about that.

MS. RICHARDS: So the works you're doing right now -

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

MS. RICHARDS: - I saw one head. Could you talk about this?

MS. CHICAGO: So I've expanded again. I'm now combining - and I'm expanding one more time in terms of the materials. I started combining bronze and glass, which I'm really interested in. So, you know, I'm starting to bring in some techniques that I've used in the past. I did this whole series of bronzes at Shidoni. And so I have some familiarity with bronze.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the imagery of the bronzes?

MS. CHICAGO: It was a series - it was also heads.

MS. RICHARDS: Heads?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, it was faces. There were two images. They were small editions in both cast paper and bronze. It was related to Powerplay. One was called WoeMan, and the other was called Double Head.

And I'm also starting to work in porcelain again. And in fact, I just got a kiln so I could, because, of course, I - now, unlike Donald, I don't save things. So when I've finished working on something, I think, I'm done. I sell it. You know, I don't hold on to everything. Now, Donald doesn't, so we don't have to buy it again. Like we had to buy my compressor three times because I kept thinking I wasn't going to spray paint anymore. But I'm going to stop doing that. Because in the new series, I'm doing some cast glass, cast bronze, combination of bronze and glass, and also some cast porcelain.

There's a problem of combining porcelain and glass. Glass and bronze you can combine because the size differential, in terms of shrinkage, is not so much. And you can chase the bronze down, you know, like grind it down to fit the glass. But with porcelain, there's a 15-percent shrinkage. And so you really couldn't. The only way you could combine porcelain and glass is to make a piece of glass, then have it cast, then have them make a mold from that. No, you'd have to do it the opposite. Have the porcelain made first, have it cast, then have them make a mold from that, and do the glass half. But I haven't done that yet. I might try it.

In the meantime, for a number of reasons, I stopped casting in the Czech Republic. Because even though they have gorgeous glass - gorgeous! - first of all, you know, there's a language barrier. And Steve Polaner, who had moved over there, spoke Czech, so he would be the one. He had a little business of helping international artists to work in the foundry. So he acted as my go-between. And he decided he didn't want to do that anymore because he wanted to devote himself entirely to Karen's work because he works with her. And second of all, the dollar tanked. And so what was \$30 a pound for casting became \$50 a pound. And the foundry decided they were going to raise their prices. So it was really expensive.

But there was a whole other reason that I had to give up Prague, which, much to Karen and Steve's frustration and mine, as good as Prague was as a foundry, they were very tied to the old way and old way of doing things. And they have a very crude investment process for their waste molds for the glass. You know, glass is just like lost wax, like bronze. Except what happens, they make a waste mold, and then you can't reuse it. They have to chip it off. And they have to do a huge amount of cold working to get the pieces to look right. And that's when I would go over there. I would go over there because they don't have - their cold workers are not trained artists. So I would go over there to supervise the cold working to make sure the finishing was done properly and the forms were correct and all that stuff.

Now, it's hard enough to cold work - to do a lot of cold working on hands-on heads, forget it. I would have to move into Prague, you know, and just live there for weeks on end, which would be unbelievably expensive and also they charge you by the hour for cold working. So I had to find a foundry that had a better investment process, because they were completely resistant. Karen and Steve tried to get them to change their investment process, because they were having troubles, too. And they just wouldn't. So I had to find someplace else to cast. So that took quite awhile. And I was fortunate to find somebody who works over there. Again, she's an American who speaks Chinese and is helping me. So I'm casting in Asia now. So, I mean, glass is challenging on every level: financially, technically, logistically, everything. But it's fascinating, too. You know, I like the challenges.

MS. RICHARDS: Why heads now?

MS. CHICAGO: Because I have something I want to say about them.

MS. RICHARDS: They look like male heads. I'm not sure.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, no, that's just - it happens to be this particular series called Toby Heads. It was a life cast of a woman who had just gone through chemotherapy. So she had no hair. I didn't set out to do a big series of Toby Heads, but as it evolved, I'm doing a big series based on her head.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the attraction to her head?

MS. CHICAGO: I did a whole series of heads. I mean, she was only one of them. I just started working on hers first.

MS. RICHARDS: What are the characteristics of the heads that you wanted to do?

MS. CHICAGO: Gestures, expressions. They're all different. She's got a beautiful head, actually. And I think it's a kind of genderless head, actually, which I like. It's actually nonspecific. You don't really know if it's a man or a woman. I think in some images it'll look like a woman, and then some of the others will look like a man, based on the treatment.

MS. RICHARDS: They're slightly larger. They're larger than -

MS. CHICAGO: They're life size.

MS. RICHARDS: They are?

MS. CHICAGO: They're done from life casts. And then the heads are built up in plaster. And, see, this is why I had to do it myself. Because at every stage they have to be carved. The plaster, then either, if they're enlarged, the clay, and if they're not enlarged, the waxes. And then if they are enlarged, the waxes. So I'm carving at every stage: plaster, clay, and wax.

MS. RICHARDS: And how will they be mounted to be presented?

MS. CHICAGO: I don't know yet, actually. When I have - the biggest challenge is if I get the big ones out of the kiln - I'm doing two really large ones, and I don't know yet if I'm going to get them - I mean, we've had already a lot of loss. One piece already went through three castings before we got it. First the caster broke it, and then the shipper broke it. It came out great finally, but it took three rounds.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you imagine, though, that they will be presented singly, in groups, at eye level. What's the installation -

MS. CHICAGO: They're probably going to be eye level. You know, they're individual pieces. They're unique pieces. So that'll be - I just haven't got the stands yet. Like all the hands, all the Hand series, were done - were presented on Plexiglas, either sort of easel-like stands if they were two-dimensional, or just, kind of, Plexiglas bases, really elegant. I haven't decided yet. I have somebody - again, I've worked with him 30 years - who does all my frames and presentation stands in LA.

So he came up to look at them, and we designed the presentation stands for the hands. And I think I'll bring him out at the end of the year, and then we'll design the presentation stands for these. Because my first show's not till March. So I'm trying to get all the pieces finished by the end of the year so I can get the stands designed. And they'll go on pedestals.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Did you look back - or will you - at the whole history of cast, of heads in the presentation of the sculptures who have done heads focused on expressions?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, I probably will. I mean, I know some of it. But I probably will look at it in terms of presentation stands before I go to design the presentation stands. I was pretty clear what I wanted for the hands. One of the reasons was, particularly, the dimension of the flat ones. I wanted them to be on plaques because I wanted light to come through. And I also put the others on Plex, you know, big, thick Plex, so that light would come through. So that's one of the advantages of using Plex, is that it allows the light to come through the glass. But the big ones, I'm going to have a problem just with the sheer weight. In fact, we haven't quite figured out how we're going to move them around.

MS. RICHARDS: The big heads?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes. They're going to weight between 200 and 300 pounds.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you name them individually? You said Toby, but I guess Toby's -

MS. CHICAGO: Oh, I said Toby. Well, no, they're different. There's, like, Two-Faced Toby and Toby Bronze and Glass. And Bronze Toby and Toby with Open Eye. It depends on -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, very factually.

MS. CHICAGO: Toby with Silver Eyes, Toby with Golden Tear. I mean, it depends on the piece.

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

MS. CHICAGO: What the piece looks like. So we'll see. I mean, I'll have to see what the response is, in terms of - I have a whole lot of others ready to go, but I have to make enough money off of these to be able to keep going. It's really expensive. I mean, whew! I don't like to add it up because it gives me goose bumps. It gets me nervous to know how much money I'm spending. But, you know, you just can't think about it.

It's like, people used to ask me how much I spent on The Dinner Party. I have no idea. I remember when I signed the contract for the casting of the porcelain tiles for the Heritage Floor, you know, with my hand shaking, \$11,000. You couldn't do it for that now. But \$11,000. I had no idea how I was going to get \$11,000. But I figured out how to get it. And also I try not to think about it in a whole way. I think about, okay, now I need to pay for the kiln. Okay. Well, I just sold something in Canada, and I'm waiting for the check. I know the check is coming, and so I can buy the kiln. That's how I try

to approach it, problem by problem.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I wanted to go back to some questions about feminism. There are a number of artists who work with - that don't work explicitly with feminist issues, but whose work relates to the inner world of what it means to be a woman. And I was wondering how you relate to their work, what you think of it. For example, Kiki Smith.

MS. CHICAGO: I like Kiki Smith's work.

MS. RICHARDS: Lesley Dill.

MS. CHICAGO: I like her work.

MS. RICHARDS: [Inaudible.]

MS. CHICAGO: There's a beautiful - Landfall [Press] printed Lesley Dill. There are some really nice Lesley Dills there that I like a lot. I like their work.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that their work is part of an opening up in the art world to dealing with issues that women have?

MS. CHICAGO: Well, there's no question there's been a change in terms of the fact that women artists can, you know, work out of their own experience as women in ways that were simply prohibited when I was young, which was one of the things I reacted to, was that, you know, the common saying was, you couldn't be a woman and an artist, too. So you were supposed to excise any trace of femininity from your work. Which I did for the first 10 years - or at least I tried.

And Irving Blum from Ferris came to see my domes, and he said, "Look at that! The Venus of Willendorf." I thought I'd drop dead right on the spot. I mean, you weren't supposed to have any reference to female anything, you know. So I felt completely put down by it, even though now I think, yeah, he's right. That's absolutely right. You know? They are like little, sort of, abstract fertility symbols. But I didn't think about it. I wasn't conscious of it. It was creeping back in, despite my best efforts to excise it [laughs].

And so then I said, screw it. I'm going to embrace. I'm not going to do this anymore. I'm not going to be in an adversarial relationship with myself. And then I set out to change it, so that younger women could be themselves in their work. I celebrate that. I think it's great.

MS. RICHARDS: You also - at one point you -

MS. CHICAGO: That's one of my goals.

MS. RICHARDS: In one point in the book *Beyond the Flower*, you said that it was time for shows devoted exclusively to women's art to be over - maybe it was generalization - and that women's work should just be seen as art. However, of course, *Through the Flower*, the nonprofit organization, sponsors exhibitions of just feminists under 40, for example.

MS. CHICAGO: Well, feminist art and women's art are two different things. What I meant about women's art didn't have to do with themes or subject matter. It had to do with grouping women just as women. Now, that was the strategy from the '70s.

As Susan Fisher Sterling and I - you know, she's the director of the National Museum of Women in

the Arts - she and I have talked a lot about this, about the fact that is a strategy; 30 years of exhibitions of work of women artists grouped by gender has not sufficiently changed institutional collecting policies or major exhibition policies. As Jerry Saltz called out the Museum of Modern Art not very long ago, and specifically Anne Temkin, the antifeminist senior curator, for its paltry representation of women, like four percent. This is after 30 or 40 years of women shows. As Susan and I agree, that is a strategy that did not have the result we wanted, which was to change institutional policies. The point wasn't just to have - yes, it was great to expose women's art, especially during the periods where it was so underexposed it was ridiculous. But that's not true anymore. Now the goal has to be to change institutional policies. And having women shows has been demonstrated as, now, at this point, an ineffective policy - strategy - especially because it actually goes against women on their resumes. Women have to take off female shows from their resumes because it disqualifies them professionally. Did you know that?

So what we have been talking about is, if you're going to have shows of women, they need to be grouped for other reasons than gender. Stylistic difference - similarities - thematic similarities, philosophical, kinship. And that's what Through the Flower shows are. We do not do shows of women that do not have a thematic or a philosophic reason. And in fact, our upcoming juried shows have - "Subversive Stitchers: Feminist Artists With a Needle" [Through the Flower, 2010], is not limited to women. "[New Mexico Feminist Art: Feminists under 40" [March 3-May 30, 2008] didn't have to be. It didn't say "women artists under 40." It said "feminists under 40." And in fact, I juried a show with another woman artist at UNM that was a feminist show in which there were male submissions and male artists who showed who were not afraid to be called feminist artists. Because male artists can be feminist artists. It has to do with the content of their work. And so that is what Through the Flower is focused on: it's philosophical or thematic groupings that clarify the range of what constitutes feminist art.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have any ideas of what should be the next step in addressing the continuing disparity between the presentations?

MS. CHICAGO: Yes, of course, a level playing field with the institutions. When I was in -

MS. RICHARDS: How would you -

MS. CHICAGO: When I spoke in Italy, when I spoke in Venice -

MS. RICHARDS: And I wanted to ask you about -

MS. CHICAGO: - at this conference on Arts and Society, I was -

MS. RICHARDS: Who organized that conference?

MS. CHICAGO: It's called Common Ground. It's a big organization. They hold international conferences all over the world on different subjects. And some years ago they started one series of conferences on art and society that are organized in relationship to big art events like the Venice Biennale, the Edinburgh Festival.

So this year it was in relation to the Venice Biennale, during the time of the Biennale. And they get people from all over the world. I mean, there were 400 people who came from South Africa, New Zealand, Australia. And the way it works, you do a plenary speaker, which is what I was there - it's like five or six of them - and a plenary speaker does a half-hour presentation, formal presentation, followed by a garden conversation.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the overall theme of this conference?

MS. CHICAGO: It was - well, it was basically -

MS. RICHARDS: [Inaudible.]

MS. CHICAGO: It was about transnational - It's an Arts and Society.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. CHICAGO: But they have a very big rubric. I tried to address the subject, the symposium subject, which was transnationalism in art. My talk was about broadening my viewpoint and how you could see me trying to build a more global view in the development of my work. But I noticed - in fact, I said to the organizer - I look at some of the papers, not the plenary speakers, but the papers, and I'm like, what does that have to do with transnationalism in art? And he said, "Well, those, we really don't require that they address specifically the topic. It's only the plenary speakers."

But anyway. In the garden conversation afterwards, this guy from New Zealand has a list of questions. He said he had a graduate student. When she heard that I was going to be the plenary speaker, she took him, and she made him sit down and write down all these questions for me. We never got past the first one, which was, "Well, what do you think about the representation of women, you know, which is - don't you think that's sort of over? And hasn't, you know, the male gaze kind of like subsumed the representation of women?" Or something like that. Okay? So I'm like - I'm not paraphrasing the question properly, exactly. It had to do with the absence of images of women by women. That men ruled the territory on images of women. And I pointed out that if the history of female representation of women by women artists was completely integrated into our institutions, this question would not come up.

And then I proceeded to reel off what my idea of an appropriate, diverse - gender diverse - museum would look like. Where you would see Lucian Freud next to Alice Neel, where you would see Maurice Utrillo and [Amedeo] Modigliani right next to Utrillo's mother, who trained him, Suzanne Valadon. And you would see [Wassily] Kandinsky next to Gabriele Munter. And you would see Picasso next to [Marie] [Laurencin]. And you would see [Edgar] Degas next to [Mary] Cassatt. And you would see [édouard] Manet next to [Berthe] Morisot. You would see his and hers through history since the breakthrough, since woman began to get training at the end of the 19th century. Then you would be able to have an adequate picture of the representation of women by those male and female artists, which is what Edward Lucie-Smith and I took up in *Women in Art*. That's what that book is about. It juxtaposes images of women by male and female artists, and shows a differentiation in perspective and point of view.

And then somebody asked me about, something about differing perspective of male and female artists: How can you tell? Okay? So I told this story about the China Project when I did this project as part of the "Long March [Project]" [2000-06], which was organized by this curator, Lu Jie, and 6,000 miles it was supposed to be. Performance, installation, exhibitions.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry. Could you spell Lu Jie?

MS. CHICAGO: L-U J-I-E.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. CHICAGO: And another curator. I forgot his name. But anyway, a Long March, a 600-mile march

across China. You know, art events to bring contemporary art to a broad audience. That was the goal of it. And I was invited to work in Lugu Lake - which is the site of one of the only remaining matriarchal societies in the world; it was fascinating. But I'm not going to talk about that. We did an exhibition. I invited Chinese women artists to work with me. We did an exhibition.

MS. RICHARDS: What year?

MS. CHICAGO: Two thousand and two. We did an exhibition in Lugu Lake. We took over an inn. And at the last minute this other curator, whom I had very little to do with - I hardly even met him; I spent all my time with Lu Jie - brought a work and put it up in the exhibition. And I looked at it, and I said to Jie, "You know, if I didn't know better, I'd think that was by a man." Well, it was. The guy used his wife's name and thought he'd put one over on me. Well, they couldn't believe it. How did you know? How did you know? Well, I knew because my eyesight is educated - my vision is educated - by having looked at hundreds and hundreds of works by women and seeing, not always but often, different views women bring, particularly to similar subjects. When you're looking at the same subject by a male and female artist. Had to be an abstraction obviously. But even there you can see some sensibilities that are similar and different.

Anyway, so, you know, the questions that I got in the garden, my point about this, has to do with a lot of the questions came out of a lack of information that is the result of the institutional failure to keep up with the changes in consciousness and changes in possibilities for both women artists and artists of color. And the institutions have maintained a commitment to the white male, Eurocentric narrative, and adding a woman or two, or a person of color, and not providing a level playing field where you can really see the production of diverse groups playing out and fighting it out in public. That has not yet happened. That's the next step. How long it will take to happen? I have no idea. Probably not in my lifetime.

Which is one of the reasons I support the National Museum for Women in the Arts, as I said before. Because it is the only - until such time as our institutions become truly diverse, there has to be an effort to prevent the continuing erasure and loss of women's cultural production, which is ongoing. As that artist I cited before said, "My art! My art! What is going to happen my art!" Because women artists cannot die believing that their - if they know anything about history - believing that their work is going to be taken care of. Because what is actually the historic record is their work is eclipsed or lost or neglected or forgotten. And overcoming that has been my lifelong goal, for myself and other women.

MS. RICHARDS: There's just a minute. So what was the reception at that conference to your speech, to your remarks?

MS. CHICAGO: I had the biggest audience of any speaker. I'm sure some people got uptight. One of the plenary guys, two of the plenary guys, got, like, uptight, you know: we are the representatives of all the things you hate! I'm like, oh, well, you can change [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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