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Oral history interview with Judy Pfaff, 2010 Jan. 27-Feb. 4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Judy Pfaff on Jan. 27-Feb. 4, 2010. The interview took place at the artist's home in Kingston, NY, and was conducted by Judith 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 Pfaff and Judith 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 RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Pfaff on January 27, 2010, in Kingston, New York, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

So Judy, let me start by asking you to talk about your family, as far back as your wish, certainly your parents and your grandparents if you knew them, but just that whole piece before you were born.

JUDY PFAFF: Well, this is short. I was born in 1946, post-war London. My grandmother was in the Royal Air Force.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her name?

MS. PFAFF: Her name was Jessie Mabel Langford. My mum, I never met my father, I never met. I was – right after I was born, my mother immigrated to Toronto, to Canada and there was –

MS. RICHARDS: Was your father's name Pfaff?

MS. PFAFF: No, no, no I was married when I was like 16.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, what was your mother's name?

MS. PFAFF: Baldwin, B-A-L-D-W-I-N, Baldwin.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her first name?

MS. PFAFF: Joan, Joan Edna Baldwin.

MS. RICHARDS: So your father's name was Baldwin?

MS. PFAFF: His name was Baldwin, John, John, Judy, Joan, Jessie, I think – and my brother's name is Michael, so a lot of J's.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's – Jessie Langford was your mother's –

MS. PFAFF: Jessie Mable Langford was my grandmother's name.

MS. RICHARDS: Your mother's mother?

MS. PFAFF: My mother's mother. There are very few children. I have no sort of – I don't have relatives basically.

MS. RICHARDS: And did she live in London also, your grandmother?

MS. PFAFF: My grandmother did, yeah. She was a seamstress. I think she worked at Selfridges – not Selfridges. What was that? It was a kind of a fancy place. Anyway, she was a seamstress during the war.

She worked with a group of women who sewed up the balloons, the dirigibles that hung over London. So she was a – my mum thinks that whatever I have came not from her but from my grandmother because she was tough, I think.

She was a real crafts – you know, as a seamstress it was a lot of fine work really and she was a sergeant major in the Women's Royal Air Force in England. So she had some moxie I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about your grandfather?

MS. PFAFF: I don't know. I don't know him, no grandparents. There was one grandmother and that was "nanny," you know. I didn't meet her or grow up with her very much. I think maybe in the last four or five years. It's a little sketchy. My family lost a lot of real estate, meaning their house was bombed or their apartment house was bombed.

So there were there houses that were put together, makeshift places, and even if you weren't an orphan you might to go someplace where lots of kids were because there was no house, no --

MS. RICHARDS: What part of London had the house been before it was bombed?

MS. PFAFF: I don't know. A lot of it is unknown to me. I didn't even know I had a brother until a little bit later. It's all a little sketchy. My mum just died a few years ago and I got more information then, you know, because – we were closer right before she was – when she was ill than any other time.

We never really lived together. I was probably difficult. I think I was. She was not used to having – she was not used to being a mother exactly. She was trying to get whatever was left of the family together, organized. She was a young woman. She had my brother when she was a teenager.

MS. RICHARDS: Your older brother?

MS. PFAFF: My older brother. He was born during the war. He's a lawyer. He has children.

MS. RICHARDS: And I'm sorry, you said what was his name?

MS. PFAFF: Michael, Michael Baldwin, very nice, very good guy. Much more – he was much smarter than me. When we met, I don't know how old we were when we met. But he had a whole different accent. I was Cockney. I had – I spoke one way. He spoke another way. I was wild. He was tame. He was nice. I was not nice.

I don't know "not nice" but I was feral [laughs] or wily or unstuck in the world, you know? I sort of made my own rules and I don't have very many – I have no good memories of England, of London, because I think of the politeness and the kind of culture. I don't know. I never – all artists have this feeling like where did I come from.

Did I get shot out of a cannon or was I beamed down from some planet, you know. Somehow I was just way too physical and way too nervous or agitated or wanted to – I would be someone who might speak out of turn and jump up and down and raise my hand too much.

In London, little girls – or in England or in most places, actually probably most places – you're supposed to be –

MS. RICHARDS: Or you get diagnosed.

MS. PFAFF: You get diagnosed. Now you get diagnosed. [Laughs.] I have a feeling I would have been diagnosable but then I was just unruly.

So we came. My mum got it together.

MS. RICHARDS: With just you two, your mother and you, not your brother?

MS. PFAFF: My grandmother, my brother and I came over to America on the Queen Elisabeth and I heard – we were in different – we weren't in any – I think we were in steerage. But by the time we hit New York City where we landed, I had an Irish accent they tell me because I was with this Irish family.

So I was – you could tell, I sort of had –

MS. RICHARDS: What year was that?

MS. PFAFF: I don't know. It's late '50s I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were over 10 years old?

MS. PFAFF: Oh yeah, like 12 I think.

MS. RICHARDS: So going back then to those early years, what kind of school did you go to in England, in London?

MS. PFAFF: Just regular, I guess it would be called a public school. But I was also in trouble a lot. So I was sort of kicked out a little bit. I mean, I don't know if I romanticized some of this. But I was in trouble in school, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So academically you were struggling?

MS. PFAFF: Terrible, terrible.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you figure out – did you have dyslexia or some other issue that caused you –

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I think yeah, but I didn't like school. I didn't like – I mean I liked if they told us stories. I liked sort of like running away. I think I hear stories now that I used to steal everyone's lunch and feed it to the geese and ducks in Hyde Park. I don't know. I think I was a little bit hard to educate.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have any encounters with art, either making it or seeing it?

MS. PFAFF: England's not real big on that. No, I think my first experience would be coming to America.

MS. RICHARDS: So going back to the ship then, you landed with an Irish accent.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, and then I met my mother, right. I met her then. She met the ship. We took a train from New York to Detroit [MI] in a really rough area.

MS. RICHARDS: So she had come before?

MS. PFAFF: She had immigrated right after I was born, to Canada, and she worked for Ford Motor Company of Canada.

MS. RICHARDS: So I'm sorry. The years then that you were in London before you came, you weren't being taken care of by your mother at all.

MS. PFAFF: No, no I never met her.

MS. RICHARDS: You were in a kind of an orphanage? You said a place where children?

MS. PFAFF: It's not an orphanage because that sounds too much like [Charles] Dickens or something. It was just a place that the – it's like – it's not like Haiti. It's not at all like Haiti but when something dramatic happens, if a place is bombed, and the English are pretty together. So they maybe put places together where, you know –

MS. RICHARDS: But you didn't have any – you didn't have any family with you?

MS. PFAFF: I remember saying when someone asked me about my mother and father, I used to say, "I don't have any." I sort of knew they existed. I never met my father. But I knew my mother was alive. But she wasn't around and I had no image of her. I didn't. So I would just – it was easier just to say I didn't have any. I now know that is not the truth. But that it felt like the truth, you know.

My grandmother I liked. She was just extremely kind to me and I think forgave me or like put up with me or, you know –

MS. RICHARDS: Accepted you.

MS. PFAFF: Accepted me or whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: So the three of you came on the ship?

MS. PFAFF: We all immigrated together, which was interesting, and also what I think one of the more peculiar parts is that my mother was corresponding with my brother because one, he was much older than me and she knew him. She left when he was five. So he was sort of someone she could sort of talk to I guess.

But she wanted him to believe, her mother to believe, and me to believe that everything was going to be good.

MS. RICHARDS: In Toronto [ON, Canada]?

MS. PFAFF: She then came through Windsor, Ontario to Detroit. So back then, to get to America you actually – it was much easier to get through Canada because Canada is part of the empire or whatever and I don't think – she was a young woman trying to get a job and she was always just a secretary – not just, but she was always – these were not high paying jobs.

She did do a little bit of dancing and was with- I think she was a dance partner at some Arthur Murray sort of a studio. She also – I'm not really sure. I never got this straight. But she either was a chorus girl for Jimmy Durante or had some – it's all fractured.

But my image of my mother was going to be this incredible glamorous woman in showbiz or something. That was my – that we would have horses, we would have, you know, cars and when we came here it was – here meaning outside of Detroit – it was very, very poor neighborhood and it was tough.

It was tough for my grandmother because she had had lots of physical problems during the war. She was blown up in some – her feet were bad and her stomach. She had been injured a lot during the war and she actually died about a year after we arrived in America. So it was real tough for my mother. She inherited her family.

One, she didn't know them, and her mother was sort of disappointed. That's a euphemism. She was like, "Where are we?" Plus it was really a redneck part of the outs [outskirts]. It was called Mecosta. It was not in Detroit.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MS. PFAFF: I'm not sure. M-E-C-O-S-T-A, Mecosta, I hope I have that right. Anyway, so it was tough. I was also in an all-black junior high school and I had a Cockney accent. I was a little unkept [sic], kept, kempt and odd. So teachers, art teachers, could handle me I guess. So that's where I did well.

I also seemed bright to everybody because I had this accent. So that got me through at least three years of school, not having to do anything because England actually has a better education system and no matter what I didn't learn I knew more than – or it sounded like I knew more and actually I probably – some things I sort of could do well and so I actually ended up –

MS. RICHARDS: More in the humanities side or more in the science side and the math side?

MS. PFAFF: Oh, not math and science but more humanities, reading and talking and I also lived with lots of families in Detroit. I never lived at home. I didn't do well at home. My brother was – he's such a nice guy but I think he – I think I used to break things.

Like if he had a toy, I might break it, or if he – you know, I mean anyway. My grandmother was very sick. So I used to live with different people in Detroit, yeah, yeah, and I was married when I was quite young

I was living in a house. The Kermans were the name, K-E-R-M-A-N-S, and they had a few daughters. I went to school with one of them, Annette, who's a really good artist. She's a really good artist. It was a family with eight children, so one more didn't sort of make much of a dent and David Pfaff, who I met there, was the good friend of the oldest brother in the house. So and when I met him –

MS. RICHARDS: This is in high school?

MS. PFAFF: This is in high school. He drove up to the Kermans' house, which is way outside of Detroit. The high school I went to was a fantastic high school. It was called Cass Tech.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MS. PFAFF: C-A-S-S-T-E-C-H, its Cass Technical High School and it was one of those high schools, it was like LaGuardia [NY]. It was like Music & Art [NY] or LaGuardia High School. It was one of those inner-city schools that took from every place and it had 32 curriculums and it actually was one of the – probably one of the better high schools in the country.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you end up there by chance?

MS. PFAFF: No, my art teacher took me over there and said, "She's not going to do well on these tests, but take her," so.

MS. RICHARDS: Your art teacher from junior high school?

MS. PFAFF: From junior high school and I've been trying to remember her name. My mum remembers her because she – I didn't know this but she came to the house and just said, "You know, I need her to go to a good school." And my mother probably said, "How am I going to do this or we can't afford this" or whatever. I think I went on full scholarship. I don't remember any money transpiring.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean it was a private school?

MS. PFAFF: No, it wasn't a private school but it was a very special school. So you had to bring your own lunch. You had to be able to get from outside of the city. You had to have bus fare. You couldn't just walk.

So it probably had some aspect of being either problematic or probably full of logistics or whatever. So anyway,

I lived with this other family, met David there, made him go to the prom. [Laughs.]

He was a lot older than me. He's a really good guy and he was in the Air Force, so yeah, anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: So you married?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, we married.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you lived with him somewhere?

MS. PFAFF: I lived with him a little bit. Well, he didn't live there because he was in Newfoundland. So when we first got married I lived in an apartment in Detroit by myself and I visited him in Newfoundland.

MS. RICHARDS: Before you finished high school?

MS. PFAFF: Yes. And so I lived with him in Newfoundland for maybe six months as an officer's wife.

MS. RICHARDS: He was an officer?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, and he was – you know, he studied philosophy and physics. He was really bright, really a nice man. He lives now I think in Carefree, Arizona, and races and fixes motorcycles, so, and he was something.

He had – he was very tall and kind of esoteric looking, thinking about it now, and he had no interest in money but he loved machines and he came from a relatively wealthy family, in my mind a terribly wealthy family, and my first car, which I love cars, was an Alfa Romeo Guilietta Spider that he bought for me because he thought I would like it.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was his family from?

MS. PFAFF: I think they – well, Pfaff is a German name but they lived in the outskirts of Michigan. But I think they were from Germany originally.

MS. RICHARDS: And was he in ROTC in college?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, that's what happened then. It was that time when I think he was studying either physics or philosophy. Everybody went to ROTC. What happened is when you graduated you were an officer.

You didn't have to go and you had – what did they call it – tour of duty or you had to put in maybe four years instead of six or two years instead of four, something like that, and you were in a – you know, the Army is set up in ladders.

So he – and he almost got kicked out all the time. He was as – you know, in the military there are rules and if you're a philosopher you might say, why do I have to jump now when you say jump or whatever. So there were these things called Article 39s which are like – kind of like you forgot to salute someone who was of a higher rank and so you get pointed out for that.

So I – and he had a wife that was young and he had a motorcycle in Newfoundland. I had a motorcycle in Newfoundland. So imagine the look of this military family. It looked peculiar and anyway, he's a nice man.

And then we lived together in Sweetwater, Texas.

MS. RICHARDS: After you graduated high school?

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: While he was still in the military?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, for a little while longer, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What fort? What base was he affiliated with?

MS. PFAFF: It was a radar site. It was in Sweetwater, Texas. Most of the Air Force bases would have been larger, like in Abilene. That was Dyess Air Force Base I think, D-Y, Dyess, I don't know how to spell that, D-Y-E-R-S, but that's not right. That's Dyers. Anyway, it's Dyess Air Force Base.

I lived in this tiny little cinderblock house on Lake Sweetwater. Because it was a radar site and it was a remote radar site, you actually weren't supposed to bring – these were called remote tours of duty. When he was going into the Air Force, obviously everybody thought they were going to be stationed in Germany or in England or –

MS. RICHARDS: What year was this? So you're – 1946.

MS. PFAFF: Well, I graduated high school in '64 so it would have been probably around –

MS. RICHARDS: Sixty-two were you married in '62, when you were 16 in '62, so early '60s.

MS. PFAFF: Sixty-two, so it was probably '65, '66, something like that. You know, this is the Vietnam War. This is heavy duty in the Vietnam War. So it was very political. Obviously I was not – wasn't a good fit, me and the military, to say the least, so anyway, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So at what point – at some point you went to Wayne State University.

MS. PFAFF: I went to Wayne for a semester or so after –

MS. RICHARDS: While you were living in Sweetwater?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, in Detroit, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Wait, before you went to Texas?

MS. PFAFF: Yes. I might have been in between to tell you the truth.

MS. RICHARDS: I think that was 1965 that you were in Wayne State.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah so it would have been after I graduated from high school was in '64.

MS. RICHARDS: And why Wayne State? How did that come about?

MS. PFAFF: Because the guy who was in my class at Cass Tech was named Todd Smith and Todd Smith's father was G. Alden Smith, who was the president or the chairman or the dean or whatever it was of the art department at Wayne State and literally he said, "She's not going to get in – she's not going to be able to pass these things. She's not going to take these tests. But she's a really good artist."

So Todd Smith, son of G. Alden Smith, who he was the most talented guy I ever met and he was so sophisticated. He grew up in art. His father was in the arts and he really liked me. So he actually – I remember – introduced me, walked into the office, and I could never get into school on my own, not just grades. My grades were probably okay. I couldn't do tests. I wouldn't do tests, like SATs [Standardize Aptitude Test] and things like that. So there was no paperwork to get me in.

I don't think you could get into school now like that.

MS. RICHARDS: You obviously then were studying art in high school.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I was studying art in high school, oh absolutely, four years.

MS. RICHARDS: And excelling.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, yes, I don't know excelling but I think I must have.

MS. RICHARDS: You were recognized, right?

MS. PFAFF: Oh yeah, it always pissed people off. I would always get things. Like if there was a prize, I would get the prize. If there was a, you know, I don't know, a gold star, I would get the gold and yet I was late for class. I would run away.

Teachers liked me or I kind of think they knew that I was making it up as I went along and I think they either felt protective or, I don't know. But I can remember a lot of like the rules were bent.

MS. RICHARDS: Did anyone suggest you go to an art school, like the Art Institute of Chicago?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I got a scholarship to Pratt [University, NY]. I was in some – you know these high school things where, what do they call them, national scholastics? I won a prize. It was just always sort of that way. So I was invited or I don't remember – this I'm not sure.

But you know, I was not going to go to New York then. I mean school was not my idea of a good time, even though this was a great school and it was good for me. But I didn't – I don't think it dawned on me that I was sort of an artist. There was nothing about career move or this is my job or this is what I was going to be when I grew up.

Things had always rolled – I always rolled with it. I would find myself living someplace, doing something, being married here, living there, going there. There was no structure. There was no this is what one does to get ahead, nothing of the sort. I just went with people I liked.

MS. RICHARDS: Nobody had ever taught you that.

MS. PFAFF: I'd never been taught that. I can feel it now that I know more now how to be – I would – I know now sort of how this goes. But yeah, I think I really was – it's really been a lot of care from outside people and me just having the awfully good luck to choose good people or good people choose me or you know.

[Side conversation.]

MS. PFAFF: Okay. We don't have a bookkeeper. She left five, six months ago and I've been doing a lot of this and all of a sudden Jeannie and I just realized that I've done a mess of this. So we're trying to get that stuff together as this new year is rolling faster, anyway, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So while you excelled in art and it was probably what you loved doing most, you never thought you were going to be an artist or you needed to go to art?

MS. PFAFF: I don't remember it being an idea.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you painting or doing sculpture?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I don't know if it was painting. It wasn't painting, painting. It was, you know, for instance my first Christmas when I was married I decided that I – he was in Stephenville, Newfoundland, and I thought – I had this apartment so I just sort of decorated it in whatever I thought was the correct Christmas thing.

So it was chockablock full of things that I'd made for Christmas. It was probably – I mean at that time it was just decoration, for sure, and it was thematic. So colors were good. So I think that – yeah – but no, being the kind of painter, like an easel and with real things and doing something and knowing, giving yourself that name, no, no.

I've always sort of – Al said this too, when I was at Yale [University, CT].

MS. RICHARDS: Al Held?

MS. PFAFF: Al Held, sorry, Al Held, when I came to Yale I lived in an apartment which was in the third floor of an old Russian woman's apartment house and it was in the attic and Al had probably been to many, many student's apartments over the years. He just said, "I can't – when did you" – like he couldn't figure out when I decorated, when I had time to do that, like why it looked like I was going to live there forever and that's always been so.

Like you know how people will get a place and they'll say, I don't own it so I'm not going to paint the walls, or I don't own it so – I'm like, how can you live here without adjusting it to yourself, right? So my places always have to feel correct to me. This house, for instance, it's as you see it's an old Victorian. I was dumbstruck when I first got it.

It's like, what is this room? What is this room's name? What do you do in this room? If you have an office, where is the office? So it was, you know, all my spaces have actually been transient spaces or industrial spaces or lofts where it's basically one big room and all you do there is you make your work and you sleep over in that nook.

This is like I had to buy chairs or figure out, you know, a rug, like I don't know. So this was my excursion into being an adult. So but that thing about architecture, making places feel, if not homey, it's not homey, it's just I can recognize them.

MS. RICHARDS: Personal.

MS. PFAFF: If they're too abstract or too neutral, I can't be there. I just get lost. So that I've always done and I think I have always done it. My mother, when I did meet her, along with going back again, she'd actually had an apartment house to try to make money, to try, and it was – the thing blew up. The guy was sabotaged.

But anyway, I was helping her fix the rooms up. This is even when I was a kid and I used to make lots of stuff, oh from doilies to aprons to other kinds of things to sell to help with the expenses, to help, you know?

So I liked making things. It was not – that's all. I've always loved making things. I've always been very busy.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were at Wayne State, you're obviously in the art department studying art.

MS. PFAFF: I was, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How long did you stay there?

MS. PFAFF: A semester, a semester-and-a-half, maybe two all together.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was because?

MS. PFAFF: We were traveling in and out. I did really, really like the image of going to college. When I was in high school, they actually had a couple classes at Wayne for high school students, figure drawing, a nude model, and I'm forgetting his name. It was an old – I think he was from Austria who taught the figure, amazing man, and he had all this knowledge and information and didn't – it was tough, a tough teacher. You couldn't – you had to study.

You had to look. You had to pay attention. You had to learn the bones, do the muscles. It was very rigorous, very academic. I thought it was fabulous. I liked it. I liked that it wasn't loosey-goosey. So I liked college because there were things to learn. I realized that I'd sort of gotten through most of school kind of just being interested and talented.

So then you can do what you want to do. He was determined to educate me and he actually was someone who committed suicide later, which made me think that he was much more complicated than anyone ever knew. But he allowed me into these classes even though I was not – I didn't have the background for it.

But this teaching thing, for teachers, with teachers has probably not just oriented my life but sort of gave me – I was not good with language. I certainly was not good with any kind of writing, reading, almost any of the things that one should be good at. But all the other stuff I could get by with this art thing.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were at Wayne State, that's in Detroit or near Detroit?

MS. PFAFF: It's in the middle of Detroit.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to the Art Institute, Detroit Art Institute?

MS. PFAFF: Absolutely every day. I thought eating down there, like bringing something in and having a doughnut or whatever it was, do you know that? It's a beautiful place.

MS. RICHARDS: A little. I've been there once.

MS. PFAFF: And it used to be that you could eat where the Diego Rivera murals are and it was also all around there, there was medieval armor and you're kind of in some Gothic or, you know, Romanesque architecture. No, it was an assemblage of different things going on around there. Obviously it's a museum. But it was really beautiful.

You would go in this sunlit sky-lighted arena with this – and I thought those murals were probably – I still think this – probably are some of the most powerful, the most interesting, experiential sort of art, especially for probably young people too and older but young people, it's got the narrative. You've got this epic thing. It's kind of wild. It's totally wild.

There are naked people in there, [laughs] like it's a little revolutionary. It's a little political. It's like guys – it's like so cool and it's in this elegant place and everybody was reading books. I love the look of museums and schools, you know? I do love that.

So I would go to school just because I liked the idea of being in that kind of class, in that kind of arena with someone that knows something that I was also interested in.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there other areas of the museum that you would go back to or certain works of art?

MS. PFAFF: I liked – I was talking to some student today and he said to me, "This is a really brilliant student at Bard [College, NY]." He'd only been to the Museum of Modern Art [New York City] once in his life and he lives up in Tivoli [NY]. In fact he's from Tivoli and we were just talking about what that's like to just walk in a museum, not with a teacher, not with any, just to have the museum to yourself, what your thoughts are.

So I don't – you know, there are things that I would say I like now but then I liked just being there, nothing particular, liked going through centuries, through rooms that had this impact or that. It was just sensations and gestalts and having history all around and a kind of silence I guess. Yeah, I like museums. I do it all the time.

I hardly ever study in museums. When I see people standing in front of anything for more than two minutes, I

don't know what they're looking at. I do things very fast. I will go back to them many times but I don't have that thing where I'm dissecting it. I look at it as part of and I can dream about it as I'm walking away. I don't like to get things go cold by analyzing them too much. I want to get it, feel it.

So I think it used to be like the museum sort of meant something in that way and to be alone or to have an experience or to get outside of real life, that was – I was very comfortable and this is something, I don't know why, I've always had. If someone asked me what I thought about something, I would tell them, [laughs] you know, like with zero knowledge.

It's not like when I go into museums now and I hear someone sort of talking about this or that, I'm like, "boring." It is interesting but they never tell you what they really think of when they're looking at it.

They'll tell you where it comes from, who they studied with, what it means, what the title, the way the color is ,the composition, I don't know, who they were married to. They don't tell you about the thing. So I never really listened. I like it as a private experience. It's mine, you know, like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it upsetting to leave Wayne State?

MS. PFAFF: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So you went off.

MS. PFAFF: Nothing's upsetting to me. You can put me here. Detroit was upsetting because as much as London was difficult, there was no one telling me sort of what to do in a funny way. The city was bombed. We were rationed. It was intimate and it was interesting and it was, not life and death, but you sort of had a feeling obviously something had happened. Everyone was full of war stories. You listened to the radio. It was sort of an unstuck world.

Detroit and the outside of Detroit seemed like there was zero culture. I had no idea what was going on. I really – it seemed bleak and terribly depressing and also dreams got squelched there because we were going to never-never-land and we landed in Detroit, or not even Detroit.

MS. RICHARDS: I guess I didn't mean leaving Detroit. I meant leaving college.

MS. PFAFF: College? No, no because I always – I've been to a lot of colleges.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I was going to say then three years later you went to Southern Illinois.

MS. PFAFF: Southern Illinois University.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did – and were you still living with David then? He was out of the military.

MS. PFAFF: Well, yes, I'm trying to think of the sequence. What happened? I was living in Texas. He really, really wanted to go to the Southwest, which is where he still is, and I really wanted to go east, probably to the museums. New York seemed fascinating. He gave – he was very sweet. When I left, he bought me a truck. It wasn't a truck. It was a van. It was an Econoline Ford van, probably the least beautiful vehicle on the planet.

You sort of sat on the motor and it was straight down and it was a tin box. But he thought I could live in there and have all my stuff. So in terms of a vehicle to travel with, he thought it was a –

MS. RICHARDS: So he was very considerate.

MS. PFAFF: He was a fabulous man.

MS. RICHARDS: And understood you.

MS. PFAFF: And selfless, yeah, absolutely did, yeah, yeah. I don't know how because I didn't give him much to work with. But no, I think – also I think he got me out of this house in outside of Detroit. I think he saw that this was really bleak in that way. I was one of nine. I was sort of sleeping under a couch or on top. I sort of didn't – I was just sort rambling through this place.

I don't know. I think he thought – and he liked me. We liked each other. I think he thought it was a way out. He did not think it was forever. I don't think he ever thought and I never thought that this – I was married. We got married by a guy who I think he went to school with whose name was Albert Cleague in Detroit and he ran for president [sic] [governor]. He was a black guy.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Cleague?

MS. PFAFF: Cleague, C-L-E-A-G-E, something like that, Albert B. Cleague, which is pretty radical thinking about it at the time because he was a pretty – anyway. David's family was a little freaked out to hear they had this black minister. He's marrying this kid. He was brilliant and interesting and kind of from a wealthy family. Like this must have looked like their world came to an end and probably in a certain way it did because he, like I said, races motorcycles in Arizona still. He must be 80.

MS. RICHARDS: So he sent you off – he sent you off with the Econoline.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, he knew I was going to go and he really set it up, yeah, and I probably had a dog or a cat or two. So it was a little bit like –

MS. RICHARDS: This is in 1968?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Sending off in a truck that was the way it worked. That was interesting.

MS. PFAFF: Oh, I know what happened. I know what happened.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you paint flowers on it?

MS. PFAFF: No, I never did that. I did have a cool little – that's another story.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you know to go –

MS. PFAFF: I traveled across the country and one of my friends from Wayne, her name was Grace Breidenstein.

MS. RICHARDS: Breidenstein, okay.

MS. PFAFF: I think now her name is James. But anyway, she was very beautiful, very interesting, and hung around –

You know Detroit at this time was very hot. It was like John Sinclair, the MC5 [band]. The arts were amazing. Ellen Phelan, I remember Ellen from there. She was remarkable. She used to – and she was a little older than me so she really knew kind of the artists, like real artists.

So Grace, who I had met there, I think was either going to school at Southern Illinois. But I went to Southern Illinois – initially it wasn't in Carbondale or Edwardsville campus. It was a campus right across from St. Louis. It was in Alton, Illinois, A-L-T-O-N, and it had been – there are schools like Principia.

There's a whole area on the Mississippi when you get down that far where there used to be Indians, the Piasa Indians.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MS. PFAFF: Piasa, P-I-A-S-A-, Piasa.

MS. RICHARDS: P-I-S?

MS. PFAFF: And there's all this mythology – Paisa, P-I-A-S-A, must be that – you know, Edward Albee, there's a lot of writers. It was kind of an intellectual community in Alton, Illinois, right on the river.

There was a moment when Alton could have been St. Louis [MO]. It just – St. Louis became St. Louis. That was going to be – is it going to be this side of the river or that side of the river. One is in Illinois. One is in Missouri.

So there was this school. I think it had been like a Baptist or a Methodist or some religious school all made out of sandstone or river bluff material. It was a really beautiful old college which was the beginning of Southern Illinois.

Until the Edwardsville campus was built, this was this interim place. It was right on the Mississippi. It was really beautiful. It was like the "old South." That's not the South but it felt to me like the old South. There were writers, James Dickey, all these kind of – he wasn't there but like that group of writers was in that community.

So there was this whole intellectual kind of writing art group. I was driving across country, I think either Grace told me to stop in there or she was there. Anyway, I stopped there. I stayed a few months or maybe even a semester, went to school because I knew all these people hung out.

You know, it's the '60s so it's a little creative and I had a boyfriend named Willie, Willie Laird, L-A-I-R-D, very

talented, really nice, who borrowed my truck and crashed it and his father, good guy, and Willie was a good guy, gave me – I think it was about $300 for this truck. At that point I just decided to go to Europe.

So I left for about a year.

MS. RICHARDS: With $300?

MS. PFAFF: With $300. I went to this – I was on a plane – Rudolf Steiner, Rudolf Steiner had a college where he was teaching people – not he, but the people who ran the college, was a college for teachers to be Steiner –

MS. RICHARDS: Where?

MS. PFAFF: In Forest Row, England, in Sussex, Forest Row and actually it was right across from where Scientology had just been kicked out of England, believe it or not. They never kick anybody out.

But anyway, so I went to this farm. I was visiting Grace, who was going to become a Waldorf teacher. So there were like people from 75 countries, all these languages.

It was this terribly elegant and kind of, to my mind, conservative, meaning there were rules. Everyone was sort of spiritual. The dance was called eurythmy. It was to make sounds, no, to create a language out of movement for the deaf.

MS. RICHARDS: What attracted you to going there?

MS. PFAFF: Grace was there. She was in England. I decided I could go back. I needed a reason.

MS. RICHARDS: Not because of this school?

MS. PFAFF: I needed to get back. I wasn't going to go to London. I sort of wanted to figure out something about England probably. This woman Grace was a little older than me. She was very wise and she had a kind of beauty. I think she probably would have looked like a caryatid on the Parthenon. She had hair that was so thick. You know that hair that's just like this and the braid is like that big and she was a kind of a – I think she was one of these women – who would she be like.

She would be like Angelina Jolie. There's something about the way she looked that was a magnet for lots of things and I was intrigued by her. She liked me. So I think in a fun way I'm like a valet. I could expedite things. I could carry things. I could make things. I could shop. I would fix the light bulb or I was sort of a good – an easy friend in that way.

I could acclimate very fast. I think she invited me. I think she thought that this would be good for me, this place. When I got there, she was in study. She was becoming a teacher. She still might be a teacher within the Waldorf system. I worked on the farm. So I think my first job was to plant 10,000 leeks.

So this was not a vacation. This was like – and there was a woman named Ms. Costellitz [ph] –

MS. RICHARDS: But it didn't cost you anything.

MS. PFAFF: It didn't. No, I got room and board.

MS. RICHARDS: You had $300.

MS. PFAFF: And there was a fabulous man, young man, he was a boy. We both – everybody was sort of kids then, Mikael Aumundin, who came from a pretty amazing Swedish family. Waldorf schools –

MS. RICHARDS: Could you say his name again?

MS. PFAFF: Mikael, M-I-K-A-E-L, maybe, Aumundin, A-M-U-N-D-I-N, Aumundin. He was, oh my god, gorgeous, beyond imagining beautiful. So I hung around the farm no problem and he and I were the only workers besides this woman, this Austrian woman who had all the – do you know that biodynamic farming is?

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. PFAFF: It's kind of really ancient sort of things brought to – for instance, this is a good story. I had to crush quartz crystals with a mortar and pestle into kind of basically sand or dust. That was my job. Do you know how long that takes? It takes a long time.

After I make all this crushed stuff in this bowl, I have to put it in this tub with water and I have to stir it in one direction and stir it in another direction for hours and I was creating these vortexes. They were called

lemniscates. Anyway, so I'm just thinking this is the most retarded thing I've ever done. This is like really lunacy.

There are these crazy people here. Why am I here? Are they punishing me? Is this like clean the abbey with toothpaste, the equivalent of?

So at one point I just said, "Ms. Costellitz, please tell me what is this and why am I doing it." And she just says – I love this – I'm not saying it correctly but she basically said, "There are little crystals. You're making crystals. We're putting it in the water. We're going to sprinkle it on the leeks you just planted and it's going to put little prisms of rainbow colors."

Now I know this doesn't work. But I thought, well, I like that story, and see, not being a believer, I'm not like a good believer of many things but I like the idea of putting little quartz crystals that would put rainbow colors on the roots of the leeks and after that it was like okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Fairy dust is what it sounds like.

MS. PFAFF: But I love the idea of that. Also we were doing things like digging up horns of cows which had been filled with dung and buried a year earlier and we undid them in the middle of the night at a full moon, put them in blood temperature water.

I mean you have no idea the sort of like – I'm in some like witchy – it's all actually good farming practices [laughs] but at the time it was like you've got to be putting me on.

So this is biodynamic farming and it's very – and also I'll tell you, my leeks were the best leeks you've ever seen and I think it must have been because of those little rainbow crystals. So it was like that. So Mikael and I decided to travel all through Europe. We hitchhiked. He was – like I said, he was gorgeous and he had this ability to like find the right root, how to say something. He was just kind of gifted with people and I was just kind of along for the ride. He found me a job in Lund, Sweden with this family. The father was –

MS. RICHARDS: Was he Swedish? Mikael?

MS. PFAFF: He was Swedish, yeah. He lived – his home was outside of Stockholm in Järna, J-A, with an umlaut or that thing over the top of it, *Järna*, and I think he was an extremely spiritual man. I mean, I was young enough that I used to think he was St. Michael, some kind of a fabulous personality who was put on the planet to guide people and to crush whoever; anyway, good guy.

Sort of like you know when you think who's the love of your life? It was like this kind of a person that's like a mythological guy. I don't know how real I knew him or how much I knew him. But anyway, interesting. So I worked. I was an au pair girl for a year in Sweden.

MS. RICHARDS: In Lund?

MS. PFAFF: In Lund.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, yeah –

MS. PFAFF: In Lund, which is south, south of Sweden.

MS. RICHARDS: And where was he at the time?

MS. PFAFF: He lived in – I think I saw him once more after that. I visited him in Stockholm.

MS. RICHARDS: So were you looking for a job in Sweden? Did you want to spend a year there as an au pair?

MS. PFAFF: No, no.

MS. RICHARDS: It seems – where did that come from?

MS. PFAFF: I don't know. I liked this – I liked the idea of going to Sweden. I wasn't a natural teacher. I'm not a natural teacher. I'm saying that after teaching my whole life. But I guess it was just exotic and another journey.

You know, I had no roots, so nothing – I could leave if it didn't work. I could do something else. There was no plan. It was random, except that I always came back to sort of school and art. So somehow I must have sort of known that.

So I was there for a year. I came back to Alton, Illinois and Willie had moved to St. Louis. So all my stuff had gone to St. Louis. So I now lived in St. Louis. So I went to –

MS. RICHARDS: So he was entrusted with taking care of your stuff.

MS. PFAFF: Entrusted? He did it because – I guess he thought I would come back some day and want my stuff. I didn't leave any messages or I don't think I wrote him. I don't think – I don't know. He was a nice guy, you know?

[END CD 1.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Pfaff on January 27, 2010, in Kingston, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

So we're talking about your leaving Lund, coming back to St. Louis.

MS. PFAFF: Coming back to St. Louis, and there is another teacher story.

So Willie is now, he's at Washington University and I guess we are still sort of in a way together. So I ask him how it's going. He says that he's doing well, that he's studying with this man named Arthur Osver, who's the painting teacher at Washington University.

MS. RICHARDS: What is his last name again?

MS. PFAFF: Arthur, A, Arthur, like Arthur, Osver, O-S-V-E-R, and I'm living around Washington University. It's right at the edge of a big park. That's where the World's Fair was in the early – you know, 1904 or whenever it was.

There's a beautiful art museum on the hill. There's the most fantastic zoo that was very famous. There was a television show that came from it. I'm forgetting his name. He's a very famous guy.

Anyway, and Washington University is a very swank university. Wayne State has like 50 billion people and it's like an inner-city school. Washington University is like the architecture school, the art school. Buckminster Fuller had been there, [Max]Beckmann had been there. It sort of was in a funny way classier than Southern Illinois, even though I had great teachers there.

So anyway, I hear about this Arthur Osver. I know that my – whatever transcript I have is put together hodgepodge. There's no continuity. There's no – I haven't taken the right classes. I haven't taken any of the prereqs – you know, it's just all over the place.

I go to the museum. Arthur has a few paintings in the museum. They're very good. I realized he was really, really a good painter. I call him at his house and I tell him my story a little bit. I'm married. I'm unmarried. I've been traveling. I did this here. I did that. But I really want to study with you. I think you're really good. I don't know if I can.

He met me. I did not have a portfolio. I didn't bring anything there and he said that he kind of made it so I could get in. Now this is a very good school. Now, I did have to try and fill out some of the requirements. Like I took a physics course with Dr. Kilandra and all I had to do is help make posters for his class or blow beakers for the experiments.

MS. RICHARDS: That gave you credit in physics?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, it did, yeah. You know, so it was – I don't know how I graduated. I did.

MS. RICHARDS: How many years did you –

MS. PFAFF: Did it take me to do those?

MS. RICHARDS: Were you at Wash U. before you got your B.F.A.[Bachelors in Fine Arts]?

MS. PFAFF: Year-and-a-half, maybe two.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had credit for two years at least of college.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah. Also my first semester there, no, second semester there – Arthur, he really liked me. I worked for him. There was also the head of the department. There was a man named Lucian Krakowski and Lucian had just graduated from Yale and after he – and he was the head of the school, the dean I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: Of the art department?

MS. PFAFF: Of the art school. He liked me. He liked that I had experiences. I wasn't like a kid. I might have been a couple years older than everybody but I seemed – I didn't seem older. I just seemed like I came from another place.

MS. RICHARDS: During those – that time at Wash U., what was your art making?

MS. PFAFF: Painting. Painting, printmaking, major – I mean, that's all I did.

MS. RICHARDS: And what would you say were your main inspirations, references, if one were to look at those paintings today?

MS. PFAFF: I think they're sort of similar in that they were – and Al Held told me this. He always thought that I painted things that I wish were. They weren't landscapes. They were some imagined landscape. It would be like the way – what's the movie, *Avatar* [2009] – it would be that place.

They were always places but they didn't really exist. So he always thought – Al used to think that I did a kind of made-up, surrealist, dreamy, put together –

MS. RICHARDS: Interior landscape.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, it could be interior landscapes but sort of –

MS. RICHARDS: But one would think they were landscapes.

MS. PFAFF: In the world in a way. So they were very large. They were always - I always painted way big, way too big always. They put me in the grad school studios because I was making everybody upset because I was just painting too big.

They were probably at the time there were these shows coming through in the Steinberg Museum – Steinberg Gallery [in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University], is that what it was called – of, you know, all the color field painters, all the abstraction.

I liked abstraction but I probably always added a kind of narrative into it. I wanted to be very modern. So I think I was probably –

MS. RICHARDS: Modern meaning from the most recent developments?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, not knowing any of the ideas, not knowing where it came from, the look of it, the look of it, the color probably too. They're stupid paintings. They were really not – I think they were probably good. I probably had some skills. I'm a good painter.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you using acrylic or oil?

MS. PFAFF: Oh, always oil. I never ever – I hate acrylic. Isn't that funny? I like only like really old fashioned materials, never – even though all those paintings are acrylic, the ones that I'm looking at. All of the [Ellsworth] Kellys, all of the [Helen] Frankenthalers, all of the stuff is all acrylic really. No, it was always oil painting.

I love mixing stuff. I like things like rabbit skin glue even though it makes everybody a little nauseous. But I like all that old stuff. I like the gessoes and grounds.

MS. RICHARDS: Who taught you those techniques?

MS. PFAFF: I picked it up myself. I always did that. I like making it myself. It was also cheaper to do it that way too.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a scholarship at Wash University.?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah I had scholarships everywhere. I also worked. I have always worked. I've always had a job. A lot of jobs I'm not very – I come to work on time. I'm okay with that but I probably wreak havoc a little bit. I worked for a while when I was in Wash U., the last year, it's called Toddle House. It was a waffle –

MS. RICHARDS: Toddle?

MS. PFAFF: Toddle House.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh yeah.

MS. PFAFF: It was like a waffle making place.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. PFAFF: So I worked from like ten o'clock at night to like six o'clock in the morning and then went to school and I'm not a good chef or cook or fast, you know. I break things. I probably forget who gets – but all the guys would come in. It was the night shift, you know, and it was sort of around – I don't know. It was just guys. So it worked out fine.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were burning the candle at both ends even then.

MS. PFAFF: I was burning the candle at both ends, yeah, yeah. It was really a mess.

But and there were fabulous artists at Washington University, wonderful, wonderful artists at Washington University.

You know who was there too, who I didn't know while I was there? Ann – who ran Knoedler [& Company, gallery, New York City] all these years?

MS. RICHARDS: Freedman?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah. She went – we were in the same class. We just were there getting some honorary something and she said, "Oh, I remember you." And it's like, you do?

MS. RICHARDS: Who else was there when you were there?

MS. PFAFF: There was a fabulous woman. I don't know if you know her but she's really – her name is Julia Heyward.

MS. RICHARDS: That sounds familiar.

MS. PFAFF: She had a name. She and Laurie Anderson could have – like she could be Laurie Anderson. Her name was Duka Delight. She did performances and stuff in the early days.

MS. RICHARDS: What did you say? Duka Delight?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, that was her kind of other name.

MS. RICHARDS: Stage name?

MS. PFAFF: Stage name I guess or that was her name at the time, Duka.

MS. RICHARDS: Spelled the way it sounds?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, Duka, D-U-K-A. People like Tom Friedman came from there but much later. The years I was there I don't think anybody – there are people who have done well but not sort of in the art world.

MS. RICHARDS: So did Krakowski have something to do with your going to Yale?

MS. PFAFF: No, he didn't. Lucian did. What happened was – I'm sorry, not Lucian. Arthur did. Arthur was – it still exists. There's a summer school of music and art [Yale School of Art].

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, at Norfolk [CT].

MS. PFAFF: At Norfolk, and because he was the painting instructor, he got to nominate two people to go and Yale chose one of the two people. So I was chosen for that. Now you have to understand, I'm just coming into the school. No one knows me and I get this prize, right. I go there. I do real well there. There's a man who used to run that place –

MS. RICHARDS: That's the summer before your senior year?

MS. PFAFF: That's right, so junior year, junior year.

So Robert Reed ran that program and when the next year, '71 comes around, Rob – Bob, Bob Reed – calls me and he says, "Judy, you haven't applied to Yale," and I said, "No." I thought it was terrible. I hate those guys. I don't know. I was complaining.

MS. RICHARDS: Wait, you – what was – what would you base this opinion on?

MS. PFAFF: Well, because it was a certain kind of proving ground and a lot of the faculty at Norfolk –

MS. RICHARDS: At Norfolk.

MS. PFAFF: Is Yale's faculty.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MS. PFAFF: So you had to do printmaking and photography and I did fine. I did really well. Actually I really did well. But it didn't – it seemed drier than I wanted. It seemed more political. This was a first entrée into sort of that world.

The visitors who came up were fantastically interesting. I thought I would probably just go straight to New York and Bob Reed literally, he and I – he had taken pictures of my stuff. He had a picture of me.

He put together my – sometimes – I don't know if this –

MS. RICHARDS: Portfolio?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, he didn't put together the portfolio. He put together the paperwork, what's your name, what's your address, da-da-da.

MS. RICHARDS: Like he was your parent and you were in high school.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, yes, he did that. He put it in. The way Yale worked then is after –

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry; he was a faculty member at Norfolk?

MS. PFAFF: He was a faculty member. He ran the Yale summer school of art and design at Norfolk. He did. He always did for a long time maybe.

MS. RICHARDS: You must not have been the only student he ever did that for.

MS. PFAFF: I don't – I guess he did it for other people.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. PFAFF: But I think he knew I was ornery and I wasn't applying. He said, "Did you apply someplace else?" It's like, no, no.

MS. RICHARDS: It was a parent-child relationship.

MS. PFAFF: It's like, you know, so he – and I was his assistant when I was there, really nice guy, really good guy.

So that's what I mean. It's all been – I actually didn't make these decisions. They were introduced to me or made for me and I didn't argue or I did and I still did it.

So Arthur sent me to the summer school. I did well there and Bob Reed wanted me to come to Yale and once I got through the initial evaluation, I think I probably did send slides ultimately or he had them. I don't know how it was sort of done but it was done at the very last minute because he realized I hadn't applied and after that I had to send the original work and this is where Al Held comes in.

I have a truck. I've always had a truck. These paintings were like 8 feet by 12 feet.

MS. RICHARDS: You had to send those?

MS. PFAFF: Now, I didn't put this together. I could have rolled them up and sent them. But I think I also knew they wouldn't hold. Like there's something about the way I paint, the kind of looseness or I like this – I used to use this muslin.

So it looked kind of almost like paper and it had rabbit skin glue and stuff on it but it looked more like silk or linen, not linen but it was very sort of transparently and it was schmaltz on it and they were complicated.

But I don't think – they weren't formal enough to hold unstretched. They needed that. So I made a crate, got a trailer, pulled this thing. I'm living in St. Louis.

I'm driving to New Haven, Connecticut, unloading this stuff in this warehouse that they had in Guilford, waiting until this thing is done and having to schlep them back and I think Al's words were – he didn't particularly like the

paintings but he thought the box they came in was interesting.

And he liked the scale and he liked that I knew how vulnerable they were in a certain way and I didn't take a shortcut to get them there. He liked that.

There were things about me Al liked that wasn't he thought I was the best artist or the most brilliant or any of that. There was something else. There was some tenacity. There was some stubbornness. There was some –

MS. RICHARDS: Commitment.

MS. PFAFF: Commitment. That might have been it. I hadn't thought of that. I think he could have seen that, yeah, and yeah, yeah, so. So we were buddies from the get-go.

MS. RICHARDS: And how was the experience of being at Yale? You were there for two years?

MS. PFAFF: Two years. I can say that I don't think I would be anywhere without that education, without Al. I had no credibility in terms of lots of things. Having a degree from there got me jobs, got me in, got me – made connections. I did not like being there at all. I think it is a terrible education.

MS. RICHARDS: And why?

MS. PFAFF: Because what you – I mean it was a great education for me because of Al but that's because we hit it off. You're brought in from all over. You're supposed to be the hotshots.

You're given very – a modicum, the spaces are not great that you're given. You hardly – there was really not much of a – no one came in and certainly told you how to paint. It was all critique. You would occasionally bring your paintings down to some –

MS. RICHARDS: They were group critiques or individual critiques?

MS. PFAFF: You would see people. They would come in. Most of the time they either did or didn't. They might say, I like that, try this. It was not – it didn't feel intense, not like what I had imagined. It was competitive.

MS. RICHARDS: Who were the other students who were in your year?

MS. PFAFF: The ones I loved the most and admire the most still, Joe Santore, great, great painter; another guy, an odd duck, interesting, Eric Holzman. There's a guy who's getting some feedback right now who shows at Betty Cunningham named – gosh, how could I, I just dropped his name – it'll come back. Louisa Chase was after that. Haim Steinbach was in my class.

In the class right before me, Gordon Moore was the man I was trying to think – Gordon Moore just shows now. Stanley Whitney is in Philadelphia, fantastic painter, just saw some new work of his, fantastic. But not very many sort of stars. It wasn't like the Chuck Close, the Brice Marden. It wasn't like that.

I think there's only been a few years which that happened. There's a John Currin, Lisa Yuskavage, there was that kind of group. There was this late '60s group, and mine didn't have that kind of – it didn't have a whole – it didn't have a, you know – Joe is figurative. Gordon is abstract, I'm collagist at best. There were others obviously.

MS. RICHARDS: Other than Al, were there instructors, professors who were important to you in some way?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, yeah, I kind of loved Lester Johnson. He was not that kind of articulate in a way but he was very human and had stories and was a gentle man and a wonderful painter. He was wonderful.

He wasn't interested in – the only person who was interested in what I was doing was Al and like I said, not because of he thought the painting – he thought that I had this – one, I had stuff to learn.

He also had been married to Sylvia Stone and Yvonne Rainer and he was very close with Lucy Lippard and Marcia Tucker and he, you know, as tough as he was, he was around a lot of tough women and because I think Sylvia was a sculptor, he also thought that she and other women kind of got short shrift. He was going to go out of his way to fix that but he –

MS. RICHARDS: Sounds like he was – well-respected.

MS. PFAFF: He respected women.

MS. RICHARDS: Wasn't one of these instructors who –

MS. PFAFF: He also was very close – I don't think people knew this very much – with Eva Hesse. They were very

close. Obviously, Sol LeWitt had the most intimate relationship with Eva Hesse. They were – he was kind of a real mentor for her.

But when I met Al kind of as an adult after Yale, I realized that he had a lot of her work in storage for her after she died and he was very close. He really had lots of wonderful stories. I think he also thought in some way that I had something of a – she was a very social and very beautiful and kind of charismatic woman. But he thought I had –

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever meet her?

MS. PFAFF: No, I never met her. I wish I had. But I think he thought I had something of an independence that she had. He referenced her sometimes in relation, you know, if to what I was doing perhaps.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there any – what was the social life like as a graduate student?

MS. PFAFF: I was the social life. I made the parties. I made the soups. I tried to get them to talk. I wasn't social. There was

MS. RICHARDS: You ran the salon.

MS. PFAFF: You went to the bar and got drunk and you were so depressed. There was a kind of hanging out thing that happened and I was like – what was that – Gayle Storm – do you know who Gayle Storm was? She was on some love boat, not *The Love Boat* [1977-1986] but the equivalent [*The Gale Storm Show*, 1956-1960]. What was it called?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. PFAFF: Anyway, she was this social secretary. That's what I felt like. There were no women in my department. I was just me. There was a woman named Joyce Owens, who I'm just in contact with now through Facebook. She was there and she walked because it was dreary. I mean, it was dreary, Judith. It was not a fun place.

Joe thinks I'm remembering this completely wrong. He thinks we had a ball. [Laughs.] I remember complaining terribly that the faculty didn't care, the students weren't talking to each other. The museum was austere. The sculptors had a – they had this fabulous building which was in Hammond Hall which is way on the other side. We were in – we were locked in the Paul Rudolph building, which is my idea of hell. It was like a prison.

I love Gabor Peterdi. He was the printmaking teacher. Gabor loved artists. He loved painters. He didn't – I don't think he liked printmakers as much as he liked painters. He was sort of a – that was his memory of Paris.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you spend some time making prints at Yale?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, sure. Yeah, I taught in the summer of '71. I taught with the printmaking teacher, printmaking at Yale, summer school. So it's two years later I'm back teaching at the summer school at Norfolk.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were n the painting department. You were painting. Did you –

MS. PFAFF: I stopped painting after about six months and starting only doing installations.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, I was going to – what was the transition to installations?

MS. PFAFF: The transition was I was not going to bring something down to that pit that those guys could sit in a row and say it was good or bad. It was like – and we couldn't talk. The students – this was not an open forum.

This was old guys who knew their arguments. It was like insider talk. It's like Bill Bailey, who I'm really good friends with now, really represented and protected the figurative artists. Al was a tough guy, Brooklyn guy who protected the abstract artists. Lester was a dear soul who –

MS. RICHARDS: Who was the head of the department at that point?

MS. PFAFF: It was a film – he was in the film – like right now the head of the department is Rob Storr but he oversees three or four departments. So there was no particular head.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, the head of the painting department.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah. Arthur, not Arthur. Andrew Forge.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were there?

MS. PFAFF: No, no but he was – he had a handle on – because he was a painter, he had affections for the painting department. So he would be involved in that. When I was there, I don't remember his name, but he was I think in film.

MS. RICHARDS: So you gradually were doing installations, which is what you ended – when you had that show at Artists Space [New York City] that's what you did.

MS. PFAFF: Absolutely, Artist Space, and right before then I had done one at Razor Gallery [New York City], which is a nonprofit place.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that – so just stepping back for a second. So you finished Yale, unless there's something more you wanted to talk out there.

MS. PFAFF: No, no more.

MS. RICHARDS: And you immediately move to New York?

MS. PFAFF: I do.

MS. RICHARDS: And where did you live when you first came to New York?

MS. PFAFF: I drove – you know, I have always had a truck. I've always had a dog. So my truck and me, the same one that I drove to Yale with, I'm driving into New York City. I don't know where I'm going to sleep the night. I don't know where any of this stuff is. I don't think I did.

I'm driving by. One of my students in one of the classes that I TA'ed [Teacher Assisted] for with Robert Reed was a guy named Dennis Kardon. Now, Dennis really liked me, really liked Al, and he was, you know, a really brilliant undergraduate.

So my truck had a – it looked like a Conestoga wagon. It had an awning over the back. I'd cut off the back. It had zippers. I had rollup things. It was like *The Beverly Hillbillies* [1962-1971]. I had got dogs, I had things.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you imagine that if you drove and not knowing that you would sleep in your truck? I mean that was your fallback?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, absolutely, it always was.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. PFAFF: So I think I was driving down West Broadway. Al lived on West Broadway. So I knew –

MS. RICHARDS: In the same building as Alex Katz?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, Al found that building. He owned – the ground floor was always rented out. The second floor was Al's. The third floor was maybe it was Alex or [Stephen] Antonakos or you know, Lucy Lippard had the place.

She lived over there. I mean so it was the first artist building. It was pink. I loved that. It was at West Broadway and Prince Street, so beautiful. There was a bodega across the street. It was cool.

So I'm driving down West Broadway. Bark Frameworks was on West Broadway and he was moving from his shop on West Broadway to his place which was underneath Paula Cooper [gallery] on Worcester Street.

So somehow Dennis knew Jed Bark. I'm driving down. I see him. We're like, hello Judy, hello Dennis, how you doing, what you doing. So I got a job that day within an hour of driving. I moved. I had a truck. So I could move.

MS. RICHARDS: You got a job at the framers?

MS. PFAFF: At the framers, but I was also moving stuff. I could – I was just – I had this truck. I don't know – and where all my stuff went.

MS. RICHARDS: Moving stuff you mean for the framer you were moving?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, moving the stuff for the framer. I don't know where all my stuff was. Maybe it was in storage. I don't know. But anyway, I helped him move his stuff and then he hired me to work in his frame shop. We had – this is in late May, early June, just finished school.

MS. RICHARDS: Right after graduating, yeah.

MS. PFAFF: So in September, the shop had –

MS. RICHARDS: Seventy-three.

MS. PFAFF: The shop had to be up and running. He was framing everything for all the galleries, all the galleries being Paula Cooper, [Leo] Castelli, whatever was down there then, not very many, Cunningham Ward [ph], Holly [Solomon] actually didn't have a gallery then. There were very few galleries. But Jed Bark was the, and always has been, the framer.

There were three people at the time. There was Jed Bark, James Barth, and myself. I worked there about a year but I also had a teaching job at Queens College [NY], which was through Al. Al was very close to Louis Finkelstein, who was this amazing crazy wonderful brilliant guy who was always at war with Gabriel Laderman.

So they're these two Jewish personalities complaining to each other. Louis was very wild and wild, intellectually wild. He loved ideas and stuff. He was a realist but he liked the world of ideas, or as Al used to say, i-dee-ers, i-dee-ers [ph].

So Al told Louis, like get this girl a job. She's going to be a good teacher. Just see what you can do. I was offered that time a real position at Rhode Island School of Design. But I was offered – because that as the nature of Yale, there was Bernard Chaet was my teacher.

We weren't that close but he was sort of the guy who sort of knew the lay of the land in a way in the academic world, what jobs were opening up. He had the connections with placing people in a certain way and like I said, in my class I was the only woman.

So there was – it was fortuitous in that suddenly there was interest in getting –

MS. RICHARDS: You had to hire, yeah.

MS. PFAFF: You had to hire a woman. You should hire a woman. So I was offered quite a few jobs. I decided to take none of them and to take my shot at New York City.

I go to New York City. I get this job with Bark Frameworks.

MS. RICHARDS: And where did you end up living at that point?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, I guess I – what was his name? I had his name. Damn. Lembeck, John Lembeck, had been a student at Yale and had taught at Yale and he lived on Grand Street and he and his wife and his child had me – I could stay there for a couple weeks.

So I had a place to crash. I had this job and there was a restaurant, very famous, the only restaurant in SoHo called Food and there was a bulletin board on Food and, you know, you have to understand in this building there was Bark Frameworks, the first floor was Paula Cooper Gallery, Gordon Matta lived upstairs. Neff, Jeffrey Neff, I think his name, he was a curator. Neff was his last name.

MS. RICHARDS: John Neff.

MS. PFAFF: John Neff, Jed Bark lived in this building. Jed Bark's girlfriend was Trisha Brown. You know, across the street lived Christopher Wilmarth, Mark di Suvero. I mean, the whole art world, dancers with the Judson Church were cooks, Bob Kushner.

MS. RICHARDS: Did Food open then? Food was open when you first came in '73?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah, I don't know. It must have just opened. I don't think it was open very much earlier than that. So my world was perfect. Also, the Broome Street Bar had been there – I don't know how long it had been there, existed. That was it. You could go in and then I was teaching one or two classes at Queens College.

So all of this stuff is perfect, John Lembeck is with Razor Gallery. He has a show there. He asks me if I want to do something in the backroom, an installation. I say yes. From that moment on, I meet Elizabeth Murray, Joel Shapiro.

MS. RICHARDS: From Razor Gallery?

MS. PFAFF: At Razor Gallery. We were all drinking and eating at Magoo's. Magoo's was my kind of place.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a tab because a lot of artists talk about that.

MS. PFAFF: No, I never did. No, I never had a tab there. I'm not good at like – I don't make little objects or I don't make things. So I could never figure out how to do that. Like everybody, there was – who was it. Everybody had refrigerators and stoves from this one guy.

MS. RICHARDS: Lewis.

MS. PFAFF: Lewis.

MS. RICHARDS: Sydney Lewis.

MS. PFAFF: Sydney Lewis. I never had a refrigerator or stove from Sydney Lewis. I sort of – I always worked. I never knew how to sort of make a deal. I'm not good at making a deal.

So you always hung out some place. There was always a bar. There were parties. John Chamberlain had the whole ground floor off of West Broadway that went all the way through to Wooster. There was stuff – there were parties every Saturday.

MS. RICHARDS: So you felt like you were part of the art world.

MS. PFAFF: Home. No, I didn't think I was part – I thought I was a voyeur. I thought I was someone who was squatting in the art world. Yes, I guess I did. I met Ronnie Bladen, good friends of Al Held. I had a boyfriend who was – what was his name?

Terrence Michael Sullivan. Terry was kind of a wild guy, fun, and he loved – he sings – he used to sing with – well he still does I think with Pete Seeger's group now. He had a wonderful – he's Irish tenor guy and he would hang out and I had a loft that I was building.

Oh and then, oh so in Food –

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, so how did you –

MS. PFAFF: In Food, I'm reading this thing, for rent, loft, right and it was $170, $150. I think I was earning $3.50 an hour. I was at Jed Bark.

MS. RICHARDS: That was good in 1973.

MS. PFAFF: I think it was. It wasn't good.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it was okay.

MS. PFAFF: It was probably minimum wage.

MS. RICHARDS: A little above minimum.

MS. PFAFF: A little above minimum and there was – and the job at Queens College, which also doesn't pay that well. But it was like a beginning and I had the show in '73 at Razor.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was the loft? So you took that loft?

MS. PFAFF: I took it and I built it.

MS. RICHARDS: And where was it?

MS. PFAFF: 88 Grand Street, G-R-A-N-D, Grand. It's real close to where Jeffrey Deitch is and all that stuff. There was a bodega across the street. It was really – I had seven huge windows. I did the plumbing. I was always living with somebody so there was always – Miko, Miko Sopic, where was he from – Yugoslavia.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Sopic?

MS. PFAFF: S-O-P-I-C, helped me build the bathroom, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: And your studio was there in that space?

MS. PFAFF: And my studio was there.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's after the – or around the same time you had the show at Razor.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I had that studio when I did Razor.

MS. RICHARDS: And what did you put in – I haven't seen a picture of what that looked like, the work you had in Razor.

MS. PFAFF: I think it must have looked – I can tell you. I can describe it. It was very minimal, meaning that the walls were painted. No, they were probably spackled like a creamy whitish, grayish thing. It was all made out of structures which cast lots of shadows. So there was kind of a putting something up, watching where the shadow fell, building off of that, adding some more paint.

It was very linear. It probably had lots of rubber bands, sticks. It probably had a kind of Johnsian [Jasper Johns] aspect in terms of that kind of painterly– yeah, flattish, not deep for sure. But I have a good hand. I had – when I graduated from Yale I actually got the painting prize from Yale.

So I think it was always sort of understood that I could do things. I have a good hand. So of course, Al used to say, "It's great, now you're using rubber bands. You could draw this," you know what I mean? So it sort of upset him for a long time that I wasn't painting. He thought that was a real loss.

But with that, with Terry, this loft, doing this stuff – oh, also I was in the '75 [Whitney Museum of American Art] Biennial.

MS. RICHARDS: Wait, before that –

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, at Artists Space. Okay, so Al got me the job at Queens, which I didn't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. PFAFF: Al got me the job – the show at Artist Space was Irving Sandler's space. That's where I met Irving. You've got to understand, I was picking up major people, not even knowing how cool they were, you know, and in the center of it.

Gordon was just a guy who lived upstairs who was totally cute and did great stuff. You know, and there were lots of characters. Ron Gorchov was around then, Charlemagne Palestine, lots of dancers, lots of dancers. Trisha, Simone Forti, the Judson Church stuff, lots of performances.

MS. PFAFF: Were there certain people who you were particularly close to who you exchanged studio visits with?

MS. RICHARDS: I fantasized about a lot of people. I probably – no, I'm not that social. I'm social sort of– you can ask Dale [Chihuly], like all my friends will say, oh I'm having a studio, and I'm thinking, oh, oh.

I don't usually do that. I don't have a lot of – groups will come through if there's someone will say like, please do this, it would be good. But they kind of come in and out. I'm not that –

MS. RICHARDS: Even when you were younger that's still the same?

MS. PFAFF: Even when I was younger it wasn't a part of my thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Because it's a normal evolution, most artists as you get older, you don't have that.

MS. PFAFF: You don't have that, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had that show at Artists Space.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, major.

MS. RICHARDS: And what kind of attention, what kind of recognition did that receive – or what did that change?

MS. PFAFF: Actually, quite a lot, but do you know in 40 years, do you know how many reviews I've gotten in *Artforum*? None. Things, but reviews, like this much.

MS. RICHARDS: Small.

MS. PFAFF: Small, two. One was for that show and one was a few years ago and you know why, because I was – Knight Landesman who runs *Artforum*, who I love, I love him. I love the way he looks and everything he does and he came into the show and I just said, "You know –

MS. RICHARDS: The show at –

MS. PFAFF: Longtown [ph], a few years ago, and I just said, "Knight, I can't believe after 40 years, I can't even get a review in *Artforum*." So I think I still wouldn't have gotten another review.

I think I made – I think he sort of ding, ding, ding, ding, ding and just did that because we've been friends all these years. But anyway, so that review was written by Tom Lawson, who runs [California Institute of the Arts], and I thought it was a terrible review. I was in tears.

I didn't know – you know, Tom Lawson is basically a conceptual artist. He's of the Richard Prince, Sherry Levine–

MS. RICHARDS: Right, the Pictures Generation.

MS. PFAFF: Pictures Generation.

I was making things, which really put me in another camp. They thought it was interesting that they didn't have the language to talk about that work nor were they interested in finding that language.

But I think he thought it was like fun. These words have been kind of – I'm thinking, I'm the least fun person I know, like, I'm always working. I'm always sort of in a quandary. I'm always figuring out how I can afford to do this, eking out some stuff, wondering whether it's nonsense or sense. I'm not just –

MS. RICHARDS: So he made a dismissive kind of comment?

MS. PFAFF: A terribly dismissive. He thought they were compliments.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you speak to him at the time about it or is this only later?

MS. PFAFF: I called him. I said, "What the fuck? [Laughs] You're an artist. I'm an artist. You know no one does things in this cavalier like way, like who's going to do that?" I was mortified. I've never heard from him since and I will never do that again no matter what anyone says. Holly used to say to me, it's always business.

So if someone says to you, "What do you think of", it could be – and you just say, lovely, excellent work, terrific, like please don't tell them what you think. It'll come back to burn you. You don't know.

So now even if someone – and I've gotten some – I've never gotten the reviews like I dream of. Like I just want them to say –

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, Roberta Smith has been absolutely –

MS. PFAFF: She's been good to me but I remember Roberta Smith differently than other people. She's full of qualifiers with me. Like she says wonderful things but it'– when Roberta loves you or she really sings your praises, it's extraordinary. She's so smart and so good. She likes me, no, I don't think – I don't know if she likes me.

She respects the work. She takes it very seriously. It's not her cup of tea. I can read that between the lines. But she's, thank god for Roberta Smith because she really legitimized a lot of work. She did.

She also did a few – we were kind of – we were never close. I can't say that. But we shared a room together in Japan. She suggested that I be in this big, big show that was in Japan, which was a very important show for me.

So she's actually done a lot of things but we have no, no – I'm always putting my foot in my mouth if I – I always think she thinks I'm going to ask for something. I'm never going to ask for something, you know. We have – there's no rapport. There really has never – and I don't know why because I admire her writing so much and she's the only one I listen to.

In her writing when she evaluates things, sometimes she'll sort of nail it, like nail a show and I think, oh my god, I thought I was the only person who had that thought. So I like that she's such an intellectual and she knows her stuff and she can write like crazy. So I'm very pleased. But no, she doesn't cotton to me and my work that much. I think she respects it.

MS. RICHARDS: Since we're talking about criticism, let me ask you a couple of other questions on that subject. Have there been any instances where writers have drawn really the wrong conclusions and you want to set the record straight now?

MS. PFAFF: I think my work has always lent itself to descriptive– descriptions. It's made of this, it's very colorful, da-da-da, and it's full, full of all that stuff, and actually they usually name most of the materials wrong.

I thought there's some stuff – I don't have the language for it. But I think it's involved with sort of trying to keep

up with evolving as a human being. So there are moments when you're involved with relationships. There are moments when you're involved with landscape. There are moments when you're involved with like trying to figure out this or that and I think it's very in tune with my own sense of who I am, what my thoughts are, and trying to keep up with that.

So it's a kind of diaristic in that way. But also everybody goes through the same, you know. I used to say at 40 everybody wants a garden. You know, I mean, when you're 20 you're always pissed off because that's your job. When you're 30 you do this. At 60 you do this. But I also think it's – I don't want anything to be owned. I want things to be experiential. I want them to be not good, not bad, just all of the –

MS. RICHARDS: So criticism doesn't –

MS. PFAFF: It doesn't go down and I haven't – it's my fault I have not developed the language to get it there. Like, I'm not easy with –

MS. RICHARDS: Why would you say it's your fault not to have developed critical language?

MS. PFAFF: Because part of my job is to be able to articulate it better.

MS. RICHARDS: Really? Do you think that's –

MS. PFAFF: I think so. I think so. It's sort of this thing. You know me enough. It's like if I don't want to answer something, I sort of deflect. I go somewhere. I get nervous. I'll jump subjects. I'll sort of try to derail that. Also, a lot of it just sounds like narcissism, elevating it too much. I don't know if it is that. So there's an embarrassments with the language.

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe it isn't your job to do that.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Has there been a substantial or noticeable difference between the response of critics, not just the superficial descriptive part, of critics in the U.S. versus elsewhere, in Asia or in Europe?

MS. PFAFF: It's only been in America.

MS. RICHARDS: You haven't – you didn't get criticism for your shows in Japan or in Europe?

MS. PFAFF: No, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Well that's interesting.

MS. PFAFF: In the early days, for the longest time I was getting a lot of press. It always sold me as – you know when Kenny Scharf and Keith Haring and all the young graffiti kids, they did have a good time. They were what they thought I was. They used everything and it was part of their lifestyle. It was part of their whole community. It was the music. It was everything.

Mine is not like that. I worry. I would – half the time I would be – I might be sick doing these installations or I wanted them to be very, very – let's say the one in the Whitney which let's say was in '81. It was called *Dragon*.

I was in Brooklyn [NY]. Life was sort of a mess. I was not sleeping, not eating, and I wanted – this felt like it was as close to – not a nervous breakdown, nothing like that – an angst ridden, full of memories, like stories of early London, being cold and all sorts of going up in smoke in a certain way.

So it was intense and I was sick as a dog doing it and it got written about as like an explosion in a glitter factory or something. It's like what are they looking at? One, there is no glitter. It is so organized. It's so handmade. Nothing is – I didn't get that stuff off the street and glue it up and throw it on the wall. It was all very – and these are things I don't even value that much anymore. If I had found it and glued it on the wall I would think that was cool too. It's just that it wasn't that.

So it never – I don't know – and I've been able to do this my whole life, is I can make something not painful, even if it is painful. It's a talent I have to sort of deflect, to sort of give you enough other things, enough noise that you can't hear it.

There's something that I won't get – you know when someone says, this is about that, if you can say that sentence and you know what it's about, you can probably make that object pretty specific and you might even be able to get to that place. I get there through circuitous means. I can't get you there direct.

I'll have to move you through more events because life isn't like that. It's never one thing. It always has these – not just variants but sort of, you know, there's always noise. There's always a phone ringing, a cat jumping. There's always a memory that sparks. But ultimately this today will have a sensation about it.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RICHARDS: So the other question I had about criticism you already answered. I said I was going to ask, but just to make sure, how do you react to negative criticism? Have you ever responded? So you said once, once you responded. [They laugh.]

MS. PFAFF: Once, and that was it.

MS. RICHARDS: And it sounds like negative criticism is very painful.

MS. PFAFF: It's painful, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And positive criticism?

MS. PFAFF: I don't take it seriously. Isn't that terrible?

Yeah because it doesn't – I always wanted to have someone enlighten me, you know, and to take me into a world I hadn't been through. Not criticism but like some way, some analogy, some insight into – not it –

MS. RICHARDS: And that's never happened?

MS. PFAFF: It probably has but I'm not a good reader. So I might not even hear it if it has happened.

Actually, it's funny. There was a fellow. He is a great writer. His name is John Yau. He doesn't like me. He won't even talk to me and I don't know why. He's kind of a difficult guy, wrote something. Ingrid Sischy who was for Artforum wanted to do something for me and I didn't know what to do and she said– she was going to send this young writer over. His name is John Yau and it was just –

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember when this was?

MS. PFAFF: It was in *Artforum*. It wasn't a review. It was just a conversation.

MS. RICHARDS: No, I mean how long ago this was.

MS. PFAFF: It was probably in mid-'80s maybe, early.

And I called Holly and I said, "This is so exciting. Ingrid Sischy is going to send this guy, his name is John Yau, to the studio." And Holly said, "Oh my god, John was the boyfriend of Rachel Stella, Frank Stella's daughter," and she said, "I don't know if they've broken up but I don't think he liked Frank or they had difficulties and just be careful."

So of course he walks in the door and I say, "hi John, I know you're going to think this looks exactly like Frank Stella," [laughs] and you know I'm like – and I'm just like – let me replace one foot with another. I mean, I was so bad. He didn't ask me anything. I didn't tell him anything.

What he wrote was one of the prettiest things. It didn't have anything to do with anything, thank God, of what I said or what I did and it was – the opening – the name of his thing was called *Arc of the Diver*, something like that and it was all sort of abstracted. I thought it was just totally cool, in spite of what I had done, you know?

So that was as close to my idea of – oh, also Linda Nochlin wrote something, which I actually really, really liked, really liked. She was reading the stuff that was coming out about me and it always talked about chaos. But it wasn't chaos in terms of like the grand chaos of a Jackson Pollock.

It was kind of the woman's chaos, like as in hysteria. So she was trying to kind of come to terms with the way women are seen when they do things which are random or chaotic or you know, spontaneous, or –

[END CD 2.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Pfaff on January 27, 2010, in Kingston, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

So Judy, we were talking about Linda Nochlin.

MS. PFAFF: We were talking about Linda Nochlin. I think Holly Solomon hired Linda Nochlin to write an essay for

a show and I think she chose her knowing that she was sort of a feminist writer, tough mind, good mind, astute.

Linda wrote some things which I had never thought about because I was complaining a little bit about how kind of dismissed my work was intellectually or critically but lauded a little bit because of its color or its, you know, an aspect of its looseness or installation-ishness. So I think she wanted someone who was a scholar and so she chose Linda Nochlin. Linda Nochlin –

MS. RICHARDS: That's a heater, right? The buzz that we're hearing?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, and you want that buzz to stay on. Otherwise you'll really be cold.

So Linda took on – she was reading the way my work was described and she sort of went on this route to like the way men's work is described and the way women's work is described. She used Jackson Pollock as the measure.

When he was doing these wildly loose and open-ended and chaotic drip works, it was considered powerful, taking on the devils. It was heroic. It was mythic. It was handling the demons. When women do it, it was always seen as a little hysterical and kind of loose-brained and kind of emotional but unstructured.

So she said basically with the same devices used in some of say, a work of yours, and some of the compositional principles that might be in a Jackson Pollock, the language shifts. There's the male good language and there's like the wimpy female language.

That interested me because when I said about this thing with Tom Lawson, like how could he take this thing which was very serious and just throw it away as sort of being like fun loving, loosey-goosey, curious, but light, light. So that helped me sort of understand there really were different ways.

One, I do think there's a female sensibility and I do think I did things much differently than most anybody, male or female, and Jackson Pollock in particular, but similar, trying to grapple with things which are unnamed had this other language connected to it.

And so she was the first one who ever sort of articulated that and I found that – it wasn't about me as much as it was that these overarching reaching ways of understanding different kinds of, the male-female stuff.

So that I liked a lot and that was solid intellectual stuff. It was solid. So that was – and that's a long time ago, yeah.

But at the time, I needed it because I thought in a funny way that I was dealing with some stuff which was epic and grappling with things which seemed important, life – not life and death so much but good and evil or hot and cold or here and there or male and female or whatever it was.

They were big ideas and they were always being reduced to this throwaway work.

MS. RICHARDS: It's interesting you just talked about these dichotomies because your work has been discussed in some cases, nature-culture, inside-outside, which does indicate that people are seeing.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, seeing that.

MS. RICHARDS: That it's an enormous, ambitious project that you have.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you are trying to put all of it all of it in there.

MS. PFAFF: All of the above in there, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to the work that you were doing late '70s, you very quickly moved beyond the walls that you had in Artists Space into the room.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And do you recall what issues, what ideas, what questions you were asking at that point that brought your work out into space and then to a much more physical reality rather than the more conceptual or intellectual concepts that you had on the walls?

MS. PFAFF: There were two big moves. I was teaching at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts], 1976 to 1979. There I decided I should learn to make real things. They had a couple shops there. There was the "wonder shop" and whatever the other name of the other – but they were not really being used for much of anything

besides fixing motorcycles. It was a conceptual arts school.

So there were all of these welders and woodworking tools and technicians and I thought I should learn to weld. I should learn to do joinery of some sort. So there was a moment –

MS. RICHARDS: At that point, sorry for interrupting, but at that point you're really thinking of yourself more as a sculptor?

MS. PFAFF: I wanted to be a sculptor. I did not want to be a painter. I thought the ideas of painting I could bring into sculpture.

You know, at the time, sculpture – actually forever, as long as I've been an artist, the world is really – the strong – the look of art, the forms of it was really based around conceptual art and minimalism. They still – they were the reigning kings there, then. They're the reigning kings now. It's always been that way.

So when the guys were talking about mass, truth, materials, process, da-da-da, it was always brown. It was always gray. It was always white. It was always white. It was usually square. It was usually in the middle of the room, kind of having a presence. None of those things interested me. As a matter of fact, they disinterested me.

So my argument was against Richard Serra, was against Donald Judd, not against but if they believed in that and that looked like art, I thought the other should – it didn't make any sense to me that things had to be terrifying and absorb your sight, your gaze, that it made you look at it.

I hated that notion. I still – you know, when – if something is too in front of me, I just go blank. I don't like the feeling. So I thought, let's see, sculpture is about your signature material. I thought that was a crock of shit.

So it just meant that if you happen to use, you know, polyester resin first, no one could ever use that again without having to sort of nod to you? It would be as silly as having oil paint be only Piero della Francesca, or actually it's Francesco [sic], but whoever it was, [Jan] Van Eyck.

So that ownership of the sculptors, when they were about in the '70s and the '70s, I didn't like it. so I thought that it –and it also, all the materials were not only expensive that they were using, you know, polishing metal kilometers and bearing them, you know, or I mean, even fluorescent tubing seemed expensive to me.

So I like the idea of having – being a sculptor, leaning about materials and adding the ingredients of painting, color, space, illusion, an overall field, a kind of foreground, middle ground, background, whatever were the components of painting, I thought they were useful and could be the same language as in sculpture.

Now you have to understand, in those days not only was abstraction a separate language and figuration a separate language, but sculpture was its own. You could do anything in sculpture. You weren't pulled down by the same history. Now why, I don't know. It's always been sort of looser and maybe not taken as seriously as painting because all the theories seem to be hooked on painting.

So I liked that. So I was at war with all that minimalism and conceptual art and the turf that was dominated at that moment by mostly guys, the men, and I love that work now, not some of it, but I can see it. I don't know why. It looked like the devil to me.

It looked like stuff that stopped the imagination, stopped– you couldn't make a mistake on how you looked at it. This is what it is. This is how you're supposed to see it. This is the language about it. There was no freedom. You couldn't play. There was no playfulness there. You couldn't like –

MS. RICHARDS: It was domineering

MS. PFAFF: It was domineering, you know, and if you walked into a gallery and you stepped on the wrong thing or touched something that shouldn't be touched or didn't touch something that should've been touched, you had made a mistake. There was kind of a testing ground and you sort of a lost a little bit.

So I really wanted – I did think and still think that the work should be really more generous and without reading the book, you should be able to feel like you can experience it. I like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you inspired by certain references to this kind of all-encompassing work? I mean, it could be Kurt Schwitters or [Edward] Keinholz.

MS. PFAFF: Oh I love that, Keinholz, I think that that's something that I've always had. I love my teachers. I love my mentors. I love my influences. I think we're family. If someone says, "Do you like Frank Stella?" I think, yeah, yeah. "Do you like [Alexander] Calder?" It's like, no shit, you know like – anyone, Schwitters, my

favorite, you know, I don't know why I can't remember his name, who is married to – he's a French welder, destructive machines.

MS. RICHARDS: ?

MS. PFAFF: Tinguely and even that name, it's like it's so brilliant. It's a perfect name for him. He's perfect. Look at – if you look at these books on Tinguely, what he did, mindboggling. He was so out there.

Do you know we installed in 1981 in a show called "Westkunst" and he was fixing his sculptures. He was the only – between he and I and Jon Borofsky, we were the only guys working as far as I could see. I love that work.

I like it. It's family. I need them.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel like in a way they were giving you permission to –

MS. PFAFF: I don't think of it like that because I'm sort of – it's only later I think well yeah, I would have learned from that or of course, but when I'm doing things I'm really just going from problem to problem, day to day, stupid problem solving, logistics, pragmatic things. So I'm not very – I'm not very high-falutin. I can get that way later on after it's all done and I can reflect on that or think about that.

I do think there are lots of things that I learned from – it might have been early Lynda Benglis when she was pouring paint on the floor. It might have been, oh, Alan Serat, oh, oh, my God, I just thought was – because he used to make sculpture that only was air balls.

There was no there, there. it was like this fabulous – and I thought he was brilliant, even though these people are not that much older than me – Joan Snyder was a painter who I could see it better than I could other kinds of painting. It resonated to me. I think because it's so emotional and the color is so – there was such a vocabulary.

It was like you want it thin, you want it thick, you want it here and there, you want sequence, you want – sort of felt like there was algebra or math, adding, subtracting. There was all kinds of stuff going on, so it had enough sort of stuff in there. There are lots of things I like. I like lots of stuff but I can't remember exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: And so at that time in CalArts.

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: You were using circles?

MS. PFAFF: No, I was doing figures. I was doing these figures.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh yes, so you really wanted to go against the rules.

MS. PFAFF: All of the figures, I really, and I remember when I was doing these figures it's like Al is going to kill me now because even though they were kind of constructivist figurative things, they were in fact figures and in fact every figure I made had a name.

This was for Richard Armstrong. This was for Mike Kelley. This was for my boyfriend. This was my – you know, this person, that – everyone I knew who they were.

If I knew who they were I knew what they would be made out of. Richard Armstrong would be made out of rock maple because he's Gothic and he's sort of Americana and he's curiously American Gothic in certain ways, kind of a tough character, not tough, brilliant.

MS. RICHARDS: So these were in a way portraits?

MS. PFAFF: They were portraits. They were all portraits. So I thought – and I always do that. It's like I will only make something if I sort of know what it is. If I know what – so there isn't a lot of sort of abstraction going on because they really have names and places and meanings and references and stuff like that and that was a time I was in my 30s, early 30s.

I wanted to one, learn how to weld and make things and the iconography was very essential to me because I had been so busy that I'd forgotten how to be a friend. I wanted to evaluate my relationships. It was like looking at my friends, my peers, everyone around me and kind of honoring – not honoring them, it wasn't that. But it was locating them and thinking about them.

So during the moments I was making a certain piece, that person would sort of be in my mind. It was a nice way to be close in a way and I needed at that time to do that. I stopped that after – I think it was a couple of years I

just completely stopped that.

MS. RICHARDS: There was a show you did at the Neuberger [Museum, SUNY, Purchase, NY].

MS. PFAFF: The Neuberger, that had evolved. So they weren't personal persons anymore. They were sort of – I made stuff–

MS. RICHARDS: Seventy-nine.

MS. PFAFF: That was '79. There was stuff that might reference African art. There were some – I made a couple of –

MS. RICHARDS: Was that because of the collection of African art at the Neuberger?

MS. PFAFF: A little bit, yeah, a little bit that. I did some stuff where there was even some religious – there were a couple of angels in that. They might be on the floor. You might not recognize them.

So it wasn't a person but sort of a signifier. There were these figures that I made were made out of fluorescent plastics and you could see through them. So they really had this – it was almost sort of like the Three Graces or something. There was a kind of rotating overlap of color. I don't think people saw these things.

But anyway, I sort of knew what I was doing because they were tableaux within tableaux. So it wasn't one person. It was like – this person now stood for something else.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that at CalArts, where you were working against the grain for sure, spurred your work on? I mean, you could have been in a friendlier environment, so to speak, to do what you were doing. Yet you did it there and you stayed there three years by going against the grain all the time.

MS. PFAFF: Absolutely, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So why do you think that was?

MS. PFAFF: I think I'm – I think I don't pay attention a lot of times or you know – do you remember that [Franz] Kafka story called *A Hunger Artist* [short story first published in German literary journal *Die Neue Rundschau* in 1922]? Have you ever – when at the end as he's being sort of – they said, "Well, why didn't you eat?" And I think he said, "I couldn't find anything I liked." So it wasn't this noble, passionate – it was something really stupid.

Sometimes I might be like that, like I think I'm fighting these wars or doing, going against this guy or this thing or this – but really I just can't – I just can't do that stuff anyway. So I do what I do. So right now I don't have many rationalizations for sort of why I do things. It sort of feels very –

MS. RICHARDS: Was that to be three years, at CalArts? Was it supposed to be three years?

MS. PFAFF: No, I think I was supposed to be only one year. I went back and forth. I liked California. I liked teaching there actually. I actually – oh, I got a job at Yale. That's right. That's why I came back. I needed to come back to take care of my loft. I had gotten this loft from Richard Serra.

MS. RICHARDS: So that was in the '70s?

MS. PFAFF: I had that loft from – I have pictures of it. I had a party on the roof of that loft on the fifth floor in 1976. That was the year of the tall ships.

On that rooftop party, it breaks my heart now, there was Elizabeth Murray, Joel [Shapiro] with his baby at that time, Amy, Ronnie Bladen, Al Held, Michael Herzon, many, half of them, three-quarters of them are dead and some were young, some were not so– some sort of died from natural – Barbara Schwartz was there. That was in '76.

MS. RICHARDS: What address was that?

MS. PFAFF: It still is 319 Greenwich Street from '76 to I still have it. But that's when I moved in.

MS. RICHARDS: That was a place you lived and worked?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I got it from Richard Serra and I then got the job at CalArts. So I was there only a few months. His assistant, Tom Bills, who's also an artist, was there. He stayed there. Other people, I just saw them again, this group of Australian guys, moviemakers, Tim Burns – no, yeah, that's his name. Who's the

filmmaker that does stuff now; Burns is his name, Ken Burns.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, Ken.

MS. PFAFF: His name was Tim Burns. So I kept getting evicted because Richard [Serra] wasn't paying the rent and there was a whole – it was just terrible. So I was flying back and forth and after three years of – I'd do a semester, I'd come back, I'd put out all the fires, go back to – this was the job that was paying the rent for this place.

It was a mess and everything was being stolen. It was a terrible – it was terrible. It was freezing. There was no heat. Then the rent went up and I had to divide it. That was – everybody has these stories.

MS. RICHARDS: At some point you bought it?

MS. PFAFF: No, no. I still only pay rent there. But I put a lot of time. We ran all the electricity. We did the plumbing. We did the roofing, all of it. It was major. But that's when this tiny art world, I had a view of Art on the Beach [Creative Time program from 1978-1985], I had a view of the West Side highway. It was a lot of – and that was the beginning of sort of Tribeca. The bar changed from Magoo's to Barney's and that was the place.

Richard used to hang out there, Tony Shafrazi, John Torreano, a lot of younger artists. It was kind of a hip downtown scene. For a while Martine Scorsese lived in one of the places, you know, [Robert] De Niro, The Odeon [Restaurant], that was the years of the early Odeon. That started in '80, '81. But it was a pretty happening place.

So I got a job at Yale. I was hired to teaching painting at Yale.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you end up having the show at the Neuberger? That was a very significant show for you at that time.

MS. PFAFF: Totally. That's because I had a show six years earlier at Artists Space. The Neuberger show was "Where Are They Now." All the artists that showed, or many of the artists that showed in the early days of Artists Space, this was curated also by Irving Sandler. So my friends – you know, I stay – if someone can sort of put up with me, we actually stay friends for quite a long time.

So Irving, I got introduced to Irving by Al Held, who suggested me for this show. From that show I got into the Whitney Biennial in 1981. I was in 1975, 1981 and then '87 actually.

MS. RICHARDS: So that work you did that you showed at the Neuberger, as you were saying, had figures and each figure was actually a portrait of an individual.

MS. PFAFF: It had figures. Yeah and it was this huge room.

MS. RICHARDS: And they were theatrical kinds of elements.

MS. PFAFF: Very theatrical.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was – could have been an issue that you were – a statement that you were making in terms of art criticism and critical theory against the theatrical.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, against all of that, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So were you consciously challenging that idea?

MS. PFAFF: I was consciously trying to get this show finished and made. It was in a space that was 100 feet by 50 feet with 30-foot ceilings. That is a huge volume. I've never had that big a volume.

MS. RICHARDS: That's the space they still have at the center with the stone floors.

MS. PFAFF: That's right, auspicious, black ceiling. That is all theater, it's lit by theater lights.

I hired a guy, I'm forgetting his name, he's a really cool guy who worked for the Big Apple Circus and lit rock shows. So I brought him in.

I was lost with how to light this show. Handling that many, and also that huge volume was being held together by sticks, sticks. It wasn't – there was no mass in this show. It was all linear. It was all color, sticks. I mean, some of them are 20, 30 feet long but nonetheless sticks.

So to hold the narrative together, to make it work– he was English. I will remember his name. He was so lovely

and he lived downtown and someone gave me his name and he came up and taught me so much about lighting. That show was really probably one of the things that held it together was how good the lighting was in there. It was very specific.

But that was a major – that's when I got Holly Solomon, you know. I mean, Holly Solomon, I could have had four or five dealers. One moment I had nothing. Then the phone was ringing and that happens to a lot of people. You'll hear that story again and again and again. There's a moment – it's sort of like there's some zeitgeist that sort of happens. Everybody gets the same idea at the same time.

MS. RICHARDS: So even though she wasn't seeing saleable objects.

MS. PFAFF: Holly never thought like that. She thought, oh, oh, they weren't saleable objects but Charles Saatchi wanted to buy it.

MS. RICHARDS: The whole installation?

MS. PFAFF: He didn't see that. He saw parts of it. There was a small gallery called Eugenia Cucalon and I made some different scaled pieces. They were smaller for her space. But he came in and wanted to buy everything there. So I think that there was a buzz about that work. I mean I'm trying to remember now. I was in *Time* magazine with other artists.

You know, it was *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Stern*, and I didn't know this wasn't going to be the way it always was. I was in architectural magazines. There was a little blurb in *Vogue* or you know, I mean whatever it was. I think it was *Vogue*.

But there was something. I made the front cover of *Art News* and it was just an article on 20 people but I'm the one they gave the cover to. So it wasn't – it was like who were the artists to watch or something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: So that obviously inspired the dealers.

MS. PFAFF: That's right. I think that inspired the dealers. But also Al Held had been out at some party in the Hamptons [NY]. He always thought Holly was kind of totally fun and he said to her, "Oh man, do I have a person for you. It's a glove fit. It's a glove fit." So Holly came over to the studio in Brooklyn and it was like a fait accompli.

MS. RICHARDS: I know you had the studio in Brooklyn. When did it happen, because we were just talking about the loft on Greenwich Street?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: When did you get the studio in Brooklyn?

MS. PFAFF: When I had to divide – I lost half – because of all this stuff that happened with the landlord, my space became half that space and the rent went up and it's a five-floor walkup. The people below me had babies. The people in back of me had babies. It was like the whole place had –you kind of couldn't –

MS. RICHARDS: What floor did you have or do you have?

MS. PFAFF: Fifth floor, top floor.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so a fifth-floor walkup was significant for a sculptor.

MS. PFAFF: For a sculptor. So Tom Bills found a space in Greenpoint [neighborhood in Brooklyn]. I moved out there. The early work that was at Holly's was all made in Greenpoint, not at Williamsburg [neighborhood in Brooklyn]. I rented that space, fixed that space up, and then I was teaching at Yale at the time.

MS. RICHARDS: At one point you – when you were making those works, and maybe this is a question that relates to the present as well, what was your process to start envisioning what the installation would be? I know the space itself inspired you but at the very beginning –

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, well you usually – yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's say at the Neuberger or at Holly's, the first show at Holly's.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, the first show at Holly's, what had happened is this figurative stuff had kind of caught on. There was interest. I did a show in Houston, Texas with Robert Longo, with Lynda Benglis.

MS. RICHARDS: At the Contemporary Art Museum, yeah.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, the Contemporary Art Museum, and it was sort of a failed show. It was called *Charms* [1980]. There weren't any figures in it. I brought – I was going to do something and I just realized it had no meaning to me anymore. I didn't need to make it.

There was no reason for it. It just – everything lost meaning, you now, and here I was in this major show with these hotshots and then I guess I would have been one of those potential hotshots and I drew a blank and I'm down there and most of the stuff is made on-site.

My husband had been sort of a physicist and I remember him talking about physics and I thought –

MS. RICHARDS: Is this David you're talking about?

MS. PFAFF: David, yeah.

So for whatever reason in this interim moment between the figures and this other more landscape sort of oriented work, there was a moment when I just thought it can just be sort of about energy or fission or quarks or charms or some subatomic, some imaginary thing that happens that no one can see but it exists scientists suggest it exists.

So I thought okay, I can work in that world because who can tell. So it was difficult. It failed. I was at my wit's end. I just thought, oh great, I just started and I just finished. This is it. This is the end.

And then for $50 you could go to the Yucatan [Mexico] from Houston. There was a flight.

My assistant, he's a really good fellow. His name was Julius Kozlowski and Julius is very talented. He was good friends with Jon Kessler. They both were at Purchase. So when I was doing the show at Purchase I met Julius and then he came to do this show in Houston.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean you asked him to come? You paid him to be your assistant?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, exactly, he came down, which he loved. It's like he was sort of like hanging out and seeing the world and then we found these tickets and I think we were only there two or three days but we had worked around the clock.

It was like – I mean you know – you've seen that situation. It was desperate, exhausting, interesting, pressured. We flew into Merida, which is this beautiful colonial town in Yucatan and I went snorkeling. We were staying at some, you know, really dive and we went to see all of the pyramids. But that was a moment.

I guess if there was a moment where I just – I got it, like what I was trying to do, what I was at war with, what about the northeast as opposed to the southwest, where there's color and beautiful sand, air, music, plastic, fish, birds, flowers, life, love, you know.

So snorkeling, and there was some quote. I remember just reading a little bit earlier than I went there about [Henri] Matisse talking about water and the qualities of water and a gravity-less field and something like that and when I went snorkeling it was like, oh my god, this total immersion, I love that idea of immersion.

I love that nothing is – things float. It's not in the same – it's this world where gravity is lost and it's beautiful and a little scary, like those moray eels or that thing or that shadow or that shape that you don't – it's fabulously beautiful but you're not – you know you're not a fish. So you're kind of nervous. Everything was in that environment I wanted.

So when I came and I started doing this stuff in Brooklyn and the new studio in Brooklyn I was working on the rooftop and I was weaving all this stuff together. I wanted it to be something about water, something about gravity.

MS. RICHARDS: So you knew you were working for the show at Holly's.

MS. PFAFF: I knew I was working for the show at Holly's. Holly thought I was going to do figures. When she came to the studio, she was like, what is this hippie dippy, basket weaving, whatever. It was totally freaky to her and then she decided that she kind of really liked it.

She loved – a lot of her gallery had a lot of people who were basically spiritual. They were Buddhist. They did sort of lovely work, beautiful work, full of color, full of lots of stuff. But it was painting still basically. It wasn't this other stuff and I think she just needed me to kind of walk her through it, to give her a handle on it.

Holly, she was a great lover of art and artists. She liked personality. She would have – we got on. She would have liked you. But she needed a handle because she had to sell it. So she just loved that it was like kind of unsellable, kind of like if she did happen to sell it that would make her one of the great dealers in the universe. [Laughs] Like if you can sell this you can sell anything, you know.

It was like – what was that Jasper Johns thing when someone said you could sell a tin can, he made the beer. I don't know the story but he made something like that.

So but she ended up kind of when she came back the second time she just fell in love with it but it freaked her out because it wasn't what she thought she was going to get and I think she was used to people having a signature and emblematic thing and it evolved over time.

But this was like it was figures and now it's not. It's nature, like two, and she wanted that. She kind of wanted that Neuberger show in her gallery. That was what she was looking for. So the inspiration for that or the structure for that – when I called that show *Deepwater* [1980] it was really about one, I thought you experienced it as you went across the gallery. I wanted it to feel like you were going down and not across and I knew it had to have things which were obviously really full of color and transparent.

But when I got the stuff in the gallery, it looked lifeless, dead, stupid, because I had been making it on the rooftop where there's wind blowing through everything. It was changing. Everything was moving around, rearranging itself. There are animals. It's raining. It's sunshine. It has all these different realities. You bring it into a gallery. There's one light, you know what I mean? It's a cul-de-sac. Holly's gallery was a cul-de-sac. It was just this dead end place.

So that's when I realized that this stuff had changed its nature and I had to make it work there. So the paining and the installation part of that, it was going to be a thing. I was going to try not to make everyone's life miserable and I just couldn't make it work. So the installation, meaning the site specificness of it, the way the things worked, was just that moment, that time, that place.

But it was driven by this – these kind of mirages and images of the water and not just Mexico. It was that it – Mexico and Yucatan just seemed like it was unencumbered by the kind of levels of criticality that New York had, levels of – you know, people seemed and it's an illusion but if you read sort of [Gabriel Garcia] Marquez or something there's kind of a life happens and it's not – things evolve.

People fall in love. People stab each other. They're not dissecting each other in quite the same way or this is hot, this is not, this is cool – that stuff, I mean I can be enamored by it and certainly I would like to have that. But I don't – I hate it. It's just the way the New York works and the art world works, I mean, if you're drunk enough you don't care.

So it doesn't really matter. But that kind of nastiness and scheming or strategizing, sorry, strategizing, didn't seem – I mean I was a tourist, so what did I know. But it didn't feel like it was the same.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that that has changed, that aspect of the art world has changed since those days?

MS. PFAFF: I think it's more so, even more so. I will go to a party or an event and sit at the table where there might be the head of this museum and there can be five quite young people at the same table or two or three or ten of them and myself and I will be flabbergasted at how much they know, who they know, who they're talking to, how they know how to handle themselves. There's a kind of sophistication –

MS. RICHARDS: You mean artists?

MS. PFAFF: Artists, yeah, artists are extremely sophisticated and they are speaking the same language now. They – you know, anyone who goes to an M.F.A. [Masters of Fine Arts] program now is chockablock full of language and they know what the curators are looking for.

They know how to speak to them. They know how to understand their work relationship. It's very different now. It's very different. But like I say – that was the beginning of the '80s.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. PFAFF: And the '80s, everything that I believed to be true or valued that I thought everybody believed to be true or valued was turned upside down and that has stuck. I was wrong. That has stuck, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Right after that you had your first show in Europe, an installation.

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: In Cologne [Germany] and that was –

MS. PFAFF: Major.

MS. RICHARDS: Major. and the color on the walls, the kind of use of the walls in that way was even more. It went beyond even what you had done at Holly Solomon.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, oh absolutely, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that that was a new direction that you were taking, that you were –

MS. PFAFF: No, I think there was sort of a natural progression of about four or five pieces at that moment.

MS. RICHARDS: And it was called *Ziggurat* [1981]and I wanted to ask you about that.

MS. PFAFF: *Ziggurat.*

MS. RICHARDS: *Ziggurat,* I'm sorry.

MS. PFAFF: I don't know if that title had any meaning. There were two or three or four shows that happened very close to each other. There was the Venice Biennale piece which was called *Either War* [1982].

MS. RICHARDS: There was an installation at the Hirshhorn.

MS. PFAFF: There was an installation at the Hirshhorn which was called *Formula Atlantic*.

MS. RICHARDS: What about *Kabuki* [1981]?

MS. PFAFF: Oh yeah, I'm sorry, that's *Kabuki*. It was. I had all the pieces. I lost them going down there and I remade this thing so the title changed.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, my god.

MS. PFAFF: So the title in the book says one thing and the title when I was there was another. I lost all the – it literally blew off the trailer in on the truck in a snowstorm between New York City and Washington, D.C. [District of Columbia], yeah, yeah, true story.

MS. RICHARDS: Wow.

MS. PFAFF: And then there was the piece at "Westkunst" in Cologne.

MS. RICHARDS: When was that?

MS. PFAFF: And there was *Rock / Paper / Scissors* [1982] at the Albright-Knox.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh yes.

MS. PFAFF: That was probably the best of all of them. That was the best piece I think. But that show was –

MS. RICHARDS: The one in Cologne.

MS. PFAFF: In Cologne, it was enlightening. It was called Western Art, "Westkunst," Western art. It was a survey show, 1935 to 1981. It was huge. Cologne, I'm going to get the words wrong, it's called the Messe [Rheinhallen der Kölner Messe, Cologne] or something like that.

It's one of these cities that has this huge place for a convention center, gigantic. You're talking about like 200,000 square feet of space.

So they might bring the automobile shows, the boat shows, kind of like the way Javits Center [NY] would be. This entire place was full of Schwitters, [Pablo] Picasso –

MS. RICHARDS: Think about the budget.

MS. PFAFF: Think about the budget. They reinstalled Josef Beuys' first show. They brought Claes Oldenburg's *Store Days* [sic] [*The Store*, 1961-1962] in. They had paintings of [David] Hockney. They had – what you're not hearing is any women's names.

In this survey show, there was not – I'm pretty sure this is true. In the entire historical section, which was

hundreds of thousands of square feet, there was not a woman painter or sculptor. This is where I met Tinguely.

In the corridor where there was the young artists, and that was an introduction of [Julian] Schnabel, oh gosh, Robert Longo, you know, people that kind of '80s people were brought in. I was in there and Barbara Bloom was in there and I think Jenny Holzer and a man named Peter Nadin did a collaboration together.

So there were three women in this young corridor, this other section. I had never really realized in the way the history was written there hadn't been any women in it.

That was astonishing and I don't know who said it but it's like – I sort of said that in a surprised way to the curator and I think he said, "Well, who would you put in?" Like, there aren't any basically. So that was sort of interesting, you know. So I sort of for a moment got a little bit more aware of this – that aspect.

By the way, Elizabeth Murray, myself, Artemisia Gentileschi were the first women ever to make it into *Janson'sHistory of Art* [art textbook] . Do you realize that? Up until that time there were no women in the entire book.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. PFAFF: The history of art, not just 1935; from cave painting on, not one.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. PFAFF: And it was the son of Janson I think that decided to introduce women.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, what was his name, is his name?

MS. PFAFF: Sydney or something like that? No. [It was Anthony.]

MS. RICHARDS: It was the new edition after I used it.

MS. PFAFF: But that's kind of amazing. Now of course it's rampant with women, not rampant, but –

MS. RICHARDS: So that was in – that experience in Europe, did you-

MS. PFAFF: You know what's funny is I think it slowed. I was –it didn't dawn on me what was happening. I was very busy. I was teaching, working.

MS. RICHARDS: What was happening? You mean the fact your career was taking off?

MS. PFAFF: The art world. My career was taking off. I didn't know that and I always – I do this. I always know better if I'm even in the same show with someone for some reason I think I'm looking at it, looking at them, thinking how cool it is.

It's hard for me to get to think that I'm part of it. I always – and maybe artists do this. You're sort of really never really the guest of honor or the reason why it's – you're not in it. You're still looking at it.

MS. RICHARDS: It was an accident? [Laughs.]

MS. PFAFF: It was an accident, yes, something like that, yeah. But those European shows and they were – and that was only a moment, you know. It's really funny. Elizabeth Murray and I used to talk about this.

She was never shown in Europe. That work was seen as very American, not conceptual, not minimal and by a woman of course. But it's surprising. She had no galleries in Europe. This is one of the great American painters and yet, you now, if it has a different kind of cache you can have work all over.

American work, and I think my work is seen as kind of American in that it's a little physical. It's kind of pioneering, like pioneer womanish kind of. It has something rough in it and I think it goes against the kind of grain of Europe.

MS. RICHARDS: The emphasis on the intellectual.

MS. PFAFF: Emphasis on the intellectual

MS. RICHARDS: And the academic.

MS. PFAFF: And the academic and what's so funny is it can be raucous and wild but it has to have that underpinning of philosophy or –

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MS. PFAFF: And then it seems –

MS. RICHARDS: Skipping a little bit, of course you had another show at Holly's.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you had a show and I wanted to ask you about it, in Tokyo.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, that was a big deal.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you what that experience – yeah.

MS. PFAFF: That was a huge deal.

MS. RICHARDS: What that experience was and how that happened and of course the piece you did and the influences you experienced in Japan that of course affected what that work looked like.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah that's kind of an interesting story. It ended up being curated by Roberta Smith and she was pulled in as a curator by Hiroshi Kawanishi and Hiroshi had a huge rapport with Paula Cooper and with the Paula Cooper Gallery. I think he was friend or boyfriend of Jennifer Bartlett. They weren't anymore.

But because of Jennifer and also he was the printer for Jasper Johns.

MS. RICHARDS: Kawanishi?

MS. PFAFF: Kawanish, Hiroshi Kawanishi, Kawanisi, "east of river," I think it means east of river. I think he pissed Paula off. They got into a row. This whole show was put together with all of Paula's artists. Joel was going to be in the show, Elizabeth Murray.

MS. RICHARDS: And Roberta had once worked for Paula Cooper.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, absolutely, and for Donald Judd and the space that I did was going to be Jon Borofsky's, who was the installation artist that Paula had. So it was all of Paula's people. Maki was the architect.

There was giant cultural building built in the middle of the heart of the most glamorous part of Tokyo. It's called Aoyama. All the designers, all the stores, Gucci, and [Fumihiko] Maki is this fantastic architect.

MS. RICHARDS: How would you spell Aoyama?

MS. PFAFF: A-O, Aoyama, Aoyama, A-O, A-Y-O? I'll find it for you. It's a big part of Tokyo, Aoyama.

MS. RICHARDS: I'll find it.

MS. PFAFF: Anyway, so this thing was all set to go and somehow it got derailed. I don't know if it was an argument with Paula that Hiroshi had or if there wasn't enough money involved. I don't know the politics of it. But Hiroshi knew Roberta very well, admired her.

He called Roberta and he said, "I have to have a whole new idea around this show." He was hired as the kind of curator for this show and because he knew Jennifer and I'm sure Jennifer was in the show. She was with Paula Cooper also. But so anyway, it was all set, or maybe because they broke up. I don't know. I don't know what happened.

Anyway, Hiroshi was stuck. He had this – he had this job. He had to do this thing. He had to get New York artists, had to be hotshot New York artists or something. He called Roberta and Roberta said, "Well, since we can't use Paula" – and she's very, very keen on Paula's artists. She loved and respects everyone. She said, "But maybe we could do it something different."

So she put in a different – she curated it differently, gave Hiroshi the names. I replaced Jon, I think, who was in that show. I was there sort of by myself for three months. So there was sort of my piece and all the other stuff got shipped in. Keith Haring was in that show, Terry Winters was in that show.

So it had a really good, really good – but it was in a funny way it was a younger – it was like a little bit of the – it wasn't exactly younger but like a different generation. So it was serendipity that I got.

So I got a call from Hiroshi and he sort of said, "Can you come to Japan, can you do – it's this huge piece" and I said, "You know, I'm not like Jon. I can't just do it on – it's physical. It has to be made." So he found me this

space. It was paid for by I guess the builder. I don't know who paid for it.

I lived there with two assistants for two months I think, maybe three months, built it. it was a phenomenally wonderful show. It was completely paid for. I didn't spend anything. I was treated like as good as anyone. Hiroshi used to come and get fish from the fish market, Tsukiji, cook for us, drive us around town, introduce me to people.

I guess if any show was fun that was fun. It went to the last minute at the last hour, the same old same old. But I had never felt glamorous before.

There's something about being in Japan that makes you feel very clean and it felt like I had help and there was a kind of respect that I was given, I guess. It was an astonishing experience for me and I loved Japan. I loved Japan. I loved everything about it.

So for me it was an homage to my experience there. I think it was a really, really good piece. No one in Japan could see it. they couldn't see it because it's like – there's only two or three materials that are sort of significant in Japan: paper and bamboo and this and that and there are masters of those materials and I think they thought I might have been making fun of the culture instead of – you know, it was sort of – what's that, lost in translation, so.

[END CD 3.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Pfaff on January 27, 2010 in Kingston, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc four.

MS. PFAFF: All right.

MS. RICHARDS: So I want to ask you a question that goes beyond this one piece. But When that was done, what happened to the piece?

MS. PFAFF: That's a nice story.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, good.

MS. PFAFF: That's a really nice story. All of my work is thrown away after it's done. So it's funny. Someone will ask me about doing a retrospective and it's like and how am I going to do this, you know?

So anyway, this piece, they said, what are we going to do with this? How do we ship it back to you and I said, "Don't ship it back to me. Throw it away."

They couldn't do it. I think that it is in Hokkaido [Japan]. I think I was told that each and every piece was mapped, numbered, wrapped, and sent to Hokkaido. Now I've never checked up on that story.

MS. RICHARDS: To a museum in Hokkaido?

MS. PFAFF: No, I think in storage. I think they were going to – they tried. They were working on finding another space for it but of course it was site-specific and you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Did they own it?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, they owned it, yeah. I mean, -

MS. RICHARDS: Because they had paid for everything.

MS. PFAFF: They had paid for it, yeah. I don't think they thought they owned it. I think they thought that if it was sold, I guess, then they would be like a dealer. They would – but Holly and I and everybody said, forget about it. It's not going anywhere. I don't really believe that it still is beautifully wrapped and in Hokkaido. But it could be. It could be. That's what I was told.

MS. RICHARDS: That's 25 years ago.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: You should check up on it.

MS. PFAFF: I should check up on it. I should check up on it. I was just there, you know? My assistants, they might stop by to bring back Willie and they live in Japan and we went back. We had coffee in that space to see what it looks like now because the building has changed, its usage. Its function has changed a lot, so.

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about at some point a parallel between your work and filmmaking.

MS. PFAFF: I did?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, maybe not exactly.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But in terms of slices and space and jump cuts and the techniques of filmmaking –

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: To create the visual realities that you do when did that connection come to your mind?

MS. PFAFF: You know, it might have been because I was at CalArts and it's kind of a filmmaking environment. It's a film school, an aspect of it is a film school and I know that I always wanted – this thing about not having the object that you're sort of always going around – you're taking pans and long shots and zooms.

The language of film I liked a lot. I like the language of zooming and panning and splicing and cutting and editing and kind of collage has a lot of that and shifting of space and stuff like that. So that language felt like a better description than using the language of sculpture or –

MS. RICHARDS: Or cubism or whatever.

MS. PFAFF: Exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah but isn't it that you were a great fan of cinema and saw lots of films?

MS. PFAFF: I do. I watch more TV [television] than anyone on this whole planet. There's not a TV – I can feel that I get nervous because there's no soundtrack in back. I always have sound on. It's not music.

A lot of times there's a lot of music playing in my studio. That's not because I put it on. That's somebody else put it on and I like it. If I'm left alone or if I'm in the studio, there is always 100 percent of the time a TV on.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me go to the subject then of your studio and what the atmosphere is like.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And I was going to ask you about the sounds. So it's always TV and is it TV that you're purposely playing because you're not listening and it's kind of like white noise and it helps you concentrate or are you actually getting involved in the –

MS. PFAFF: I think actually I kind of get involved. You know, on Sunday there might be like, on cable, 24 hours of *Law and Order* [1990-2010]? It dawned on me once that since I have probably watched five million episodes of *Law and Order*, and why, I actually don't remember any plot. So it must be that I actually am not listening really.

But I love *Law and Order*. I love – I'm now tremendously involved with *House*. I love Hugh Laurie. So if it's Monday and eight o'clock, it has to be *House*. I now watch *Morning Joe* every morning. Why? It frazzles me. I don't know why I'm doing it.

MS. RICHARDS: That's a surprise.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: A financial show, a stock market show.

MS. PFAFF: No, it's not a stock market. It's politics.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh okay. I'm thinking of – there's another one.

MS. PFAFF: Joe Scarborough is kind of a – he's kind of a nice Republican but he is a Republican and it's Mika Brzezinski who's the daughter of –

MS. RICHARDS: Zbigniew.

MS. PFAFF: Brzezinski, who is fantastic – he's like – I love him.

You know, there are times when – I can even listen to Oprah Winfrey, stuff that I don't – it's just like if it's four o'clock, it times my day.

MS. RICHARDS: Why not music?

MS. PFAFF: Because I have to change it and it gets on my nerves. I can't listen to too much NPR. I don't know why. It's like I can't stand NPR [National Public Radio] after a while. I can listen to it for an hour or so. I can do it back and forth.

MS. RICHARDS: So there's a populist –

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: A populist kind of tone.

MS. PFAFF: Because it gets too health foodie, good for you, correct politics. I don't like it. I want it to be – yeah, I can do –

MS. RICHARDS: Comfortable.

MS. PFAFF: And not tedious in that way. I can watch *Project Runway*. I don't like the teary reality shows, like house makeover where everyone's crying or it's just – I can't stand it. But if it's sort of funny stuff –

MS. RICHARDS: Do you watch cooking shows?

MS. PFAFF: I love cooking shows. I think the *Iron Chef* and now they've got like *Iron Chef America* or something like that and the chairman, I think the dance programs, where they – who's – I can't believe Donny Osmond won. How could they do that?

You know, I can watch – do you know Anton Ohno, the speed skater, he won like the fourth year of this dancing, *Dancing with the Stars*. Phenomenal, I was riveted, riveted.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you dance yourself?

MS. PFAFF: I used to dance a lot. I used to dance a lot. But it's not about that. It's just like it's sort of fun. Yeah, I can watch – I can watch – I'm the only one I know who watches every minute of pre-Grammys, Grammys, post-Grammys, pre-Emmys, Emmys, post-Emmys.

MS. RICHARDS: It's not for the gowns I don't think.

MS. PFAFF: I like that too.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh okay.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: While you're doing that in your studio –

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I'm working.

MS. RICHARDS: You're going to tune it out or you're going to tune it in. It's just background.

MS. PFAFF: In and out, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the light?

MS. PFAFF: Oh tons of light. You will find –

MS. RICHARDS: And incandescent, a mixture, do you look for a certain tone that's right?

MS. PFAFF: No, that's a painter. A painter would need that, full spectrum, da-da-da.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. You just want it very bright.

MS. PFAFF: You'll notice there's always – Christmas lights are on every day of the year forever. I have a lot of sunlight in my studios. I always have a mix of incandescent and – incandescent is very yellow and very warm. I like to – fluorescents are kind of green and they flutter. I don't mind that part of it.

It depends on if – yeah, there's always a mix. I'm not pure about that. But a lot of it, it always has to be bright. My studio is usually brighter than most.

MS. RICHARDS: And the use of assistants, you've had to use assistants.

MS. PFAFF: I have to use assistants. It's changing now because I can pay more, because I'm not a kid, because people don't do it for love, because there's more professional things.

It used to be like we would work night and day, day and night, maybe got $100 a day, maybe got $50 a day, didn't get double time and a half. We were in it together. They were marathons. Now, Jamie, who is a fantastic assistant –

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

MS. PFAFF: Hamilton. Jamie is extremely skilled. He's a first-class rock climber. He's a first-class welder. He's the most – he can rig anything. It's like I need to get something that weighs 1,000 pounds up into the ceiling. He knows which knot and he can pull it up with one finger and it's amazing.

But he's not – in the old days, like a Julius or a Bill Wilson or Rob van Erve, we were in it, like having a right hand. I would start painting this and I'd say, that needs to – can you put that over there. We've got to move. I could speak and I didn't have to say much. Now it's like it's much more technical.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say you have a more professional relationship?

MS. PFAFF: Totally, which is not as much fun. It's not as much fun. I can't call on them in the same way. We don't go out and go drunk together. We're not the same age. Our lives are different. We have this very limited conversation in a way.

MS. RICHARDS: So he's doing a job and he has expertise that you need.

MS. PFAFF: He's doing a job and it's five o'clock and we go home. I can say this will probably go on into the night. If you can stay past that, I would really appreciate it. I can't make him, I can't, and they will say, I can, or I can't. I'm busy tonight, I've got a date, I've got this.

When it's really important, they absolutely will do it. But I can't guarantee that they'll do that. I can't assume that they will do that.

MS. RICHARDS: Does knowing that that's the way they work –

MS. PFAFF: Changes everything.

MS. RICHARDS: –help you in keeping yourself from getting to the point where you have to work nonstop marathons because you have to somehow –

MS. PFAFF: It is a bit better. I'm a bit more organized. It always runs to the wire. I don't know why. But I'm now by myself running to the wire. There's not five people who are asleep on the floor, you know. I can't push them that hard and I don't want them – I don't want that to go that way. So I will stay and I will finish the show. But I have to let them go.

MS. RICHARDS: Besides the fact that you are working many, many hours, have you though always started in the morning and maybe not exactly being a morning person but you'd start in the morning and you work all day through and it's everyday and it's not kind of a 9:00 to 5:00.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, it's not nine to five. It's never been nine to five. But also because I'm not – Ursula von Rydingsvard is the kind of artist who I one day would like to be.

She's disciplined. She gets up at five o'clock. She exercises. She eats well. She takes care of her family. She can cook. She picks up lunch for the assistants or she gets to work – she's there at eight o'clock and she's out of there by five o'clock. She can cook dinner. She can go out. She can meet her friends. She has one of the more disciplined and she doesn't skip a beat. When she's there she's working.

I'm not like that. I walk in. I've got to water the plants. Oh, gosh, I forgot that phone call. I'm hungry. I'll mix this glue up because I've got to do that. Oh, I've got this, we need some more– you know, I need another drill bit. I'm the one – it's not –

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think she has assistants who think of those things or you just work better –

MS. PFAFF: Well, she's got one material and one glue and that makes it different. I have 1,000 different materials and it's not just that. It's like there's acrylic paints and oil paints and signed painters enamels and oil sticks. There's even temperas. There's glazes. There's patinas.

MS. RICHARDS: When you're at the very, very beginning of thinking about a work, are you alone?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And are you with a pencil and paper?

MS. PFAFF: No. I actually begin, to freak out, and then think I better organize this and then I might get a pencil and paper and then I go back again, but no.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're physically working with the materials as a beginning.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, as a beginning, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Moving things around.

MS. PFAFF: Moving things around. The hardest thing with the assistants is they don't know what I'm doing. I can't tell them what I'm doing because I don't know what I'm doing and it's very hard for them, to tell you the truth.

Sometimes, there are a lot of artists who actually the assistants make the lion's share of the work. The assistants like that. They respect that that person trusts them. They know what they're doing. They're given strong directives. It sells. It's seen as great stuff. They like that. Anyone would like that.

With me, you don't get that kind of closure or they can be working on something that I never use or it becomes an unimportant part of it or I need 50 of this kind of bracket because this is the way I'm going to hold that up and then after they make it, it's like, that is not right.

I made a mistake. Your work is never – you don't know what it's a part of. It's very hard on them emotionally and I never realized that. I thought they would like that because one, I'm making all the big decisions. You know, that is not fun.

MS. RICHARDS: What gave you this insight?

MS. PFAFF: Listening to people who made other people's work and I might say, does that bother you that they're not making it. Let's say a [Mark] Kostabi, I'm taking out – I'm not going to say anyone's name who we might know or is in the same – people make that work. You work in the style of Kostabi and I think there's a pride in that.

With me, someone will say, what did you do in here, and they'll say, ","Well, I painted that but then she painted over that or you know. And also I want all the big decisions. I don't want them to do that thing.

What was nice with Jamie, there was one show that we did together that we were humming. It was the first show I did – installation I did at Ameringer Yohe [gallery] and there was a lot of architectural motifs. Jamie and I had demoed this house and built this house together. So we'd had a kind of working – and it was with architecture.

So when I did that show and I did – we were taking molding from this place and thinking about stuff from India and all. So we were welding. I would say, this is how – and I would be like holding it, welding it, holding it up. We'd do that and he would – I'd say, I don't think we can do this and he'd say, oh I've been thinking about this.

We can do it this way. We were like this perfect team for a while. It was like having a sous chef that was like – you know when you watch those shows it's like they're cutting and doing everything and doing it and you get it when you need it and stuff like that. That was a perfect show where it was really lately but he was the welder and the show was a welding show.

MS. RICHARDS: How has technology affected your work?

MS. PFAFF: Oh lots, in many ways. Like, you know, you can't tell but there are computers all over this place and printing places and I want a CNC [computer numerically controlled] cutter which is like this, you know, I don't have one. But I love technologies and new technologies. I have –we have like five TIGs [tungsten inert gas welding machine], MIGs [metal inert Gas welding machine], oxy-acetylene [welding].

If it's made, I like it. I mean, I have 50 different hammers. That's not technology. But if there's a new anything

on the market, if I know about it and if I can use it in any way, I will get it. I like it a lot. You know, I wish I knew more about digital recorders, digital video. I wish I was more adept at doing video or any electronic stuff or robotics. I wish I knew more about that.

But lately there's an awful lot of lighting in the shows. You can't tell probably but there's lots of little – I mean, I did a show with LED [Light Emitting Diode] lights at CalArts in the mid-'70s because I just thought LEDs were the wave of the future. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: When I think about your work and the multiple elements and all the possibilities, I would think that you could possibly try that out.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, translate it there.

MS. RICHARDS: Translate it and at least do working drawings in a way.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, you know I used to do these drawings.

MS. RICHARDS: And have a 3-D[three dimensional] kind of space in fact.

MS. PFAFF: And have a 3-D kind of space. Well, this new "Avatar" movie has gotten me a little buzzed in terms of some of that.

But you know what's funny, I think I like the stupid stuff the best, like when things get too expensive, too high-tech, too shopped out, too many programs to learn, too many adapters to plug in, too many bulbs that burn out, too many boards that don't work or too many interfaces that aren't there, it's like please, just weld it together. Just stop the nonsense.

MS. RICHARDS: You've mostly had studios in different places from where you're living.

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that because just physically –

MS. PFAFF: It's physically, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: It's not that you don't ideally would like – would want to live –

MS. PFAFF: The best studio I ever had was on the river here in Kingston. I lived and work in the same place. I've never been happier.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's an ideal?

MS. PFAFF: That's the ideal. This place is not zoned for commercial stuff. Where the studio is, is not zoned for residential stuff. I think I could change – I could get a variance.

MS. RICHARDS: Over the years your studios have basically been getting bigger?

MS. PFAFF: Oh, my god, they're monsters. Actually I should – when you come back up to do whatever you have to do anytime, I will show you the studio. It's really cool. It's really a good studio.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you find that studio?

MS. PFAFF: You know I didn't find it. I was kicked out of a place. My assistant – no, she was more my student. She was also an assistant but – what did she do – she was kind of brilliant and she wanted to archive things.

She sort of dusted, cleaned, organized, and made life nice, you know? That's Laura Gail. She graduated from – Laura Gail Tyler, she graduated from Yale in photography.

She's got a mind – like she's got a photographic memory. If she was here now, she would be saying, that was '82, not '81. That piece was called this. His name's that. She just has this memory for things. So she – how did she get – she found the place.

She found Willie, my dog. By the way, where is Willie? What time is it? Five-thirty?

MS. RICHARDS: Six-twenty.

MS. PFAFF: He should be here. May I make a phone call?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you were saying this assistant found the studio.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You would live in the same place.

MS. PFAFF: Absolutely, yeah. The idea when I got this house was I would have a studio on the third floor and then I would build another studio here. But as you can see, this is a real neighborhood and it's very residential and when I get deliveries of steel and wood, you know, you've got 18-wheelers coming up these roads.

So it dawned on me that it would not be correct. I probably could have done it and in time – this, I will leave and go to that place and I think I can get the zoning changed and I will live there. But it would me more – but over there I'm like a teacher.

That's the other side of the river. That's the Bard [College] side of the river. They can find me. They can come bother me. Here is – Kingston is a more neutral city.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to the evolution of your work, there was a period of time in the late '80s, possibly, when you shifted from making these installations –

MS. PFAFF: To objects.

MS. RICHARDS: To objects.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Could you talk about why you made that shift and then we'll talk about the objects a bit.

MS. PFAFF: I think that the work got seen and I was – it seemed like it was sort of performative and kind of – everything was being destroyed. I didn't make them to be destroyed.

They were really always made as well as I could, given the time frame and they were real things. They were not 500 bathtubs stacked up. They were handmade, detailed, lots of imagery, lots of time, lots of work, and they were completely being trashed by me. So I just thought that was unhealthy, stupid –

MS. RICHARDS: And obviously you, your dealer tried to sell them.

MS. PFAFF: Yes. I mean, it became silly.

MS. RICHARDS: And could you have refashioned them for a different space if you were offered that idea?

MS. PFAFF: I always thought that somebody would want me to design a garden, an anteroom, give them – a lot of – I'm forgetting the Italian guy that had that place that had artists do site-specific pieces and sold to MoCA [Museum of Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA].

MS. RICHARDS: [Giovanni] Panza?

MS. PFAFF: Panza. But because it didn't have that conceptual cache I was never invited to those kinds of forums. I always thought that if I could do it in a gallery, I could do it someplace else and if it was made for – you know, a church, a theater, a gallery, a museum, whatever venue, a garden, a theater, that it would translate. Probably the only place that happened was commissions, of which I did three, and I would probably not ever do another one. They are horrible.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to talk to you about commissions. Is this the moment you want to do that?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, we can begin there, sure.

MS. RICHARDS: So did you apply? Have your applied?

MS. PFAFF: I don't apply for commissions. The way commissions work is, I think you can apply. I think they are open –

MS. RICHARDS: Competitions.

MS. PFAFF: Competitions. Usually there's an art advisor to some corporation, some city, some percent for art something. They put together ten artists. They call those artists. You create an idea or a model. There's a competition. You win the competition.

So I might get a phone call that says there's a building outside in Portland, there's a space in Philadelphia, there's a police station in Miami.

MS. RICHARDS: Are these examples of actual –

MS. PFAFF: These are examples of actual things and every competition I've been in I've actually gotten it. But it takes years to complete. I'm the fabricator. So no other work gets made. Some of these projects take years.

No money is made, not a cent. I go into debt with everything. I'm not clever with how much things cost and how much time things take. It's like I'll make it as good as I can and every time I went to a fabricator they would sort of say, well, this copper, we should change it to plastic or we should change this glass too and it's like, no, glass is glass.

MS. RICHARDS: So are these ways, in their words, of reducing the expenses?

MS. PFAFF: Cutting the costs, yeah, and if you're paying someone $50 an hour, you can't get much for $20,000, $30,000, $50,000 if it's taking months and you've got insurance and engineers and shipping and materials and renting a space to make the piece in.

Some of these pieces were gigantic. I was in Walla Walla, Washington, for seven months. It was like "my Waterloo," it was like terrible. [Laughs.] So I'm never going to do another one of those.

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe we'll come up on that again. So going back to making just discrete objects –

[Cross talk.]

MS. PFAFF: Yes, it was really just like, please, don't do this anymore. You will really – it's upsetting. I wasn't sleeping. I had nothing to show for it. I was sort of on parade in a certain way.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the issue that you had to be invited to work in a space.

MS. PFAFF: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: You couldn't be completely independent on that timetable and all that.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, exactly, and it's hard on the institution. Most of these places don't know what they're getting into. As much as I think in São Paulo [Brazil] they love me, they make a wonderful thing, they don't particularly want me to – they don't really care.

They've got a venue with 1,000 people. They want you to come in and out. They want it to get a lot of press. They want you to go away. They want you to have a good item and I take everything so seriously.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you made these objects over the period of time.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, it's about four or five years.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, late '80s.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, early '90s and I've never done it since actually.

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to say, but you stopped.

MS. PFAFF: I stopped.

MS. RICHARDS: So what do you think worked and what do you think didn't work? Each one, they came out from the wall and they were very complex. They were really representative –

MS. PFAFF: I don't think they were as successful. You know, I've actually restored those objects.

MS. RICHARDS: Did some of those sell?

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: That might have been one of your goals, create objects that could sell?

MS. PFAFF: Yes. My first show at Holly Solomon when I came back from Japan, oh my god, it was really successful. It was 1984 I think.

MS. RICHARDS: Japan was '85.

MS. PFAFF: Japan was '85, so it must have been '86. It was called *Apples and Oranges*. It was at Holly's. Was that '86? Do you have a?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. I have *Apples and Oranges* here somewhere, '86, correct.

MS. PFAFF: So one piece went to the Whitney. One piece went to the Modern. One went to the Albright-Knox. One went to the High Museum in Atlanta.

MS. RICHARDS: Sounds like you hit a homerun.

MS. PFAFF: Absolutely, never happened again. That was it.

MS. RICHARDS: The height of your career.

MS. PFAFF: And you know what, I stopped – well, no I didn't stop making those things. I did another show. I left Holly's, not for any real reason, but she was in a fifth floor gallery on Fifth Avenue where the elevator, you couldn't – you could barely get three people in the elevator. So I was chopping everything down.

That's actually why those pieces came about. I couldn't do an installation in that gallery. It was a domestic space. She bought that gallery and designed that so people could see what things would look like in their living room. It had that scale to it and the writing was on the wall. I could not do it.

You cannot do an installation in that place. It would have choked it. There would be nowhere to move. It wasn't right. It was domestic.

So I remember having this dilemma like what am I going to do and then I thought about this very funny thing about like there are three kinds of things, like let's say in the Renaissance. You had the little canvas. That was for a portrait. You had a little bit bigger one. That was probably for a still life. And the larger canvases were for landscape. So I thought I'd done the landscape. I'd done the portraits, still life, so I did a show for Holly of still life and that was that show.

So it wasn't – and it came in a time when I just thought I can't make another installation. I can't throw it away again.

MS. RICHARDS: But you actually did the piece at the Whitney, which was '87.

MS. PFAFF: That was '87, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Patricia was '86.

MS. PFAFF: That was not an installation. That was a big piece. That was called *N.Y.C.-B.Q.E.* [1987]. That was not an installation. I still have all those parts somewhere and that was a terrible moment actually.

MS. RICHARDS: How was that?

MS. PFAFF: Because that thing we were talking about, the world had changed. In that same room at the Whitney was the Jeff Koons bunny [*Rabbit,* 1986] which is now probably a billion dollar piece. There was Jeff Koons' floating basketball tank [*Three Ball Total Equilibrium Tank*, 1985]. There was Barbara Kruger. There were two paintings in that room. She had just seen them.

They had just been brought in because they were sort of ordered up. It was 17 feet tall. It had a big rhesus monkey. It was screaming. It was a big face of a rhesus monkey screaming and in the mouth there was a text that said, "I shop, therefore I am." So the whole show was full of a kind of cool, a kind of cynicism, and I was still throwing air balls.

MS. RICHARDS: So was that piece misread completely? You're talking about configuration.

MS. PFAFF: Completely, I don't know if it was misread. It was just out of time. It was sort of like, what is this doing in this show? And it was called like that by even people, like Robert Hughes initially was quite enthusiastic about my work.

It was slammed. It was slammed, not only that, the curator of that show who curated me into it, Lisa Philips,

who was kind of a friend at the time, and was quite wonderful, I don't think she ever spoke to me again. It was like the end of a relationship – nothing happened. I didn't have a fight with her. I think she realized that she had – the world had changed and I was not in that new world. It was really – it was the '80s, the late '80s.

Oh, my god, it was seen as suburban. See, I thought it was real Brooklyn and I – it's my misreading perhaps of Brooklyn. But I also thought it was like American. It was like Stuart Davis, or you know, it was like America. It had kind of a – I also thought that that piece particularly kind of looked like Lichtenstein, like Roy Lichtenstein. It looked like Pop art.

MS. RICHARDS: I was thinking about [Tom] Wesselmann

MS. PFAFF: And Wesselmann. It had a great – the great American nude. It had an American component.

MS. RICHARDS: And the actual objects.

MS. PFAFF: And the actual objects, so – and man, that thing structurally was killer. There was shit going on in back, how it got there, how it was cantilevered, the engineering of it, I was dazzled by. Who cares about that stuff but I care about that stuff and I really –

I thought it had a kind of optimism and a kind of like this is how it – this is this onslaught of the backyard of shops, the music, the – you know, the – and it was called *N.Y.C.-B.Q.E.* meaning New York City Brooklyn Queens Expressway. It's like how you get there and this transition for me to Brooklyn. I was in love with Brooklyn. I'd done this big piece underneath the Williamsburg Bridge.

MS. RICHARDS: The Anchorage.

MS. PFAFF: The Anchorage and the Brooklyn Bridge, the Brooklyn Bridge. I got all these street signs. It was – I don't know – I was – and see because I was among this stuff and engineering it, I was also full of myself.

I thought the backs of my stuff looked so much better than Stella's [Laughs] because he made all these cutouts and he didn't care how it got there. He's an imagist. He really can come up with powerful, graphic images.

I'm like – I'm like munching around, this connection, not that. Let's weld it this way, not that way. Let's hammer this out. I need it to be there effortlessly. I don't want to see all these brackets and all this – I want it to be like Calder.

Like Calder was – it was engineered, simple engineering but wonderfully engineered. So there are things – there are 8 feet of space being held up by two or three tiny – you don't even know. Sometimes I'll look at it and be like, how the hell is that working. It's really cool.

But anyway, so I was engaged with the engineering of that stuff and the imagery and everyone else in the world it seemed was involved with sort of a critique of something or other. I don't – I can't – not only can't I do that, I don't find it interesting. So I was off-time, completely, and it took years to recover from that show. Talk about the dull and dead and nowheres-ville.

The good news is I didn't actually realize that. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: You continued to do the objects and you did a wonderful piece that actually had no color, *Horror Vacui* [1988].

MS. PFAFF: Oh that's when –

MS. RICHARDS: And I was wondering about that period.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, that is because I was invited to go to Pilchuck [Glass School, Stanwood, WA].

MS. RICHARDS: Oh yes, I wanted to ask you when that was.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, oh my god, but that's also because of a man named Billy Morris. Do you know who Billy Morris is? William Morris?

Oh my, Billy Morris is about the most beautiful man you will ever see in your whole life. He's a lot younger than me. I don't know how many years, maybe 14 years younger. So there's no even – I don't even get – I don't even dream about anything like that. But for some reason, Billy certainly caught my imagination. One, he was beautiful. Two, he was the – and still is – the most skilled glassblower on the planet.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you meet him?

MS. PFAFF: He was Dale Chihuly's gaffer. He lived up there – gaffer meaning he worked for Dale Chihuly.

MS. RICHARDS: But how did you –

[Cross talk.]

MS. PFAFF: Oh I was just invited there because I knew Dale earlier on. We were in a show together.

MS. RICHARDS: So you hadn't used glass.

MS. PFAFF: No, no reason to.

MS. RICHARDS: So they invited you there.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: This was in the late '80s?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I thought they must – yeah, maybe '88, '90, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: I think '88, yeah.

MS. PFAFF: So I'll go to this community. For some reason Billy Morris is the – he's blowing the glass. Why did he do that? I don't know. Anyway, he thought art was sort of bullshit. It was unnatural. He's someone who is the most natural artist. He sort of was so handsome. He drove the truck.

Because he drove the truck and was handsome and talented, Dale had him – he learned this and that. Dale met him on the road. Anyway, he evolved into kind of an amazing very talented fellow, mindboggling.

So I was talking to him a couple times and I would say, well who else has come here, and he would say like, Kiki Smith, and he's real – and I said, I'm like, "Billy, do you know who these people are?" And he'd be like, "Well, Kiki seems interesting and I like her but I don't get all the stuff."

So what I realized, because he was so skilled and the glass world is only about, many times, is about technique, that I sort of became his teacher, not in what he does, but ideas, i-dee-ers.

So he and I got to be very, very good friends. He would come by every day, every evening, and we sort of had this test. I would sort of – he would do something. I would say, what do you think about that, what is this, and so we had this – it was kind of like student teacher and that would reverse when in the glass thing I was listening to him.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the project you were working on there?

MS. PFAFF: Nothing really.

MS. RICHARDS: You went and you just were experimenting with techniques?

MS. PFAFF: I was trying – oh yeah, this is part of it. That's right.

I would make these structures in wire or rod or something and he would blow into them. So he was constrained by the shapes I would make and I had some control over – I mean, I didn't like the idea of someone sort of like make me this and then you get that and you think it's yours. I don't know.

It's that whole thing about who's making it – who's zooming who, who's making it, who's the artist, the author. So I thought it had – if it's doing to be this word collaboration, at least he's going to have to – I'm going to have to know what he can do. He's going to have to yield to the form that I was making.

So it was just sort of this – it was sort of a tango of sorts. It was sort of – it had some mischief in it, the technique, the give and take. We would hang out. He's so – we're still very, very good friends.

And so when I was there, I was staying in this little cabin really on top of this mountain that looked out over like the San Juan Islands [WA] and if I was on this – it was very humble.

MS. RICHARDS: They found this place for you?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, it was made by the early students. This place I was in actually had been Dale's cabin, probably the first year he put Pilchuck together, which is this glassblowing place. He either made it or he and his crew made it. It was beautiful. It was like the house with the view, no running water, no electricity really, it

was very humble. It was a cabin, but beautiful.

It was so romantic and it had this big porch and it did have running water. It had a hose and you could take a shower with a hose outside on a porch. So the wind would come up and it's north – it rains every day. It's wet. There is like plants everywhere. Things grow and it's like oh my god, I'm not a happy camper in the woods. I'm like –

But anyway, it was this other kind of immersion. It was not about color. It seemed to be about wind and air and breath and this transparent glass is like so beautiful. It's kind of magic.

So all the color went out and it was really because of that experience of just watching him sort of create these sort of bubbles and these voids and this transparency. It was beautiful. I can't use glass because I break it. It breaks. So there is a few things with glass.

It wasn't about the glass. It was really about this environment, this kind of enormous skill that Billy had and then even romance. It was my secret romance but I was just – I couldn't believe someone could be that talented and have – and come out of nowhere, in a funny way and now if you hear him talk, he's brilliant and he's really brilliant.

And so it was nice to sort of be there through – I think I needed what he had and he needed the conversation and I got – it was not the art world. He was not in the art world. That experience was not the art world. It was really in a funny way, really about nature.

MS. RICHARDS: What came out of that experience, I mean physically?

MS. PFAFF: All that work. There was a whole three or four years work came out of that.

MS. RICHARDS: There were a number of pieces that included glass. Do you remember those?

MS. PFAFF: Yes and they were all –

MS. RICHARDS: Like *Straw into Gold* [1990].

MS. PFAFF: *Straw into Gold*, one called *Milagro* [1991].

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. PFAFF: There was a show at Max Protetch [Gallery].

MS. RICHARDS: And those were mostly off the wall, on the floor.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, they were off the wall. Hardly any matter. They were all linear. They were all kind of wire, open wire structures.

MS. RICHARDS: I was thinking about that and reading about the fact that several people commented on an evolution of your work from an involvement with a planar space.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Circles and spheres to linear, although you had at the very beginning it was linear with the figures.

MS. PFAFF: It was always linear stuff. I think what defines – I think what happened at that moment, I think it was really –

MS. RICHARDS: Is that a kind of a purring [referring to Lupe the cat]?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, it's something. She's schitzy. She doesn't know what she feels. Like she likes this but – see, that's what that is. Like you can see her little tail going. So she's not happy but she'll come right back. Her name is Lupe but I think it's Loopy. Come on, come on, no one's around.

I think it was sort of this thing about how I saw Brooklyn, the color, the awnings, the kind of they would always have these churches and there was no money for stained glass. So they used contact paper in windows, in basements for church glass.

So there was that kind of an ad hoc – I'm thinking that that stuff that to sort of emulsified and sort of shimmery, and I think it was trying to get at something more spiritual.

So all the graphics went way down. All that plainer, dot, stripes, pop, just disappeared and I just wanted – also, you know at this point I started paying attention to Brooklyn in a different way.

There were lots of things which were being burned. There were these huge vacant lots and there would be cars which would be caught on fire, beds, sofas, everything was being burned, just thrown in there and burned.

I was grabbing a lot of these old bed frames and sofa frames and all the springs in them and so that thing *Straw into Gold* was really about taking all this really terrible depressing sad imagery and sort of shaping it into another reality. So there's like "hope" or whatever it turned out to be.

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about spirituality.

MS. PFAFF: It was a kind of spiritual – see, in thinking of it now, I do remember like it happens to me where I'm not in – this is what happened – I can think of it now too.

If I'm not in the city and I'm not around the art world and a bar and talking and lunch, and I'm in nature, then that image you drop, that need drops, that noise drops and it sort of becomes taken over with this other thing and I certainly will usually try to track what now is impressing me.

When I did a show at Andre Emmerich [Gallery], when he moved uptown, when I move uptown, I was living on the river. So when I'm in Brooklyn it had this kind of thing, the noise level I guess of Brooklyn.

In Pilchuck out there, I'm in this cabin by myself. I'm sort of in this undefined romance that has zero physicality. It's just all in my head, thank god. If he ever hears this he's going to kill himself. Anyway, so when I was up here on the river I just thought what am I going to make work about?

Nothing's coming in. I'm just looking at this river flowing and it became about the river flowing. So I am very much smitten with where I am and what I'm experiencing. So I think lately the work has – actually much – the art world doesn't quite interest me.

So it really is my life up here, my garden, building this place, my friendships, a book I might read. So I don't – I'm not at war with anything particularly. I still am – I'm a street fighter so if someone pushes me the wrong way I will get back into it. But I'm sort of left to my own – and I think after that show in the '80s where I was completely off track with –

MS. RICHARDS: The Whitney?

MS. PFAFF: The Whitney, with the installations emerging, then that was a new game in town, the color, the installation, the permanence of it, sort of it was the way Dana Schutz might be, like it's still painting but it's a whole other way of looking at it. It's timely. It could be in 50 years or in 20 years.

That might look like, what were we thinking about? Why did that seem extreme? So I had lost my edge, even though I thought I was learning a lot and it was growing and it was still the same set of things that I wanted, a liveliness, an all overness kind of. It was another experience of color and this and that and it felt like it still had the same things but it was seen as like boring, not interesting, been there, done that.

[END CD 4.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Pfaff on January 27, 2010, in Kingston, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc five.

Judy, one of the major installations I think that you did was at Max Protetch in 1992, a piece called *Flusso E Riflusso*.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I saw a state one. I don't know if there was a state two, if that – what

MS. PFAFF: Oh you know what, you might have gotten that from – I also did a print called *Flusso E Riflusso*. So they might have – it might have –

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, anyway it was a piece using driftwood and everything I think was suspended from the ceiling which was a change.

MS. PFAFF: It was yeah. That was brand new yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Brand new, not from the walls and so I wanted to ask you about the evolution of that piece, the

imagery.

MS. PFAFF: That piece came because Ursula von Rydingsvard and I, she had a studio upstairs in Brooklyn and I was downstairs, we were asked by the people who ran Exit Art [Gallery], Papo Colo and Jeanette Ingberman to do a collaboration.

Now Ursula works exclusively with cedar. We walked into this gallery. It was totally tiny. Well not tiny, but it was –

MS. RICHARDS: The Exit Art when it was on Broadway?

MS. PFAFF: On Broadway. It was called the Cultural Space or something like that.

Anyway, it was like 18 feet wide, 20 feet wide by 40 but it was like tiny. You came up a circular staircase and the previous installations collaborations had been between people where they might have had their correspondence to each other, was the show. You know, small, intimate.

MS. RICHARDS: But she's asking two sculptors

MS. PFAFF: Two sculptors. Both of us walked in. We know each other pretty well and I said, "Ursula, I don't know. I think we should just fill it up," and she said, "Well, yeah, that's what we should do." So she did this huge – it was seen as kind of a bed.

It was like this platform. It was like a chunk of land and she brought it downstairs to my studio and she was actually in, I think, Anguilla [Caribbean] while I was working on it.

So she dropped kind of the first stop down and I'd be calling her and saying, okay, Ursula, I have to drill some holes in it now. Is that okay? I have to do this and it was like I didn't know what to do with this big brown thing, kind of this rectangular solid with all these edges and all this weight. I just freaked. It's like I don't know what to do.

MS. RICHARDS: And the two of you hadn't really discussed what to do?

MS. PFAFF: What to do or what to look like.

MS. RICHARDS: So how did she decide what to make?

MS. PFAFF: I think she just – I don't know. Actually that I don't know. I think it was like the room was this size. We could put this big a slab in it. So when it came –

MS. RICHARDS: So one of you had to go first so she went first.

MS. PFAFF: Well, that's the – she's organized. So she knew not to – it took me sort of forever to come to terms with this object, what to do with this object. So anyway, I had this relationship with this object and when it left I realized I like that wood or that thing.

So that piece was – and also every time I went to Pilchuck I would call Ursula and I would say, this is the land of cedar. They've got cedar shingles. They've got cedar siding. They've got cedar stumps. Pilchuck is on a farm, a lumbar – not an orchard, what's it called.

MS. RICHARDS: Forest?

MS. PFAFF: Forest, it's pretty bad when I can't come up with the word forest. It was a forest and they harvest all of these old growth cedars, or not old growth or whatever.

It's the land of cedar and I said – so I'm calling her saying, "You will love it." Now Ursula hates that. She uses four-by-four milled cedar. She doesn't want any romance. Whatever it has she puts it in it.

MS. RICHARDS: Images of trees.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, she doesn't want a branch. She doesn't want a root. She wants lumber, the finished dimensional lumber. So I was so intrigued by this material now that I had to deal with, that literally, that piece was because I was – I needed cedar. I became a junkie, you know?

[Audio Break.]

MS. PFAFF: I went back to Pilchuck and all of a sudden I was finding, because I was keyed for it, all this cedar.

Those roots in that piece are all cedar. They're the cedar that I was saving for Ursula [laughs] and she didn't want that stuff.

I wanted that stuff and also there was something about the way cedar roots grow. It's like muscle and tendon and it has – it's very – it's like the difference between a Japanese rock garden and a Chinese rock garden.

The Chinese like all this sort of stuff that's sort of spooky. It's got holes. It's all kind of like devilish. And the Japanese like geometry and smooth and round or this. It's really kind of Zenny. This was like Ursula is the Japanese and I was the Chinese on this.

So anyway, so that piece absolutely and again, a lot of times I'm trying to think of other ways and it's not by like logic, like okay, I don't want to do a wall piece so how do I get to the floor. It's just I can't do another wall piece. I don't know what takes its place.

So it's sort of simple and you noticed it. It was all kind of hung from the ceiling and I just thought it's so cool. All you have to do is go from the – the wall has one frame reference. The floor has another frame of reference.

If it floats, it's a whole other way of looking at things and experiencing things. So that was like – it'd be like thank you lord, thank you, God, I know it's a stupid idea that it's hanging from the ceiling but it changes everything.

So and that was sort of me coming to terms with Ursula, needing kind of – it makes it like I knew cedar, I knew the smell of it. So if I – there was a familiarity and a relationship that translated through her, through her material. It still was her material but it's sort of in this other place.

So I like that it had that kind of bond or it opened up and there was no need for color, you know, there.

MS. RICHARDS: And that wasn't by any means the first time you hadn't used color. But that might have been the first major installation in New York that didn't have color.

MS. PFAFF: It was, that didn't have color.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the reaction of the critics toThere that and your friends?

MS. PFAFF: Roberta [Smith] said, "Moderation at Last" [review in the *New York Times*, 1990]. [Laughs.] There wasn't that much noise about that show. I liked it so much. I thought it was elegant. You know who liked that? I did hear things. Nancy Graves, Nancy Graves, Nancy brought people –

MS. RICHARDS: And she was a friend of yours?

MS. PFAFF: She was a friend of mine. She loved that work. She and I had a lot in – she would be in my family.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you meet her?

MS. PFAFF: She came into a first show I had at Holly Solomon and told Holly she wanted to meet me and she was someone who obviously I knew the camels and I'd seen images of some of this early work, earlier work which had a kind of shamanistic, kind of Africanish – there was some bones floating, some stuff.

But and by the time I met her she was probably doing these kinds of maps of the moon or something like that and some – she always has historical references.

I think her father worked at the Peabody [Museum of Natrual History, Yale University] or something. There was some way, she always had an archeology– and she's brilliant. She's very brilliant and we traveled together. We went to Sicily together. We were quite good friends.

There was a – when I got to Pilchuck and with Billy Morris, again, I thought that she had done so much with casting and bronze. The coefficient of expansion for glass and copper and bronze, they work together well. They're perfect. Steel expands too much and contracts. So I know this because when I would have Billy blow into it, it would squeeze in. Sometimes it would explode the glass. Copper works with it very well. It just expands at the same rate and shrinks at the same rate. So you can work with them together.

So I thought – I think Nancy liked this and I do this a lot. It's like since you do this, you might like this, and so I'll put people together.

Nancy was very beautiful and very elegant and she kind of – if you treated her like a lady, she melted a bit. I think people saw her as being very tough in ways. I think she was extremely warm and graceful and if there was respect there – and I respected Nancy and I think she knew that and so she – if I had ideas about something, she

knew it was coming from a nice place.

So I hooked her up with Billy because I thought, oh is she going to like this. They loved each other. They were very close and she had that brain aneurysm on the mountaintop at Pilchuck and she was working with Billy and he took care of her. He got, you know, a helicopter in to take her. This was desperate. She was dying. She had a huge – it was life and death there.

But she did a few glass – she worked with glass like an angel. It was made for her. it was made for her. Had she lived longer and had not been sick and recovering, I think she would have done some of her most amazing work with Billy or with working in that at Pilchuck with the other blowers or gaffers and with that work.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you want to talk about the big installation you did in Philadelphia in the train station or do you feel like you've talked about that a lot? O,kay we'll go on from there.

You talked about a shift in your work that you realized had happened only a few years later from an exterior landscape to an interior. But one could see all of your work as an interior landscape.

MS. PFAFF: Absolutely, you know that – it was Kiki Smith that said that.

MS. RICHARDS: What was it?

MS. PFAFF: That was Kiki. Kiki is one of the people – I can't say I'm close to her. She's an artist who I have admired from the get-go. We don't have a lot in common. But she's someone who if I was to come back again, she could – she seems free of – I mean maybe it's because she's been around the art world.

She was raised by artists. I mean, she's had a lot of stuff happen to her. She seems free of the – she can do what she wants. If she wants to make fairies, she'll make fairies. If she wants to go to the morgue and do dead bodies, she'll do dead bodies. If she wants to sew, she'll sew.

You know what I mean? It just feels like – more than any artist – there's a few of them. I think Sigmar Polke has a freedom that fascinates me. I think Bruce Nauman has a freedom that fascinates me and Kiki Smith, absolutely.

MS. RICHARDS: I think you have a lot in common

MS. PFAFF: Oh, interesting, I sure do admire her.

MS. RICHARDS: Not necessarily the imagery.

MS. PFAFF: No, but just an aspect? Oh, thank you. I think I was looking – oh I know what was happening. I was teaching a class at Columbia [University, NY] and everybody in my class was a girl, a woman. A lot of the students were from Barnard [College, NY]. There was a lot of talk about the body from Kiki's influence.

It's stuff that gave me, personally, the willies, like there was a moment when most people, most women in the art world were either sort of doing stuff about women, about their bodies, about vaginas and about periods, stuff that's like yikes, keep me away from this. For some reason I thought the way Kiki understood – it's like Eva Hesse.

Like when she was first doing it, it was only seen as kind of a sloppy minimalism and then later I think it was understood to be like that transparency might relate to bone or flesh or blood or cartilage or sinew.

It was seen differently once you sort of got it and it took a long time because she was thrown into the minimalist and the true to materials sort of stuff, that that other layer of sort of pathos or physical relationship that women might have with their bodies in relation.

Anyway, I was teaching a class at Columbia and there were all women in this class and it was this moment and I thought, this is the name of the game right now.

I can't be involved with these women and teach them if I don't come to terms with this impulse which seemed rampant at that time and Kiki was my guide through that and because of that, because I was thinking of her, thinking of teaching, thinking of how I'd find this language, it was a revelation.

I thought, oh my god, I have been dealing with this internal landscape and I called something *Corpo Onbroso* [1993], something like that, which is dark body and it was as how that was – a little show at the Rotunda Gallery [Brooklyn, NY].

It was actually quite a nice show and I was teaching at Columbia at the time. So that was my thoughts and so

with that show, even though it looked – it was wiry and sort of had my signature on it.

But it felt completely different and I think it was this realizing, in fact what you said. It had always been about that. But I had to get there by way of Kiki and teaching women, you know, so.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me ask you about teaching then as we're talking about teaching. After you were – well, you had a position at Columbia. I don't know if it was going to be temporary or ity was going to be permanent?

MS. PFAFF: Not it was a big deal. That was a drama.

MS. RICHARDS: And let you left to go to Bard.

MS. PFAFF: I did.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that happen?

MS. PFAFF: The man who hired me there had been a good, good friend at Cal Arts. He had hired me actually for CalArts. His name was Allan Hacklin, interesting man, very smart, ran the department at Columbia.

MS. RICHARDS: Hacklin?

MS. PFAFF: Hacklin, H-A-C-K-L-I-N. He called me and he said, "Judy, I'm running – I'm the chair, dean of Columbia. I'm going to offer you a job. It's a major job. It's full-time. It's got a real salary." I was an adjunct and visitor forever. "It's a real salary."

MS. RICHARDS: You did what seems like hundreds of adjuncts.

MS. PFAFF: Hundreds, hundreds, there's not a school – I mean if you knew, hundreds.

MS. RICHARDS: Who would you say no to?

MS. PFAFF: I don't say no. It's like a bad thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Anyway.

MS. PFAFF: So Allan says, "Right now it's an undergraduate department. I'm getting rid of the graduate school. I want to have a major – an art major for the undergraduates," which was hard to do at Columbia. That's a school which is – the great books is a core. It's like it's major, it's major.

My students – I was so successful there. We had a ball. Anyway, he gave me my first real, real, real job. I was the head sort of head of the sculpture department. I could hire a few people, get them in, set it up, do that. He knows I can – I can make things happen. I can do that. So that was cool and I was only there for two years.

What happened was he was true to his word in that he did take away the graduate school, did get an undergraduate major, and was ready to install the – to begin again the new grad school that is now Columbia's grad school and he wanted to keep me in the undergraduate department and I was just biding my time waiting to build this graduate school. I felt incredibly betrayed. There was also –

MS. RICHARDS: Why didn't teaching undergraduates seem enough?

MS. PFAFF: I don't know. It wasn't even that. It was just that it was kind of a demotion and he was bringing in – it was kind of became this other kind of boy's club. It really did. Just something shifted and I can't tell you all the reasons.

MS. RICHARDS: So the first year you were teaching undergraduate.

MS. PFAFF: First year and second year and I'd been working with putting this program together, developing all this stuff. It was kind of – it was his baby but it felt like my baby and then I was like – and I had the seniors. I didn't teach freshman. I was teaching – basically I was teaching it like – I'd never taught an undergraduate class. Now I do all the time and I love it.

But I had never taught freshmen. I'd been teaching seniors and I taught it like it was – you know, like everyone was going to be an artist when they grew up. It was the real deal. So I was going to be teaching freshmen and sophomores, after I had put this department together.

Leon Botstein, who's the head of Bard, calls me. He calls me. I think it was December Twentieth, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Out of the blue.

MS. PFAFF: Out of the blue, "I want you to come teach at Bard."

MS. RICHARDS: He knew you were teaching at Columbia?

MS. PFAFF: He knew I was teaching at Columbia. I had done a visiting gig at Bard and it was – I was the – what fellow, what was the – Milton Avery something or other. The worst, it was the worst place I'd ever taught. The students were fine. The faculty was terrible.

They were suing each other. They didn't like each other. It was terrible. It'd all been there for too long. It was terrible and I said, "You know, Leon, this is really bad, thank you but no thanks," like you know, I'm not interested, thank you.

He calls me back again and he calls me back. He calls me Christmas Eve. Now, Leon is Jewish. This doesn't mean anything to him [laughs] but he said, basically it was like – I remember. I was on Greenwich Street, downtown, this little bit of snow is falling.

It's like Christmas Eve and he's like, "Judy, just come, make it a happy Christmas" [laughs] or something like that and I was like, "You've got to be putting me on." Like it was so – I thought it was hysterical. But he's something. I admire him a great deal. He is something and this thing had happened –

MS. RICHARDS: Had you told him actually why you were rejecting it?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, oh I'm pretty clear.

MS. RICHARDS: And did he feel that you were wrong?

MS. PFAFF: He said that – no, he said, you're absolutely right. That's why I want you there and I said, "But how am I going to do this? These are all tenured." He said, "Trust me, the minute I hire you, half of them will leave," which was true, which was true.

But anyway, this thing had happened that I felt from my very good friend, who is a good friend still, I don't know, and he will admit to this, there was something going on.

They were all playing poker together every night. I mean, it was like – I'm not imagining. I mean, I can get overboard on some stuff but I'm not imagining this. This was not a good time and Leon said the right thing to me. He said, "This will be your department."

This – you've been teaching everywhere. You're probably under the radar. You do all this stuff – you don't – he said, "You can make this – this is a clean slate in a funny way or it will be in time a clean slate. I'll let you do whatever you want. I want you here. I need you here." That's Leon.

He hires really good people who will do the work and he never has to – he doesn't bother them again. I don't bother him. He doesn't bother me. So it was really a good match. But that was hard and it did – it did what I feared it would do. It took me out of the city. I cannot get back there.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you imagine commuting ever?

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So initially you thought you could stay in the city.

MS. PFAFF: I was staying with Al. I was like a carpetbagger.

MS. RICHARDS: You'd come up for a couple days.

MS. PFAFF: I'd come up a couple, usually three days, three-and-a-half days, go back. But actually it didn't work. The job was bigger than that initially. Now it's not. Now it's fine. But it was a big job because setting something up, starting, there was no secretaries, no budget.

MS. RICHARDS: So not only were you a professor of art but you were the department head.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. PFAFF: And you can tell, I'm not a good administrator. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Was there someone who could be the administrator behind you that you hired?

MS. PFAFF: I have a secretary. I have a secretary and there is a co-chair but the co-chair, and he's good, but he runs really the grad school and the summer program. He's a really nice man.

I'm the one who complains and complains we need this, we need that, we need someone, this printmaker sucks, I know someone who's good, let's bring him. I'm like – I fluff it all up and upset the apple cart and make everybody nervous and now it's like – it's like a – I think it's the best art department in the country, undergraduate.

MS. RICHARDS: What would you say is your approach to teaching? Could you describe it?

MS. PFAFF: I think I throw them into the deep end. I am not sequential in my teaching. I don't sort of think we'll do color first, line next, composition. It's like I think I start at high, like the best paints, the best brushes, the most ambitious. They learn by sort of going like, oh shit, you now.

MS. RICHARDS: So it's not just sculpture you're teaching.

MS. PFAFF: No, when I was first at Bard I was teaching painting, printmaking, sculpture. The first project I had for my freshmen was build a house. I don't know. It felt like with that you'll learn a lot. You'll run into trouble. I can help you. I need them to do something so I can help them fix it or teach them how to do it. If they do it slowly –

MS. RICHARDS: So it wasn't about developing their artistic vision. That was about physically making something.

MS. PFAFF: As soon as you make something – for instance, once when I was at Yale I had the undergraduates, because they didn't have a language for art and I thought, oh I don't know how to establish that there's really – that they do, they just don't know it.

So I had them – I think maybe they used one material and one tool. But I had them make 50 things that they liked, shapes that they liked, 50 other shapes that they didn't like, right? That's kind of easy.

Do you know what was funny – and so say you have 15 people. That's 1,500 pieces of things in there. The mound of stuff or the platter or the whatever, however they distributed these things, the bad and the good actually looked very similar, do you know that?

MS. RICHARDS: Obviously that's a good learning.

MS. PFAFF: But no one could make something. They know what they're trying to make and when that thing doesn't quite work then it becomes the bad one.

So something – it would be – and then I would have – then we'd start, right? "What do you like about the good ones?" And they would say, "This shape fits perfectly in my hand. This one looks like," da-da-da, whatever it was. They could be organic. They could be geometric. This one, that curve is not quite right. That – it just has a nasty – and there would be – and you'd look and they were almost the same but they knew when it was right. So I'm thinking isn't that interesting.

So this is not just – these are abstract forms most of them, right. For whatever reason you have a highly developed sense, I like this red, not that red. I like this touch, not that touch. I like this the way it fits with this other one, that other one doesn't fit half as well. So all of them had very distinct senses of what was right and wrong, for themselves.

So that might not be an empirical language for everything but they at least knew – so they could begin to attach rationales and logic and thinking and then with that, if I'm looking at that, I might say you might like the forms of Hans Bellmer.

You might like Kurt Schwitters. You might like [Joan] Miró. You might look at a Zen garden. You might – you could really attach personality, ideas, sensibilities from just this simple most rudimentary dumb, I like, I don't like.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you create that problem yourself?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: That's a wonderful problem.

MS. PFAFF: Walking in– because I had eggheads. I had kids who were brilliant undergraduates. This is the only

class they're ever going to take in their whole life.

I needed them to know that it was – you could locate – you could get to what something is and describe it and why you like or don't like it based on something that they actually did. I mean it was so silly but by the end of this, like the next week, all of them had like, well you like that because you're kind of a surrealist.

MS. RICHARDS: They had the language.

MS. PFAFF: They're like oh my god, they're just smart and they get it and if I said, I think you might like this, and I would send them to an artist, they would do the research on that and they would say, "Well you got it wrong. You thought that I," you know what I'm saying?

So as soon as you crack it open, they actually know what they know and like what they like and their whole life they've been making judgment calls. Little girls, not this sweater, that sweater, I like this pink, not that pink.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. PFAFF: You just don't know that that's what you're doing and with that, you know, that you've become this person with all of these things that you value.

So it was – so yeah there's – and every year I'll think of something but it's usually based on how I've – when I was at Queens College, none of the girls – mostly there were girls – had ever been to New York City, never been to the museums, never done anything.

But they knew makeup better than any – you should see. I was like – I walk in, I'm like, how did you do that, [laughs] like I'm asking, look at that hair. So I had them – there were a couple projects I had and we only used makeup and they had all the supplies. They all had the stuff.

So I sometimes had them try to make – swap faces, swap shapes. I could bring in an image, let's say, it's easy, like a Picasso and say, how did this 2-D [two dimensional], 3-D switcheroo happen?

Can you flatten that nose, can you put that – so we learned all about – because they knew - I knew they knew makeup. It's a language. It's shape. It's, you know, color. It was an easy way to introduce in Queens College, this is my first teaching, one of my students was the Pillsbury Bake-Off Queen. She'd just won second prize, major, and she was a nutritionist and she had hundreds of birds. She lived in a two bedroom apartment in Queens.

MS. RICHARDS: With hundreds of birds?

MS. PFAFF: Hundreds of birds. One room was an aviary and she – all the zoos around who had sick pets, sick birds- would bring them to her and she would bring them back. She was amazing. I had her – all the projects, she just baked them. It was so much easier. It was so much nicer.

So yeah, so teaching is a little bit like who are they, where are they, what do they need, what's going on. It's a culture. Every place has its own sort of culture. So you just can kind of figure out what might work with this.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like this was – that you enjoy teaching.

MS. PFAFF: I do enjoy teaching.

MS. RICHARDS: That there's a tremendous gratification.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you think it's influenced or affected your work? I mean, if you can imagine what your work would be like if you hadn't taught, which you have so much.

MS. PFAFF: I think I'm so stubborn and sometimes I'll find students like this or I might say this word, like, they're "un-teachable." In a way, I think I either – I'm pretty absorbent. You can show me anything and I'll think about it and I'll be part of – but I see so much that it all kind of gets in a slurry of sorts.

Occasionally students, especially Bard students, especially by the time they graduate, they do stuff that knocks my socks off. I don't think I think, oh I should do that or that would be something I could learn from. But probably they – sometimes I'll think I'm younger than they are because they get all kind of sophisticated so fast. But they do turn a phrase.

They have this thing because they're unencumbered by a lot of history and a lot of shall's and shall-not's, they

really have a freedom and that's a nice thing. So it reinspires me that I value those things that they have and I hope that I can still have an aspect of that. But direct influence, no, no.

MS. RICHARDS: I didn't mean that. I mean the things you said.

MS. PFAFF: I think what I like is I still like to look at young artists' work. I still see – I don't think there's been a year where I think I have said been there, done that, seen that, it's over, like I'm bored. I am never bored.

I can be disappointed that they don't work hard enough. But I'm never bored with what they do. I do – like I'm a really good visiting artist because you can put me in front of anything and I can talk about it on their terms usually. It's like reading tea leaves. I can usually figure out what their mother did if they're the first sibling. I mean I – it's been freaky how right I can be and I'm usually the kind of person who will ask that direct question right away.

So for me, it's enjoyable because – you know this feeling. It's like you've been doing it so long, you know something. It's second nature. You get it. You're good at it now. You were probably always good at it but now you're kind of relaxed and it's really fun.

MS. RICHARDS: A feeling of mastery.

MS. PFAFF: It is, it has that and I realize that's how it is. You know those books where I guess – was it called *Outliers* [*:The Story of Success.* Malcolm Gladwell. Boston, Little, Brown and Company. 2008]? That's what it was called, *Outliers*.

Where it's sort of like if you practice the violin for 2,000 hours, you will be good. If you practice the violin for 8,000 hours, you will be very good. If you do it over 20,000 hours, you'll be a genius and it's sort of like that. You just have to put the time in.

The difference between, you know, kind of good and great is mostly about – and I also then think if you can continue doing it for that long, you probably get something else from it. So there's a reason why you continue.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. PFAFF: But it's really almost just about the time and very time – I'll listen to an 80-year-old writer talk, a 70-year-old actress talk, an 80-year-old, anybody who's – they'll talk about things so easily.

It doesn't seem that smart anymore. It's just like breathing. They know things. They're relaxed. They kind of get all smart. They get all to be geniuses if they've just lived long enough to kind of be there, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, maybe, however, maybe because they're geniuses, they're the people you're hearing.

MS. PFAFF: That might be true too.

MS. RICHARDS: And you're not hearing the people who, no matter how many hours they put into it –

MS. PFAFF: But I sometimes listen, - you know, you're around here, you'll meet somebody at some civic function, who's – you know, been laying bricks and they seem to have a knowledge. I don't know. I don't know.

[END CD 5.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Pfaff on February 4, 2010, at Ameringer McEnery Yohe Gallery on West Twenty-Second Street in Chelsea for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc six. This is a continuation of that first part of the interview at Judy's in Kingston, New York.

Judy, when we last were speaking I think we touched on printmaking and it's been an area that you've devoted a lot of effort to with some amazing results over many years and I wondered if you could briefly talk about how you approach printmaking in relationship to the sculpture and the other works on paper.

What does it do for you? What are you seeking when you want to make a print? I mean, if there's a general answer to that, maybe it's different each time. But your engagement of printmaking, what it means to you.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, it began a long time ago. I've always been interested. I think it's because it seemed easy to me, the reversing of things, kind of the thinking in layers. I don't know if you realize it, but prints really always look nice.

You put some schmutz on a plate and you run it through and it comes up and it's really like who did that, what angels came in. There's something about it, especially from the etching. I love etching.

MS. RICHARDS: That's definitely your experience but I can personally think of lots of boring prints by other people. [Laughs.]

MS. PFAFF: Really, but I think it's the way – there's also surprise in it. There's a kind of reversing of the imagery, obviously gets front-to-back, back-to-front. I never know – actually it took me years to realize that that was happening. I didn't even notice that it wasn't what I had drawn. It was the reverse of what I had drawn.

So I think there was always a kind of magic and a kind of surprise in printmaking and it was so much easier than sculpture and also, we talked about this a little bit, there's usually a kind of mechanical system that I'm working with. I have a router. I have a chainsaw. I have a torch. There's usually an implement between me – it's not like clay where you are the instrument. I usually have a tool between it.

So I think with printmaking, more than even drawing, there's this intermediary aspect of it and I don't really know, I just have always loved it and I love that it's sort of – and you asked how I got into it – you can ask anyone who's ever worked with me with printmaking. I have a very unorthodox way of working. I don't have a drawing that gets translated into a print.

I don't know what I'm going to do when I get there. I start out slow. I make a lot of things and then somehow through the process I figure out what I've been doing, what I've done and I have an orneriness. It's not anarchism. It's just sort of like don't tell me what to do because I won't – I'll try to do that but then when I can't, I'll like – well, I'll do this other thing because I'm being in revolt or something.

But so the first prints I did in the real world was with Crown Point Press [San Francisco, CA], which is the best etching publisher in the world and I decided to do woodcuts, you know, which, you know, I mean, they're very elegant, so they –

MS. RICHARDS: Because you didn't want to do an etching?

MS. PFAFF: I didn't want to do an etching, isn't that – and I love etching. I don't like woodcuts. I mean, I like woodcuts but at the time, the imagery I was doing, it didn't seem like the right medium and so with the drawings and the prints, depending on what I'm doing, find an equivalent technique or seemingly technique in printmaking.

So with these kind of graphics sort of stuff that I was doing in the '80s, the woodblock prints, and they were very complicated. It wasn't – and even with that, usually woodblocks are kind of key block, key plate, and all of the other colors key into that. They register within that.

I had all different kinds of things. I cut them to fit so there's no matrix that this stuff is being set into and so initially I don't know if the print is two feet by two feet, 10 feet by two feet. So there's no size. I'm not working with a fixed image.

So if it grows, it grows. If it shrinks, it shrinks. It's so – for that people who help you and publishing places have lots of people who relay want to expedite and help you get to this product or this print, I make them a little batty because not only do I now know what I'm doing, they don't know what I'm doing.

So until – and it's usually at the last minute – until I know it and I've figured it out, I've done all the stuff and it's dawned on me what in fact I was doing, until that moment, they just watch me make things. So what happened with Tandem Press [Madison, WI] –

MS. RICHARDS: So wait, with Crown Point then–

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, with Crown Point I did a couple of prints, actually very good ones. It was a set of woodcuts which the whole suite was called Six of One [series, 1987] and then I did six etchings and it was called – what's it called – like Six of One, Half a Dozen of the Other.

So the other six were called Half a Dozen of the Other and they were all etchin and the work had changed. It was five years between the two bodies of prints. The worked had changed into this very, very linear, kind of slinky, atmospheric, wiry, bedsprings, atomic sort of stuff. So then etching then seemed perfect in a way and so we worked on that.

After that, and my big relationship in printmaking was with Tandem Press.

MS. RICHARDS: And they're based here?

MS. PFAFF: They're in Wisconsin. They're part of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. It's a huge, huge university press. But it was put together by two artists/engineers. So it has a real masculine sort of feel to it where Crown Point is a very elegant – you know, they do offer the best opportunities. They do it. It's very – they

play. They bring you sushi. They play great music.

At Tandem, it's kids playing music and you know, I mean you can turn it off if you want but it's a livelier, younger, and noisy, physical, we can do stuff. The press is five feet wide and like 10 or 12 feet long. It's gigantic.

So for me it was a perfect place because one, I could work there late and make a mess and try things out and I had enough student help that we could – it kind of was more hands-on in a funny way and less technical, not that the work is not technical but it just had a looser feel and a more physical feel and I think because of these – Bill Weege was –

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell his last name?

MS. PFAFF: W-E-E-G-E, Weege, I would think that's how it's spelled. He was such an open-ended guy and he did lots of work with Sam Gilliam, Alan Shields in the early days, and they were just making paper and throwing it among – gigantic things. I think Sam Gilliam did a half mile of prints. So it was a loose environment.

MS. RICHARDS: Is making paper part of your process?

MS. PFAFF: No, no, no.

MS. RICHARDS: But part of your experimentation and your working is figuring out what paper–

MS. PFAFF: Figuring out what paper, yeah, and what can do what, yeah, and it's very funny. Again, there's a kind of perversity with what I – the stuff I make is very physical and it's on the thinnest rice paper, which is the most difficult to print with.

MS. RICHARDS: Why do you think you came to that balance of thick and thin?

MS. PFAFF: I think – isn't it funny? When I was a painter, I only painted on muslin. Canvas, like duck canvas, number 12, number 10, is just so thick and I like stuff that squishes I guess and so if you have muslin and you put rabbit skin glue on muslin, it's like parchment.

So when I was a painter I always had stuff that really looked like thick paper. So I think that kind of paperishness, that parchment, that kind of transparency, but it was hearty. It's all Japanese paper, so the fiber in it is called gampi. It's sort of extremely strong.

MS. RICHARDS: Gampi?

MS. PFAFF: Gampi, G-A-M-P-I, it's a very long fiber. It gets beaten like crazy. So when it hooks together, like the paper I used, you can literally roll it up in a ball, dunk it in water, and it will be perfect at the end. So it can be abused and yet it's fragile. It's really beautiful. It's like the way silk is strong. Yeah, it's like silk. It's the equivalent – it's like the paper equivalent of silk, thin silk. So it's very beautiful.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever wanted to work on both sides of it then?

MS. PFAFF: I do work on both sides. I work on both sides all the time and I also always make – many times for a while I would put shellac on the paper or wax on the paper so it actually becomes – the paper becomes totally transparent.

So a lot of times I'll revert – I will print – the print will be on the front but I'll show the back because the way it comes through is more interesting. So yeah, I do that reversing thing keeps happening all the time and yeah, there's a lot of transparency and working on both sides.

MS. RICHARDS: At what point do you decide how large the edition will be and what's the reasoning for that?

MS. PFAFF: That decision is made by the publisher. When I worked with Crown Point, the editions were quite small. They were around 15 and I think it took 20 years to sell them. I'm being [laughs] – so when I went to Tandem and I started making prints, I said to Paula [Panczenko], I said, "You know, let's make three of each one of them, like, we're not going to sell them." We'll just have them and I have so many. So it doesn't really matter and she said, "No Judy, let's do an edition of 15," and I fought her on that because I just thought why make all this stuff if it's just going to sit in some – and actually you kind of have to pay taxes on things that you have. They are valued at "X" or "Y" and you've got 100 of them.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean the arrangement of that was you would own the edition?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I mean –

MS. RICHARDS: And it would be inventory?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, it's inventory. It's considered inventory. So it's kind of a liability to have a lot of – and she's stupid.

MS. RICHARDS: She felt that it was an asset.

MS. PFAFF: She felt – she felt that these were really good and that she could sell them and I tried to talk her out of it. She was right. I don't know why. I used to say I'm her Diebenkorn. I mean I was sort of like – she loved this. So I think people can really – if someone loves the work, if they show it, someone will come in and they'll just start talking about it.

So I think it's her enthusiasm and she featured the work. There are a lot of people now who think I'm a printmaker. They don't have any idea that I make sculpture, absolutely. I am being brought in as a visiting artist by the printmaking department and if I show slides of sculptures people might say, oh my god, I didn't know –it's like that's actually what I do.

This other thing is this – but it's become – and because I'm like I said the first batch of prints, there was a five-year hiatus between the first batch and the second batch. So stylistically they had jumped enormously. I go back to Crown Point every year. So it's like – and I go back a lot – so it's really – it stays up with the work. The prints advance the sculpture, the sculpture advances the prints. They really help each other, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you going to Crown Point at the same time as you're going to Tandem because they're offering you two different things?

MS. PFAFF: No, I really only print with Tandem now.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I thought you said you went to Crown Point every year.

MS. PFAFF: I'm sorry, no, I go to Tandem every year. I'm sorry, that's my error. Yeah, I go to Tandem every year and it's more like –

MS. RICHARDS: Hopefully in the summer.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, that's what's so funny. The first time Paula asked me, I was invited to come in February, which is like Wisconsin in February is my idea of hell. It's everybody's idea of hell unless you live in Alaska and then it sounds okay. But yeah, and Crown Point was in San Francisco, which is – I mean, who doesn't like San Francisco?

So but it really is a good fit for me. It's also like family and for me – they trust me now. So I do think when I was at Crown Point, because it's such an elegant place, I tried to make nice things. I mean, even though I was like kind of doing what I did – there was – I can see how nice they are and they do – I like them still very much.

But there's more experimentation for me at Tandem and I think it is also because it's a university press. It's not – they don't have to make money in quite the same way.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there a particular master printer that you always work with at Tandem, or a few?

MS. PFAFF: The one I have the closest relationship is a man named Bruce Crownover. It's also because he trusted me from the beginning. He had worked with a Japanese master. What would they call them in Japan if you're – you know, it's not just master. It's like you're a historical relic, or not really, but –

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, living treasure?

MS. PFAFF: Living treasure [laughs], so he worked with a living treasure. So there, if the master says do this, do that, you do it, no questions, and there's a lot of respect for artists. There's a lot of respect for the technique. He doesn't have to know what he's doing.

It would just be do this and you say, yes, I'll do that. So Bruce worked with me. I think he trusted that I did know what I was doing even though no one thought that I could pull anything off. It was just so scattered.

MS. RICHARDS: What was scattered?

MS. PFAFF: The process. I made it probably the first time 20, 40, 50 plates, different ones. None of them I liked. So I would just do another and another and another and what I realized at the end were they were actually like dominos, like this one goes to this one and so this is a set of four that worked together. This is a set of two. This is a unique one.

So I didn't know what I was working – I knew I was working towards something but there was a moment like – not "eureka" because that sounds really good, but like duh, that's what I'm doing. That's the system. That's this cosmology. That's the story. I had the actors but I didn't know when they were to enter the room or I didn't know what scene.

So it was like finding the narrative with these parts and I knew – I knew it. But I didn't know the form and a lot of times that for me is the hardest thing. I have tons of units, tons of parts, and there's a color probably that it's repeating. There's a shape that's in it or a sensibility that's repeating but it's not clear to me yet how to push it, where to take it, and that comes usually late, kind of through exhaustion.

I think like in some – you know how the surrealists used to get totally drunk or do a lot of drugs or stay up all night to kind of get it or to get to some other place and so in a way I think this – my methodology is a lot about like just getting to your wit's end and then you'll find an answer and there's always an answer.

MS. RICHARDS: So Bruce had the stamina.

MS. PFAFF: You have to have the stamina.

MS. RICHARDS: And the trust.

MS. PFAFF: Trust in that, I trusted in that. I don't know where it came from. I always do. It's like, don't bother me. Tell me when the opening is. Tell me when it opens. I'll get it done by then. That might be one minute before then or one hour before then, it's never a day before then. Now why I can't do it a day before, I don't know. It's adrenaline. It's like kind of being scared a little bit, trying to like, okay, no fucking round, do it now.

You've done all the experimenting. You've taken your time. You've tested this out. You now – that's it. You've got to call – it's like you've got to call it quits now or it's time to go. The door's opening in the show and there's people there and it's too late. So but I keep thinking that I've grown out of that. I haven't– I'm still doing that kind of thing.

But I mean there's a show – it's a little paper show uptown and I'm installing it. It's like who installs a drawing. There were parts.

MS. RICHARDS: Where?

MS. PFAFF: It's at the Museum of Arts and Design [NY].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, so you have a show up – oh at the museum, yes.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I saw that, yes.

MS. PFAFF: Even that is like the day before the opening and installing it and it's like – it's a paper show Judy. It's not – anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: So through this whole process you've really pushed the boundaries of printmaking as well.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, well I don't know but in ways I can see that. I mean, if I – Paula Panczenko, who runs Tandem, she's the director, she said to me the other day, "Like how many prints do you think you've done?" And I said, "Oh, maybe 30 or 40." I've done over 100 editions there in the last – I guess it's 14 years or something.

MS. RICHARDS: Does that help support them in any way?

MS. PFAFF: It helps. It bought my house, yeah –

MS. RICHARDS: I know it helps support you but does it help them too?

MS. PFAFF: Absolutely, yes, absolutely.

MS. RICHARDS: So even though they're nonprofit, they do want to sell.

MS. PFAFF: Absolutely. Well, it's not nonprofit. The university likes them to be able to pay the bills. They will support obviously if they can, if it's not a good year, but there is – it's not as pressured as a gallery or another publisher.

But there is pressure to keep afloat and it is a business in that way. But yes, and they do – they have David

Lynch and they do a lot – some of the younger artists, Nicola Lopez, fabulous printmaker doing a show and they give – and someone like Sam Gilliam, carte blanche.

You want to make a 200 foot print, you know, I think they're hoping that someone will like it but they don't say let's make it 200 1-foot prints. Whatever you need they will help with that.

MS. RICHARDS: Once you've finished the edition –

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you then going to decide how it should be framed?

MS. PFAFF: I frame every one of them, yeah. They come – that's another thing that I – and actually, Tandem now has a whole framing department because I make the prototype. I design the profile. A lot of them are gilded and there was stenciling on them.

For a long time they were pretty unique frames and I would – and I said to Paula, I said, "Don't worry about his. Since none of them will sell, one – you might sell one every six months. I can accommodate that. I can make the frames for that." So as soon as these things started selling it's like oh my god. So they set up a framing department. I taught them how to frame them.

MS. RICHARDS: So they're creating each frame as the print is sold because it's such an expense.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And then the cost of the frame is included in the cost of the print.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, and you can I guess buy the print without the frame but a lot of the ones which the frame is quite unique, the tendency is to always buy the frame with the print, yeah. But I've also worked at Bark Frameworks. That was one of my first jobs. So I have a love- hate relationship with framing. I get it.

Today, it was very funny today, I took my class around Chelsea and half the time I realized I was looking at the frames again. I go in and out of looking at frames. But I didn't like many of the frames and usually, there are decades when framing is like unbelievable, like oh my god. But now there's – I think people are pulling back from frames.

So there seems to be an ordinariness or a more neutral framing going on which probably is good. But I didn't like it. That was my critique. Even in the Philip Taaffe, did you see the Philip Taaffe show? I didn't like those frames. They seemed old-fashioned or not – I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MS. PFAFF: They didn't seem right to me and there's a beautiful Diane Arbus show and I didn't like those frames. So I don't know if I was just one kind of a, like, what am I looking at, if that's what I'm looking at.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a certain specificity that was missing, that they were –

MS. PFAFF: Yes, yes, it seemed –

MS. RICHARDS: It could have been ordered by somebody.

MS. PFAFF: It could have been ordered by someone. I mean, it's so funny because this frame, this gold leaf edge that is in this gallery is a throwback from the color field painters and I used to always wonder about that.

How can you have a color field painting of sort of this expansive emptiness and then have this very fast, shiny line around it. But that was the package. It was sort of everybody frames that way for that moment for those kind of paintings.

So I've always kind of looked at that and you know, yeah, anyway, as a framer, and I was not really – it was Jed Bark so he was the designer of the frames. There was this neutralization of the frames and this very elegant package and so I think from there I just decided I hated framing and so when I made my own I made it match the painting. [Laughs.]

Like I just saw there's a beautiful show at George Adams and I love Roy De Forest and he always makes his frames and I just love that he makes his frames. His are really cool. Did you see that show?

MS. RICHARDS: Not yet.

MS. PFAFF: It's a killer. It's a killer show. There's not much in Chelsea to look at, a lot of photography, but that's a very – George Adams has a great eye I think. It's a beautiful show, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of other works on paper, at what point is it that you're doing drawings? Is it in between sculptures?

MS. PFAFF: In between, in between, it used to be really –

MS. RICHARDS: The installations set the agenda.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, you know what's funny is for the longest – I always have made drawings and lots of them. I never thought about them as being drawings or things. It was like when you exhausted, when you can't make another – please don't make me do an installation.

It was like going to jail because it was very exhausting to do those pieces and I ran out of money, nothing was selling. It was just like this awful situation that I had myself in for many, many years and the drawings were just like – it was almost like going to bed. It was almost like recovery.

That's what I mean and I realized later on really the drawings actually spoke about the sculpture to come. They really preceded the sculpture, which was interesting. I never sort of noticed that and it was Holly Solomon who really liked the drawings. She decided that they were real and that I should consider them.

MS. RICHARDS: Realized they were works of art that deserved to be presented.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I don't think I ever showed – I did a drawing show with her once but they were all kind of cutouts, adhesive, very glittery. Canal Street was my source of – was everyone's source of materials and there was this plastics store, industrial plastics, and I knew them so well.

I think I gave them half my – whatever money I made I think went to that store. I don't think they ever gave me a discount, which was kind of amazing after a while. But I loved that reflective – it's called an interference pattern. It's very glittery. I think it looked like TV, like video. It's really – so I used – I had lots of adhesive.

I would go all around the world getting Japanese contact paper, German contact paper. Japan has the most – still has the most classy contact paper and now you can't buy contact paper. Do you know that?

MS. RICHARDS: You cannot?

MS. PFAFF: No. There's only a few. You can a little bit but it used to be that in every Woolworth's [Department Store] and every five-and-dime and every hardware store everywhere and now it's only maybe a few wood grins, black-white maybe. But it used to be amazing, I mean if you like contact paper. [Laughs.]

But see, I used to also do floors. So the whole floor would be contact paper. It would last through two months of a museum show and not tear. You could wax it. You could – I mean you know, it was – and you could get it up because housewives don't want glue on their countertops if they're protecting their countertop.

So I was like – yeah, I could tell you about every industrial material on the planet, its qualities. So yeah, the early days were a lot of these adhesive things and I think – and I still cut stuff out but I hadn't really – just as I'm saying this I realized that I've been cutting stuff for a long time. I think it's because I can layer it. I can stack it up. It sticks. It's like an object in a way, building and layering.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of knowing all these industrial materials, I was going to ask you at some point, this seems a good moment, about conservation issues and I assume – I mean, ideally when museums have acquired your work, they've interviewed you and talked about –

MS. PFAFF: No. One, they don't acquire the work. They never acquire the work, very few.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, those pieces that you did over the '80s?

MS. PFAFF: The '80s were – but those were like Calders. Those are like paint on metal. So there's not really – and then all the paints in the '80s and '90s were all sign painters enamels. That's really major paint. That's really great paint. It's got good pigment.

It's made for sign painters to do signs outside and last through snow, rain, sleet, sun. So they're highly pigmented and very, very durable. The plastics I always wondered if they would survive and I've seen them. Some of them are 25, 30 years old.

MS. RICHARDS: In people's homes as opposed to museums?

MS. PFAFF: No, I [laughs]–

MS. RICHARDS: You haven't seen them?

MS. PFAFF: No, I have them. I have them. They look fine which surprised me because I didn't know. I mean there is – things fatigue in a way. Plastics shrink and crawl a little bit. But the plastic – the plastic adhesives were always on plastic, Mylars, or frosted Mylar. So the shrinking and expanding basically happened at the same degree. They were doing that together.

MS. RICHARDS: Am I correct – I've noticed and I think I've read that your installations or even objects that have included non-art materials, a chair, a bucket, whatever, they're always new things that you've purchased rather than discarded pieces that you've found, junk, trash. Is it for aesthetic purposes or conceptual reasons that you actually are only using new things?

MS. PFAFF: There was a while when I actually used a lot of old things. Those pieces which are called like *Straw into Gold* or *Milagro*, those were bedsprings and bed frames which were burned in these yards in Brooklyn.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, we talked about that.

MS. PFAFF: Those were actually old. I made them look – I made them really look nice. So they looked new, they looked newer. They didn't look tragic. They didn't have that. It wasn't Bruce Connor. It wasn't like death, dying, burnt, grody.

I liked sparkly things probably and there was a moment and this is actually always happened – sometimes it happens that if I need something, I will always say, oh god, what am I looking for. It's usually right in front of me. Like all that furniture, Al Held used to say I would say it's like real urban stuff and he said, "No, it's really suburban, suburban, Judy."

But I kept finding that stuff right outside my door. I would open the door in Brooklyn and there would be this patio set or I would go around the corner and there would be someone was throwing away another. There was just a moment when everybody was throwing away everything I needed. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So the idea that you're not recycling old things is not true, you are.

MS. PFAFF: No, I recycled some old things, yeah, but I do like new things. I do like buying them new and distressing them. I think when you hear about that what I'm really talking about is all that wiggly line and all that stuff, everyone thinks I find that.

They come straight and I heat it up and bend it. So there's a lot of manipulation of materials that look like one should be able to find that. But in fact you can't. But if there's an object, you know, I do like plastic things. So if new plastic looks nice to me, it looks like Mexico, it looks like the Yucatan or it looks like something really – or in Japan, the plastics are such Technicolor. Their plastics are so beautiful.

They usually – they have more laminar and more corals and just these off-colors. Ours are more graphic I think.

MS. RICHARDS: You must have trouble when you go, needing extra suitcases to bring –

MS. PFAFF: Well it's very funny. When I went to Japan for a long time to do this big piece, I came back with brooms and dustpans and kitchen stuff and I just thought they were the most beautiful.

Also I thought they were great design and I'm bringing it on the plane as like extra luggage and they just – you know, I don't know. I think they just thought I was a little nutty. But I love that stuff. Yeah, I do love that stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back for a second to the works on paper –

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you working simultaneously on many pieces –

MS. PFAFF: Many pieces and if you went to –

MS. RICHARDS: And it sorts out as you were discarding.

MS. PFAFF: Absolutely. I mean, I do batches. I mean, and they spawn each other. It's like I keep thinking I'm very fractal. I start out. It seems like it's going to be this and it spurts five and then it spurts, each five spurts five and 10 and 20 or Fibonacci [numbers].

It's like there's a way in which I work that it starts out, and I keep saying, Judy, make it simple, keep it together, don't make people crazy, don't make yourself crazy. Don't make the gallery crazy. Don't make anybody, your dog crazy, and then it just goes and the further it kind of spins out, I get more courage at the end.

In the beginning I'm sort of saying that there's some more rules and by the end you fly. It's like when you – you know when you're going to a party like in the old days and you start out and you do a dance and by the end of the evening it's like everyone is having a great time.

It's totally formless, formless form, and all the energy is coalescing and the party's just got this gestalt, this thing that's there and initially you were really just doing a little dance. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: This probably never happens to you, but are there moments when you want to work and no ideas are coming and if so –

MS. PFAFF: Always, always.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you do to work through that?

MS. PFAFF: You just sort of make something. You do something. I don't know. You do something and then something happens. No, I start out – I hate that. I hate that. It's like I am now this age and I still don't have an idea when I begin.

But the end, I have billions of ideas and I think mostly now people work in the reverse. They have lots of ideas and they make, they give form to those ideas. I have no ideas and by the end I have lots and then it has a lot of form. So it really – and I like that feeling.

I like the feeling of inventing it now and keeping in touch with what I just saw, what movie, what phrase just was said, just what's going on in my head without knowing that that's really what I was thinking or I'll look at a body of work and I'll think, that looks so sad or that looks like you have confidence today. Things are given off and it gives you feedback.

I don't keep a diary but I would imagine that could happen, like you'll read a notebook from a year ago and you'll think, oh, I was really off my rocker then. I didn't know that. I didn't' know I was so upset. I didn't know I was so happy. I thought that was going to be forever. So you can see things sort of after it passes. How people can get an idea and hold to it, I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: After the explosion of ideas –

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, then it collapses. It's empty.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there a moment when you edit, say okay, now let me look at all these things that I've done over the past day or week or month and throw some away?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, yeah, absolutely.

MS. RICHARDS: Recycle?

MS. PFAFF: I don't know if I recycle so much but I will throw it away, yeah, yeah, and usually it's the first things. I get better at the end. So the first notations, say, experiments, usually get into that or I can cut them back enough that they disappear. If not edited out, they would lose their significance. They lose their priority place. It shifts. The meanings shift or their importance shifts and it becomes just white noise or whatever color noise. Yeah, but I will edit.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you found over the years that you're working more quickly or you're working more slowly? Has the pace changed at all? I'm thinking in terms of 2-D, the two-dimensional.

MS. PFAFF: If I get a – all of our lives are more complicated. How many hours are spent on the computer doing email or doing this or that? It never felt as complicated, all of the, you know, parts, all the hats that you wear.

But when I'm just in the studio and the phone's not ringing and there's not – I don't have to teach and I'm working well, I'm smooth as silk. It feels less difficult now. It feels – I like it. I like the – I'm not – initially, like I sort of, I don't know if I said this earlier on but I was really at war with how sculpture, what it was being defined as and now there's hardly any definitions to break down.

There's no wars to fight. It's all come and gone or you know, I'm sort of out of it now. Out of that, "where am I in relation to this?" I can do my work and that's nice. When I talk to older artists, I think that's one of the things that feels very, very good, is you – hopefully you're not as vulnerable to what critics say. Hopefully you feel

comfortable in who you are and you sort of – it's too late now to turn back or start over again.

So it's a kind of acquiesce and to have a great – it feels more exciting to me now. I get – I still do not like to show in New York. It feels like people come out with guns blazing or there's always like, she thinks this or this used to be that or I liked it better with the color. There's kind of a – unless you're sacrosanct and there are some people who have never heard a bad word. I'm not one of those people [laughs] and I always like wait for the next shoe to fall.

But other than New York, I love showing and going places and that feels good. New York is – it's pretty – it's not cut throat. Most of the time you don't make an impression. It's like you're just – I mean think about it.

If you get – if one gets a paragraph in the Friday *New York Times* every 10 years, you're doing really well. [Laughs] How sick is that? That's so bad and that's it and it can make or break you. You can breathe or not breathe for years after a good and/or bad review.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back a little bit, I want to continue talking about your current work but we haven't talked about some important past works, at least from the past 10 years or so. Going back to a major installation you did at Emmerich [Gallery, NY] in '97 called *Round Hole, Square Peg*. It was a major installation. You really put that gallery space through some tough –

MS. PFAFF: I think they closed a few months later.

MS. RICHARDS: It was amazing that you were allowed to punch holes in the wall and all the things you did.

MS. PFAFF: I know, I know.

MS. RICHARDS: But can you talk a little bit about the evolution of that piece, which seemed to be somewhat of a departure for you, when it was done.

MS. PFAFF: It wasn't done – in a way I think a huge departure. I went into a kind of shock when I changed galleries.

Andre Emmerich was a very – kind of not just an established gallery but it was a very classy gallery and it didn't really show sculpture like I might make and I thought we were an odd fit. I was an odd duck, a little bit. That title [Round Hole, Square Leg]was really about me and my relationship really to the gallery and what it – well, me in relation to a lot of things.

MS. RICHARDS: He did show sculpture, like-

MS. PFAFF: He did but it was like –

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Didn't he show Louise Nevelson?

MS. PFAFF: Yes, maybe earlier on. She wasn't there when I was there. She was with Marlborough [Gallery, NY] I think. But it was a real painters' gallery and Andre, for instance, I mean simple things. I don't know if you ever noticed that.

He never had the windows – window – it had southern light onto Fifty-Seventh Street and it had these blinds which were vertical blinds which were always closed. The first thing I did when I walked in is I opened the blinds and pulled them open. Andre said the reason you don't have a window in the gallery is real life is more interesting than paintings.

So not – just like if you can see someone walking, it's always going to capture your - it's going to take you through the window and I thought, yeah, it is more interesting and I would like that in to work with that. So also what I had realized, especially with the way Andre's gallery was to Fifty-Seventh Street, my studio in Kingston was to the Rondout Creek. It was exactly the same distance.

The light was the same and it's a river of sorts. One was a river, kind of this urban river, and mine was this and I was in this. I was teaching at Bard. I had this beautiful – I rented this tugboat factory that was an extraordinary building and I was completely at a loss.

All of the imagery from before then had been sort of New York, urban, suburban, input music, sound, whatever, and this was like the river flowed. A heron would stand and look in my window. There would be sturgeon fishermen. There would be the rowing team would go by some. It wasn't the Grand Canal but it had a lot of activity and it was this working class river in this working class town.

MS. RICHARDS: What town was that in?

MS. PFAFF: Kingston, it was right on the river and it had been a tugboat factory and so when I got to the gallery, I thought – I mean I just was – I thought, one, it's not a gallery that makes sense with what I do. When I looked at the configuration, it had a beautiful plan.

The plan of the gallery was kind of interesting and I just sort of realized this.

So anyway, the thing about the river, I just thought nothing happens. So in a funny way I'm just going to have to make this show about nothing. So it did have these sort of very Zenny parts to it.

It was a lot of steel, almost no color. There were a lot of – there was an ice storm that happened in April so there were a lot of trees that fell and so I gathered all these trees and most of them were chopped into parts. So it wasn't whole trees.

But it was just sort of this sound of things kind of flowing and a kind of drop in the water and a kind of fallen tree and it was very – I think it made a lot of sense with this kind of lyrical abstraction in a funny way.

MS. RICHARDS: There was a horizontality.

MS. PFAFF: There was a lot of horizontality, from the river.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Which seems to the river, previous works had a much more vertical –

MS. PFAFF: Exactly, yeah exactly, so and I thought it had different like anterooms. Like there was a room for this kind of, in quotes, "meditation," and this kind of – it was the emptiest show I ever did and it was like the fullest show I ever did.

It had lots of material in there but it all sort of disappeared with this kind of horizontality, this kind of the light kept pouring in from the windows and so you sort of felt like you were in a day or in a place and even though you're on the fifth floor on Fifty-Seventh Street and Fifth Avenue, it had a real pastoral, for me, I mean that's the way it felt for me, that I thought it was a portrait really of the river and I thought it was kind of a compliment.

As bullheaded as I am, I wanted Andre to like it. So I thought it had this big open landscape orientation like what he made his reputation on with these kind of large, like Frankenthalers or a kind of air, amount of air in the gallery and a kind of quality of air and so I didn't really want to like be the bull in the China shop, which I was, but I actually really wanted him to have rapport with this piece. He actually – I do think he did like it.

But getting it in, welding in place, having the gallery have, you know, I think on some of the things 1,000 pounds of plaster poured directly on the floor [laughs] two or three times, welding, grinding. I mean he had to go home. But when it was all said and done – and that is a funny thing – like the prints actually always look nice, like elegant in certain ways.

A lot of the sculpture has kind of a grace to it. I don't know how it gets there because I don't have that. But at the end, all the parts sort of add together and there is a kind of ease. Not ease, but a wholeness to it in a certain way and that one was quite graceful by comparison.

MS. RICHARDS: That seems to have evolved into the piece you did in São Paulo the following year.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, very much so. Miranda McClintic put my name forth to whatever committee that is from seeing that show because she had actually curated me in a show at the Hirshhorn in 1981. So this was really 12 [sic] years later.

I don't think – I mean, we'd probably seen each other. But I think when she saw that show I think she saw the work again and sort of thought, oh, I should present her to do that. I think it – she saw me in a different way probably and the work had obviously evolved I guess hopefully and so that was a big show for me in relationship to having me be seen again.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. PFAFF: And Miranda was the one who really –

MS. RICHARDS: And that piece again had no color.

MS. PFAFF: It had no color.

MS. RICHARDS: No color.

MS. PFAFF: Only had some color from the Brazilian red earth and that was quite minimal, quite a small amount of it. What's that stuff called? It has a name, that earth, like blood earth or something like that. It was a beautiful name for that color earth. Anyway, yeah, it had very little color.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the impact – when you did that installation in São Paulo, of course there's a huge audience. I don't know quite how many people came to see the biennial but a good number. But there was almost no press in New York about anything of the biennial.

MS. PFAFF: No impact. Nothing, nothing, and I thought that piece was hard to see because every – there's so much stuff and it was really quite experiential and it's kind of a carnival kind of thing and there was extraordinary historic work in that show.

MS. RICHARDS: What does the title mean [*Coroa de Espinhos,* 1998]?

MS. PFAFF: It's "crown of thorns," crown of thorns. It's also a plant, coroa de espinhos. It's a plant that in Brazil, all the rich people instead of barbwire, they have that plant. It's the equivalent of barbwire.

MS. RICHARDS: In addition to barbwire.

MS. PFAFF: In addition to barbwire. But also I thought that that piece was very – I have zero religion. But if the – if Andre's piece was sort of Buddhist, that piece was Catholic.

It had – you couldn't tell but there were lots of – there was a kind of floor plan going on and these kind of columns and I don't know if you noticed but the trees were upended so that the column cap were the roots. So it kind of had a kind of Christian Catholic imagery and I don't know why but – and I don't know why – a lot of pieces for about five years had this nod to churches and church architecture or religious architecture.

Even the Elvehjem [Museum, WI] piece which was called *If I Had a Boat* [2001], the floor plan of that is a maze which is in a Catholic, in a church, like in Spain, you know.

[END CD 6.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Judy Pfaff at Ameringer | McEnery | Yohe Gallery on West Twenty-Second Street, New York City on February 4, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc seven.

You were just mentioning the LBM installation, but let's skip back – just, actually, the same year, just right before then, you did a really interesting work called *Notes on Light & Color* [2000].

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Talk about that. And again, there were parts of that had never looked –

MS. PFAFF: Never done before or since.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, and since.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, I was a visiting artist at Dartmouth [College, NH] and one of the perks of that residency was they give the artist a show in this gallery. And it's – I forget the name of the gallery –anyway [Jaffe Friede & Strauss Galleries]. And I was teaching, also, at the same time, at the same time at Bard's, so I was teaching in both places, going back and forth. [Laughs.] And it's like a five-hour drive from Dartmouth to Bard in the winter.

So this was one of those moments when I said, okay, do not do an installation. This is stupid. And we will make – we will make drawings and so there was actually a time when I was – when I was doing a large piece in Walla Walla and it was a very despondent time. And I realized everybody in Walla Walla read *National Geographic* because they didn't want to be in Walla Walla and they would just [laughs] fantasize about being in Africa or any place – I usually I call it "my Waterloo" – it was like sort of the end of the world, you know.

Anyway, I was working on these *National Geographic*, sort of fantasy escape things for a while. And then – and I was doing well. And then I was going to do a show in the gallery of these drawings. And then I really took a good look at this gallery and it was perfect. It was – it had the shape of a fish. It had this brown sort of wall and came back around and then cut off here. So it had this kind of double curve in and out, you know, with concave and convex, but there was some way in which your eyeballs filled it up in a funny way. It was – I saw it. I was walking down a hall, the doors were open and you just couldn't register the space. It was just peculiar space

because it wasn't a flat wall. And you didn't know it was a curved wall.

So you were trying to sort of make it flat – I mean, you know, so I just thought, I've never seen anything that's sort of dealt with vision or the eye. You know, when you listen to [Paul] Cézanne just talk about sight – just the, you know, just the physic – you know, and all the impressionists. So it felt like this thing had this funny relationship to eyeballs. I don't know why, but also like right and left. And I loved that idea, so I was working with these sweep molds, these plaster sweep molds. And then all of a sudden, I though –

MS. RICHARDS: Sweet molds?

MS. PFAFF: Sweep. S-W-E-E-P. Sweep molds.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MS. PFAFF: And so you have a template and you can draw out this form. And I just thought, if you had two spheres coming together but the spheres were the voids and your nose was the center and your eyeball sort of went to one side – I don't know – it just came to me.

And also, this thing – I used to work, proofing, you know, with Albers prints [Josef Albers] at Yale. But also, I was sort of – one of my little tiny wars was with the – you know, like the ideas of Madame [Helen]Blavatsky as opposed to, you know, and [Johann Wolfgang von]Goethe as opposed to, you know, the kind of more concretized sort of real stuff that was happening with Albers.

Anyway, so anyway, I just thought – and the show was opening in literally like five days. And I was like, no, I can't stand it, like I had no – you know when you have no choice? It's like I hate that. Like, I couldn't let this gallery go. It was just too beautiful. It was one of a kind. I had this really clear vision of what it would look like and that happens to me only once in a blue moon. So I thought, you have to do this. So it was – it's my favorite show. It's my favorite show. I think it took five or maybe few more days – maybe it was a week to build it.

MS. RICHARDS: It must have been challenging to get all those materials.

MS. PFAFF: In there – yeah, I know, because I didn't come with those materials, you know? So and it was sort of mathematical. I had to sort of work out the templates and the – not pulleys, the bearings – the wheel bearings to make it all work. Anyway, so and it was lunar – when you walk down the hall, it was a spaceless space. It had – and it had these sort of Martian, sort of, it wasn't built as a gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: It wasn't built as a gallery then.

MS. PFAFF: It was built totally in the gallery. It was destroyed in the gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: No, I don't mean that. I mean the space at Dartmouth, with the curves, was that built as a gallery?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So most painters couldn't use those curved walls.

MS. PFAFF: I think it was a slow enough curve that they could, but it was peculiar, totally peculiar. [Laughs.] I really thought it was so beautiful. It's a little bit like the way this table shape is, you know, like these sort of strange sort of '50s sort of things and I don't know. And it was red-green, there was this red-green thing going on. It was like a colorblind test.

Anyway, it was very optical. It was very spacey. It was, like, really spacey. It felt very lunar. It felt like it was gravity-less when you walked in there. This is me talking, so I have no idea what other people's experiences, but I think it had that.

And actually, Terry Riley was around doing a concert and he thought it was cool. So I thought that was good, you know. Anyway, and it was destroyed almost – I think it was open for a couple days and we had to take it down because there was a – because I had the timing wrong. I thought I had all this time, you know? I didn't. I read things backwards, so I – but anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: But it was gorgeous.

MS. PFAFF: It was really nice.

MS. RICHARDS: And all those colored, fluorescent plastic – the films.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, films.

MS. RICHARDS: Where the bulbs were colored, too.

MS. PFAFF: Some were colored, yeah. Actually, no, those weren't colored. They were UV light, like not black light, but there's a white UV light. It's not a – gronabs [ph] are kind of purple. This was a UV light which was that weird lavender-blue.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh yes.

MS. PFAFF: And black lights are sort of very dark – dark sort of purple.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know – since this has only existed for a couple days and yet you have fantastic images, might I ask you –

MS. PFAFF: Rob van Erve took the images from me.

MS. RICHARDS: You have a wonderful, consistent – consistency of quality in these sadly no longer existing – in having images of these unfortunately no-longer-existing installations.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, Rob took those. He, actually, is a fantastic photographer, as you know, like was my assistant. We were very close. He had a feel for that piece and a couple other pieces he – he took them very seriously. And I think what was nice about Rob was he wanted to document the work so it did, in some way, exist, you know, so that was – and he was an assistant. He helped make it.

So, you know, a lot of times, people who work with me, it's like they have to cook, they have to drive a truck [laughs] they have to know how to weld, they have to know how to take photographs, they have to know how to sweep the floor, you know, so there's kind of a –

MS. RICHARDS: They should get a degree when they finish with your –

MS. PFAFF: The thing is, is everybody who works with me can really get jobs because they are really skilled with all of the parts of doing a show, you know? So yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: It was a spectacular piece.

Then, let's go to the Elvehjem Museum piece, which you were talking about the maze.

MS. PFAFF: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And I wanted to ask about that decision to use the maze form on the floor.

MS. PFAFF: Well, you can see the architecture is like the '70s-concrete-bunker architecture –

MS. RICHARDS: Challenging, to say the least.

MS. PFAFF: For me, challenging because there's no way to soften it. Now, I have seen fantastic shows in that space that did in fact soften it. But you either have to ignore the architecture – I tend not to ignore architecture. I tend to sort of use it. I thought the funniest thing about that place – it has all these staircases so I added more staircases.

I also thought it's – you know, it's in Madison, Wisconsin, in the winter. I think you need a place to sit and rest and think and a kind of more spiritual place than this architecture kind of gives you. So there were a lot of little decisions in that. There was a lot of planting. I planted kind of a garden in there. It actually survived really well.

MS. RICHARDS: I read that the university, at least those people in the building, loved it. And it was a very complex piece that used the entire –

MS. PFAFF: They loved it. You can't see it in the pictures because it's so linear and it's so gray.

MS. RICHARDS: But it was – what I wanted to say is that it seems so unfortunate – I mean, all the pieces, unfortunately, they don't survive. But that that couldn't have become permanent or lasted there long than a year, was that your decision? Was it their decision?

MS. PFAFF: Their decision. That it lasted that long was a coup. I've never had anything of – I must sort of compliment also Russell Panczenko who did that. I don't know how he knew this but he decided that I should have a kind of quasi-survey, but he also knew that the installations don't exist, so a survey can only be prints

and drawings and these kinds of pieces.

So he did this very wonderful thing. He had me come in and do an installation, a big one, and paid for it, very generous. And then allowed me to do all the other work, so it was an amazing kind of gift.

And he's done two shows with Xu Bing – his first show in America and his second – so here is this guy who actually is like, if he sees artists' work and likes – and Gillian Jagger gave her this wonderful, huge kind of – for her, a retrospective also – and it's a fantastic museum setting.

So I do think it's very funny. If I work with a gallery, they have to be super nice because they have to put up with this, and if I ever do a show in a museum or something, they have to be really nice because it's not a power show for them. It's full of problems. It's full of – someone is going to complain about the noise or the –

MS. RICHARDS: Challenges.

MS. PFAFF: It's challenging. It's full of challenges. So I self-select, or it self-regulates in that way. But what I thought also about that show, that space is extremely vertical. The light was in the ceiling so it had these – you can't really quite see it but it has these huge spires that go up 40, 50 feet. And they're kind of hung with these lead balls on the bottom. So if the balls swing, the whole cathedral shifts. And it has a real nervousness.

Now children – they protected the lead; it wasn't, like, exposed lead – they liked the balls, so they would move them around. And you would see this whole kind of willowy structure move.

And it was sort of like the way [Antonio] Guadi did his structural sketches for the Sagrada Familia where he had this line drawing with sandbags on the bottom so all the parabolas, all the geometries were worked out upside down.

So this sort of had this – it wasn't upside down but it was based on sort of trying to sort of get some kind of cathedral-ish thing that was still based on these weights that sort of moved as you kind of – it made you pay attention to the light in the ceiling, which was about 60 feet above.

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking about these pieces swaying, I'm wondering if you ever considered adding the element of sound. I mean, you have so many different elements. You probably don't need another one.

MS. PFAFF: No. But this is going to sound very funny, but I'm actually kind of a purist. You know, there's a thing now where everybody leaves clamps in or the machines on as a kind of casual – like, sometimes, I'll be doing a show and I'll say, man, my ladders look great in here.

[Side conversation.]

[Audio Break.]

MS. RICHARDS: I asked about sand and you said you were a purist.

MS. PFAFF: Sound, yeah, like, all the things that I see which are –

[Off-side conversation.]

MS. PFAFF: The things what I think would make something kind of cool, like putting a video or this or that – one, I don't have a real feel for that stuff. But even though something will look fantastic, I think, that would be too clever. That would be – I don't know. It's not about those things. And even though I can sort of – I know enough to be able to turn a phrase to have it all sort of work easier. But I don't do that. and I can't – I'm not giving you good examples but I know there are easier systems and easier ways to accomplish something and I reject it because it's really not quite right. And I wish I would stop that.

MS. RICHARDS: I've never felt the lack of sound. I just suddenly – when you've talked about the swing –

MS. PFAFF: Well, a lot of times –

MS. RICHARDS: And the kids pushing –

MS. PFAFF: – dancers will say to me, or, I get asked this a lot: What do you listen to? These pieces are very musical. This would be great for a dance company. So I think there's an element of sound which is sort of – it's a reflex somewhat.

A lot of people have asked me about sound – like, why don't I use it or is there or what do I listen to or is this – I think it's also about the nature of the composition. It feels like there might be kind of jazz or even the structure

of a complicated classical piece. Like, there's just layers or a bass note or a this or a – kind of a spatial-sound thing or an ambient thing, like an Eno, Brian Eno, or something. But yeah, it's been asked a lot but no, I never have.

I was really excited I got light bulbs in. I thought that was so high-tech. [Laughs.] You know, I was like, that is so modern. [They laugh.] And it'll take me a long time, like I'll know – and actually, I've done work for 30, 40 years which has light bulbs in them but I am always – actually, a lot, yeah, a lot of stuff has had light bulbs. But they've always been sort of smaller, not really a big deal. But I love light – there are light bulbs everywhere. Chandeliers, any kind of light. But even now, I'll plug something in, I'll think, that is very cool. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: At Elvehjem, also, you put together works on paper in amalgamations to create an installation. I don't know if you'd call it a new work of art but you decided –

MS. PFAFF: Yes, well, if I have a chance to do that, I will usually do that. I cluster things, so I like having 10, 20, 40 things in a room together even though if they're sold, obviously, they would be sold apart. But my druthers is to have it all together. And Russell completely allowed me to install all the works. He might suggest, this might work.

You know, people who live in museums really know about how rooms work. Like, what's the feature wall where people tend to gravitate to, what's the lead wall, what's the – this wall always gets a kind of attention in a certain way. So there might be advice but he was very good at giving me license to install flatwork in clusters also.

MS. RICHARDS: Moving up a few years, you did something maybe for the first and maybe only time – a set for an opera at Bard.

MS. PFAFF: I've done a couple sets. I didn't do one for –

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, was the Bard the first or no?

MS. PFAFF: Seventh. I did one – I got a Bessie [New York Dance and Performance Award] for it, actually.

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me about that.

MS. PFAFF: It was a piece – do you remember when BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music] first started doing these artists – what was it called, like, "artists do the stage", or something like that. But they had dancers at the Lepercq Space at BAM. Not the formal, big space but the kind of – it's like an auditorium or a gymnasium, the second-floor space, which was called the Lepercq Space.

There was one year where six artists were invited by Harvey Lichtenstein – is that his name, yeah. And they coupled them up with different dancers. And I was coupled with the Nina Weiner Dance Company. And the piece was called *Wind Devil* [1984]. *Wind Devil*. And that was interesting. It was more, kind of like a stage set. The opera set I did later was really more like a piece of architecture. *Wind Devil* –

MS. RICHARDS: What's the difference between a piece of architecture on stage and a stage set?

MS. PFAFF: Stage sets – well, the actors, who were very professional, said to me, "Oh my god, this is like real stuff; it's like real material." There wasn't anything faux about it. There wasn't – the back wasn't – everything was exposed.

MS. RICHARDS: This is the Bard?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, the Bard piece was massive amounts of architecture and steel. And even though it was very linear and looked very transparent, it was tons and tons of steel. They loved – they kept saying, this is like working on a piece of art. And they worked at the Met [Metropolitan Opera]. They've worked in great, great opera houses.

But things made by set designers are made more cleverly. They're made with things that look like steel but are cardboard; look like this but are that. The backs reveal that it's faux. It's like a ghost town in Hollywood or something. It looks really convincing but it's not real. They were really happy. And it was difficult for them to work – you know, it was a pretty dramatic thing, there were balconies, so it had to be very solid.

But they really liked it and they said it was unlike a stage – not from the audience point of view – from the audience point of view, it looks like a stage set – but from the actors, from their experiential point of view. And they thought it helped with their delivery, or, you know, their acting or their singing or their sense of it. They liked that very much. And that was a thrill because I had never worked with anybody who had to sort of live in it and act on it and interact with it ever. And that they liked it very much was just a thrill, really a thrill.

But the piece for the Lepercq Space that I did for Nina Weiner was actually all this – oh, it was good. There were all these fans in it and tree kind of things in it. The fans, some of them – for instance, I thought a beautiful moment was this tiny little fan that might've been 10 inches in diameter pushed this – it was a fan modeled off of windmills, like, in the desert. So they're gigantic and they pump water or they – you know, they work off the wind.

So this tiny, little, 10-inch fan, it took an hour but by the end of the show was rotating this giant fan. It moved it a little bit, a little bit; all the latus [ph], struts, I'm not using the right word, but the arms of this, you know, this fan would've filled this whole room so I think it was about 16 feet in diameter. And the doors everybody walked through would spin like a fan. So everything was rotating. There were tiny – this motif of fans and kind of wind blowing and these stylized trees.

And in the Lepercq Space there was also all the way down, there was this tiny, little inset in the wall that no one had ever used. And the dancer, I thought that she should do, like, a vignette way up there.

She didn't want to dance, herself, but she sort of had some things spacial she wanted to, and it was sort of, like, behind, like, a kind of screen. I made all of these louvers that came up and down. So you could sort of see this shadow in the back. So it was very spatial, it was very airy and it was kind of – had a lot more color and it did have a real dry, arid, desert palate.

And I think it was the first year these awards, which were called Bessies, were given and I got one for the stage set, which was pretty good because there were some pretty good people in that batch. And the second time was for *Regina* [2005], which was at Bard.

MS. RICHARDS: At Bard. Oh, you got a Bessie for that, too? No, that was –

MS. PFAFF: No, that was just – I got a good review in the *Times*. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: You did an exhibition I just wanted to touch on called *Buckets of Rain* at the gallery in '06.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And I've read that that was in part a response, or, time you were working on it, you were moving through the deaths of some important people in your life.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, absolutely. It's funny because you know that phrase, the good news and the bad news? You know, do you want to hear the good news first or the bad news? The good news was in September, I got a MacArthur grant. And I kept it silent for a long time and I was – I mean, it was announced, I guess, in January. I forget when it was announced but you find out about it much earlier than everybody else knows about it.

And I was a little bit sort of in shock with that grant because I didn't know sort of what it meant. I was, like, really nervous that I would blow the money; you know, like the millionaire lottery winners who end up on skid row a year later. I mean, it could happen because you kind of get a little drunk and stuff.

And I had been in such major debt. I wasn't in debt then so much but I had just gotten this new studio. I didn't know how I was going to pay for it. I was going to do anything. I've always lived a little bit in advance of the money. [Laughs.] I sort of live before the money comes, knowing that everything is going to be all right. But this frightened me. And so I don't know why I didn't spend any of it for a long time for a while.

And then all of a sudden, people started dying. It was, like, Al Held died. Oh my god, that's right. I had a ticket to go to Italy to visit him the day after the opening of that opera set. I never made it to the opening. He died the week before. I had a ticket and the set was in – and the actors had to learn how to – what they call blocking [ph] – do all the kind of – stuff.

So I just flew with his daughter, Mara, and helped take the studio down in Italy; went to the cremation; I mean, it was just – and from that moment on, I don't think for a year I could figure out how to feel. My mother died three months later; Elizabeth Murray was extremely sick.

These are, like – Elizabeth and I were not – she wasn't that much older than me but she was the salt of the earth. She was the wise one. I felt very close to her paintings. I always thought she was very – I mean, Elizabeth had a great career but I never thought she was understood as being as great a painter as I think she is. Al was someone who was my mentor. So I sort of lost

MS. RICHARDS: Did Nancy Graves die around this time?

MS. PFAFF: And Nancy Graves. You know, there was just the – all my most – and my mother because I didn't really quite know her and I wasn't even grown up with her, taking care of her and getting her through a pretty

tough – and also, my mother was quite pretty in her own way and wouldn't accept that she was dying, so it was quite complicated emotionally. You know, when she did die, she –

MS. RICHARDS: What did pretty have to do with not accepting that she was dying?

MS. PFAFF: Because I think she just thought everything was going to be – she was one of these people who kept up a kind of façade – not façade. It was like – do you know who – what's his name, Reverend Sheen, the art of positive thinking [sic] Norman Vincent Peale [*The Power of Positive Thinking*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1952.] I think her life was so tough that she decided she would live positively, which meant you never noticed that the world around you was crumbling.

And she used – she was quite charming and quite attractive and so she would go into the hospital and everybody would say, how pretty you look, and stuff like that. And she would say, "Did you see how nice that person was? He says I'm doing really good."

And it's like, she was 80 pounds. She couldn't walk. She couldn't – you know. And I sort of got – it was hard for me because I'm so pragmatic that I just thought, I need to tell her what's really happening. But the doctors weren't telling her and then I couldn't – so it was very complicated for me.

But it was an education. I don't know if we talked about this before but because I had to have people come and help me help her, I sort of learned how to be a caregiver, which is nothing I – it's not my nature. I mean, I could do things like, oh, good dog, are you hungry, eat this. But I'm not a doting mother or a doting-hardly-anything. I can care for things but I don't have that softness or that kind of giving over oneself and sort of being –

MS. RICHARDS: Selflessness.

MS. PFAFF: Selflessness. I don't have that. And I learned a little bit of that there. But anyway, my mom's dying. I didn't realize I would be so affected by that. And that was mindboggling that I was.

And I remember actually years earlier when Al's mother and father died, and he must have been 70, and he said, "Judy, I'm an orphan." And I remember thinking how funny that was. But after she died, it felt like for the first time, like, even though I had very little connection, you now have no connection. You're an orphan in that kind of way.

So that show was a way for me to come out of that thing. Not that that got rid of it. Actually, it deepened it. But it made me come to terms with it, in a way. And like that one show we were talking about, with –

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I got them mixed up because I know this is the show that had the colored light bulbs and the –

MS. PFAFF: Yes, yes. But it was kind of colorless light bulbs. They were sort of different whites, like, cold white, warm white –

MS. RICHARDS: But then there were colored pieces of Plexi?

MS. PFAFF: In parts of it, yes, there were. And what happens with the Plexiglas is it transfers the light into the Plexiglas so it sort of has that bright edge all over the place.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there an influence of a trip to China on that piece, too?

MS. PFAFF: Probably. But that sort of was –

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a different time?

MS. PFAFF: Yeah, no, I'd come back from China. Yeah, so it would have had an aspect of that. But I just needed something – some sort of dramatic sort of thing about black and white, life and death, dead and alive, the light in the end of the tunnel, the black hole. And it was graphic.

It was the most graphic show that I've ever done. And it was in very succinct quadrants, like, the white one, the black one, the this-one – the kind of light coming – that that was, again, the light that came through that, that space, was – you could time it.

Like, at two o'clock, it had these long shadows; at three o'clock, it was glowing from the building across the street. It had this kind of cycle of a very distinct way. It was like a sun dial in there. And I needed to block out some of the light. So there was scrims of tape on the windows, which kept the light down probably about – I'm wondering, probably about 40 percent, I would think. But you still had these streaks.

So it was a very graphic show and very clear thinking on my part for, like, I had to hold this to this kind of construct, it was full of soot; there was lots of soot.

MS. RICHARDS: You were actually using a burning device I think?

[Cross talk.]

MS. PFAFF: [Inaudible] torch. Major amounts of soot, which – there are Hans Hofmanns in the back room, so it was pretty dramatic.

But it just felt piercing, graphic, stark, like a reality check, like, no glossing over. It was sort of clearer to me and kind of moodier. That was like another tree falling in the forest. There was some feedback from that but not from the directors in the show because there was a little clip in *Art 21* that featured the building of that. But it was a very particular mood.

The later shows – the ones which were in *All of the Above* [2007] and the ones – *Wild Rose* [2008]. And I can see it. The lid is off. It was like, no problemo. The need to be so succinct, so – to use the word again, kind of graphic and kind of adamant. These were, like –

MS. RICHARDS: Lyrical and gorgeous.

MS. PFAFF: Lyrical and a little stormy, not real stormy; little things happening, incident, and kind of a lovely light in them and a real air. The air in *All of the Above* was just – and it's funny, I was sick as a dog through the entire making of that piece.

I was so sick. I don't know what I had. I think it was some flu or something. I would stagger in at nine o'clock and I couldn't get past six o'clock, which is – I usually go from morning to late in the evening. And I would be asleep or passed out until I had to get up and do that. Yeah, the flu.

And I look at it and I think, so much for it resonating what I'm feeling. [Laughs.] None of that is in there. I think, too, what happens is I loved being in that space. The people who worked there were so nice to me.

MS. RICHARDS: Is this the *Wild Rose* you're talking about?

MS. PFAFF: This is *All of the Above*. It was the Rice Gallery [Rice University, Houston, TX]. Kim Davenport and all of the people there, they're used to having people install. They were surprised at how little help I needed. They're used to sort of, like, buying the materials, bringing them down, having a crew, you know, install.

What I liked is because they see artists install all the time. They've done fantastic, fantastic shows. They thought I was, like, a pro. [Laughs.] And I was, like, thrilled at that feeling, like, they think I know what I'm doing. I mean, not that other places don't. But there's a nervousness. They were not nervous, they didn't check in to see if it was going okay. They knew from the way I was handling things that I knew what I was doing and wasn't scared.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you conscious of the fact – or consciously aiming to make a beautiful experience?

MS. PFAFF: No, no. It had that. It had that in it. Initially, I had lived in Texas when I was growing up in Sweetwater. And coming back to Texas, all I remembered were these terrible dust storms. And the whole atmosphere would go red. So I thought I was going to pick up on that. It just didn't – it didn't. And I don't know; it had its own experience. There was very little narrative going on in that.

I was very enamored with this – I was spinning all these Styrofoam shapes that are kind of like – you know when you see Chinese acrobats when they have these plates on sticks and they are twirling in the air. So it sort of had that kind of spinning-plate thing.

And all of a sudden, I just saw them as being this, like, really nice sort of sets of movements and air and light and incident. And it just felt like one of those beautiful sunsets or one of those – when the clouds, you sit and look at them and you can count an elephant or you make up what you see. So it had this kind of shapiness to it and this light in there.

And also, it was, like, beautiful Texas – it was warm in the winter. And so I think – I don't know. I have no idea why some of these pieces have the feel that they do because I go in very willful and then the space takes over.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it just coincidental that you had that experience after the burnt –

MS. PFAFF: That's right, that's right. It, like, washed that away. I can read that into it now and I didn't know it at the time. But looking at it, and that's one of the pieces that all the pictures of it – usually when I look at

photographs of shows, I'm completely disappointed because there's something it doesn't get. Those photographs are as close to getting the experience of it of anything that's been photographed. So I was – in that way, I was sort of pleased about that.

MS. RICHARDS: Changing gears a little bit, I wanted to ask you about your relationships with galleries. And you began early on – we talked about the show at the Razor Gallery in '73. And then you had a long affiliation with Holly Solomon and you talked about how that came about, I believe. When her gallery closed when she passed away – or before –

MS. PFAFF: Before.

MS. RICHARDS: – you, I think, had a couple of shows at Max Protetch. How did that affiliation develop and then how did that evolve into the Emmerich?

MS. PFAFF: I'd met Max a long time ago. I actually painted his gallery when he was on Spring Street.

MS. RICHARDS: He was on Broadway –

MS. PFAFF: It was Spring and – he was on – I showed with him when he was on Broadway. When he first came up from Washington, D.C., in the mid '70s, early '70s, mid '70s, he had a space – I think it was on Spring Street near Jaap Reitman bookstore and Rene Block and all those, that era. And I think he had always showed David Reed. They were good chums. And I was – I painted his gallery. I met him then.

I think maybe even though David Reed, I might have met Max again. I was getting quiet frustrated with Holly Solomon's gallery because she moved uptown and I couldn't get the pieces in. And I was stuck only doing sort of kind of drawings or things which I was destroying to get into the elevator, cutting them apart, welding them back together, cutting them apart, taking them downstairs.

Well, there was a moment when I had the two galleries. Max wanted to show the big pieces and Holly would show the small pieces. That didn't work out for very long because Max needed things he could sell and Holly wanted things which were important. So I don't actually – oh, I do know.

André Emmerich, I had known because he had shown Al Held. So I knew him, knew the gallery, knew a lot of the artists in the gallery. And he had seen a show of mine in Cologne, the show "Westkunst." And he actually had his photograph taken with that piece and sent it to me. I think his brother who was a photographer or something or his nephew or son or something took a photograph of him in front of that piece and sent it to me.

And his directors at the time, I think, was – Jim Yohe was there, who is here. And Donald – I'm forgetting the other man's name. They, I think, might have said to André, "Well, what about Judy Pfaff?" Al's always talking about her – or this and that. You like her work – you know.

And he thought it was a cool idea. And they came and they asked me to be with the gallery and I just thought – it didn't really make sense but I thought it seemed kind of out of the fray, out of lower Manhattan.

You know, relationships with dealers are complicated. This seemed like it would have a kind of grace to it and I thought I – you know what, I thought I could get a catalog. [Laughs.] I'd never had a catalog. I thought, wow. Oh, and I was doing these big drawings and they really like the drawings. And they were just so enthusiastic and I think it just happened, I don't know.

And it's sort of funny because Max Protetch used the gallery right next door to here and now I – Max and I were born on exactly the same day. He was born on September 22, 1946. And it's exactly the same day. So initially, I thought well, that's going to work because we're the same. Now, we are so not the same. [Laughs.] So anyway.

And also, André had this sculpture park up in – it was called Gallatin. So there was something about maybe doing outdoor pieces. And so it felt like it was a step up, in a way. It was a step out of the public, out of the conversation, but it felt legit. And I also think at that moment, he was also doing shows a little bit with, like, Yoko Ono; there was a Max Ernst show. For me, it was kind of a changing of the guard.

What I didn't realize is actually André was kind of getting out of the business. So there was a looseness for a while. Actually, Jeffrey Deitch was the director there for a little while. I don't know how long.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, you mentioned that last time.

We don't have too much longer; the gallery is going to close. But I wanted to, though – so then, I know when you finished Emmerich, you – Jim was here; that's logical, transitional.

MS. PFAFF: Yes, that's logical, yeah. But there was quite a while when I didn't have a gallery. I think it was six years. It could have been seven years, I did not have a gallery. It was just so peculiar.

And you know what, some people – I never asked; I never knocked on anybody's door and said, "would you take me?" But other people asked for me. There was no interest. There was nothing. There was not even – I think I had had a reputation of not being able to sell the work. Everything was being thrown away. No one wants to trash their gallery. I might have been interesting but I was not a cash cow, or I was not someone – and if I had had a time, it was over. If I had an influence, it was done already.

So there was – you know, Jim and now Miles and Will – it's a leap. It's difficult to work with me on a certain – I mean, you can tell we're really good friends, so it's not like they don't like me, but it's like, at some points, "Judy, can't you," – you know, like, "are you going to do another one of those installations?" [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Let me ask you, what are you thinking about right now and what are your – what are your biggest challenges and is there a dream project? I would kind of end by those kinds of thoughts about your work.

MS. PFAFF: Well, you know, there's a possibility – I should take you up to see the studio. There's a lot of stuff with architecture. We've been doing a lot of building. We've been doing a lot of –

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

MS. PFAFF: We – there's a fellow, Mel, who helped me get the roots; Jamie is a fantastic – he was an assistant for a while when I did a very good show which was called *Neither Here Nor There*.

MS. RICHARDS: May I ask who their last – their last names?

MS. PFAFF: Jamie Hamilton –

MS. RICHARDS: And Mel?

MS. PFAFF: Mel Benson.

MS. RICHARDS: So they're your team.

MS. PFAFF: That's my team. And Mel, Mel takes care of the property up there. He found five wells on the property. He laid all of the radiant heat. He did all the excavation for stuff. He's –

MS. RICHARDS: Is this in the Kingston house or in the Tivoli studio?

MS. PFAFF: Tivoli, the whole compound at Tivoli, yeah, yeah. He introduced me to the wonderful world of earth-moving equipment. He's brilliant. He's really brilliant. I mean, I could go on about Mel for a long time. But without Mel, I could not have handled this property. It's just gigantic and big and – it had no electricity; it had no water! It had nothing . It was like a fallow, beaten –

MS. RICHARDS: What attracted to you –

MS. PFAFF: I could afford it. I was kicked out of my place. It was the cheapest thing around. No one would touch it for a 10-foot pole. It was very –

MS. RICHARDS: It was a white elephant?

MS. PFAFF: It was not a white elephant; it was like a falling-down elephant. It was an old, dying elephant. It was problematic.

MS. RICHARDS: But you're happy you got it.

MS. PFAFF: It's now – we got it in 2002. It's eight years, so – [laughs] – eight years of hard labor. [Laughs.] But it's beautiful now. I'll show it to you. It's really cool.

And so now, there are expanses. There's a breadth to how I can move. There's gardening, and – not just – it's not just gardening. It's, like, moving earth around.

And Kiki Smith is going to do a project I think at Bard, where she's kind of putting a kind of nondenominational kind of sanctuary together. And she's asked –

MS. RICHARDS: We talked about that.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah? She has asked a lot of artists, or a few – I'm sorry, not a lot – maybe 10 artists, women, to do projects in conjunction with this space with her. And I am just thrilled because it's, like, really good timing for me because I want to do an outside piece. I like the idea.

When we we've been talking, it's like, I've had this kind of – you know, what we were talking about, like, one piece is very catholic, one piece is very – so just even the nature of that kind of thinking space, feeling space, silent space quite suits where I am and what I'd like to do.

So it was just an amazing sort of – I hope it happens. Knowing Kiki, it will happen. So I'm not only totally pleased that she would have invited me but I also think it's a wonderful, wonderful project.

So that's the sort of dream. It's like going, like, really taking – I know how to build; I know how to design things; I can do this. So I don't have to keep throwing everything away. So even if I make myself my own sculpture part of sorts, it feels really nice.

And I don't make things to throw away. It's just that's their fate. I would like them to stay at the Elvehjem for a long time especially if it's a good fit, if the space can function. A lot of my large pieces which are in institutions, like, there are a couple projects which are – the big piece in Philadelphia in the ceiling. They kind of disappear. You can take them out. They don't dominate your view. They really are – that's kind of like this – I was thinking of it as kind of odalisque in it's very soft in the air. So that's a thrill, and that's like a step.

But also, there's all this paper stuff. I got this new corrugated material, this expanded honeycomb material from this guy in Bogalusa, Louisiana. I have to meet him. He's so cool. I like talking to him.

So right now, it just all feels easy. It doesn't feel that difficult; not like, what's next? It all feels like it's rolling pretty nice.

MS. RICHARDS: That's wonderful.

MS. PFAFF: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Thank you.

MS. PFAFF: Thank you.

[END CD 7.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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