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**Oral history interview with Allan McCollum,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Allan McCollum on February 23, 2010. The interview took place in New York, N.Y., and was conducted by Avis Berman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's U.S. General Services Administration, Design Excellence and the Arts oral history project.

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

## Interview

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Allan McCollum on February 23, 2010 at the Archives of American Building in New York City. I start the same way with everyone: Would you please state your full name and date of birth?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: My name's Allan Lloyd McCollum and I was born on August 4, 1944.

AVIS BERMAN: And you were born in California, is that correct?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I was born in Los Angeles.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And would you tell me a little bit about your family background, in terms of where you lived and how you lived?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You mean, like, a little bit of the history of my parents and so forth, before I was born?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, please.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: My mother's family is all from the South. She grew up in Texas. Her parents [and grandparents were from Kentucky, Texas, Louisiana and Georgia –AM]. My father's mother was Welsh, from Holyhead, Wales, and had moved to New York as a young woman and married a New Yorker who was from Niagara. So my father was born in New York City, 1918, I think, and grew up as a young actor onstage, on Broadway. My mother grew up as a singer, piano player, in addition to many other things.

So there were performers and artists on both sides of my—both of my grandparents. My grandfather was a cartographer. He worked for the Indian Bureau and went around the country mapping [federal territories, I guess. Indian reservations, and so on –AM]. I don't know [all of –AM] what he did. But he was a frustrated cartoonist and his wife was a piano teacher, and so forth. So all of their kids had artistic bents, including my mother and her brothers and sisters. My father and his mother moved to Los Angeles to pursue his acting career. His mother was also an actress and [a model –AM], or something.

AVIS BERMAN: And her name was McCollum as well?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, his father was named Charles McCollum, but he died when my father was six years old. His mother took the name—I guess her maiden name, which was Nanne Lloyd Hewitt—H-E-W-I-T-T, N-A-N-N-E. But my father had his father's name and he was Warren Whiting McCollum. My mother's name was Ann Hinton.

And they met and then, for some reason, my grandfather and his family moved to Los Angeles, following his civil service job. I don't know exactly what he was doing. And they were there, I don't know, [many –AM] years. During that period, my mother met my father and some sort of—I think it was a USO chorus or something, where they all were involved in a chorus. They met in some artistic situation and got married.

Then he went off to the war. I was born, more or less, while he was overseas and then, before I was two years old, they moved to the South Bay, which is a southern section of LA County—Redondo Beach, Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach area of Los Angeles County. That's close to the water. I lived maybe [three –AM] miles inland from the water, but the township extended to the water. That's where I grew up, until I was about 20.

AVIS BERMAN: And—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Redondo Beach. North Redondo Beach.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So your mother's name was Ann Hinton. And what were her birth and death dates?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: She's alive.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, good. Well, what was her—I'm glad to hear it. What was her birth date?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: [Laughs.] February 5, 1923.

AVIS BERMAN: And your father?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I think, November 30, 1918. [. . . –AM].

AVIS BERMAN: And he died—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, he's died.

AVIS BERMAN: So what would his death date be?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't know the date exactly, but it was in 1987.

AVIS BERMAN: And were your parents pursuing show business careers out there?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No. They wanted that, they would have preferred that. But as is often the case, it doesn't work out. My father was in a lot of different movies, but always very small parts, or in the background, and so forth. And his wife had children, so she often had secretarial jobs and factory jobs and so forth. They both worked.

They were divorced—oh, and then, when he got back from the Army, he did very little movies after that. I think the Army changed him. He lost his sense of humor, as the family told me, and lost a certain amount of playfulness and outgoingness, as soldiers often do. He tried to go to school to study law, but wound up just working at factory jobs. And until he died, he was a security guard,

basically.

But occasionally, he would do a little theater. You know how there's always community theater. So they would both do that. My very earliest memories are the two of them being onstage, playing opposite each other in a play that I still love, called *Down in the Valley*, written by Kurt Weill, based on American folk tunes. So my earliest memories, maybe, of them, were of them being onstage and during rehearsals and so forth.

But they divorced when I was about six or seven. And he kind of disappeared. Then they remarried when I was about 13 and stayed married until I had left home—stayed married until about '75 and got divorced again. And then got remarried in, like, 1984. So my mother was married to my father three times, which is kind of a record.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So there was a lot of in-between periods. So my father was a little bit alien for me because he came and went. And then there were [my mother's –AM] boyfriends in between and so, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: But they always went back together for some reason.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: And then in the end, when he died, she was by his side and that's something. So I guess they had a happy ending in that sense, [laughs] but it was quite miserable in between, in many ways, in my memories. I have three siblings, two born during the first marriage and one born during the second marriage. And he's, like, 12 years younger than I am.

AVIS BERMAN: So are you the oldest? Are you the first?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I am the oldest.

AVIS BERMAN: And are the other three—any of them in the arts?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Intermittently, yeah. My sister [Mary Ann –AM] was a singer/songwriter, did performing and often did backup in other groups. My brother [Mike –AM] is a singer/songwriter. He published his own CDs, but finally gave up trying to make a living at it. And he had a band. He became a paralegal, but the money he made from a paralegal helped him go to Nashville and hire the greatest backup bluegrass musicians and he's done two albums since. But, you know, he doesn't make any money at that.

My other brother, [Chuck, is an actor and a comedian –AM]. He wound up—actually directed a movie once. He wound up, most recently, a casting associate, working for casting directors. And right now, nobody has work in LA, but that's what he's skilled at. He directs plays at little theaters on the side. His son [Matthew –AM], this weekend, has also become an actor/director. His play that he's directed is opening at Yale University this Saturday. So they're all, everybody—

AVIS BERMAN: So all the McCollums are still within the theater.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, they can't—there's no [one in my family –AM] that I know of [who –AM] decided to become a businessman. And none of us even went to college. I mean, we all tried for, like, a month here and a month there, but the arts sort of pulled us away.

AVIS BERMAN: And are you a good singer? Can you sing?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Am I what?

AVIS BERMAN: Are you a singer?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I can carry a tune. My hobby throughout the '60s and '70s was writing songs. My brother often sang them in his band. I have some recordings of myself singing. They're usually country-style songs. I'm not bad. I think it had a great influence on my skills to reduce complexities to simplicities, the way—I mean, poets do that in a way, but often, unless you're a certain type of poet, you don't reduce it to something everyone in the world could understand.

Whereas a pop song writer, or county singer even, especially, following the rules of rhythm and rhyme and structure—you know, chorus, verse—you develop skills of reducing things. I think I used that. I think the reason I like songwriting is that's connected to how I wanted to be doing that as a plastic artist.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, so you found the conventions of songwriting were helpful.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: In a way that I don't—did art conventions. Are there equal art conventions that one could apply?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I think if you're a conceptualist, perhaps. I don't know. I mean, I never thought about it in that way. I mean, I suppose any artist might spend years trying to resolve some train of thought and then suddenly go, I got it and then, you know. I mean, the work I have been working on most recently are these shapes, 31 billion unique shapes. Well, it took me fifteen years to resolve whether I could make them symmetrical or asymmetrical and how to make them asymmetrical in a way that continued to seem simple. And stuff like that. So it can—solutions may seem really simple, but it might have taken someone years to get to it, at least with me.

I mean, I honestly think growing up in [near the motion picture industry –AM], where you are in the—I mean, I moved. Later on in life I moved to Venice, Santa Monica and interacted with people from—including my dad, so I think you learn to appreciate how intelligence can be resolved into something that everyone can understand. You're just not out there preaching to the converted or to the educated or to the intellectuals. Your intellect is applied to making something that can be understood by the man on the street and so forth. You know, that's Hollywood mentality.

Sometimes there have been brilliant writers and directors in Hollywood that have made films that anyone could—break anyone's heart, brilliant or stupid, or educated or not, or old or young, you know. In my interpretation, that's a Hollywood screenwriter/director's discipline. So I think when you grow up out there, you're affected by that, whereas in other parts of the country that's looked down on, back east, especially, or even in San Francisco.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, very much. So once you were in Redondo Beach, so you pretty much stayed in the same house, or the same neighborhood?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And so your schooling was uninterrupted?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: So what kind of a kid were you?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, very alienated. I never felt I belonged. I mean, you know, my family somewhat didn't feel like it belonged in the extended family because the extended family were more artistic and successful in their artistic endeavors. I felt alienated within my family because I was the oddball amongst my brothers and sisters.

The house we lived in was the odd house in the neighborhood we grew up in. The neighborhood we grew up in was the wrong side of Redondo Beach. The South Bay was considered, you know, isolated from the rest of LA because it was all surfer dudes. And then LA was considered the city of commerce to people in San Francisco and then California artists were considered overly commercial and naïve to the people in New York.

I know this is a weird way to describe how I felt as a kid, but I think how I felt as a kid, as kind of alienated—and it partly had to do, I think, with having a father that kept disappearing, you know—and I think I've looked at the rest of the world in this same way. So that's why I just described it like that, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, within—I mean, in retrospect, do you think you are really odd and alienated from your siblings now, or do you think—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, still.

AVIS BERMAN: Even though they're all singers and artistic, they express themselves.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, they tend to be more populist in their approaches to things. None of them know anything about contemporary art, or they know a tiny bit, but it's more, probably, personal than what I chose to do as a career. I mean, it's more—I keep a distance. I keep a distance based on—my childhood wasn't the happiest and I think one of the ways—as my psychoanalyst puts it, I keep a distance from my family as a way of maintaining my relationship with my family. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: I was going to ask you if you had been psychoanalyzed.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, I've been in psychoanalysis for 30 years.

AVIS BERMAN: And are you still in it?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: No, I only say that because in your readings and all, in the language you use, I could —

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It seems like I'm very narcissistically self-involved? [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: No, it seemed as if you had examined yourself in a way that usually only people who have been psychoanalyzed.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, maybe so, maybe so.

AVIS BERMAN: No, it's not narcissistic. It's—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Analytical?

AVIS BERMAN: It's analytical. Well, it's the ability to turn something inside out and look at it from several different perspectives and see what things meant. I just thought there was a wisdom that was in there that came from looking at—you know, having to look at things and really see where things—see where things originated.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, when I decided I wanted to be an artist, which was rather late in life—more than most of the people I know, maybe when I was 23, 24—I had no college and when I made this decision, I mostly developed knowledge, well, a couple of different ways. One of them was reading. So I would read *Artforum* magazine and then look at the footnotes and then look up the books written in the footnotes and that kind of thing, but I didn't have somebody telling me what to read.

And then the other—and I did, I tended towards the analytical. I think that was what was popular to read back then. But it suited what my goals were as an artist because I wanted to kind of change—I wanted to change my view of reality and so learning about psychoanalysis, anthropology, structural linguistics—learning how different cultures see the world differently helped me realize I could change the way I looked at the world and use my work to possibly influence that with others. What was I going to say? I just forgot what I—

AVIS BERMAN: Well—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, the other experience was driving a truck and being an art handler. That went on for many years and all the other drivers had their MFAs and were still working.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I'm sure that certainly gave you an inside and jaundiced look at the art world because certainly, there would have been the person who treated you as a nobody and there would have been others.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You'd be surprised. They do not all treat you like a nobody when you're an art handler. Is that what you mean?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I don't—I mean, maybe some do. I mean, and I'll say, the galleries on 57th Street, yes. They treat you like a nobody. The galleries in SoHo were hugely respectful, recognized—I mean, I remember when I moved to New York, one artist friend said—it was Jack Goldstein, in fact. He said to me, "Everybody is nice to everybody in the art world because you never know if the person you're talking to is going to wind up being chief curator at the Modern or working at a hamburger stand." Because everybody has to start out—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, today's peon is tomorrow's curator.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That's true. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: I want to go back a little bit more to your childhood. Did you draw or paint?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: All the time, yeah. I didn't paint, but my grandfather [Allan Hinton –AM], like I said, was a cartographer and he had a big—on his right elbow, he had a callus that was, like, a half inch thick from leaning his elbow on his drawing table. I mean, he was always drawing. That's what he did for a living. But he also had wanted to be a cartoonist and so he was skilled at drawing cartoons. And we'd sit—I'd sit on his lap. We would play squiggles. You know, he'd make a squiggle and I'd make a drawing out of it. He'd make—I'd make a squiggle. We also played the surrealistic—

what's the—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, exquisite corpse.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exquisite corpse, we'd play that all the time. I don't—I mean, he must have learned it from surrealists, I guess, unless they learned it from somewhere else. I don't know, but he—I don't know what his—I know his sister [Fannie Hinton –AM] was a librarian in Atlanta and so I connect that with literature and art. She was a librarian of literature. And so he would draw with me and show me how to draw and show me how to do this and that.

And so I wanted to be—for many years, I wanted to be a cartoonist and I would invent cartoon characters and do comic strips and stuff like that. I mean, up until I was maybe 11 or 12 and then my interest turned more towards wanting to make movies. I thought for many years I wanted to be a special-effects man for the films and I was very enamored of science-fiction movies and especially three-dimensional animators like Ray Harryhausen, or Willis O'Brien. And Ray Harryhausen was such a hero to me. I once rode my bike 60 miles to look at his house. [Laughs.] Do you know who he is?

AVIS BERMAN: Only a little bit. Yeah, it's just like, Susan Sontag went and stood outside Thomas Mann's house in California.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What, she did? [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I was on my bike. And then I go, okay, here's the house. Now, back to Redondo Beach. [Laughs.] But then I wrote my high-school term paper on him and wrote a letter to his address telling him, asking—it turned out—because I recognized that his house was on a piece of property that had been used in the movie *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*. [They laugh.] Because the view of the beach from his house was exactly—from his backyard. It turned out that he did lots of his work at home, in his garage and so on. I mean, in those days—

AVIS BERMAN: I know, it's just, the Ed Wood movies weren't really that far from what was going on and just—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What's Ed Wood movies?

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well this guy, Ed Wood, was a director—was it *Plan B, Plan B from Mars*? He was supposed to be the worst director who ever was.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, he was a bad director.

AVIS BERMAN: Bad, yes. And they actually—Johnny Depp, they made a movie about him. He was a cross-dresser and it just—but that's what they would do, essentially, come out and do things in their garage. And it was really only one step removed from what other people were doing, too. He was just a little—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I guess so. I mean, the movie houses weren't set up for, say, tabletop micro-stuff and you might as well do it at home. And Harryhausen would actually only do it when the sun was in certain positions because he didn't have the lighting. And his father helped him make the models. And you know, you set up three-dimensional animation—you can spend six months moving a character, one bit at a time, and then the rear-screen projection coming behind the image. You



move it one frame at a time and then you move the model one frame a time. It can go weeks and weeks to make a minute on screen, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: Actually, that's what—I just went to the Kentridge press review and that was all—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I'm sure he's hugely influenced by Harryhausen, Willis O'Brien, these—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah because that's exactly what—and he would make the group of drawings, film them, then erase some of them, refill. Anyway, it was fascinating—the process is. But I'm sure you're absolutely right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I mean, I saw his recent piece about—who is it, the writer with the—

AVIS BERMAN: *The Nose*.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, and the film projected on the back seemed simple at first, until you realized that there two of him, three of him. One of them would move a table and then the other one would move the same table. And you'd go, wait a minute. Where was the split screen there? And then you realize, he really has studied split screen, frame by frame, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: So and then, when you were a teenager, were you drawing as much? Or were you still interested in—I mean, I realize you were thinking about the movies.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, when I would do—when I would want to make a movie, I'd do—what do you call it—storyboards. And I took art classes in high school.

AVIS BERMAN: And were you good? Were you considered the class artist?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, there was a couple that were much better than I am. [Laughs.] And I didn't—there was this aspect of which it was an easy A, if you go to draw. But I'm not a great drawer, but I enjoyed the classes and most of my best friends I met in the art classes.

AVIS BERMAN: And were you someone who—would your family go to museums, or would you go to museums?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No. I never went to an art museum until I was, maybe, 23. In terms of contemporary art, the only art I knew of as a youth would have been what was at the local insomniac, beatnik café. You know, you'd see these abstractions. And my uncle was Jon Gnagy, the television educator. He would come by for Christmas and so forth. My grandmother [Nell Hinton – AM] lived right next door, so we were—even though—well because she lived next door to us, all the family events were at her house, so we only had to walk next door. So he was always there on Christmas and certain holidays.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, he married one of your mother's sisters?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: He married my mother's sister [Mary Jo –AM], who was also an artist—a really good artist and a—

AVIS BERMAN: How did they meet each other?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I think they met in—he was from rural Kansas and they lived in Oklahoma at the time, my mother's family. I think they met working at some sort of graphics, designer's studio or

something like that. She was working there and he was working there and then they were very young and they married and were married until he died.

AVIS BERMAN: And were you aware, when—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: And they moved to New York soon after.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I mean, were you aware, when you were younger, that he was on national—did you watch him? I mean, he had a huge following, I mean, as I even—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh yeah, yeah. I mean, his first television broadcast was 1946. I don't think he started a regular TV show until 1950, but at that point, I already would have been six. The problem is, we were poor, so we didn't have a television until I was around 11. So probably, I missed much of his shows from the '50s forward, but still, by the time we got a TV, he had, at the time, the longest—what do you call it when the—

AVIS BERMAN: Longest running?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, but it wasn't, it wasn't—syndicated, the longest syndicated running TV show when it—I think it didn't stop running until 1970. You can still buy his kits in the art stores, even today. So every Christmas he'd give me a kit and then I'd learn how to draw in pastels from that, or I'd learn how to do this. Because you know, he was a good, a very good instructor.

AVIS BERMAN: He was. Also, in retrospect, looking back, he would always talk about rods, cones and cylinders, so it's very clear that he was coming out of Cezanne. Not that I would have known it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I wouldn't have either, but he totally made—he even said that in the introductions of his books and so forth. He had friends that were in the contemporary art world of those years. But he didn't—he was a populist and he wasn't interested in—I mean, I read a little interview with him.

He just wasn't interested in teaching people who were already educated. He was a populist and he loved the invention of television because he could teach so many people at once. But he knew they weren't all going to be interested in learning how to do an abstract painting. I think he did one show on an abstraction, but that was all. But he grew up in an Amish—no, not an Amish—

AVIS BERMAN: Mennonite?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: A Mennonite community. That's why he had the beard, by the way.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Not because he was a beatnik, as people think. I mean, maybe it was a crossover, but every Mennonite in his days had a beard. He told me once that, in his growing up, in the Mennonite community, everybody knew how to do anything.

You didn't have anybody say, "Oh, I don't know how to build a fence," or "I don't know how to cook," or "I don't know how to sing," or "I don't know"—because it was just assumed everyone has developed—they helped each other. He said it was one of the big alienating things when he moved out of the Mennonite community to discover that people didn't—they had no problem not knowing how to do things. And that hadn't been—that was part of his impetus to—

AVIS BERMAN: So he grew up in a creatively uninhibited community.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, that I don't know how to say, but I've never been to a Mennonite community. I don't know what it's like. But I'm guessing, from the movies—you see these movies about the Amish communities. When they build a barn, everybody knows how to build a barn and they all help. So I assume that's kind of what he was talking about. He was very much into jazz and folk music as well, which was sort of coming up from the—not symphonic music, but music from the level of everyday folk people up. He liked all that too and has folk musicians as his friends.

AVIS BERMAN: And did he encourage you to be an artist?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Sure. Well, I don't remember him—I don't think so. I think he just encouraged that we all should know how to draw. But that didn't mean, go on to be an artist.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, I guess not because he just thought it's just something you should know how to do, or not be afraid of doing.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I think he was a little—I don't want to second-guess him, but I think he was a little—what's the word—defensive about not having pursued a professional artist's career and having done this. I remember the first time I sold a painting—I can't remember how much it was for. It was a lot of money, to just sell a painting out of—it was \$1200 or something. I had just started out, it was my first show and he didn't believe me. I remember he looked at me and said: "You did not. You didn't sell a painting." I said, "Yes, I did." And then he got kind of defensive, like he didn't want to talk about it. So I thought, you know, he didn't make his living selling his paintings. He made his living basically as an illustrator and a teacher on TV. And so I think, — I may be wrong, but I always felt there was a little bit of insecurity about how he—

AVIS BERMAN: Right because you, on some level, were moving into the art world—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —which he wasn't involved in.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Which he kind of turned his back on for reasons that were perfectly fine, but he seemed to have a defensiveness about it. I was shocked because I thought he would be oh, so happy. But he didn't seem to be. But we weren't close, so I don't really know how to—he may have just had too much to drink at that moment and was thinking about something else. I don't know. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: No, but it would be just so—you know, he was an unusual personality and someone that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, he'd suffered a nervous breakdown a couple of times and spent time in treatment and so forth and gave up New York, I think because of that, and retired young. And, I mean, left New York youngish.

AVIS BERMAN: Because he was so enterprising. I mean, really.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, his idea of enterprise, I think that's what influenced me more than learning how to draw with rods, cones, cubes and cylinders or whatever. It's his love of enterprise and his love of—his populism, too. So I would—I think, yes, even when I was a little kid, I would design imaginary kits. Even as an artist, as an adult—when I design a project, I make sure it's something I

can break down into steps and teach an assistant to do, or teach someone else to do.

But there's no complex—I've never done a project that involved complex hand skills or inspired gesturing or anything like that. If I have inspiration, it's more in a sequence of choices that I've made, but not in the execution. That's generally the kind of art I like in others, is when you go, wait a minute? How did they get from that to that to that? Like, that's the creativity. The end product may be something anyone could make, but how they got to that end product—the path and the story.

You know, it's like when somebody—have you ever talked to somebody where—each sentence, there's no logic between the first sentence and the second sentence and the third sentence. You have to fill in the blanks yourself while you're listening. Sometimes extremely brilliant people talk that way and sometimes really not brilliant people talk that way. But sometimes, it can put chills up my neck when I realize how they got from that topic to that topic. And what they felt didn't need to be said, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Or they had already said it, or they jumped in their mind to it, so—it's an inwardly—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, it's not like they're not doing it on purpose. They just—that's the way their mind works, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, you were close to the water. Was being near the sea, did that play into your life then and later on?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I never followed that thought through in my head. Being too far from the water in the neighborhood, I know, had an effect on me because there was a class system. If you were on one side of Sepulveda, you were in one social class. If you were on the other side—so they would call the people from the wrong side of Sepulveda, landers or outlanders, or something like that. Then when you went to the beach, people would kind of look at you, like, well, where are you from? You know, so there was that—being by the beach created a—but you're asking about staring at the horizon—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I just wondered if—well, or just being on the beach, or wanting to be near water, or just—I just don't know if because you—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'm still that way. I very much need to be by water periodically. You grow up—if you grow up on the ocean, a number of things happen. One of the things is—the mythology is we're 97 percent water, or whatever—and going into—and life emerged from the ocean. So if you're sick, go swim in the ocean. If you have acne, go swim in the ocean. If you're depressed, go swim in the ocean. [Laughs.] Then it also has that mystery of the horizon line going as far as you see, which you don't get when you live in the city. And all of the—whatever's underneath it. It's all very spooky. I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: I don't know either. I just asked because of the—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'm sure there's some ways that, if I think about it, I could come up with something that I might have chosen because of that. I mean, maybe, maybe the presence of a view that seems infinite influences your ability to think metaphorically about quantity, for instance, or infinite numbers. Because I do think about huge numbers. But you might be the same way if you grew up in the middle of the desert, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. I mean, and were you good at math when you were in school?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I was very good at math until we got into second-year algebra. I always connect it with hormonal changes when you're a teen and suddenly you're interested in girls and your math ability evaporates. So I do not know why, but I've always noticed my math ability disappears when I'm either feeling threatened or attracted to a woman, or threatened by a man. [Laughs.] I don't know what it is. I think it's hormonal. So I didn't—my math ability did not exceed my hormonal—

AVIS BERMAN: Or maybe you were better at geometry? I don't know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'm not very good at math. No, I mean, I—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, because clearly, in what the work you're doing now is, you have to be using some sort of system to get—unless someone else worked it out for you—to have all of these possibly infinite variations.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, you have to be a little obsessional, but even now, I wouldn't say there's any math involved. I would say there's arithmetic—very little, even, arithmetic. It's mostly combinatorial: A plus B, A plus C, A plus D.

Then you write down what you're doing and you keep—so it's really very amateurish, the arithmetic that I use. Sometimes I have to come up with a formula—like, how many parts do I need to produce—but that's usually just: Okay, if I have 12 parts that I'm going to combine with 12 parts, that's 12 times 12. I mean, okay, that's arithmetic, but it's not complicated.

Although it's gotten a little more complicated—like, if I'm going to combine the same 12 parts—like two parts, putting them together—and then I have to decide whether I put two of the same parts together or don't put two of the same parts together, but just put all the parts that are different together—then you have to have this weird formula, like  $N$  equals—you know, what is it? Capital  $N$  equals small  $N$  times  $N$  plus one, squared, over two, or something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Equals  $X$  or something like that.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Something like that. But yeah, I have to know—I didn't figure that out mathematically. I figured it out by trial and error, until I found a formula that worked. And it was—like, it took weeks. A friend of mine [Doug Drake –AM]—I mentioned the problem to him and he said, "Oh." Then he just wrote down the formula, like, in 10 seconds. He's an art dealer. I think I went, "What is this, from doing 10-percent discounts? Or how do you know how to do this?" He did it right away. So obviously, I know, I'm really bad at arithmetic.

AVIS BERMAN: So just with this kind of—if not training, you were doing creative things. But you did not think, I want to go to art school when you were in—did you know what art school was when you graduated?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: When I graduated from high school?

AVIS BERMAN: From high school, yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No. I hadn't even considered—I didn't even know. I mean, I think I had heard the names of some art schools, but I didn't. No, I remember going to see my high-school counselor. All through high school, I was in plays. There was a period when I wanted to be an actor. I think when I—that was after I kind of realized being a special-effects man involved too much technical knowledge. And it was a way to make friends because I was very shy. So when I got out of high

school, I got the thespian-of-the-year award for my role as Sheridan Whiteside in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

AVIS BERMAN: *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I was in many other different productions. I think I thought that's where my direction was going when I was 17. I mean, I had a lot of jobs that had nothing to do with—I was a phone installer. I was a dishwasher. I worked at many restaurants, mostly just unskilled jobs.

AVIS BERMAN: But were you trying to break into films?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: A little bit. I did a little theater. There was a couple of little theater productions I did. I took a theater class in the summer at the local community college. We did *The Wizard of Oz* and went around to different high schools. I was in a production in Hollywood of *West Side Story*, but I had a very small part. Then I moved to England for a while and was in a Shakespeare company, but all of this was before I was even 21.

So when I realized I didn't want to be an actor—I didn't have the social skills or technical skills to be an actor—I sort of almost just threw a dart at a dartboard to decide to take a trade-school class. Because I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I had to do something better than washing dishes because I had spent many years just washing dishes. I liked washing dishes because any time you need a job, you can almost always find one within two days, washing dishes. Because nobody can stand those jobs, so they're constantly turning over.

But my logic, I think, was, well, if I'm going to work in restaurants, be a restaurant manager because then you could get—it's probably the same to manage the restaurant. You can get a job very quickly. Any country in the world there's restaurants. So I signed up for a trade-school course in restaurant management, which involved chef's training. I was only there five months.

I met a young woman [Judy Houston –AM], who was studying fashion design, that I fell for. She made extra money—she had been married to an artist, a real artist [Bruce Houston –AM], and they were divorced. She had a child. But she also would do modeling for art classes. She did standard modeling for John Altoon. I don't know if you know who John Altoon is.

AVIS BERMAN: I do. Not only that, I have met Babs Altoon, his widow.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Get out.

AVIS BERMAN: I know Babs, yes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I loved her.

AVIS BERMAN: Everybody knows Babs.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. So I don't know what she's doing now, but—

AVIS BERMAN: She lives in London.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, I heard that, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: And she works for either Christie's or Sotheby's, one of those.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: She does? Good for her. Well, she was my girlfriend for a while, this other

woman. She was talking fashion design. And not only was she one of his models, but she—his psychoanalyst had set up a group therapy session just for John, so there were, like, everybody in the group therapy was a friend, which was weird, or his model.

And then so Judy [... -AM]—she was so naïve. She thought you could bring your friends to the group therapy, so she brought me to one of John Altoon's group-therapy sessions. So I sat there an hour and listened to John Altoon talk about all his problems. He was hilarious and totally adorable and completely nuts. But then when we left, I didn't know that you couldn't bring a—I mean, I had been in—I didn't tell you that I was in a mental hospital when I was 17.

AVIS BERMAN: No.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So I knew what group therapy was. I didn't believe that she could bring me, but I thought, well, it's a different kind of group therapy. But boy, she got in trouble after that, later. They were nice to me while I was there, but—Judy, she wasn't an artist herself, but she was artistic. She taught me a little bit. She taught me about—I guess the most influential artists that made me want to be an artist were the ones she taught me about.

She taught me about Robert Rauschenberg. She taught me about John Cage. And she taught me about Vija Celmins—and John Altoon, a little bit—but it was Vija Celmins and John Cage and Rauschenberg that just—I had no idea who they were and completely—I mean, when you grew up in those days, not knowing anything about contemporary art, you pictured some crazy, drunk guy throwing paint at a canvas. You know?

AVIS BERMAN: Cutting his ear off.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Huh?

AVIS BERMAN: Cutting his ear off.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, or that, yeah. But I mean, the modern, the contemporary—but I mean, that they were sort of slob—you know, creating—

AVIS BERMAN: The Pollock idea, I guess.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: The Jackson Pollock—but a caricature of Jackson Pollock, you know. And so that's basically—and so that was not interesting to me. It still isn't, you know. That's an old-fashioned—I mean, that had its moment. But then I learned about Lichtenstein and Warhol and so forth. After Judy and I broke up, I learned a little more about pop art.

I had been reading about pop art in *Life* magazine because, you know—and I think when you combine Vija Celmins—my first painting was an attempt to combine Vija Celmins with Roy Lichtenstein because they both appropriated imagery but made it emotional.

She made it hugely emotional. All the images she appropriated were things that broke her heart, one way or the other. Images from World War II, or where she had spent her childhood, or things she was passionate about in art. There was a lot of emotion in what she did. With Lichtenstein, it was sort of hard to find the emotion. I'm sure it was there, but he had a way of disguising it. And I liked both and I later became friends with Vija.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you ever meet Lichtenstein?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Never. Although I did work at Castelli Gallery for a couple years, when they did installations, but I never—I may have said "How do you do," but I didn't—I'm very intimidated by the older generation. I never had a mentor. That's something you learn how to do when you're in school, I think. But that, I think, is both good and bad. I miss that I never had a mentor, but as—I can't remember who said it, "It's great when you don't go to college because there's so much you don't have to unlearn." [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's also when you're self-taught, I think you tend to read more intensely. Because you're so worried about what you may have missed, you sometimes learn a lot more.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Maybe, but then you also learn a lot less. It's a totally double thing. I mean, I'll be talking to—people, including yourself, have mentioned names to me already that I know I should know and I don't know who you're talking about. That happens to me every day. Students are constantly making references to artists and I go, "I'm sorry, I don't remember who that is."

So when you're learning by yourself, you tend to only learn what you think is interesting yourself. You don't have to have a bunch of people telling you things that you ultimately don't find interesting. That's a good thing, but it's a bad thing also. It restricts you socially. It restricts you intellectually. And some—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, not anymore. I mean, we're talking about a past condition. I don't think it restricts you now.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, no. I've come up with ideas that I think I want to do and some assistant will say, "Well, so-and-so has already done that." And I go, "Oh" because I don't know, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, yes and no, but you're going to do it your way. I mean, it's just something different—photography, if photographers thought that, they could never do anything, I think.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, yeah. And if you know too much about that—as I've met students who know way too much about art and they're just—they're under perpetual arrest because everything they do, somebody else has done and they know it. But if you don't know someone else has done it—like, I'm thinking of Andrea Zittel, who's a friend of mine. So she spent—she did these trailers, you know.

Well, she was hugely criticized by knowledgeable art critics like Benjamin Buchloh, who's spent his life studying Michael Asher, who did trailers. For every *documenta*, he did a trailer. He's done trailers three times. Andrea had no idea that this other artist had done trailers and if she had, who knows, maybe she would have not done them. And I'm so glad that she didn't know, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, indeed. I mean, if you're a traditional painter, how can you not—if you want to paint landscapes, you know, there's a—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, that's another, yeah—

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, how could—you know, it seems to me, your hand is going to look different, or you find a way to do it differently. So I just—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, but hopefully, of course—and that's a different way of being an artist, in my mind. It's like, how do I interpret something that's already been done to make it my own?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.



ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But I think my—maybe from being out West, where everything is supposed to be new and everybody starts out something new—that I have, more or less, always thought I had to come up with something that hadn't been done before and that—rightly or wrongly, that was my preconception about being an artist.

AVIS BERMAN: True. Anyway—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I was going to say also, like, my *Surrogate Paintings*—this may shock you, but I didn't know about Malevich, who did *Black Square*, or something like that. I didn't know. I remember in those days, people would say, "Oh, I really like your Malevich quotations." You know, art historians would say stuff like this, which—I'd want to punch them. And I go, "I don't really know who Malevich is." Then I'd have to look it up.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, actually, those never reminded me of him in the least. I mean—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Who? What?

AVIS BERMAN: Malevich—it never reminded me of him.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, am I pronouncing it wrong?

AVIS BERMAN: I'm not sure. Maybe I'm pronouncing it wrong. I think it's—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: See, I don't even know how to pronounce it.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, I thought about other—I would think about Ad Reinhardt, or I might think about Roy Lichtenstein because of the stretcher-bar paintings.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Roy Lichtenstein, for sure.

AVIS BERMAN: That's who I—because I thought that was a brilliant idea on his part, to flip it around and paint the back of the—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, also, Matt Mullican influenced me with those because Matt Mullican made signs that stood for signs. And you had—and he made signs for everything in the world, including a sign for a sign. That idea of making a sign for a sign influenced me also. Yeah, I think Ad Reinhardt, but also Robert Ryman, even Frank Stella—people took the logic of paintings and made something that—I don't want to try to put it into words. But I mean, they were almost as if they were signs for paintings.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, also, once you started casting them, then it was a whole different thing, too. That was fascinating. I thought that was a fascinating idea, to cast the painting—the casts of paintings.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I think that made it much more explicit what I was doing. And then almost turned me into a sculptor at the same time, which wasn't necessarily my intention. But I wanted them to be viewed as props and that was my goal, for people to look at paintings as props, which would give them kind of an anthropological eye. Well, if you looked at Western culture with an anthropological eye, you'd consider framed objects to be an interesting and discrete phenomenon. And what was in the frame wouldn't necessarily be part of your first analysis.

AVIS BERMAN: But the frame signals that it's—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Something to look at.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Something more important than something that's lying on a table, or whatever—a different kind of importance.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So the cast—so the idea of a prop was trying to produce an object that could only be seen as a prop, as opposed to a window that you'd look into or the black cat in the cold basement with the lights off or something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: I want to go back to the point of when you decided, or how you decided that you were going to be an artist, or a painter. You seem to have started out as a painter. Am I correct?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes. I guess so, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, from what I have seen, yes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But I've never shown anything on a stretcher bar, except my very first—oh, those things—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, those later. No, I'm looking at what was at the Jack, I'm thinking about the Jack Glenn Gallery. And I want to find about him. I know Connie Glenn quite well, and so—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh really, you do?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, so the Jack Glenn Gallery was the kind of phenomenon that no longer exists. There are no papers or anything anymore. I just wanted to find out what kind of a place—and if he was encouraging to you. Let's talking about your early—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, Jack was the first art dealer that was aggressively wanting to work with me. It's interesting because Jack, when I met him, I was doing these.

AVIS BERMAN: Which are the construct—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: These are stretched paintings, which I would [dye gray –AM], put tape on and then full-on bleach, which would soak under the tape. Then I'd take off the tape and hose it off to get the bleach out. So it was like a photograph. It was almost like a photograph.

But Jack looked at this and offered me a show. He knew who I was—I can't remember how—through a whole sequence of art handlers. He opened a new gallery and he was from Kansas City. He was looking for a few young artists and people that were new. But then I started doing these and he decided he wanted these in the show.

These are not on stretcher bars. These are made from two-inch strips of canvas. They are glued together with boat caulking in a system where you'd lay—say I had an eight-foot piece of canvas, two inches by eight feet. I'd cut off the final two inches so it would be seven foot, 10 inches. Then I'd bring the two-inch piece back to the left and then add the next piece, which would mean I'd then cut off four inches and then bring the four—so it was like a little bit of a, kind of a crossword-puzzle type of tile-design type thing—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, so you were beginning to work with a system, if—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, not only with a system, but what's important about these to me, is that I started to work—okay, I mean, I'll have to make—I want to explain this because it's important. I never did like the idea of starting out with a blank canvas and adding to it. There was an immediate hierarchy set up when you do that. I found that hierarchy to be rooted in a kind of mystification of the artist, or a deification of the artist—that you start out with something blank.

And who's to say what the heck is blank anyway, as Rauschenberg asked. You know, there's no such thing as a blank canvas. Or as Tim Rollins said later, "The first thing an artist should think of when he looks at a canvas is, who made this canvas?" [They laugh.] I didn't like the hierarchy of the artist as this master, with his wonderful paintbrush and his great eye, making a mark on the—and not only did I not like it that painters did that, I didn't like that Smithsonian did that because I didn't like it that these artists would go out into the desert and do some gesture which then became somehow more significant than the flat plains underneath it and take a picture of it from an airplane and then show it in a gallery.

It was just like a painting to me. It had the same logic—the same hierarchical logic of the artist doing a gesture on a blank area—canvas—be it the canvas or the desert or whatever. And that hierarchical thing exists in most artistic gestures, so I would—at those days, I was trying to say, well, how do I come up with a painting that didn't start out with a rectangle which then—I then "improved" upon by adding a mark or two or three?

So I started making basically what were like pieced together quilts, in a way, starting with little shapes that I would glue together. And then when they were finished, they were the rectangle, but it was completely backwards to the hierarchical gesture of starting out with—deciding that a canvas was empty and ready for you to—

AVIS BERMAN: No. I wonder if you saw—there is a very important Whitney quilt show about '70 or '71.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I didn't see that. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, you know, the—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I lived in LA in this time.

AVIS BERMAN: I know, but—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I was not directly influenced by quilts at all. I'm only looking at it in retrospect that they—I'm just saying they were made like—I was much more influenced, say, by Eva Hesse or Richard Serra in this distinction. You know, his *Splash* or her—she would sew things together.

I have to say there were a number of women artists in those days who made distinctions between—who were interested in the distinctions that culture makes between women's work and men's work and I knew Mimi Schapiro, sort of, and I knew Judy Chicago. I liked them and I admired them. They were interested in that distinction very clearly, especially Mimi.

I also remember reading Thorstein Veblen's theory of a leisure class where in his introduction, he comes up with this vaguely hilarious but very accurate distinction between men's work and women's work that transcends all cultures in his mind. The women were usually doing—the way he

—the simple way he defined it in the end was that men would spend days doing nothing and then explode in killing a rhinoceros and then they would—that would provide food.

But the woman's—you know, the women had to do daily, repetitive tasks, cooking, feeding the baby, whatever, making whatever they did, cloth or whatever. So that is a very typical division between men and women's labor all across the world. I don't suppose it's 100 percent, but at least that's the way anthropologists seem to always notice it or define it.

So he was writing about—and then he translated that onto class, that the same division between repetitive work and inspirational momentary explosive had to deal with poor people did the repetitive work, the rich people did the—and so on and so forth. So—add to the point to where you're really rich and that's why he's so funny is that then you would do repetitive work because it showed you didn't have to because you were so rich but you do it because you could, you know.

So these distinctions were interesting to me about labor, handiwork and I think the idea of the premade canvas that you were supposed to ignore and do something on top of was really important to me. So I just want to acknowledge that some of this thinking in terms of these divisions, as they were applied to class distinctions, I probably—were triggered by my thinking about the feminist positions on these things. So—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think that actually, LA and California were a lot because of the presence of Schapiro and Chicago were really far ahead on this just as they were far ahead of New York on things like community murals and community art. I think it was more populist out in California.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I think Judy was a big promoter and Mimi was too. But there were New York artists—I mean, like Pat Steir, who actually taught at CalArts for a while. So I actually met her out there. And Joan Snyder—artists who did paintings but they didn't—they weren't done all at once. They were like diaries. You do a little thing one day and then you take a different color and a different brush and a different paint and do something the next day.

And their paintings were like big diaries. I remember thinking, my god, you know, that's not like Yves Klein. [They laugh.] It's a completely different approach that reflected the basic different ideas of labor.

AVIS BERMAN: To be sure—or Yves Klein taking three women and covering them with blue paint and having them roll on the canvass.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, well that. I didn't mean Yves. Did I say Yves Klein? Who did I mean?

AVIS BERMAN: Franz Kline.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: The other Kline. Franz Kline. No, Yves Klein is a different. No, him I like much better. I'm sorry. See, I always make these kinds of mistakes.

AVIS BERMAN: No, but Yves Klein actually kind of worked if we're talking about women and working and using the women as your paintbrush, which is what Yves Klein did. [They laugh.]

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But that isn't the only thing he did.

AVIS BERMAN: No, no, no.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: His analyses of like—he had a strong influence on Ed Kienholz. I was of course

influenced by Ed Kienholz in a number of ways. But, no, I mean, he had the same paintings at different prices, for instance. Ed Kienholz—have you got time or—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah. We've got plenty of time. That's the—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Ed Kienholz did a show. I should mention the shows that influenced me when I was younger in LA because there were some good galleries in LA in those days. Ed Kienholz did a show that blew me away. He had moved to Idaho from—he has a home in LA And he decided to move to Idaho. He needed all of these things. He needed a new stove; he needed a new car. I can't remember all—equipment for building the house; I don't know what.

He did a show that was clearly based on some of Yves Klein's thinking where he had, I don't know, a hundred watercolors—have you ever seen these? There are three washes, three colors, like blue, yellow, pink or something and then a stencil that he would make or put together somehow, kind of a Johnsian, old-fashioned stencil. And then he'd say *for* in italics and then underneath it would be what you could trade him for this watercolor.

And sometimes it was money. One of them was for \$1. One of them was for \$10,000. Those were the first two that sold, was the mythologies. Then other ones would say, for a certain type of truck, for a leather saddle that would fit my mule or whatever. And it was—all, it was like a trade fair. You were going in and the collectors literally would have to go out and buy the thing and give it to him.

It was all about exchange. It was a wonderful, wonderful show that signified, that generated a feeling of social interaction in a way that art shows didn't in those days. Another show was later, much later than that, maybe in the early '70s, mid-'70s, was Michael Asher. He was offered a show by two different galleries at the same time or—I don't know, one offered and he—I don't know how it worked out. And his project was that they traded spaces.

So the Thomas/Lewallen Gallery moved over to the Claire Copley Gallery and the Claire Copley Gallery moved from the Thomas/Lewallen Gallery and showed their own artists. So suddenly, if you had been showing at the Thomas/Lewallen Gallery then you wound up having your show at the Claire Copley space. The show would have had no meaning unless you were part of the art world, in this particular case. But if you were part of the art world, you'd walk in and it would be like you were in outer space because why am I looking at Connie Lewallen sitting at Claire Copley's desk with one of her artists—and the other way around?

So those two shows were enormously influential on the idea of the art gallery as a different kind of space of exchange.

AVIS BERMAN: Did Kienholz have his show at Ferus Gallery? That would have been—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, that show was at the—we'll have to Google this. I'm forgetting her name right now, but she is a conceptualist gallery that was very, very important in the late '60s.

AVIS BERMAN: Virginia Dwan? No.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No. That was an important gallery, too, but, no, it was one of the best galleries in LA I'm blocking the name right now.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, not Asher/Faure?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, way before that and after Dwan. Oh, god. I knew I should bring Google

with me. [Oh! It was Eugenia Butler, of course. –AM]

AVIS BERMAN: [...] I was wondering, in terms of shows at the Pasadena museum, I think it was about '67 or so that John Coplans did a show on serial repetition.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: He did?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That might have been before I decided to be an artist. I think—the first museum show I saw when I decided to be an artist, as I recollect, was a show John Coplans did at the Pasadena Art Museum. But it was Roy Lichtenstein. I don't remember if that was the one you're talking—I know he did an article in *Artforum* on serial repetition but I don't remember if—I don't think—I think that may very well have been—if you say it was '67. I didn't even decide to be an artist until '67. And that was mid-'60s. And I didn't—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I'm pretty sure it was '67 because I think—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I might have seen it but—

AVIS BERMAN: Because Lichtenstein himself was influenced by that serial repetition and started using that himself from seeing that show and went out there.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Really?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Hmm. Well, the Lichtenstein was a great show for me because, up until then, when you see his pictures in a magazine, they just look like what you'd expect—

AVIS BERMAN: What they're supposed to look—graphic, commercial graphic—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, ridiculous. But when you see them in person they're absolutely magical. It's like you're the Incredible Shrinking Man from that '50s movie because you see all of the dots; they're big. You see the messes where he screwed up and you see pencil marks and all of that. They are really amazing.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, yeah, they were much more personal than you would think.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, yeah. I mean, they got more hard-edge as time went by. But that period was just spectacularly spooky.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess we should also bring up, in light of future work—and I'm not sure; now, I cannot remember when this was on the West Coast, but obviously Walter Hopps was a name to conjure with. So did you see the Duchamp show that was out there? Okay, well, that might have been—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Walter Hopps—he may not even have lived in LA when I decided to be an artist. The Ferus Gallery had closed. The Virginia Dwan Gallery, I think I was late to learn what it was and it closed within a year that I decided to be an artist. I remember being there a couple of times, but I wasn't knowledgeable enough.

Walter Hopps I never met until like 10 years ago. So I worked in the art handling company and the

woman who ran it was related to Virginia Dwan. I remember that things from that gallery were stored in their warehouse, things from the Ferus Gallery, including Kienholz's piece called *Walter Hopps Hopps Hopps*.

And many other things from that era. Irving Blum had his storage there. Oh, I have to say also Wallace Berman was a big influence because of his interest in using—well, many things—but mostly his interest in using photocopies. I did a whole series of works, none of which exist anymore, where I was imitating, trying to do what he did; even framing things the way he did and using a—the first art equipment I bought was a photocopier, a very inexpensive \$125 photocopier that was in two parts and it was this horrible—they all fade as the time goes by. But it was similar to what he was doing. You're not related to Walter Berman?

AVIS BERMAN: No, I wish I were. But I'm not, no. Well, who were some of the other artists in the Jack Glenn Gallery? Were there any that you became friendly with or were interested in or had an effect on you?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, he was like 50 miles away from where I lived. So there wasn't like a scene around the gallery. I'm trying to remember who—the lyrical abstractionists. Do you remember who they were? They all showed in that gallery. That was a kind of a Kansas City focus. But the lyrical abstractionists were there. But they lived in New York. So they didn't live in LA [Ronnie Landfield, I remember. And David Diao. —AM]

I don't remember being surrounded by other LA artists at that gallery. I wasn't with that gallery—I had two shows there and then moved to the Nicholas Wilder gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, which we will talk about in a minute or two. But we should also—because we should discuss these—I guess this kind of constructed painting or—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: —caulking. Instead of strips I used these squares.

AVIS BERMAN: But it says it was stapled directly to the wall?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, once they were all glued together the piece was stapled to the wall, yeah. But when you took it down it was still one long piece. And that—I mean, there is an attempt to imitate curves even though they were squares. That was part of the fun of it.

If you stand way back, it looks like a curve. It's like a digital attempt to create a curve. Of course, this was way before you would have known anything about digital manipulation but—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. What do you think the main idea or inspiration was for this, for these—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Inspiration?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, is that a concept?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I guess it was what I already said about these in a way. It was coming up with a synthetic way of producing what wound up as a rectangle with images. But I think, in this case, I was looking for it overlapping. It's hard to tell from the photos, but some of them had varnish and some of them didn't. And systematically—

AVIS BERMAN: Let's see if this one is better. I tried to photocopy some of the ones that—just because I thought this might have a little bit more textures.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Where did you get that?

AVIS BERMAN: Detroit Institute of Art show. Whitney Museum library has a whole bunch of stuff on you if you ever want to fill in your own archive.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I don't even know if I have this. But it was a way of—when you go up close it looks like a completely different thing, like looking at a brick wall or something like that. When you go back it's a painting, it's an image. I don't know, at the time, it was kind of about infinity; that you could go on forever and your stopping was—I mean, perpetual canon. Do you know what that is? It's a kind of musical piece that's like a round.

*If Love Had Wings*, that's a reference to clairvoyants. So I don't know. I think there were a number of different themes in there. But mostly I was thinking—I don't know, I want to say mostly. I was very interested that how it was made was visible. That probably came from reading Robert Morris and looking at Richard Serra's work and even Frank Stella, how his paint had always seeped under the tape, in those days, and that you were foregrounding the making. The imagery was sort of there but balanced with the results of the making.

So it was kind of a synthetic way of doing an abstract expressionist thing, maybe, or—where the making is the whole thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I can see how Robert Rauschenberg must have been a huge influence on you. He must have broke like a thunderclap on you in terms of process and what was possible.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I think, by the time I decided to be an artist, his influence had influenced so many other artists that it wasn't directly Robert Rauschenberg.

AVIS BERMAN: But you said you had learned about him and John Cage.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I learned about him and then—but it wasn't—he probably influenced many different people in many different ways. His statement about "there is no such thing as a blank canvas" blew me away. What was his other statement that I so loved? Oh, the erasing the de Koonings, that these things could be considered autonomous art works; erasing a de Kooning, hugely funny and wonderful and smart and beautiful and just seemed to say so much.

In terms of his own flatbed productions and all of that, I guess that influenced me. But by the time I became an artist I think his influence had infiltrated so many others. I was probably more influenced by Eva Hesse or Sol LeWitt than I was by Rauschenberg. But they were clearly influenced by Rauschenberg. Do you know what I mean?

AVIS BERMAN: Right, exactly.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So he was definitely a hero. He was working at Gemini G.E.L. and I met him and had dinner—was sitting at a dinner table with him once. So I did meet him but it was no—there was no—he's very charming and intimidating and wonderful and cute and smart, really smart. Now, there is someone, when he says, "One sentence follows another follows another," the creativity is like, how did he get from that to that? You know? Did you ever talk to him?

AVIS BERMAN: Not at length, more listened, because he was so intimidating to be in the presence of. It's like, what do you say? I mean, you just want to listen. There is almost nothing you could contribute to an intelligence like that.



ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, you just have to adore him, I guess. That's the way I've felt.

AVIS BERMAN: So is there a reason you left the Jack Glenn Gallery?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's nothing I'd want to say and then be—he was a complicated, sensitive guy and— it's a funny thing to talk about. One time I asked him what the goals of his gallery were. He said, "I don't know what you mean." I said, well, you know, like—and then I started naming other galleries and how they focused around, you know, formalist painting or they focused around conceptual art. I said, "Where do you focus?"

He took that to mean I was criticizing him. He got really hurt and he said, "I think you should find another gallery." Then I said, Connie, what is—and she goes, "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know what his problem is. That hurt his feelings or something." I said, "Well, it wasn't meant to be"—but, at the same time, Nicholas Wilder offered me a show. So I thought, well, Jack is feeling awkward with me and then—and I should—Nicholas is closer to where I live and more prominent in a way. So I went over there.

It was really weird. Jack was much nicer to me later. I don't know if he regretted it or—I don't know what his thinking was. It wasn't like we were friends so—I remember, I think, looking back, he was just much more defensive than he should have been in probably many other areas too. So I don't know. I don't really know what happened. But it was mutual, I guess, in a sense.

AVIS BERMAN: So you went to Nicholas Wilder.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right. I had known him more—I knew him—I had more of a personal—a little bit more of a personal relationship with him because I had been delivering art to his gallery for two years and knew him from parties and things like that. I think his boyfriend actually worked at Cart and Crate or one of his very close friends worked at Cart and Crate. He was a completely charming, brilliant guy and he helped found *Artforum* magazine.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it seemed to me you would be suddenly really tuned in to things if you weren't in the scene already—which I guess you were from the art handling, that that was one of the epicenters for art in LA at the time.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Totally. I was extremely lucky that he gave me a couple of shows.

AVIS BERMAN: And was he able to sell your work?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Some. They both were able to sell work—not to where I could live on it, but, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: So were you still working as an art handler to survive?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. I worked as an art handler up until around 1971. Then I think I spent three or four years doing odd jobs but mostly selling work. And then I moved to New York in '75 and became an art handler again and worked at different museums and galleries and didn't—and then—until maybe 1986 I didn't have to do that anymore. I didn't have to have a job after that because I was selling enough work to just get by. So—but it's huge.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I guess I would say, do you have a sense of what Wilder appreciated in your work or—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What who?

AVIS BERMAN: What Wilder appreciated in your work or—I'm just wondering, in terms of a dealer, his sensitivity—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't remember what he said. I know he—I don't remember. I think the—I was in an experimental area with painting. One piece that you wouldn't—there are no photographs of anywhere. But I did pieces that were based on these squares like the perpetual—like this series. But they were extremely goopy, all of these paintings.

I was trying to do a synthetic Jules Olitski type of thing where there was—it's not in any of the books. And so, like, the canvas square, every canvas square was done in some different technique and different—I mean, I invented like 12 different ways of painting a canvas: sometimes against a piece of plastic; I might throw glitter on it; I'd throw sand on it; I'd put strings—and I had this whole light vocabulary of squares that were all different. I glued them together. It was really kind of a commentary and a critique and a fun interpretation of push and pull and Hofmann and Olitski.

It was like taking the formal language of painting and turning it into something that a computer might generate, you know? There was no computer, but it was like making a crossword puzzle or something. I think he appreciated the humor of that. I'm just guessing. He did like—he liked seeing my production. I remember in '87 he moved to New York and gave up the gallery. But he came to my opening of *Over Ten Thousand Individual Works*. He went, "You haven't changed a bit. This is like visiting your studio in [1969 –AM], 1971 where everything is made of little parts glued together."

But, I don't know, I don't think he ever exactly pinpointed what—I think he just thought I was—I remember he told me that he kept a list. When he had heard an artist's name he would write it down. Then when he had heard someone else mention it he'd make a check. And then when he got to three checks he'd go visit the artist.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you know what? I think that's a great idea because usually that means also other—because probably that came from other artists.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, that's the way he was, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Often the best choices are from what other artists say. Of all of the groups that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'd like to think so, yeah. I mean, when a person is sort of an artist's artist; I don't know that I would call myself that. But, he heard my name enough times to—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it meant that other artists, I guess, respected—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It might not have been from artists that he was hearing my name.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, you don't know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But many dealers succeed by having good ears as well as good eyes.

AVIS BERMAN: I think that's what Leo Castelli said, that you didn't have to have a good eye; you had to have a good ear.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I associate that with him, too. [Laugh.] That was one of the critiques of him as well.

AVIS BERMAN: Speaking of sort of—as I said, I was digging around in the vertical files of the Whitney and I found this picture, which, I don't know what this is from. I just thought I would—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's the back of an announcement card. It's a little embarrassing looking at it. That's me and my girlfriend at the time.

AVIS BERMAN: Was that Ms. Houston?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, this was later than that. Her name was Effie Rosen. She had been the girlfriend of David Deutsch and Jack Goldstein before—this was a very small art world and everyone was always changing partners. She was wonderful. But David Deutsch, who was my landlord—he rented a building and then subletted three sections to other people. He's a wealthy guy. I don't know if you know who he is. He is an artist now in New York.

I remember when I did this announcement card he said, "Well, Allan, I guess there's no question that you're heterosexual." [They laugh.] I was so embarrassed because I think there was a mix-up, probably due to Ruscha and Bengston's playfulness with their announcement cards. But LA artists often confused themselves with rock singers or something. My choice to use that picture on the announcement card clearly was something I would never in a million years do now. But, Ed Ruscha and Billy Al Bengston always had their pictures on their announcement cards—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, all of the Ferus Gallery artists always did stuff like that. There was like a big testosterone potion over there.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They were hugely influential on everyone. Billy Al, especially was—everything he did was so funny and smart and—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, then, why did you decide to move to New York?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, there were some personal reasons. I had some disappointments in my personal life that made me want to get away and there was a woman I didn't want to keep running into. That was one reason.

There was—other reasons: Nicholas Wilder closed; the Pasadena Art Museum closed. The art world sank into a deep depression. I also felt that there was—it's a funny thing to say because it isn't the case now, I don't think. But in those days I felt there wasn't enough critical—there weren't enough critics that challenged you. The critics were all pretty bad. And I remember the critic from the LA Times describing Daniel Buren as an op artist.

I mean, they were really bad. And they didn't know how to—you know. I wanted critical feedback. I didn't feel I was getting critical feedback. I also felt I knew everybody in the art world there was to know—which isn't true—but I felt that way at the time. So I had numerous reasons to move to New York, mostly career oriented and wanting to find where there was more competition and more critical feedback because I felt like, at a certain point, there is not enough competition in Los Angeles and your work doesn't grow and you need competition. Boy you get it in New York. You really have to define what you're interested in and come to terms and analyze and distinguish yourself in a certain way and have something that your work is about that no one else's is.

In those days I didn't feel that I was—that was happening to me in LA Maybe it was happening to others, but not to me. I left in '75, same year, say, Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Charles Ray—they all emerged after I had gone. So I didn't have the fun of those brilliant young guys.

AVIS BERMAN: Just before we leave this I didn't ask you because it's clearly important to you later on, but were materials something important to you? We're describing these things so they're not—we don't have the traditional baggage of, say, oil paint, but—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I'll say. There was a number of reasons for that. Did you have a further —

AVIS BERMAN: No, no.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay. One of my feelings was being influenced by Craig Kauffman, Billy Al Bengston, Larry Bell, none of whom used anything you'd ever see in an art store. [Laughs.] Now, Billy Al probably does. But in those days it was metal; it was spray paint and Larry Bell with his huge machine to coat glass and Craig Kauffman with his vacuform. It was like—and even John McCracken. There was just a whole slew of artists from the older generation that seemed to have absolutely rejected your standard art materials.

Yeah, there was a reflection of, say, Donald Judd, I'm sure in all of that. But, I can't speak for them or maybe pop artists, but the way they interpreted it out there involved really embracing industrial techniques in a way that I don't think ever quite happened here in New York. So that was part of it.

The other part was I felt—because I didn't go to art school and I was already 23 years old—that there's no way I could catch up with somebody who had been to art school by learning how to use oil paint, canvas, ceramic clay, all of the things you would learn in fundamentals when you go to art school. I thought, well, I guess the smart thing would be to skip over that and decide that's not important and choose my own materials.

So I made a vow to myself to never go to an art store. It was years before I went into a—so, like, these bleach paintings that I made, I made with bleach I bought in the supermarket and Rit dye that you buy in the supermarket. This is the boat caulking that you buy in the hardware store and this is lacquer that you buy in the hardware store. The canvas you bought where they made sails for boats.

So it's like I'm constructing paintings that you call paintings but they're made out of industrial materials. This was not an uncommon outlook in Los Angeles. My interpretation of it had its own coloring to it. But, in wanting to get away from the logic of painting as I've described it, to come up with something more democratic, less hierarchical and less mystifying the skills of the artist, et cetera. All of these decisions fed into that.

But the artists like Billy Al Bengston did love skill, clearly, but it was a skill that had nothing to do with what a painter in his studio, what you would expect him to be. There is a Kenny Price show up right now that's just—hugely skilled, but completely weird. So anyways, that was the generation of artists.

AVIS BERMAN: And that was carried on at Gemini, too. They loved the industrial idea of LA when they brought the artist out. I mean, that was a high-art enterprise, but—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Really? Is that how you think of it?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think that Gemini G.E.L. was very interested and they could fabricate anything.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, they had this—I think, as I recollect, that they invented fabrication

techniques. I remember them doing—it was hilarious. Rauschenberg wanted to do something complicated about cardboard boxes that were flattened and all of that. They had to create archival corrugated fiberboard that looked like it was the brown—corrugated, but it wasn't. It was archival, but it looked like—and I remember thinking, does that really fit with Rauschenberg's concept?

But, no, yeah, they did vacuform, I think, with Oldenburg. Yeah, they were interested in new techniques. So maybe that was an LA influence, too.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, because they weren't just going to make prints; they were going—if the artist wanted to make some sort of object, they would do that, too, because they would call on the aerospace industry. They just would look all over the place and find guys who could make things.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I sort of think of Robert Watts that way, too. I don't know if his—from that period here. So when I came to New York, Robert Watts was one of the artists that sort of, I thought, oh my God, I get this, because he used many different kinds of industrial techniques whereas other New York artists—outside of Judd nothing comes to mind as really focusing on that exclusively.

AVIS BERMAN: Was it the techniques alone that drew you or attracted you to Watts' work and ideas?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: To whose work?

AVIS BERMAN: Watts. In other words, was it the techniques—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, it was his—yeah, his humor, his mixing up of—I think what really got me was his—the *New Light on West Africa*, West African sculptures. But he'd cast them in plaster and then had them chromed. It absolutely made no sense. Where would that ever be needed anywhere or ever done? And then putting them in this dramatic Brancusi setting like at the Modern with the lights and the rest of the room is dark. It made you sort of question all of our boundaries that we put between so-called primitive art and chrome-plated whatever. It was a very odd—so, no. But it was also the objects he chose to make. But that display stood out more than anything. And his humor. You know, that he often used polyester resins in embedding things and—

AVIS BERMAN: And he was kind of—was he maybe a bridge between Pop and Fluxus? I think he embodied a lot of different things.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I think he stayed on the Fluxus side whereas Lichtenstein and Oldenburg moved over—I mean, wanted to—moved for a definition that was more specific to them. I don't really—I mean, it's very funny. When you're from outside of New York, you think of all of those artists as being Fluxus. When you're here, boy, you call some of those artists Fluxus, they'll hit you.

I was reading an interview with Sol LeWitt where the interviewer—this was just recently—what's his name who did the interview? It was in *BOMB*, where he got almost angry when they associated it with Fluxus. I suggested that certain kinds of Fluxus performances to Joan Jonas once and she would—"Those weren't Fluxus performances, those were," you know, whatever they were called, the group that—in the Lower East Side. I can't remember the names of all of the groups.

AVIS BERMAN: There was one. There was Colab, too, but she wasn't in that. That was something different. That was about nine years—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That was later.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, slightly later: '78, '80, that's when that—or maybe '77 is about right?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, was it that early? I didn't even know it was that early.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, because I think they had the big New York show that they had that was 1980, the Times Square show. I think that was about 1980 that the Colab performed.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But I'm talking about the '60s, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. I thought we were talking about when you moved.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, that's true. But Robert Watts was—I was influenced hugely by Fluxus writings, Something Else Press, in the '60s because I would buy their little pamphlets. And like Lawrence Weiner claims he didn't even know who Fluxus was. I look at his work and think, that's so Fluxus. But if you say that to him, he'll like, what?

He didn't even know who the Fluxus artists were until much later than those of us who happened to know where a certain bookstore—that I don't understand that history. I was so shocked when both Joan and Lawrence—and then I read this interview by Saul Ostrow. Saul was shocked, too, because he told me, he said, "Yeah, I couldn't believe that Sol LeWitt claimed he was not influenced by Fluxus." [Laughs.]

But apparently Fluxus had a very specific group. It was kind of cliquish. If you were a serious artist, a certain type, you didn't want to be called Fluxus. Yeah, I don't know about that. Like I don't want to be called Simulationist or Neo-Geo. I mean, that infuriates me, these kinds of terms. I get where I want to hit somebody when they call me that. I write complaints to people.

Somebody wanted to do their thesis on the Neo-Geo movement. I said, "What the heck is that?" That was a joke somebody made up and I wouldn't be a part of it, things like that. But maybe Fluxus has that kind of a feel to certain people. I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess so, though I thought Fluxus has gained a lot of—not just legitimacy but caché over the recent years.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I would think so, yeah. It's taken very seriously. But I guess there is those who wanted to be a part of it and those who didn't.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, well, I guess so.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, it's not like Neo-Geo, which nobody knows what the heck that even is.

AVIS BERMAN: I think it's Peter Halley now, period.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Even he thought that title was a joke. Yeah and he would have been the only one who really fit. I don't think he likes that term because somebody told me, yeah, he said that was a joke; it wasn't really the name of a—I think he called himself a Simulationist. [Laughs.] I don't know why people have to call themselves anything.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I saw a couple of his paintings the other day somewhere and I thought they really looked good, a couple of the earlier ones, yeah. Anyways, maybe I like bright colors. But, anyways, I guess for housekeeping purposes, just asking you before we begin a little bit on New York, were you—have you ever been married?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No. I have no children or—

AVIS BERMAN: So you got to New York and where did you land?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I stayed with a friend in SoHo and wound up through the *Village Voice* finding a loft space, a loft unit, portion of a loft, for rent. Six of us built our own spaces in this loft and worked hard to get rent stabilized over the years. And so now we're rent stabilized.

AVIS BERMAN: So you're in the same place.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's the same place I was in—

AVIS BERMAN: So the same building. Are you the only one of the originals left or are there other—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, no. There's like nine of us or so. I mean, I think I was—I think of all of the tenants there, I am now the oldest, the one. But most of us have been there 25 or more years.

AVIS BERMAN: So it's still an artist's building as opposed—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: More or less, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: As you know, once you start getting new people in then they want the lobby fixed; then they want the door—you know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I know. There has been many, many lawyers we've had to work through. There has been four owners to the building. Right now, just two years, we were all threatened with eviction and we had to get a lawyer. We're fighting and we had to go to the community board. We had to go to the city. I gave a lecture at City Planning just two weeks ago about making sure they didn't do this and this and this. The new owner had to back down on all of these things he had said he was going to do. He wanted to create high-end condominiums, blah, blah, blah.

AVIS BERMAN: So it's still scary. After all of these years, you would think that artists would be safe.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't think a lot of people who work for the city even remember the development of SoHo as an artist's—I mean, that was many years ago.

AVIS BERMAN: But also that they were—making it legal and making it an artist's district and all of that. I thought that was safe from all of the legislation—because of the legislation.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, it's safe but there is a lot of—if I were to leave the building then the next tenant would not be protected even if they were an artist. Also you have to be a certified artist, which means a set of specific things. If your place is too small, it has to have been grandfathered at a certain point. Yeah, there is a whole lot of—I mean, it's complicated.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So you, as you said, have you ever taught?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Not in any regular—the only time I've ever had an actual teaching job was very recently; I think it was 2004 I taught at MIT for a year. I do regular student critiques at Columbia for a number of years now. It's one of the joys of my life. It's much better than teaching. You just go in twice a year, four times a year, and meet with the artists.

I've done student critiques many different places. I was a visiting artist in Florida a couple of times at different universities. But, all in all, I've only ever taught at MIT where I actually had a class with

assignments. It took so much out of me. I always fall in love with the students, which takes you away from yourself and your own work. You don't get anything done.

So no, teaching is not something—I love it when I'm there but I'm unable to work on my own work while I'm doing it. I just can't—it's like too much. When you don't go to college, you don't know what it's like to be a professor. But you also don't know what it's like to be a student. So you're in a mystery all of the time. You don't even understand what—I had to call two friends to find out what a seminar was, for instance, right while I'm doing it. And they'd say, "Well, a seminar is"—"Oh, okay, okay."

AVIS BERMAN: Right. It's probably something you know how to do. It sounds like you just needed the semantics.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I didn't know how to do it even. I mean, since when in normal life would I sit around and say, "And what do you think, Mary?"—about Walter Benjamin's comment that blah, blah, blah? I don't do that socially.

AVIS BERMAN: So anyway, did your work begin to change once you were here? I mean, obviously it did but how and was there a period of adjustment or were you in—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It was seven years before I had a show when I moved to New York. Like I said, it's like you have to reassess everything you know to come up with something that is just yours. There is that kind of a thing. You don't want to—at least with me. I mean, because my early goals were to come up with new ideas as opposed to being a better painter. So I wanted my ideas to be distinctly mine. But I also had a whole range of things that was one of the goals in the background, of course, with every artist. So that's not very important, I guess, to mention.

But I don't know how else to say it. Of course my ideas grew and grew and grew and changed and shifted. But that's a long story. I don't know if I could say that in two minutes.

AVIS BERMAN: No, no, and I'm not asking you to because I'm just asking—when you say you didn't have a show of your own for seven years, but it looks like you were showing in a lot of group exhibitions. It seems to me that you were—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Not even that many.

AVIS BERMAN: You were known.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I think between '75 and '83 there is a pretty big blank in my résumé.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I see that you were in the Whitney biennial.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: In '75. That was with my LA work.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. I see what you're saying. So your—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: When I came here I was doing these paper pieces and continued to do those. They were transitional. They were kind of a mass-produced, sort of little parts that you cut up and glued together—not these so much, but these. These were from '74, '75. They were just like little paper versions of these.

But what they were was they could be paintings; they could be drawings; they could be charcoals.



They could be any material as long as it could go on paper and then you could indefinitely start gluing them together. They were a grid on another grid. The grid was made up of 96 separate parts.

96? No, I guess 16 separate little parts. They were like these little—as Liza Bear once called them, my "fake paintings." It was my attempt to—we haven't really talked about the ideas behind my work yet exactly. Mostly you're just asking me specific questions. But this was an idea to level—I had already been trying to level the idea of the hierarchy between them. Then I was focusing on the hierarchy between painting, watercolors, ink drawings, pencil drawings and then prints and then posters.

And, you know, there is this hierarchy, this class system. I've always been very focused on how—the way we divide up art which reflects how we divide up people. So with that particular series—and that bridged my being in LA and in New York—I was coming up with a system that the distinctions between all of those things were irrelevant because it was basically—they could have been any. They could be paintings; they could be drawings; they could be watercolors; they could be ink drawings.

And they were all put together the same way and there was no hierarchy. They were all the same size. So that was part of my thinking. I mean, it was—I don't know who I would claim as an influence for that. So it was a continuation of trying to grow out of the logic, the class logic of the mystified artist and the mystified object.

AVIS BERMAN: And were these being—was this shown in any galleries or anywhere? Or was this —

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That's much later. [These were called *Glossies*. –AM] That came after the *Surrogate Paintings*, these objects.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay, I'm getting confused about that. Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Sure, no, it's fine. I mean, because they're very related to these technically.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, exactly. Oh, I see, these were the—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You should see them in person. They're funny. They're not real photographs. They just look like photographs with glossy adhesive on top.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, that is also the problem. You're looking at them in a catalogue; you're photocopying them and by now you're flattening them by several generations.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Even when you're looking at them in person you think they're photographs of drawings because they have the laminate on top that makes them look like a photograph, like a glossy photograph.

AVIS BERMAN: So you were also really continuing your interest certainly in nontraditional art materials there. I should also ask you how you got to HYDROCAL. I mean, that's a little bit later but that's sort of—it's an important material in your work.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, HYDRO-STONE more than HYDROCAL actually: two different products by the same company.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right, because—how did you happen on that or figure it out? Because that

was something Otterness was doing, too.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah. Well, I don't know. I thought lots of artists used HYDROCAL, don't they?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, but some—but not often so conspicuously, shall we say?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What?

AVIS BERMAN: Maybe not so conspicuously? Maybe I'm wrong.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't know. I mean, Tom Otterness' are very conspicuous.

AVIS BERMAN: That's what I'm saying. His were. That's what I meant. I picked him because he was so out there with it because it was a cheap kind of material.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, he'd sell them for \$5 or something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Exactly. He was living that, sort of trying to do that at the time.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, there was—do you want to talk about the *Surrogate Paintings* because there is so much to say about them, I don't know if we have time.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, maybe we should wait till next time; maybe it's a time to take a break and then we'll make another appointment.

[END OF DISC ONE.]

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Allan McCollum for the Archives of American Art GSA Oral History Project on February 25, 2010, at the Archives of American Art offices in New York City.

I first want to ask you were just a couple of things that I didn't pick up on yesterday. And I had asked you if you had seen the Duchamp show at the Pasadena Museum of Art. And you had said you hadn't. But I think the follow-up question is, is Duchamp an artist who is or was important to your thinking?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What was in that show, by the way? I may have been wrong in saying I didn't see it. Do you remember?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I wasn't there. They had paintings. It was a retrospective. He came and he famously played chess with this nude woman.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Whom I actually knew.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Eve Babitz.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, and her sister [Miranda –AM]. No, I didn't see the show. If I did, I don't recollect. I think probably for better or for worse, of course, he is in the back of everybody's mind all the time. But I was probably more influenced by the people he influenced rather than by his work itself. I don't remember ever focusing on any historical figure of that generation with any intensity.

AVIS BERMAN: You also mentioned John Cage was important to you. But I should ask you why.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh my god. That is a very complicated thing to have to answer because he—I have to think back like what exactly would it have been. When I learned about him, I knew nothing about art at all. So the idea that anything he did could be called something artistic was sort of astonishing. I think probably—just to be frank, it was probably his interest in Eastern thought that triggered because before I learned about art, I had read books about Zen Buddhism and I had gone to Baha'i meetings and I was interested in defining oneself in the universe as many people are. I was also very interested in—I don't know if I spoke about this the other day, but I was interested in trying to reconstruct my sense of what is real because my past had been kind of an unhappy one.

So I was interested in the concept of rewriting reality for oneself, rewriting the way one looked at things and recognizing that that was a possibility, which is why I was probably drawn to structural anthropology to some degree, studying that different people had different ways of looking at things. There was no one single reality.

It is a very important thing to know when you are 18, 19, 20 and 21 that you can—you don't have to live the life your parents lived. So there was that. He was like a model for that kind of a thing. I think probably what struck me most in those days were artists who explored or questioned the structure of the narrative. In other words, a typical musical structure might be ABA, or a typical play might start out with—there are terms for how stories begin and end. I forget what they are all called, denouement at the end. I forget the—

But there is always a structure that people study and write about and learn and adopt. There are many different ways to create harmony and many different ways to create scales. But Western music tends to stick to one. Well, he advanced an idea of freedom about that that I didn't know anything about before that included silence, that included things going backwards, things disappearing, just dumb things, things you wouldn't even expect. He influenced many other musicians and artists to do the same thing.

So I guess—plus, I have to say his writing was available. There may have been many other thinkers and artists who followed similar freedom of thought and so forth and inventiveness. But he wrote. He wrote well. He included that logic in his writing. Something Else Press produced many interesting books about the Fluxus artists, but also John Cage published some of his writings. I bought those books.

I can't say that it was sitting there listening to his albums, although I did have one, which I played over and over and over again. But it was more reading his writing and recognizing his questioning of structure, and especially, you know, beginning, middle and end structure, which is every story, every symphony, has a beginning, a middle and an end. He didn't think that way and that was really astonishing to me. I had never considered that, I guess, at that age that there could be another structure.

AVIS BERMAN: Especially in the strong Western musical traditions that you had experienced. I mean, you were from a musical family.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, my mother's influence—yeah, the musical interests in my family were geared to folk music and opera, operetta, musical comedy, things that are fairly structured without—there is no avant-garde interests in my family. There is a lot of liberalism in my family, but not to the point of radical avant-garde.

AVIS BERMAN: But it was a cultivated musical family in terms of those interests.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Cultivated?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, in other words, liberal and appreciated various kinds of genres, folk art and opera and other—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, yeah, folk art. It is funny. I wonder about the folk art and opera, but not rock and roll. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Also that may have been generational. Was your family religious?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, but—well, that can mean a million different things. My father was a Republican who never went to church. My mother was a Democrat who always went to church. My uncle was an atheist. My mother used to quote the joke, when he walked into the room, he was such an atheist that when he walked into the room, you could feel the glorious absence of God, which is I am sure a joke she got somewhere else. Outside of that, no,— my grandparents were. We went to church, but it was more sort of like typical—it was more a social thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I was wondering if there had been shall we say, fairly observant religiosity and that was something that you had to rebel against or break away from.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, not at all. No, the nice thing about my family was there was never any pressure to go to college, to be one thing or the other, to—maybe they thought you should learn how to support yourself, but they didn't say how, and anything about religious beliefs. Political beliefs were acceptable. There were many different opinions in the extended family that people—not everyone shared each other's opinions. It was liberal in that sense.

AVIS BERMAN: And I guess—and another thing that you had felt that we really hadn't talked a lot about—some of the important ideas behind your earlier work and certainly from the mid-'70s and maybe it is a little sooner even with the constructed paintings that you really did seem to be questioning the art environment, the art space.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What do you mean, the art space?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, the space in which—, the spaces in which art is supposed to go, how we define a gallery—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Do you mean—oh, oh, well, up to that point, I don't think I had quite gotten into exploring the idea of the physical space of the art gallery. That came just after what you are talking about. But no, the way paintings were defined was a significant preoccupation. In those days, defining what a painting was was a preoccupation of the formalist critics, a very interesting preoccupation.

The works I described the other day, which were made of little pieces glued together, so you didn't start out with a rectangle, but you wound up with one. This was clearly me bouncing off of—in a way that was partly humorous, but partly resistant, I guess. Well, more than humorous. It was ideological. And it was bouncing off of, say, the quote by Hans Hofmann, that the first four lines of your composition are the edges of your canvas. And what is his name? The work of Frank Stella, absolutely exploring the idea of the edges of your canvas, defining what goes into the canvas.

So these are—and like Robert Ryman, reducing everything to stuff put on a rectangle, you know. And Roy Lichtenstein, almost making signs for paintings instead of paintings. So these influences—what was your question? [Laughs.] I am sorry.

AVIS BERMAN: No, no, that is okay because I had—you were just talking about defining what a painting was.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, yeah. So my interest was to reverse the Hans Hofmann equation, like that the final four lines of your composition are the outside edges of your painting because I have never put it that way before. But that was the way I was thinking because I guess must have felt disturbed by the restrictions of the formalist concepts, as others must have been.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So you were saying about the space of a painting. I am not sure—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, not the space within a painting, but the space in which you put paintings either galleries or—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, that hadn't come up yet in our last conversation, I don't think. Do you want to go into that now?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, because we were just on the cusp of that.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, right, exactly.

AVIS BERMAN: We had just gotten to the *Surrogates* when we stopped.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, this preoccupation with what I talked about before about how—what artists are defined as doing is taking some kind of set and then altering it, some kind of background and adding something to the foreground or some kind of set of conventions and then playing with them, kind of the way a jazz musician takes a tune that is already written and improvises. But in a way, that is a very conservative way to look at—it wasn't when the jazz musicians decided to do it. But jazz is hugely embraced by conservatives because of that, because oh, it is an improvisation on something that already exists.

So I was talking about the narrative structure, wasn't I? I have to go back to being interested in not music so much as stories, as plays, dramas. There was a while when I thought I wanted to be a filmmaker. Then I thought I wanted—there was a while when I thought I wanted to be a dramatist, a playwright. So the idea of a narrative structure was engrained in me. I have to go back to Bruce Boice.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Because he did a series of paintings—geez, I haven't seen his work in years and years. You know who—

AVIS BERMAN: No, I don't.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, he did a series of paintings in the very mid-'70s, which were three canvases in a row, a triptych. He showed at Sonnabend. The final painting—or even calling it the final painting is a narrative. The painting to the right had a frame around it. The paintings to the left didn't. The painting on the far left might have had a circle and a triangle and a line. Then the painting in the middle might have had a square and a pentagon. Then the final painting would have had some element from the first two, but put together with a frame around it.

So basically, without any words, he was imitating the look of an equation. This canvas plus this canvas in some way equals this canvas, which has a frame around it. Well, it was completely

ridiculous because there was no story. It made you realize wait a minute, what is this left to right thing that we have? Why does the frame suddenly mean—it is a combination of the other two canvases?

I just want to give credit to that series of works by Bruce Boice because he really astonished me how embedded this sense of left to right, A plus B equals C, you know, the beginning, the middle, the end, how this kind of way of looking—and he did that in painting. And that had been done in dance for years at that point, playing with the idea of the narrative.

But I hadn't seen—I hadn't noticed it in a painting. I know it had been there with many other artists, but I hadn't noticed it in such an exaggerated, humorous way until Bruce Boice. He wrote articles in *Artforum* frequently, too. He was a writer. I loved his writing as well.

AVIS BERMAN: I will look him up.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay. So I have to contextualize the going from the untitled paper constructions to the *Surrogates* in a way because it involved learning about or thinking about being influenced by Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, the BMPT group. Do you know BMPT [Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni group]? Okay. So I am not a critic, so I don't know how to put things in words exactly. But there was a problem—there was a distinction. There was an interesting—just as I was becoming an artist, there was an interesting shift from pop art to conceptualism to minimalism to post-minimalism. All of these so-called isms emerged in the same five or six years, it seemed to me at the time, or maybe a dozen years.

They all played off of one another in all these interesting ways. I think I liked minimalism. But at the same time, I felt it sort of reduced the viewer to a pair of eyes and gut and reduced to the space to a cube. It eliminated all of the social, political ramifications of what an art gallery was and so forth. So while the minimalists were amazing in the way they eliminated a lot, they also avoided certain questions at the same time for reasons. They had reasons for doing that—hopefully to make one center on the situation and start thinking about it in a reduced way.

Then you had, I guess, the so-called post-minimalists or the land artists who similarly by working outside of the gallery made you think about the gallery. The pop artists had sort of glamorized popular culture in a way that hadn't. So suddenly, like all of this questioning was going on. The conceptualists, maybe you could say they were interested in the intellectual grounding of how we thought about all culture.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, there was a phrase at the time, the dematerialization of the object. But it was a huge questioning of - by a lot of people of the object or the sacredness of the object.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, that was part of it. Yeah, but then there were other artists in the similar period that glamorized—made the objects exquisitely simple and beautiful at the same time. I don't think one could have happened without the other. Maybe it was the influence—maybe it was the wonderfulness of *Artforum* magazine at the time to throw all these things together, all of these essays that were so wonderfully contradictory sometimes to one another. What a great time to decide to be an artist just as that magazine was invented.

But what became more and more clear to me in looking at this confusion—and there is also a formalist painting where you are seeing the painting to an object of some kind. What I missed, I guess, was what Buren was very focused on, which was the political, social constructs that allowed all of those—the whole gallery world, the whole art world, the whole world of art collecting, the

whole world of artists to define themselves. And so he and Michael Asher and the BMPT—I wasn't aware of the situationists at the time. But those artists were influenced by them and also, street art groups like the Diggers in California and the Provos in Holland.

But one thing that I found in that Kienholz piece that I told you about was that he—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I looked that up.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, you did?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So he had introduced the idea of money exchange. Now, where do you see that in any of those other artists? They are talking about how things are defined and they are ignoring the central thing is that you walk into a gallery and can you afford it? [Laughs.] Or who paid for this? You know, and you walk into a museum and whose interests are being represented here and who paid for that gallery? Their name is up on the wall and so forth. So there was a lot of sort of ignoring the financial situation, which I don't feel Buren ignored. So the *Surrogates*—

Okay, I had been thinking up to the point of the *Surrogate Paintings*. I had been thinking, I guess, I don't know if it is horizontal or vertical. I guess it is horizontal. No, I guess it is vertical. I had been thinking about painting in relationship to how paintings are defined historically, the history of painting, the line, form, shape, color and texture, what painters came before me, all about them and thinking about that. I hadn't been thinking about painting in relation to a couch, to a chair, to a table, to people walking around.

It is funny because I have been thinking recently about a show that Billy Al Bengston did in 1969. Did I speak of that?

AVIS BERMAN: No, you just mentioned him in general.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, he had done a show in the LA County Art Museum in 1969. Apparently the curators wanted to borrow works from collectors for the show because he had many works in many collections. And his idea—and I don't know why, would love to ask him—he borrowed not only the paintings that they owned, he borrowed the sofa that went underneath them and the lamp table and the coffee table and the chair.

So as you walked to the museum, you would see these settings that were from collectors' homes. I don't know why on earth he did that, but it was hilarious. It was brilliant. And that had an influence on me, too. I have never seen another artist do that. It made you completely rethink collectors and museums, artists' kind of structuring.

So anyway, that was an excellent model, I think, in thinking in terms of coming up—of artworks in relationship to everything else, the world that gives them meaning, the sets of expectations, the contexts and so forth. And so the *Surrogate Paintings* to me were meant to, sort of, be very confusing to people. They were meant to be paintings because they all were unique in color and they all had texture.

And you can't tell that from photographs, but they all have a lot of brush marks and so forth. I did them by hand. There are many, many layers, which you can sort of tell because I was influenced by painting of the '70s, people like Elizabeth Murray who got into thicknesses and Ralph Humphrey and others, many others, who built up surfaces over time as opposed to making something happen

all at once like Franz Kline. And so what was I saying now?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, we were talking about the surrogates. You were describing them.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, okay, so I—and probably somewhat influenced, I have to say, or inspired by Matt Mullican who would work about signs so often. My background in theater, interest in theater was to start thinking about and inviting the viewers to think about the artwork as a prop, which was either in the background or in collaboration with the context, the couch, the lamp, the social behavior, the art world, the gallery, the museum, having to think about all—if I could turn the painting into a prop, then you would say, well, what is the story the prop sits in? The story is the structure of the world, specifically the art world.

So I designed these *Surrogates* that stood for paintings in my mind and also were paintings at the same time. I worked very hard to make sure that someone couldn't say oh, that is not a painting because I made them all unique in size and unique in color and they had hand brush marks on them. But at the same time, they were like looking at a sign up close that you are supposed to be looking at from far away. In fact, that was part of my inspiration was how paintings looked from a distance.

I had a job at the time during those years, for instance, as a cleanup man working at night in an office building up on 33rd Street. I was working at night, you could see two blocks away into a window where the light is running. You see something on the wall and you would know it was a framed something, but you wouldn't know what. And that and the paintings, framed objects that were out of focus in movies in the background or photographs, the idea running through my mind of what would it look like if I were an anthropologist from Mars and I came down here and saw these rectangular things on people's walls. How would I represent them to my fellow Martians, you know, and trying to explain the culture of earth or Europe or whatever?

So all of these attempts to come up with an object that could be read like that led me into the *Surrogate Paintings*. So I made—I don't know in the end—100 or more of these and started out showing them in galleries just like a minimalist exhibition where there would be like 10 of them. Well, that was read like a minimalist exhibition. It wasn't what I intended. It wasn't read like a stage set. I guess there was a kind of virtual Brecht—influence in my wanting to—as many artists since Bertolt Brecht have often wanted to include the idea that you are looking at something false at the same time as you are looking at something real. But the situation is false.

So Brecht would say oh, we have to show the lights—the spotlights have to show. It has to be obvious that the people wearing costumes, they have to occasionally look to the audience and make reference to the fact that they are actors on a stage. There has to be this constant not allowing the viewer to escape into—and that was a political gesture. So to me in those periods of, say, the Vietnam War, escaping into pictorial realms was a way of escaping from reality. And many artists said this that you can't just walk around in a rose garden escaping into the space of the canvas. The canvas is an object. You are in a room. The room is in a building. The building is in a city. The city is in a country and the country is murdering people or whatever. So there was a logic to that that was very political for Brecht and for, I think, many of the post-minimalists, too.

AVIS BERMAN: I should just ask you at this point—even though I am interrupting your train of thought—you escaped being drafted?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: [Laughs.] Yes. Well, I had been in the mental hospital for depression. So I had a document claiming that I had been in a mental hospital for depression. And I had a minor physical defect of some kind that I don't even remember what it was called. I don't remember what it was



called. But it is something that had almost no implications for myself in my life. But it registered with their examination. So those two things relieved me from going into the Army. I didn't have to battle it or anything like that. So no, I did not go, but while many of my friends did and suffered and my best friend from high school had a nervous breakdown in the Army. And my uncle like I said, the atheist, was also a Marxist, peace guy and, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Was that Sam Hinton, the folk singer?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Pardon?

AVIS BERMAN: Was that Sam Hinton, the folk singer?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, I remember he was registering people from the Peace and Freedom Party and so was I, which was an alternative party against the war and so forth. So anyway, the politics of space were something that many artists thought about. But here is the problem. The *Surrogate Paintings* were read by people as monochrome paintings, which they were. But the fact that they were signs was sort of lost on people. The fact that you could hold—people would look into the painting instead of looking at it as a prop, which is what I wanted.

AVIS BERMAN: They were trying to find the painting in it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I guess so, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Whereas you were trying to remove the idea of the painting.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It was really even hard for me to look at them that way because it wasn't the way you are supposed to look at a painting. Of course, part of the sign design was that it had a rectangle within a rectangle. It was like a mat with a window in it. It was an 8-ply. So you actually went in and there was another rectangle glued in there to represent the idea of something in the frame.

But people would grab them and look into them. I remember this and I kept thinking how can I—so I had to come up with a number of strategies to represent them as what they were, what I wanted them to be. One of them was taking—I took an installation view of my first—well, not my first, but one of my exhibitions and rephotographed it and rephotographed it and printed it and rephotographed it and printed it and rephotographed it and printed it until the surrogates were out of focus. Yeah, that is not—

I guess I don't have any of it. But anyway, if you just imagine one of the *Surrogate Paintings* being rephotographed and then rephotographed again to where it became like a UFO, all out of focus from—like it was shot from the satellite. So the idea of—so I did a lot of photos like that and used them as announcement cards. When I would do a *Surrogate Painting* show, I would put on the card—I think I used it two or three times—totally out-of-focus version of one of my own paintings—not out of focus because the lens was out of focus, but because it had been rephotographed so many times, so that the resolution was low, so bad.

AVIS BERMAN: There were so many generations.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Because I was trying to reinforce the idea of looking at the surrogate from a distance. Then I started taking pictures off of television. When I would see—and then I had started giving black centers to the surrogates, so I thought that was even a more—so it wouldn't be like a monochrome. So the frame would be one color that I would paint it and then I would paint the inside

of the mat black. Then I made those *Surrogate Paintings* and I kept finding things that looked like them on television in literal situation where there were props being used, paintings as props.

So I started—and it was then that I began something that became a consistency in my work ever since—is creating supplements that went with the so-called artwork. But they were supplements that would give it spin on the way you would look at the artwork. So whether or not the supplement was part of the artwork or not was a question. But I did recognize that every time we look at a painting, we are looking at it in the context of photos we have seen of other works by that same artist, maybe even photos of that exact painting, what we have read, what we have heard, what we have learned, what we know, the context all together.

I started taking these photographs off of television when I saw these works that looked like my works in the background. I would print them and not sell—well, there was one show where I was trying to sell them. Then I realized no, wait a minute. It is better that they—I had a show at Marian Goodman's. We had a separate room where they were for sale. Nobody bought any as I recollect. Then I realized no, it is better if they are not for sale because then it is very question—so all the shows after that, I would put them in the hallway, in the office or send them to the magazines when they asked for photos, but they weren't for sale as artwork. This is getting ahead of myself because that is more in the area of the *Plaster Surrogates*.

But for the *Surrogate Paintings*, the out-of-focus pictures played a role. And every time I—and when I did a show, I would give it a name that sounded like a caption to a photo. The exhibition would be titled, *Collection of the Artist*, or the exhibition would be titled, *Gallery View* or something that you expect to see under a caption, so that you would get a sense of it being a stage set.

One time I actually was asked to do an installation in a gallery space, not in the main space, but in a back room. I said it has to have a couch and a lamp. They went and got couches and lamps and put them around it just like the Billy Al Bengston installation with the *Surrogate Paintings* on the wall, so that people might understand that I am talking about a complex of contexts.

But in those days, I was making them out of actual frames. I actually had gone out and paid a framer to make something like 120 uniquely sized frames. And then I would glue a rectangle of mat board with a hole in it, a window in it, and then place plywood on the back and then put hangers and then I would press it and paint it 50 times to where it developed a thickness and all that. It would take so long to make a *Surrogate Painting*. Then the other—and that was one problem because I really wanted to do large installations because the larger the installation, the more it looked like the Louvre or a poster shop or some situation that was clearly referential to the space. Trying to make more of them took so much time.

Then the other problem was because the frame was actually physically a separate piece of wood, people would tend to look at it as only a frame and they would look into the frame. So the solution to that ultimately that I came up with was to make molds of the *Surrogate Paintings* and cast them in plaster—in Hydro-Stone, which is a kind of enhanced gypsum cement.

AVIS BERMAN: So it would be solid, too.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So it would be solid. So there would be no distinction between—no literal distinction between the frame and what was in the frame. They were the same object. They were distinguished in the way I paint them afterward. But, in fact, there was no physical distinction beyond that.

So to do that, I had to learn what a mold was. I knew what the mold was, but I had to learn how to make molds and how to—what kind—and I remember going to a lecture on sculpture materials at the Sculpture House, which is a commercial place. This must have been in 1981—and I remember Kiki Smith being—there was like only 10 or 20 of us and I had met her. I didn't know her, but I remember she was there, too. We were learning what sculpture was. [Laughs.] I don't know if she would even remember that.

Then I started—was able to make more at a time and got into much more of the mass production thing. At the same time, I started—that was when I started showing the photographs that I took off of television with the—then I started calling them *Plaster Surrogates*, which tipped into a kind of into sculpture.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I mean, had you thought of yourself as a painter or just artist? I mean—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I guess so, yeah. I think when I decided to be in quotes, "an artist," my image of what an artist was was a painter. I didn't have—I don't know. I even once had a caricaturist on the boardwalk in Venice Beach do a picture of me with a palette in my hand and wearing a beret because I just thought that that—I think that was my—it didn't occur to me to be a sculptor until—even though I was very influenced by many sculptures. I think I didn't have the confidence to go beyond saying I was a painter until—it took quite a while, five years or so or more.

AVIS BERMAN: Also the description would be limiting because of their installations. I mean, there seem to be just a lot of fluid things. I mean, you make things. But it seemed—I am asking you because I couldn't really—I don't know if you categorize yourself as a sculptor. I can't categorize you. I mean—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, no, in the end, in those days, my level of comprehension of things, I guess I sort of thought one had to be a sculptor, a painter or whatever, printmaker. I think that that—I mean, it took years—when you applied to the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] for a grant, you had to call yourself one or the other. It took them years to say other media or mixed media. There were many ways the language was different back then for describing what artists do. I remember having to learn how to call an artwork a "piece" as if it were a piece of music or even calling something a work had an implication instead of calling it a painting or a sculpture, you would call it a "work," which would imply it could be any number of things.

These were terms that weren't regularly used in the same way until the late '60s. I had to learn that because I didn't grow up thinking—even in the '70s, I remember crossing the border from Mexico into America and the Mexico border guard said what do you do for a living? I said I am an artist in Spanish. I said, "Soy artista." And they broke into hilarious laughter. It hurt my feelings. I didn't know why. And it made me mad. I thought do I look like a fruit to them? I mean, why are they laughing that I call myself an artist?

Twenty years later, I became good friends with a Mexican. I said to her, why do you think—I explained this. And she said, "Oh, well, in Mexico, you have to qualify what kind of an artist you are. You have to say I am a plastic artist or I am a graphic artist or whatever because if you just say I am an artist, it is like saying I am a genius." [Laughs.] So that is why they laughed at me.

AVIS BERMAN: Perfect, you are just like Oscar Wilde when he came to the United States. When Oscar Wilde came to the United States and he said I have nothing to declare but my genius.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: He did? [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I guess they laughed, too. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: His was purposeful.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, well, do you think that really happened? Probably.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, the newspapers reported it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Really?

AVIS BERMAN: That is what he said when he landed. I am sure he concocted it, came up with it. I am sure he worked on it for weeks on the way over on the boat. But that is what he said.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I know a fellow who was being interviewed for a job as a professor and the first question they said well, what do you profess?

AVIS BERMAN: I guess you are supposed to say my faith?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, exactly.

AVIS BERMAN: Anyway.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But anyway, it tipped over— I started making things that you could call sculptures. But what was I—there was something—okay, so what else?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I see the one—I think it was collection of the artists that you had showed at 112 Workshop, but I just wondered if that might be something to talk about. What was the place of that, of 112 Workshop in the '70s?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Where was it located?

AVIS BERMAN: I know about it. I think that was a pretty happening place. And I wondered if—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, at the time—

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, it was just like some kind of room that artists could take over, right?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I visited 112 Workshop when it was at 112 Greene Street. But when I showed at 112 Workshop, it was where White Columns ultimately became. And then they changed the name later. But it wasn't really at 112 Greene Street, but it was called 112 Workshop.

AVIS BERMAN: And she is a little older than you, but Dorothea Rockburne told me she showed there and it was very important to her as a young artist.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, that would have been before it moved. I don't know the history of it. I do know that Julian Pretto worked at 112 Workshop, but he wasn't the founder of it. I know that when I showed there, it was mostly at the invitation of Claire Copley. Claire had run a gallery in Los Angeles that I had showed in. She became one of the co-directors of White Columns. I had made a proposal there—I mean, it was called 112 Workshop at the time. I think it became called White Columns within months after I had my show there. But Julian Pretto, do you know who Julian Pretto is?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, not personally. But I know—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But you know the name. So Julian was the first person to show a *Surrogate Painting* for me. I had approached him something like in 1978, one of the only times I ever walked into a gallery and said can I show you my work. It was with Julian. He had this temporary gallery on Spring Street. But he had also had—what was it called? But he had ran a number of different galleries in New York that were temporary spaces that were in buildings that were for sale and he had a very clever way of opening galleries in different buildings. Then when buildings sold, he would move because he also had his real estate license, which he obtained just so he could do that. He was really a great guy.

So he was really, really supportive of me during this period. He showed the first *Surrogate Painting* in a group show. And then he closed and moved to Costa Rica and stayed there for a number of years and came back later. In the meantime, I showed the *Surrogate Paintings* at Doug Drake's gallery in Kansas City and at 112 Workshop. The show at 112 Workshop coincided with the show at Artists Space in one of their rooms. So while the first—oh, what was the name of that gallery that Julian ran? The Fine Arts Building. The Fine Arts Building was a building on Franklin or Leonard and he had had a huge history of Julian bringing artists in and showing them in these empty spaces because he somehow—he had worked with a real estate agent that was trying to sell the building.

So they weren't going to get any tenants until they sold it. So it was empty for years. He gave me a show there. That was really the first one-person show. I am misremembering. That was just open two weeks. Then I did something at Artists Space and 112 Workshop showing *Surrogate Paintings*. Yeah, that is true.

AVIS BERMAN: And were there other people who were encouraging you at the time? I know that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You mean a circle of friends kind of thing?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, or other people in the art world or critics or people who were supporting you at the time?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I would say it was well—I would say Julian was almost central to that. But he introduced me to other people that did help like, for instance, the molds that I made to create the *Plaster Surrogates*, I had 20 basic *Surrogate Paintings* that I then made 20 basic molds from. I had no money and Jack Boulton, who at the time was—what do you call it—the curator at Chase Bank

AVIS BERMAN: The corporate collection curator.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, but he had an interesting history. He had worked at the Cincinnati Art Center before that. He was a curator, a wonderful, wonderful guy who supported many, many young artists who were just starting out at the time in many ways and in as many ways as he could. The way he supported me at that moment was he was working with a collector named Robert Kaye and Robert offered to buy the 20 *Surrogate Paintings* in order for me to start to be able to afford the mold-making costs, which I had got on my credit card and start producing the *Plaster Surrogates*. So Bob Kaye to this day owns the basic original 20 *Surrogate Paintings* that he has now seen copies of all over the world. And that was Jack Boulton's doing.

So Jack was a really good friend of Julian's. Julian also introduced me to Yvon Lambert. He invited me for dinner to meet Yvon Lambert. Yvon did the first show of *Surrogate Paintings* in Europe in

1980, I think it was. He took the show from 112 Workshop to Paris. It was all through Julian's—and Julian wasn't saying oh, I need a commission for this or a commission for that. He was just a guy who wanted to help artists and create—I am sad talking about him because he is gone now. He just wanted to advance art, you know. I don't want to leave out—

AVIS BERMAN: All right, okay, and that is—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Let me see that. Oh, Julian was also friends with Hal Bromm. And he did a backroom show of some *Surrogate Paintings* also with the black centers, not the monochrome ones. But this was all prior to the *Plaster Surrogates*. Also, Julian organized—you asked me the other day about the so-called glossies, works I called the—Julian organized the show of those out in New Jersey and they were kind of an in between mass producing the *Plaster Surrogates* and the *Surrogate Paintings*, I did the glossies, which were things that looked like photographs, but really weren't. They looked like—I described them before, I think, yeah.

He also introduced me to other people. He was a go-between in the end for me showing at John Weber, for instance. So Julian is crucial in my career.

AVIS BERMAN: Very much so. It is almost like a fairy godfather or someone to really do that and just keep doing it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: And I am not the only artist that he played that role with. I did mention Claire Copley. I mean, she also was—when I lived in LA, I slowly started learning about the more conceptualist side of things. I never did look up the name of that artist's gallery I couldn't remember. Claire, I met through Billy Copley and Al Ruppertsberg.

Al Ruppertsberg is a very, very good friend of mine. He was also very influential on me out in LA because there was nothing that he couldn't—the whole world is open to him in terms of what he uses as content in his work or the kinds of objects he makes. He was very interested in popular culture, mass production techniques. Nothing was beyond what he would do. He didn't draw the line anywhere in terms of making objects.

AVIS BERMAN: You weren't really at mass production techniques yet, though, at this point?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I mean, I would say the *Untitled Paper Constructions* were made of printouts that I would make and then cut out and glue together. All of those squares of canvas that I would—those were all mass production techniques. They were all thought of in those terms. Whether I mass produced the final objects is another question. But the untitled paper constructions were organized so that I might. If anybody had ever bought any, I would have. [Laughs.] So probably.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I guess because when I look at these—and, of course, now I am jumping ahead to the *Individual Works* or some of the others, but I was thinking because there certainly are many of them, but I almost would call them serial uniques because you were certainly doing serial production. I don't know if that is—I mean, maybe I am splitting hairs.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I wouldn't say—I mean, mass production is a term that is controversial because—I like the term quantity production. As far as serial uniques, yeah. I had never thought of that term, but it was always my interest to confound—I didn't want—and this has good and bad. I didn't want people to be able to say, "Oh, they are just mass produced like a Coke bottle or a tube of toothpaste," because they were all unique. I was interested in philosophically how people drew the lines between—I can look out at the world and say, oh, all blondes are alike or everybody from

Texas is alike or I can say—you know. What qualifies as unique and the same is a philosophical, ideological, cultural construct.

So my interest was as I said before, the hierarchy of objects that we construct to reflect the hierarchy of people we construct was at play in my decision to start producing things in quantity and say look, who says when there is 1,000 things that they suddenly—or that a single unique thing is somehow intrinsically better than 1,000 things that are the same. I want to mix this up and get people—

AVIS BERMAN: You were trying to say what makes something have value or what is value, I guess.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and that is a good way to put it because, I think back to my mother, my father, my aunt, all worked at a ceramics factory in Redondo Beach—Manhattan Beach. So their handiwork was on these, sort of, mass-produced objects that—it was called Metlox Pottery.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: As I recollect. So in our homes, both my grandmother's and my aunt's and my mother's, there were objects that had the human touch of them or people they knew, but they were also mass produced like plates that we would eat dinner off of were from Metlox Pottery. It is so different than when you go into a wealthy person's home and see objects that are handmade, but they are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. And when they die, they are going to be given to museums or they can sell them anytime they need money or whatever. It is a very different kind of value than—

Then there is also the mass-produced objects that have value because they belong to your grandmother. But they were mass produced. They were some kind of souvenir that she bought when she went to the World's Fair in 1930 or something. And there are thousands of these, but it means something to you because your grandmother gave it to you, whatever.

So there is a sense of sadness in this to me that a mass-produced object can have much more meaning to a person than something done by an individual artist that had nothing to do with their life. How does that get explored or understood in a wider cultural context? There is a lot of feelings involved in that for me. I will think back to those objects I had in my home that would have no value whatsoever at Sotheby's. So this distinction was disturbing to me.

So when I got into quantity production, I also got into coming up with ways to distinguish each object from the other, so that a viewer or even me—I couldn't just wave my hand and say oh, that is just a copy. Blah, blah, blah. I wanted to make that—so if you were going to reject them as having any value, it had to be for a better reason than that.

AVIS BERMAN: Even though chronologically, we probably should be talking about the *Perpetual Photos*, maybe because we are talking about these issues, maybe we should talk about the *Perfect Vehicles* because they are fitting this idea a little bit more at the moment of the production of art and everything being a little bit different.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I don't know if that is a direct—I think it might make more sense to—the *Perpetual Photos* were all unique also. There was no duplicate. They were related to the taking pictures off of television.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right, exactly. Well, I guess because I was thinking about this value of the

object because you kind of made it look like a pseudo-art object in terms of a Chinese ginger jar, but there were many. And you cast them. I mean—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay. Then I can talk about—I mean, then I think what the shift—

AVIS BERMAN: It looks like a semi-traditional art object. That is what I guess I want to say.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. I mean, it is definitely meant to look like a traditional, but then so are the framed *Plaster Surrogates* meant to look like traditional. They were meant to look like they could have been a certificate of merit, a photo of your family, a painting by Picasso, any number of things. What I think would characterize the movement into making the *Perfect Vehicles* was a couple of things.

One of them was an interest in exactly what we were talking about, the way something can have value and maybe even spiritual, religious value. The other thing was I wanted to make a three-dimensional version of the *Surrogate Paintings*. I wanted to make a version that was three dimensional. That was another interest because it was enlarging the context of what you see on the walls to what you might see on a shelf or on a sculpture stand.

The other shift I was interested in was isolating that funny moment where like I said about the souvenir, the funny moment where an object is useful and to where it sort of shifts over time or decision-making by some curator or whatever, it becomes an object of aesthetic value, in addition to—or as opposed to a jar you can put tobacco in.

So I was looking for something that was a standard—one of the ways I describe the *Surrogate Paintings* in my head—and even in the artist's statement once—was a standard wall-mounted Western European object, a standardized—I forget how I said it. It was a standard thing that we would see everywhere. Maybe they had vastly different meanings and different—some of them were artwork, some of them were photos, whatever. But it was the standard wall-mounted artifact.

I wanted something that was the standard three-dimensional artifact that had a similar cultural commonness to it. So over the few years of thinking about that, a number of solutions came to mind. One of them was the standard Asian vase because you see them absolutely everywhere in movies, in paintings, in people's homes, rich or poor. They are used to symbolize so many different things. You can put your dead person's ashes in there. It can be a religious object that has to do with praying. It symbolizes—vases like that can symbolize the womb. They can symbolize oh, I have been around the world and I understand culture and history. They represent the Orient and the other—

I chose a vase that actually had flat sides so it referenced flatness like in a painting. It had a lid that kind of looked militaristic and phallic. So I just was looking for what I ultimately decided was like a symbol of a symbol or as I thought of a few years ago, it was almost like an homage to one thing standing for another because they are so overly symbolic these things and could fit next to a *Surrogate Painting* in a similar way, but in a three-dimensional work.

AVIS BERMAN: They could be on the table next to—they could be next to the lamp.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly, they could.

AVIS BERMAN: I don't know. Did you ever sell them individually or were they sold—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I sold them in collections of five, never less than five until I started making



them really big. Then they were sold—I started making them like almost seven feet high, six feet high, six-and-a-half feet high. Then they were sold individually. But no, I didn't want them to be—and I also wanted to be clear that you couldn't take the lids off. I mean, they were solid. They were cast as solid objects.

AVIS BERMAN: So if someone bought five or three or four, would you go to his or her place and arrange them or anything?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No. You have to draw the line somewhere. I didn't do that. One of the meanings of that shift, though, for me, which was very, very important actually was what I had been show beforehand could be basically identified as something that belong in an art gallery or an art museum. When I started doing that series, the *Perfect Vehicles*, it was something that you could find in a craft museum or a history museum.

That was very, very different in my mind because I wasn't only focusing on the context provided by the so-called art world, but also something beyond that, another kind of museum, another kind of object, another kind of valued thing and that world that defined that because when you think about what an art museum is or an art gallery, it is defined in the same way that a painting is defined next to a lamp, an art gallery is defined next to a craft gallery and an art museum is defined next to craft museum or a natural history museum or any other kind of museum.

So that was my first step in kind of really expanding my interest in how a museum was contextualized, not just the objects you see in them, but the whole context of the museum itself exists within a wider context of museums. So these objects—at the time, I was making a living partially by working for the Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Design and Architecture.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, the Smithsonian.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, I had a badge that said Smithsonian and everything. And so that—in fact, the bases that I designed for the *Perfect Vehicles* were rooted in as a style of bases that I would see at the Cooper-Hewitt.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, because these would usually be the trees with glass over them.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly, I never put glass on them, but I left a space in case. Then the velvet—I can't remember his name, but there was a designer at the Cooper-Hewitt that did bases just like that. I just copied what I—and also, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Met and these places that have huge vase collections that are not necessarily simply art museums, but also design museums and history museums.

AVIS BERMAN: And this would be a good point is that—just because you said the Victoria and Albert, were you traveling? Was travel important to you at a certain point, if you began or did you?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I traveled to do shows in Europe. I did months of traveling in Mexico. And I hitchhiked through Morocco in my teens. I did some traveling. That opened my mind in a number of different ways, especially being in Mexico, seeing the way everything has a more—has a certain kind of decorative base that we don't have here.

No, I wouldn't say there was any direct influence on the *Perfect Vehicles* from visiting the Victoria and Albert.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, no, I am sorry. I just meant in general, is travel important to you or were you

doing it or are you someone who gets a lot of nourishment out of it?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It is a very good question because I have ceased to travel in the last 15 years. I got very tired and exhausted of traveling. But I think that the idea of seeing how other cultures organize themselves was so confusing to me and interesting, but almost more than I could handle. At a certain point, I think—I thought I can pretend to be worldly, but I am not. [Laughs.] Best that I pay attention to my own—there is no way I am going to ever fully understand what it is like to be even British. I mean, and so much less African. I don't think I formulated this in so many words. But I don't know how to answer your question. It doesn't come to mind for me to say oh, yeah, traveling is really important.

AVIS BERMAN: Or are you someone—well, some people like to go and live in other cultures for several months, you know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Absolutely, absolutely.

AVIS BERMAN: Or sometimes they rent a house. You know, a lot of things that happen—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Absolutely, yeah. I wish I were more like that. Even moving to New York has been complicated for me. And in the '90s, I started doing projects in small towns because I felt New York was so complicated that if I wanted to do a comment about community or the way communities relate to objects or something, New York is way beyond my ability to grasp in any definitive expert way. I just didn't have that level of abstraction. I had to think about smaller worlds, I think. But no, no, but the way a museum values objects from the "exotic" East, of course, was very interesting to me.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I want to explore this idea of the craft from another way. Correct me because this certainly—these, the *Perfect Vehicles*, you must have needed assistance to help you make these. I don't know if you were using assistants before or when did that begin. That is certainly kind of a craft process traditionally, you know, as the artist—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I don't know if I would have defined it as a craft process. But yes, I started working with assistants, I think, in 1982. I did a show at Marian Goodman's of *Plaster Surrogates*. That was the first time I really brought in an assistant, which was Lisa Corinne Davis who now is an artist on her own right and has a show opening this week. So she helped me do the first *Plaster Surrogates*. Also Pete Omlor, as a friend, helped without being paid. Pete Omlor wound up being, I think, one of the head preparators at MoMA.

But in 1984, you know who was my assistant? It was Andrea Fraser. Andrea was my assistant off and on for a couple years there. We became very close friends and still are.

AVIS BERMAN: She is amazing.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah, she is. And she wrote about my work at age 20.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I have—she wrote with such authority.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: She has written twice about my work or three times actually. But the first piece was in '86 and she was 20 or 21, perhaps. She was just—she is amazing. She is the smartest person I think I know. The *Perfect Vehicles*, yes, I had assistants. Also, I stopped casting my own *Plaster Surrogates* and had other people cast them. Sometimes friends, sometimes people would approach me and say I need work and then they—Kenny Goldsmith, do you know who he is? He is

the founder of UbuWeb. He did all my molds for years and castings. he would subcontract things and take over. He is a Fluxus—I don't know—you can't say a Fluxus poet anymore, but he runs UbuWeb.

Nathan Lieb who is a mold maker for many people, six works. He is an artist that shows regularly now. He also made molds for me. So a lot of time I was able to have people make things elsewhere and then send them to me. Then we would paint them and sand them and so forth. I couldn't even list all my assistants. There have been so many.

Amy Adler was one of these people who we called the *Perfect Vehicle*—I forget what we called her, but she did almost all the *Perfect Vehicles*. Amy Adler and—

AVIS BERMAN: Painting them, too?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, painting them, just not casting them. Also, Katy Schimert. Katy was one of my early assistants and many others. Amy stands out because she was the main *Perfect Vehicle* painter.

AVIS BERMAN: The *Perfect Vehicle* goddess.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Something like that. One of the other assistants made a sign to put up over where she works, the *Perfect Vehicle* expert or something like that. I don't remember. But definitely, the idea of leaving their hands showing was important. But I got involved in how that was to be done.

AVIS BERMAN: Because this would seem to be that you really had to have a setup once you were going. I mean, talking about quantity productions.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, there were times when I would have to rent—I mean, there were times when I think I had three small studios at once and then I would stop renting one when I didn't need it anymore. Then sometimes a new project, I would have to rent a new little space. And then at one point, I bought a larger space, but then went broke and had to get rid of it. Now I have no studio at all. For instance, when I do something, I have to either rent a space or someone else does it for me. It has always been a combination of those things.

AVIS BERMAN: Because you have to store your work.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Storage is the big issue. I have a big storage—2500 square feet of storage space that I have had for now 12 years. But it is not a workspace.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I mean, it occurs to me—and I am just jumping ahead to something like the *Individual Works* is that something very large, if it is 10,000, is that you don't get—you don't get the pleasure of seeing the entire conception laid out unless someone is going to exhibit it. I just wondered if that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: With that project, it is definitely true. Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: It seems it would be very frustrating that—it looks like you probably have to make things and put them in a box and wait.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, that is exactly how we did it. That project kind of was next in line after the *Perfect Vehicles*. The *Perfect Vehicles* as I explained, kind of grew out of an interest in other

types of art objects that are not quite called fine art objects in the way of contemporary art, but are also thought of as art objects. My experience working at the Cooper-Hewitt enhanced that because all of their collection is not fine art objects. It is things like silverware and textiles—

AVIS BERMAN: Silverware, they have hair curlers.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, exactly.

AVIS BERMAN: I remember seeing the show they did on hair, which was wonderful.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Really?

AVIS BERMAN: They had a whole show on hair and they would have pre-Raphaelite paintings. But they had all sorts of rollers—blow dryers, things that teenagers use.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That would have been fun to see.

AVIS BERMAN: And there were things from my childhood—rollers or things my mother would—, all sorts of curlers and devices. So Cooper-Hewitt—forget silverware, they collected all sorts of objects.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I remember doing condition reports on something like 3,000 pens and pencils because they did a pen and pencil show. Yeah, no, I mean, that was an amazingly interesting place to work. Not that sitting there doing condition reports was that interesting, but just the concept of—and experiencing how things wind up there—not always because they are beautifully designed. Sometimes they are just there because they are, like you say, interesting culturally or belong to a wealthy person or something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, and also some people have the collecting instinct because I know that the Cooper-Hewitt founders collected wallpapers. But you don't just collect the most exquisite example. You get all of the—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right, exactly, exactly.

AVIS BERMAN: You want to be—this is what the universe of wallpaper was.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly. And it often involves individual collectors, which is very interesting and influenced me. I remember they did a show on cast-iron piggy banks. There was one guy in the world in America who was obsessed with—and so he came. It was almost all from his collection. He was almost sadly obsessed with cast-iron banks. Yeah. What a great place to have—but working there—and I believe how it influenced the *Individual Works* project because of seeing all of those kinds of objects that you are describing, but also what came across the desk at one point was a Fabergé egg of some kind, I think, as I am recollecting, something that was either a Fabergé egg or related to a Fabergé egg of some kind.

AVIS BERMAN: Something by Fabergé, perhaps?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Possibly, yeah. I started thinking about these kinds of objects that are produced basically for wealthier people. Like a Fabergé egg, for instance, typically would be owned by somebody with plenty—enough money to—

AVIS BERMAN: They were originally made for the Russian czars.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly. And as beautiful as they are, what is more significant is the amount of jewels that go into them. They are considered highly unique and beautiful and so forth. So I started thinking about that category of so-called art objects that involved—like Tiffany's and Steuben Glass and these sort of high end—they are things that are mass produced, but at the high end of things. So they are another kind of confusing—another kind of confounding object to me, that they are designed specifically to be unique and high end, but they are produced in quantity and they are marketed in such a way that they are collectibles.

I was becoming more and more interested in the wider concept of what you would call a "collectible" by working at the Cooper-Hewitt and how that context—how paintings and sculptures fit into the context of the collectible object in general. I was particularly influenced by Tiffany and Steuben ware, which I don't know anything about. But I remember I would see them in catalogs and stuff like that—and the Fabergé egg.

So I think I was frustrated by what seemed to be this ridiculous sort of high-end, classy object, which were produced, which people owned, in my mind, simply to show that they were better than everybody else—[laughs]—which is not fair, I am sure. But that is the way I thought of it. And wondering if I could come up with something that made that look ridiculous by coming up with tens of thousands—I ended up making over 30,000 unique objects in that *Individual Works* project. They were shown in groups of over 10,000 each, but there were three groups of those. I have enough molds to produce another 10,000 if anybody ever wants to finance it.

So I fell into a lot of thinking about, at that point, a more profound thinking about how, I think, the ideologies involved in deciding that things are all the same versus all different. One of my preoccupations at the time was as I started making these—and you know they were all made of toothpaste lids and all these things you would find on the street, knobs that came off of drawers, mostly stuff I found in grocery stores and pharmacies, parts of things.

AVIS BERMAN: It is like hardware store stuff, too.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, also that, yeah. But mostly I would use objects like designers that would make you want to touch, - like very well-designed things, but not designed as fine art objects, but things that you would want to hold, that attracted you in the store to buy them maybe or that—

AVIS BERMAN: Feel good in the palm of your hand.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly, yeah. I mean, there is a lot of sexual connotations to that, too. But also my—a big question arose in my brain at that time because I started making these parts that we would put together, a vocabulary of parts to put together to make unique works. I was doing it extremely simply in my kitchen. I didn't even have a studio site at that moment. I was making all these parts in my kitchen. Ultimately, I sent all these parts out to have them made somewhere—made by Kenny and his assistants, Kenny Goldsmith.

But I started realizing that to make 10,000 unique objects wasn't really very complicated. Of course, it took a lot of focus and determination and writing things down and following a set protocol. But it didn't involve any computer work. It didn't involve any higher math. It was something that could have been done 2,000 years ago by anybody with any sense who wanted to.

So the question came to my mind was why don't people do this if it is so simple because I think even when I finished that first group of other 10,000 works, the ultimate costs were less than \$5 each. The people were paid well to do it—I mean, not counting my time, I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: Forget you. You were working at minus-X per hour.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, that is true. Yeah. But even if you added—but the actual production costs were lower than I would have guessed and they got higher when I made the second group of 10,000 because people were wising up at how hard it was and all of that. But even in the end, I think they are producible for—I don't know—way lower than what you would pay for Steuben Glass.

I guess my thought was—my interest became okay, if it is not that complicated to mass produce unique objects, why don't people mass produce unique objects? And what became a large area of interest for me was what is it that is in our minds that makes us not want to do that? And then I, of course—I guess part of the conclusion was we want things to be the same for ideological reasons. We want there to be—that is when I really realized the degree of ideology involved in mass production. It involves thinking in terms of masses and we want to think in terms of masses or the management class wants to think in terms of masses.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I guess I must have seen the individual—they were at the Whitney in a biennial, right?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They were, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And I saw that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Good memory.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, and it occurred to me that I am not—I had also wondered—I am not sure if I ever consciously saw what 10,000 things look like.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, me neither.

AVIS BERMAN: Because—I mean, except, you know, you would see a field of grass.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Or popcorn.

AVIS BERMAN: Or, I mean, a field of grass could have thousands, but it reads as a mass. And I just wonder—I mean, we never see what a mass is broken—because we have no concept of what a large number is. As Charles was saying, we have got 17 million documents. Well, 17 is going to look the same as, you know, 300,000 if you have never—because you can't conceive of what an amount looks like.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That is totally what was interesting to me. I think over the years, that interest has taken a number of different faces for me. But as you are putting it, like I say, when we produced them, they all went into boxes. I didn't know what they would look like until I got them out. And there was a nausea that went along with it, sort of a—I mean, there is a lot in that work that is very celebratory. For instance, there are hundreds of different hands involved. All the people who designed all those little lids that go on your toothpaste tubes and all of the people, my assistants, that made them and painted them. I mean, so it is kind of a celebration of labor and design.

But at the same time, there is a fear, a kind of a nightmare of exactly what you just said. We don't know how to picture millions. We don't even know how to picture 10,000. We pretend this is resolved, you know, but it isn't. And who knew 200 years ago that we would have to even consider 6 billion people on the planet. This is like a concept that was all not even at the point of being abstract, you know, 200 years ago. I mean, people didn't know even how big the planet was.

So the idea that a human brain has to figure out what it means that there are six-and-a-half billion people on the planet is absolutely unresolved. It is like we are three months old in trying to picture that. We say "we" can because we say we. We say everyone. We say everybody. We say masses. We say all these terms we use to define quantities of people, which are just ridiculous. We are like idiots. We don't know what we are talking about when we say everybody likes— everybody is wearing black in the '80s or whatever. So these are the kinds of trains of thought that I was interested in triggering for myself and for others, I guess. I was starting to think about these distinctions that we make.

AVIS BERMAN: I also want to ask you a question just because you said this before. I am really not trying to be rude or disrespectful because it is clearly a contradiction you have to wrestle with, but as you said, you want to make these things populist or democratic, but you can't do it unless somebody—let's say an individual work, another collection unless someone else finances it. So you are, in a way, caught up in the toils of having to depend on the wealthy person.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: And I just—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, it is a dilemma that I think every artist who ever wanted to be populist has to face. It is especially difficult for me because a populist like Warhol or—if you want to call him a populist—or Rosenquist or something can make prints that are inexpensively purchased or posters. Because my interest is in making things all unique, that is an extremely difficult thing to do. I guess in my infantile fantasies, I am hoping that at some point, there is a way to do exactly what—how like right now you can go online and download for 99 cents a MP3 to play on your iPod? For even maybe, sometimes 85 cents.

In my mind, each time—because I do it periodically, download some tune I want to hear, and I think wouldn't it be great if you could download a unique shape or something like that, which then became your artwork or something? I don't know if that will ever happen. But yeah, of course, I live in this dilemma. You have to figure that you are working symbolically.

I don't come from a wealthy family that could then do something like that and still live. I have to sell things. I deal with—this is like a daily nightmare of thinking how do I survive and do what I want to—I guess I can comment on it or the other thing is I can try to make—and this is important to me that most every one of my projects, you don't have to know anything about art to enjoy it or hate it. [Laughs.] But, you don't need to know about Duchamp to enjoy over 10,000 unique objects sitting there. You can just go oh my god, there is 10,000 unique objects.

And I like to think—I hope every project I have done I have reduced to something that can be looked at by someone who is educated, very educated in some elite concept of something or just somebody that just doesn't, you know, is interested in other things, but that aren't art, but would enjoy it for similar, you know—

I think I connect that in my brain to growing up in the Hollywood mentality, where you admire directors and screenwriters who write something that can be broken down into something hugely significant philosophically or just plain entertainment. There are people who know how to do that really well in Hollywood and people who think they know how to do it well and don't. But there are a few that do that very, very well historically.

AVIS BERMAN: I think since you are also someone who is involved in critiquing the museum and art

world, since you said you worked at Cooper-Hewitt and off tape, you said you worked at MoMA [Museum of Modern Art], are there other museums you have worked at? I mean, because it kind of gives you a uniquely insider view of this, too, which I am sure fed into what you made.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, no, I think that when I was an art handler, four years working as a truck driver, crater for art, working at Cart and Crate in LA and then Cart and Crate opened a branch here in New York for a while and I worked there. Did I talk about Cart and Crate?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you just said it was how you met everyone. But if there is something else you want to say as well.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Did I mention that Jack Goldstein, Laddie Dill, Barry Le Va, Peter Lodato—who else—Scott Grieger. There were a number of artists that were—James DeFrance—all of these artists are known artists now in LA and elsewhere. And they all worked there, too. So driving on a truck with these folks and also meeting the curators. But looking at the backs of all the paintings, seeing things as having weight as opposed to being pictorial. You know, understanding the problems of framing, storage, crating, all of that.

Ed Ruscha did the signs on the trucks for Cart and Crate. Ed Kienholz's ex-wife was one of the office people there. Anyway, it was a—

AVIS BERMAN: Lyn Kienholz.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, before. Mary Kienholz.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: [Laughs.] No.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, missed one.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't know how many.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess at least three.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I guess. So yeah, even then, I would sometimes be going to LACMA and so forth and involved in delivering things, sometimes stretching canvases and so forth. But then when I moved to New York, actually my first job in New York, as I recollect, was being a guard at the Whitney.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so you worked at three museums, at least?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. Well, yeah. What three? You mean—

AVIS BERMAN: Whitney, Modern and—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Cooper-Hewitt.

AVIS BERMAN: And Cooper-Hewitt.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, well, the Whitney job was six weeks or something—or no, maybe more, couple months. It was just during the Calder exhibit in 1976. It was a full-time job. There were interesting people working there when I was there that went on to other things as well. And then I



went to work, like I say, Cart and Crate. Next was the job at Castelli Gallery doing installations and deinstallations, working for this wonderful guy named Brad Gillaugh.

Brad—he doesn't live in New York anymore—but when I moved to New York, I paid for my move by renting a truck in LA and going around to all the galleries and saying is there anything you want me to take to New York for you? I gave them a price and then it wound up paying for all the gas and the truck rental.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, very enterprising.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I was very enterprising. So most all of the galleries gave me something. Some of the deliveries involved going to Castelli. Well, at Castelli, I met Brad Gillaugh. We liked each other. Brad wound up saying at a certain point, would you like to do installations and take down, so that when it was—so once a month, I would go there and take down a show and help put up another one. So that was that experience, too. I didn't get to know Leo, but I got to know very well the Brundage sisters.

AVIS BERMAN: Sure.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Patty was the first person to buy a *Surrogate Painting* from me, Patty Brundage.

AVIS BERMAN: That is wonderful.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: And I dated Susan for a couple of years. Who else did I—well, Brad and there was another name I mean, I got to meet well-known artists, of course. But then—I know there is someone I wanted to mention that worked there that I am forgetting. Oh, Janelle Reiring was the registrar there at the time who went on to open Metro Pictures. I had known Helene Winer in LA So Metro Pictures was two people that I knew from my world. So anyway, what were we saying?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I had—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, it was just the context—

AVIS BERMAN: The context of working for these museums. Actually it is funny because you had said you had worked at MoMA. You weren't describing Castelli—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, the job for MoMA was very brief. I think it was two to three weeks. I mean, I had worked delivering things there often. But I did work two to three weeks installing this—working on the installation of the Picasso exhibit in 1980, I believe. What was nice about that job was that I met a number—everybody has their own way of meeting people. Usually they go to college and they know all these people from school. I met them through jobs.

On that job, I met Brian Wallis who worked for the registrar. I met Valerie Smith who wound up marrying Matt Mullican. I met Tom Lawson who founded *Real Life Magazine* and his girlfriend at the time, [Susan Morgan, I met them –AM]. And they wound up all being part of my life later. I think every job I have had has that kind of a—

AVIS BERMAN: Let me disillusion you about college unless maybe you went to an art school. You don't keep up with those other people who usually are pretty alienated. [Laughs.]

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Maybe.

AVIS BERMAN: Unless maybe you go to Yale or some Ivy League school. But most of the time—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, well, you look at the recent *Pictures Generation* exhibition at the Met and 40, 50 percent of them all went to CalArts and knew each other.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And art school is different because—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I see.

AVIS BERMAN: I just meant like a regular liberal arts college.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I see what you are saying. Okay, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Believe me, you don't keep up with—it is about the same as high school.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, well, yeah. I do critiques at Columbia and there is a definite Columbia grad group. They all know each other. They all help each other. They all introduce each other to one another. When they are asked to curate, they do their friends.

AVIS BERMAN: —also pretty close to that. As they get older, it may or may not change. But I think art school is different from a regular four-year college in terms of the network because it is different —because mostly if you are all interested in being artists, it is different what you would get from a regular four-year school. But no, it is true. At some of those, there is a—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: And there is almost—I mean, for instance, we talked about Myron Stout or Allan Kaprow and the show that had Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts that was at Columbia a few years ago. I don't know if you remember that. But they knew each other because they were in school together.

AVIS BERMAN: They all taught at Rutgers Douglass.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They also?

AVIS BERMAN: They taught at Rutgers Douglass.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, they both did.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, they both did because—I mean, that time at Rutgers Douglass—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But the show involved what they had done in college together. They both—I don't know, but yeah, sure—

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, I agree. Yeah, yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: There is a connection when you go to school. Maybe—you are right—I probably exaggerated in my mind.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, only because you probably think you are missing—I think you are—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I totally think I am missing all the time.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, I think you—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I had no mentor. I didn't have any mentors to agree with or reject. [Laughs.] Or I forget who made the joke that it is so lucky when you don't go to university because there are so many things you don't have to unlearn. Did I say that during the last interview?

AVIS BERMAN: Possibly.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But yeah, so that was a short job at MoMA. But, I got to work with William Rubin and follow him around as he did all these choices on what to hang where and so forth and learned about how that works. He would say I think this wall has to be moved three inches back. Then we would go home and the next day, it would be three inches back. He had this amazing power to change everything just by snapping his fingers. It was really astonishingly interesting.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, how did you—when you were watching him how he worked or how he thought about things, what was your reaction? Did you agree largely? Did you find it—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I think I was just sort of—it wouldn't have occurred to me to agree or disagree. I think I was just learning. I think I was sort of astonished with his—you know what I mean? There were probably many things to not like about him. But I found him wonderful because he was constantly lecturing everybody about the importance of this painting versus that painting and not only to the visiting couriers or curators that would show up, but even a little bit to the workers. He would sort of—it wasn't so much what he believed and what he thought as much as how much he loved what he thought and what he believed that I remember feeling moved by.

The meaning he gave to—I don't think I would write history if I were a historian the way he did. But his love for what he did was very moving and impressive.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also, I guess he felt at least some sort of educational motive there if he was telling—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Totally, absolutely—

AVIS BERMAN: Imparting it to you so you would understand what you were doing a little more that maybe he just wasn't arbitrarily doing something.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, and I don't remember him ever talking directly to me. He would talk directly to the preparators or whoever was there. He would often get angry and yell, a difficult person, but clearly he had great skills doing what he did.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I also want to ask you—also I do not want to neglect the *Perpetual Photos*. We can talk about that or we can—it seems more natural to be talking about the collaborations at the moment. But we could go back and talk about the photos—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: If you have any questions about them, it is fine.

AVIS BERMAN: Let me see what I have. Well, let me see. Well, yeah, this was, as you said, you took from working in office windows, you found—you watched TV or the movies and you found works of art and as you said to me that you purposefully couldn't tell what they were. I guess that was one of the important reasons for it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: And then you blew them up so they became extremely indistinct.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I am going to laugh when you say that.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They were just as indistinct before they were blown up. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. Because I would think okay, it is almost—and the reason—, thank you for correcting me, but it almost seems like a Lichtenstein, a Ben-Day dot process when you blow them up and you are seeing—these, to me, as they get larger, they seem to dissolve into their little component printing processes more.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I guess so.

AVIS BERMAN: But maybe I am wrong. It is almost like the pattern or the little discreet objects—the marks.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That gives you some texture you wouldn't see on the TV screen for sure. I think that by blowing them up—I mean, like some of them I did at a small size because I didn't have the money to make them any larger and some I did much larger than they normally would have been even on the TV set. But I think the—and the reason I call them perpetual, I guess, was connected to well, a number of things—one, that there are billions—borderline infinite amount of out-of-focus painting images if you look at every frame of every film that was ever made and then you start thinking well, then they are sent out over the broadcast spectrum for TV. And everybody's TV has the same image. You might as well be talking about infinity. So there was that.

There was also the idea of however large you made them, however many times you duplicated them or blew them up, there was no more information there than when they were tiny. So there was no more knowledge. So I think I was trying to—well, of course, recreate—these were supplemental in a way to the *Plaster Surrogates* because I was trying to reinforce and underscore the idea of the artwork as a prop in the background. And also by making them where you couldn't—by only using images where they were out of focus where I couldn't tell what the image was, I wanted to orchestrate a situation where a person would walk across the room hoping if they got up close, they could see what it was.

Then once they got there, hopefully, they would realize oh, even when you get up close, you can't see what it is. So what you have isolated, I wanted—what I was hoping to isolate was the desire to see what is in the frame by walking up to it.

AVIS BERMAN: And being frustrated, I guess, if that was your expectation.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't think my goal was to—well, not frustrated in a bad way, but just to—it was that Brechtian idea of suddenly turning the focus back on why did I walk across the room to look into the frame as opposed to oh, I am going to get lost in this image, you know, of a cat or whatever it is.

So that was—I remember having the model in my mind of not only all of the other stuff I talked about like seeing pictures from a distance, but also like say you go into a person's home. They say can I take your coat—assuming you are on the East Coast. They say can I take your coat? I will get you a drink. Then they walk off and you are standing there. And then you look at the framed things and you walk over to look at each one because that is what you do.

What is the whole train of thought and emotional context of doing that, of walking and looking into

a frame—walking across the room to look into a frame? So I was thinking more of that than what you do in a museum. But in general, the idea of walking across the room to see something closer to see what it was. That was one of the things that I wanted to reference and reproduce that activity as if you are directing somebody to walk across the room and look closer. That was part of the thought in the *Perpetual Photos*.

But they were clearly related to the glossies, which were all about the feeling of looking through a photo without looking into it and to the surrogates, which were about feeling of being in a gallery, but not having something to look into, but rather, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. I guess "frustrate" was the wrong word, but kind of just upset your conventional expectations is maybe it or just surprise you a little bit in that way. Yeah, I don't know. It is like—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That word, I guess, can apply. But frustrate and upset both have kind of a negative thought that I maybe wasn't—

AVIS BERMAN: You know what? I don't even—well, that is funny because I guess this is my own vocabulary. You know, frustrate—I guess, provocative. I guess what I want to say is it makes you think. That is all.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. It is like when you go to kiss your lover and your lover makes you wait. [Laughs.] You know, it is not an evil frustration. It is a tease.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Maybe. I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think the photographs maybe do lead us into some of these collaborations. I mean, a little artificial here because you worked with several other photographers like Louise Lawler and—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh.

AVIS BERMAN: So that is what I was thinking. It is someone who is really into looking at art objects in museums in a very formally focused way, but turns the tables. And so you had several collaborations with other people such as Louise Lawler and Laurie Simmons and—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Andrea Fraser.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. And later on, Allen Ruppertsberg and I think somebody else, too. Oh, Matt Mullican and all. But I just thought we would talk about—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: And Andrea Zittel. We did one little project together.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So I thought we would talk about how some of these occurred like Louise Lawler and how you got together and what it brought and how it enriched what you felt you were doing.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: All righty. Well, I guess the first collaborator would have been Louise. I think she and I have done maybe three projects—three or four projects together. We knew each other. I had met her in 1975. Claire Copley introduced me to her in Citibank one day. But we didn't really

become friends until maybe '78 or '79. Now, she had worked at Castelli Gallery as the slide librarian briefly. I don't know how long she worked there. But I didn't know her then. I started working there after she left.

But she became very close with Janelle Reiring. So there was a moment when I had come up with the idea of the *Surrogate Paintings* and I was developing this. I am just telling you the history of how I got to know Louise.

AVIS BERMAN: Sure.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay. So Louise had been asked to do this job that—silly thing—was putting together a whole office floor—what are those cubicles called where they had to build the cubicles? You would put them together with screws and whatever.

AVIS BERMAN: Prefab?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't know. Yeah. The office cubicles that you get prefabricated and then you have to put together. Well, some guy she had gone to college with—I can't remember his name —

AVIS BERMAN: Assembling them. I don't know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Huh?

AVIS BERMAN: Assembly required?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, something like that. All right, she had a much more—she had a very interesting history of friends, very close with Daniel Buren, whom I admired. And this friend of her asked her to pull together some people to do all this assembly work. So somehow Chris D'Arcangelo wound up in charge of this fabrication, this job.

I had never met Chris D'Arcangelo. But he worked for Daniel Buren. One of the most adorable men I have ever met is Chris D'Arcangelo, smartest, everything. He and Peter Nadin were doing collaborative projects together at the time. Anyway, so Janelle asked me if I somehow wanted to do this. And so through this, I got to know Louise because it was me, Louise, Chris D'Arcangelo and Terry—

AVIS BERMAN: Winters?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Huh?

AVIS BERMAN: Winters?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes. Terry Winters. [Laughs.] Thank you. So I remember the four of us. I don't think there was anything but the four of us. I really didn't know any of them. I just fell head over heels for Chris and Louise. They were really good friends. And they had done a number of collaborations of sorts together.

They were all into collaboration, which I hadn't really considered as a part of my work. So that is how I met Louise. I can't remember the name of the project. But Chris and Peter were doing this space where Peter had rented, Peter Nadin, where they were asking—they were going to do a project with an artist and the next artist would respond to the previous artist and the next artist—

And this all was going on. So Chris and I, we became friends more or less. He had this idea where I was going to put up—because I had showed him my *Surrogate Paintings* before I had shown them anywhere as I recollect. His idea was that there would be a week of my *Surrogate Paintings* and then he would come in and spray paint because they did spray painting for a way of making money, painting apartment buildings. He was going to come in and spray paint the whole gallery, including my *Surrogate Paintings*. Then we would remove the *Surrogate Painting*, which was a very Daniel Buren-esque idea.

We never got to it because he died. But in the meantime, of course, I became friends with Louise and it was kind of heartbreaking. He committed suicide. But Louise and I continued to be friends and still are. We had a long conversation on the phone last night, so we are friends. She and I over the—I can't remember how long it took us before we did a collaboration. But I think the first collaboration we did was the *Ideal Settings*, which was—

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes. That was at the Diane Brown Gallery and that was '84.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay. So while in the meantime, we were socially friends, we never did any particular project together. But she would come over and photograph my production of *Plaster Surrogates*, for instance. She sometimes—when I said Robert Kaye bought the first 20, she and I went out to his house when I was installing them and she photographed them over his bed and stuff like that. So we were friends.

Through her, I met any number of people. She is very social. I met many people. But the Diane Brown show, that didn't start with Diane Brown. It started with Richard Milazzo and Tricia Collins, as I recollect, did a magazine. They asked artists to do a page. So they somehow—I can't remember if they asked the two of us to collaborate. I can't remember how it wound up. We decided to collaborate on a page.

But our train of thought was that well, if it is a page in a magazine, let's do an ad. Well, if we do an ad, then we have to have something to sell. So what will we make to make an ad for? So then we had to design something, figure out something that would be for sale and that referred to both of our works. It took months figuring out what would refer to her work and my work at the same time. But both of us did works about display, about the art object in context. And the ultimate—

Oh, I know what else I forgot to mention. We had done a collaboration that never got shown anywhere before that. I think it was in maybe 1980, '81 or something where she had married Benjamin Buchloh. They had gotten a place up together in Halifax. How did this happen? Oh, I know. She said, "Allan, let's do a project where you tell me what to photograph and I will photograph it."

I had been thinking about the display of collectibles and valued objects. So I said—I had become enamored of jewelry stores that you saw in their windows on Sunday when all the jewelry was moved and all that is left were those little tiny sculpture bases that they put—all of those display items became suddenly the center of what you were looking at as opposed to what was being displayed. It just cracked me up because it was very much like working in museums. It was about the story of display underneath what is being displayed.

I said, "Let's go up to Madison Avenue and look in these jewelry shops." So we went up there. She got her tripod and we took pictures. We never did anything with them. We tried to print them up in Halifax, I remember. But we were not so enamored of the results, so we never showed them. So that was what contributed to our ultimate concept of designing our own display object, which we didn't want to define exactly what it was. But it was a little rectangular solid with a circle disc on the

top, which I made. ———[And Jim Welling did the photography for us! –AM] I did the making of the objects because I was set up to do that more or less.

We called these things *Ideal Settings*, which referred to the idea of a perfect display object upon which something else could go or not depending on how you understood what that meant. And so we made about 100 of them and then decided to show—to have those be for sale in that magazine page. For \$150, you could buy this *Ideal Setting*, which I think we called *Ideal Settings: For Presentation and Display*. That was underneath and then it said "Louise Lawler, Allan McCollum, \$150." Nobody bought one.

But it did come out as an ad in this magazine, looking like an ad. It was supposed to be an artist project page. And because we were referring to the context of a magazine. Then one of us—I can't remember who it was—me, maybe—one of us—somehow one of us was invited to do a show at Diane Brown's or come up with a project. We decided to do it together. And that is when we made 100 of them because we had only made three before that, for the photograph. So we made 100 and then asked Diane to find all these sculpture bases she had in the basement. And then we made a display using all of her sculpture bases and putting all of our—so it was really all of our *Ideal Settings* on top of it.

It was really like a room of display with sculpture bases designed for display with our objects, which maybe were designed for display, but we weren't going to be that descriptive. We projected the price on the wall. So it was kind of like turning the gallery into a showroom that was about things being for sale. Now, I had already done this with the *Surrogate Paintings* in a way because—I didn't mention this, but I did a show of [*Plaster Surrogates* –AM] in 1983 with Marian Goodman, whom I had met through Al Ruppersberg, who also showed there at the time.

That was the show that Robert Kay's money financed basically. But what I wanted to forefront with that show in terms of the context of, like I said, the Brechtian angle was to not only aim to have the viewer aware of themselves in a show space, but also that they were in a commercial space where things were for sale. So there was a price structure that was very simple. There were five different widths of frame face, which coincided with the depths of the surrogate. And the smallest were \$100. The second biggest was \$200. And then the biggest were \$500.

So you could go around and look and say by looking at the size of the frame face, you would know what the price was. So it was very much related in a way in my mind to that Kienholz exhibit.

AVIS BERMAN: Very much.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. Also, the Yves Klein show where all the paintings were the same size and different prices. So I wanted to orchestrate and have that be part of the content of the installation was that things were for sale, were available to own. They weren't just to look at. The question of owning them was available and very inexpensively actually, comparatively at the time. Even then, \$100 was—most of them were bought by friends of mine.

So we reiterated that. I had been focused periodically on—she was focused on other aspects of display. I had gotten into the idea of things being potentially ownable, which she hadn't really gotten into in that same way back then. So we combined those interests in a very interesting way, I think. It took us a long time to figure it out. But the price on the wall was, of course, a reference to the things being for sale. So we sold one out of that show. [Laughs.]

So that was, I guess, my first collaboration, I think, with another artist, which led to numbers of



others, other ones.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, clearly, you liked it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I liked what?

AVIS BERMAN: You liked collaborating.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I do. I did. For one thing, I have all these rules that I apply to myself like, for instance, not limiting how many objects I will make. If somebody says are you still making *Plaster Surrogates*, I say maybe. I mean, I am bored with them, bored with making them and I have some available and I don't know if I would make more. I don't want people to say oh—I mean, it is very hard on my career and the dealers hate me for this, but I don't want to say I am limiting this.

AVIS BERMAN: You don't want to make it suddenly exclusive.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly. To me, that is a cheap trick to say oh, there is only 10. I remember and I won't name who, but I remember working at Cart and Crate in Los Angeles. One of the dealers had us build a false wall to hide this huge painting behind because he had two of them or three of them and he only wanted the collectors to see that he had one. So they would come in and they wouldn't notice there was a false wall. Behind there were two more of the same series.

AVIS BERMAN: That is so fascinating.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Unbelievable. It is normal salesmanship.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I don't know. Most people probably wouldn't think about building a wall.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, that was the extremes of it. I mean, he didn't just hide them in a drawer because they were too big. So we had to build a wall. It was hilarious. This was a huge 10-by-20-foot paintings or something that he was hiding. And it just cracked us all up. It made him laugh, too, the dealer because he knew—but that is what you do. You say oh, this is the only. And they were unique works. But he just didn't want to make it look—you know, it was very funny. But that kind of a thing that you have to think about.

So I like to not make limited editions. So even when I am asked to make what they are called multiples, I will say, "I don't want you to say there is only—you know, let's leave it open if we want to make more or something." Or I will say we have to make such a huge quantity, it is ridiculous, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, photographers always keep printing their negatives if someone wants one.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, often they will change the size. They will say okay, well, these were done. I mean, it is funny. There is only 10 of these. Then when they run out of 10, they will make them slightly smaller or something. That logic fits into the way photographers work also. Signing things, you know—but not all photographers and not all the time, depending on the circumstance.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so I guess we should say that the *Surrogate Paintings* were unsigned.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, they are definitely signed.

AVIS BERMAN: They are definitely signed. Okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Signed, dated, numbered.

AVIS BERMAN: Because you were signing—right. So they are signed.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Everything I make is signed. Yeah, I think, just about everything, yeah. I am going up to Hamilton, New York, next week to sign 6,000 prints. I am not looking forward to it. No, I guess it is the week after next. But yeah, I just signed 3,600 prints at Graphicstudio two weeks ago in Tampa.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess, did you ever intersect with Don Saff or was he before your time because he —

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I met him, but the person now in charge is somebody different.

AVIS BERMAN: He is a remarkable person and very creative and probably would be a lot of fun to work with.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I will bet you. I don't even think I ever did meet him now that you mention, although there was someone in between. He was the person from the '60s, right, or from the—

AVIS BERMAN: Who was the one who founded it—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes. No, I have not met him. I'm sorry.

AVIS BERMAN: And he founded it in the mid-'70s.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Was it the mid-'70s?

AVIS BERMAN: Right, and then he was there maybe certainly into the—at least into the mid-'80s or possibly to—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay, yeah, he was clearly the—

AVIS BERMAN: He was bored. There was nothing to do in Tampa. He had no intellectual stimulation. So he thought if I could start something and get other artists—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Is that what he said?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, because he was originally from New York. No, well, he got into it and made it better than that. But he just thought wouldn't it be great if instead of just teaching art that we had a real artist and students—and the artist wouldn't have to teach. He or she could make something. What happened was is that Rosenquist was down there and that was the time when his first wife and child got into a terrible accident. He just was down there visiting and recuperating and Saff invited him to the studio.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You mean he moved to Florida as a result of Graphicstudio giving him things to do? I'll be darned.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, exactly. He loves Florida. I mean, now he is a Floridian. But that was the beginning of it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right. Of course, Rauschenberg, too.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, right, there were others as well. But it sort of came out of Graphicstudio.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I didn't know that exact connection. I know he is—Rosenquist is hugely supportive of Graphicstudio and constantly doing things to help them raise money and so forth.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, well, I think he does—I think he is a nice guy. If he likes something, he really does lend his name and help for causes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: His wife now was working at the Whitney when I was a guard.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Mimi Thompson?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Mimi was working in the curatorial—

AVIS BERMAN: Anyway, do you want to quit for today? Or do you want to go on to Laurie—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I can go on if you want.

AVIS BERMAN: We can go on a little longer. I mean, if you are feeling tired or you—you know, if you are running out of juice.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I don't think so.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. So I guess because we might talk about your collaboration with Laurie Simmons because we—oh, I guess we should just—you had said that you made rules for yourself. And not want to put words in your mouth, maybe that cracked that a little bit for the collaboration?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, cracked down. Is that what you—

AVIS BERMAN: No, cracked, you know, the rules—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: When I did collaborations, I was able to not have to follow my own rules because I was collaborating. So I had to—with Laurie, for instance, she had no problem making limited editions. So that is what she did, you know. So our project was limited to a certain size print and so forth.

Okay, I guess that was the next collaboration was with Laurie, not—in terms of sequence. Yeah, Laurie and I met at a peace march. [Laughs.] I think I was about—I can't remember when it was, but I was about 38, 39 years old, something like that. I liked her so much. We liked each other. The way we decided—we talked about—the way we decided to express that we liked each other was to do a project together.

And as she describes it—I don't remember this, but I think it is probably true is that I approached her with this idea because she had been taking pictures of dolls and little puppets—little dolls and mannequins. She took pictures of lots of little things. Well, this was interesting to me because when you blow up something that is little big, bigger, it was a little like my *Perpetual Photos*, blowing things up to where they become less resolved than they seem when they are small.

And they have a very different emotional effect when you do that looking at a standardized little doll big. It is different. And it is very emotional. So I guess I was thinking about that and thinking about my *Perpetual Photos*. And so I can't remember. We were having lunch or something and I said I know what I think you should do is you should get—instead of just photographing dolls that are

like four inches high, go find dolls that are like one-quarter inch high, tiny little dolls, and photograph them through a microscope. Then we laughed and then she said, "But those are also like your *Perpetual Photos*." I went, "Yeah." And she said, "Let's do it together or something like that."

I said, "Yeah, okay, let's do it." As it turned out, I had a friend at the time who had a friend who worked at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering lab, where they took pictures of samples, when you are having yourself tested for cancer or whatever.

AVIS BERMAN: Biopsies.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Biopsy, right.

AVIS BERMAN: Also, they have pathology slides, things like that. Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, she was the pathology slide person. Then you would send your biopsy samples to her and she would take photos of them. So she had been to art school. I can't remember her name right now. She had been to art school with this other person I knew. So we called her and said, you know, "How could we work this out where we take pictures using the microscope?" And she said on the weekends and that she could come in. The lab was closed. They would let her do it.

So we went to the train store—hobby train store to find those tiny little—we didn't know how big they would be. But it turned out there was three different scales, HO, N-scale and Z-scale. HO and N-scale are sort of like very accurate. Z-scale is ridiculous. It is almost like for kids or something, really tiny. I remember—[laughs]—it was funny. We walk into the store and there was this very serious, geeky train guy there. We said, "Do you have any of those teeny-tiny little figures?" He said, "Could you tell me what scale you are referring to when you say teeny-tiny?" Very seriously.

So we had to say, "Just the smallest you have." I remember telling this story to Sherrie Levine later. I said, you know, we said—he said, "Would you please explain the scale of teeny-tiny?" And she said, "You should have said, you know, itsy-bitsy." She is hilarious, Sherrie.

But anyway, so we bought the smallest ones we could find. They were only about a quarter of an inch high, if that, maybe eight millimeters high or something like that. We bought all of the different kinds that they had and took them to the Memorial Sloan-Kettering on one Sunday afternoon. That woman did portraits of every one of them. [Laughs.] Some of them even four-by-five slide, but mostly just slides. Then we—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, those are much bigger than probably what she normally photographs. I mean, those itsy-bitsies because usually what, you know, tumors or little cell—and they are much smaller than those. So she must have—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Maybe, but I mean, the camera was set up to do a range.

AVIS BERMAN: No, it is—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: She has got three or four different cameras depending on what you are taking a picture of. Some of them—and the nice part is that one of them, a camera is just set up so you can put different colored filters underneath the object in order—it is used in order to highlight different things that you are taking a photo of. And so we could change the color of the backgrounds even do the same picture with three different color backgrounds.

AVIS BERMAN: That is great.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: You know, it is just like this whole thing of what teeny-tiny is.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. Well, for me, there were many—she and I both had different reasons, interests in doing this. But, for me, of course, it was related to my thinking about where do we call something similar or where do we call something the same or what do we call something different? My thinking was anytime you—if you put anything under a microscope, even if it looks exactly like something else that you have like two different thumbtacks, you are going to find amazing distinctions because of the mold-making process and all of the flaws and all of that if you look at it under a microscope.

So that project for me reinforced the ideology of making those distinctions. And with Laurie, of course, this referred to the problematics of stereotypes, stereotypes between women and men, between different kinds of men, different kinds of women, all of these things, these stereotypes we come up with. There was an analogy that the *Actual Photos* described. I have to say at the time, if you look back at that moment in time, American artists were not doing well. There was a huge recession from the mid-'70s, even until the early '80s—the early '70s until the early '80s, a very big recession. That generation of artists that kind of emerged during that period had a huge amount of trouble making a living and still do.

That area still is—there were no huge *Artforum* ads or collectors buying artists that emerged in that—so there was a kind of resentment when suddenly all of these expressionist painters from Germany from our generation started becoming hugely a big hit through Marian Goodman and Mary Boone and other dealers that were—

So we thought it would be—I think one of the things that we got a kick out of doing that project at that moment in time was that it was a kind of mechanization and parody of expressionism because these little figures—once you look at them up close, they are all out of—they are ridiculously distorted. And at the same time, it was like there was a kind of a parodic and maybe affectionate reference to the Dusseldorf School as well. So there was something very historically pointed about the popularity of German art at the time for me and Laurie. It tickles me to look back at how—I think that is pretty funny the way we did that. And it wasn't only the German artists. It was the Italian trans-avant-garde. There was this kind of—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, there were the three Italians. There was Cucchi, there was Clemente and Chia. Then there were the Germans. And then there was Schnabel and—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly. Yes, exactly.

AVIS BERMAN: It was something quote, unquote, "the painting is the return to painting," I think it was called that or something.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, you remember.

AVIS BERMAN: I was here.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: This is where—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It was like interpreted to be—I remember what is his name at LACMA?

Maurice—

AVIS BERMAN: Tuchman.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Tuchman. I remember him saying [something –AM] in an interview that sort of horrified me that was so great. The '80s that now suddenly there was stuff to buy as if [during –AM] the whole generation of conceptualists and post-minimalists, there was [now –AM] nothing to buy. I couldn't believe he said that. But you look at like Richard Serra or Lawrence Weiner weren't even in the museum collections until the late '80s—or somewhere around there. That generation, they were not collectibles by the average collector.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think that it is a horrible remark. But it illustrates your preoccupations completely because by saying there was something to buy, it was something you could put over the sofa.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, with the lamp and table. It was a setup. They would fit into that, they were large, so not completely. But it was something that you could put on the wall and it was more manageable from his point of view.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: True. It also created that contradiction because I don't think I could have done what I was doing if it hadn't been for that generation of artists that were making things they couldn't sell.

AVIS BERMAN: Because nobody was.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But not only that, even today, for the average collector, do you want just a couple of words written on your wall as an artwork? I mean, that generation like without Weiner, Buren, Kosuth, others, I don't know that, or Asher, I don't know that the—that informed a whole bunch of stuff that came afterwards and also made it harder for us to be accepted critically because we were—artists of my generation were also—I don't even want to say my generation, but that emerged in a popular sense in that mid-'80s period because we were all different ages. I am 10 years older than Jeff Koons and 15 years older than Ashley Bickerton and so forth.

But they were often criticized for being commercial because they had things you could "buy." It is true that—I can't really put myself into that generation because I was working since the '60s. But I think it was an unfair look at those artists because—I don't know. I don't know. I am not going to get into that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, they, the critical they is always changing anyway.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah. But, I mean, I remember when I started doing the *Plaster Surrogates*, I had read—or the *Surrogate Paintings* that coincided with some texts I read by Daniel, where he critiqued the portable art object as making it impossible to understand the context. He used the architecture as a symbol of political control. He would refer to the architecture as a symbol of the political, social context. So to make an object that was portable was the opposite of what he was doing at the time. I remember thinking very clearly that learning from what he had done, I was going to try to make it okay to do because by ignoring the portable, you are also ignoring ownable, which was, I thought, an important concept to think about—not to mention feel.

So Laurie and I got very entrepreneurial. We print those things out. We got the slides. We printed

them out with a machine at the camera store, which they don't have anymore. But they did have machines in those days that you could print photos out in the lobby of the camera store. And then we wrote letters to every dealer we could think of and offered to show them in a smaller gallery like the project space or whatever and did four or five shows and got five galleries to put their money together to take out a full-page ad in *Artforum*. [Laughs.] We have never done anything so entrepreneurial since.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I see. No, because they were all—I am just looking here. This is the actual photo. You had it in New York, Atlanta, Houston, Chicago and Los Angeles.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: That was energetic.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, it took a lot of letter writing and it was fun. I remember I traded art for someone who had a wood shop to help me make crates that they would all fit in. We made our own traveling crates because I knew how to do that.

AVIS BERMAN: That is great.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Amy Ben-Ezra was the person who helped me build the crates in exchange for art.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think that this is a good time to stop for today. I think we have got a natural place. Then we will continue the next time.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: So thank you very much.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay, thank you.

[END OF DISC TWO.]

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Allan McCollum for the GSA Archives of American Art Oral History Project on April 7th, 2010 at the Archives of American Art.

I was saying to you off tape that—we left off last time about 1990, and there is—certainly an important piece that I think you did was *The Dog from Pompei*, and you began also to work with fossils. I see that as—even though *The Dog from Pompei* is a figure of museums—of trying to get away from the art system a little bit and deal more with nature. And maybe I'm wrong about that.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I think dealing more with nature was more like a side effect of what I was trying to accomplish at the time. In those days I was—I don't know what the word is but I was trying to replicate what artworks did but making the status of the object more questionable and also to focus on the context that made an artwork read as an artwork.

So, I was interested in other categories of collectibles, other categories of things that people valued, other types of incidences of display, other types of ways that objects had meaning. So I was open to any other kinds of museums, other kinds of galleries, even stores, showrooms, whatever. I had an interest in that, so I think we've talked about that.

But one of the things that, in my interest in trying to come up with something that was questionably an artwork or not an artwork but had all the same qualities of an artwork, I felt an interest in the fact that many artworks—I'd say most of the things we value in art museums are old. They have a history and that's part of what we enjoy, or that's part of the meaning or the significance of an artwork in an art museum is that it's old, even if it's only 10 years old, you know?

And back in the [mid-'70s –AM] when I was coming up with the idea of the *Surrogate Paintings*—things that stood for artworks but weren't quite. You weren't quite clear what they were, or maybe they just represented artworks—I had thought of the idea of using fossils. This is like in the early '80s when I was doing the *Plaster Surrogates* and so forth and I became interested in molds.

At the time I was working for the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. I think I talked about that. I remember the registrar, [Cordelia Rose, her –AM] husband was a—what do you call it? He was an anatomist of some kind. Let's see, what was he? Is there such a thing as an anthropological anatomy? I think that's what he was interested in.

AVIS BERMAN: Probably so. I mean, why not?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, and he had a collection of fossils, and I told her I would like to make copies of fossils. She lent me one, which I got to keep and look at for a while and then I gave it back to her. But I didn't—so I was kind of waiting for the opportunity to be able to do a fossil of some kind because fossils—and I don't know if I have talked about this before but the interesting thing about most fossils—

AVIS BERMAN: No, we haven't talked about fossils.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: We did?

AVIS BERMAN: We haven't.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: We haven't. Oh, okay. Well, because in making objects from molds in which the object is always a replica of something else, or always a duplicate of something else directly coming out of a mold, it seemed almost impossible to me that I could make replicas that also had the aura of time, of being old.

We can make a copy of a statue of Nefertiti that was made 3,000 years ago or whatever, but we know it's a copy and it doesn't have the feeling of the actual original that you would see when you go into the art museum. So I was thinking, well, how can I duplicate the feeling of age of an original old thing?

Then I slowly realized that fossils are copies; they're not the original. They're made by nature. They're copies created by nature. They are—each molecule is usually replaced by some mineral of some kind over millions of years of the action of water and so forth.

Then I guess I came to the conclusion that, well, if I make a copy of a fossil, it's no less original than the fossil because the fossil is already a copy. I mean, not all fossils are copies; sometimes they're mummified real things and so forth. The word "fossil" covers a lot of different kinds of objects, but when we think of fossils we generally think of, say, a dinosaur bone or a seashell or something that you find in the desert 6 million years after there was a river there, or whatever, you know, or an ocean or whatever.

So, I was kind of waiting for the opportunity and had my mind open for that. In 1991, two different



things happened very close together. One of them was an art dealer from Naples wanted to do an exhibition with me—

AVIS BERMAN: Naples, Italy.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Naples, Italy, and his name was Pasquale Trisorio, and his wife Lucia. He wanted to do a show with me. He had shown *The Perfect Vehicles* prior but he wanted to do something original, and I said, "Okay, you live in Naples." He had government connections because he had previously worked for the government. I said, "Can you get me the right to do a mold of something from Pompeii," because I had read about the plaster molds from Pompeii ever since I was a child.

My original thought was a very common object. I didn't want to do the dog from Pompeii, I didn't want to do a dead human body; I wanted to do a loaf of bread. So I asked him to seek out if he could get me the rights to do a loaf of bread. So he said he would really work on it.

Okay, so it took, I don't know, a year or so, but he wasn't—and then I went to Pompeii and we looked all around and I found there are many other kinds of objects. There was furniture, there was tree stumps; there were all kinds of things that they had made casts of in the [1800s –AM] but also in the '60s here and the '50s here in the 20th century.

But what we discovered, and he didn't know it either, the loaves of breads that they have found are actually still the real loaves of bread. They're not casts like the dog and the people—

AVIS BERMAN: You mean, like, they're petrified or whatever—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They were burned—they were heated so hot from staying in the ovens that were then covered by the volcanic ash that they turned to carbon.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: And so they're black but they are carbon—they are the residue of the actual loaf of bread; they're not copies. So I thought, well, that does not fit with my interest. Plus, they wouldn't let us touch them, of course.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They were so fragile and they were in the—I think the museum in Naples. They weren't on the site of Pompeii, which didn't bother me at all that they weren't on the site of Pompeii but I wanted something that had been a copy.

So we thought, oh, that doesn't work, and so I chose an armoire, some kind of bookcase that they had made a copy of out of concrete that they had found as a mold. The original bookcase—it was not a bookcase but like an armoire, and it had disappeared over time but it had left a cavity, a mold—a natural mold. So they had made a copy of this piece of furniture, so I thought, I want to do that.

Well, he spent months trying to get permission. They wouldn't let him do it. The reason—it's funny; in Italy, even though it's way down in Naples, it's a national thing, and so you have to get permission from Rome and it's really complicated. They wouldn't let us copy this object because it was too new and they wanted—they wanted to maintain the rights and all of this. I don't know what their problem was.

So we went to the idea of the dog. I didn't want to do a person because it seemed too filled with emotion but I thought, well, the dog is such an icon of the past and such an icon of mold-making. And it was unearthed in 1874 and the mold—the unearthed the mold and made casts in 1874. So it's quite old in a number of different ways.

Okay, we tried and he tried and tried to get permission to do that. Nobody would give him permission. They said no. So then he got to know, during this period, one of the mold-makers who typically worked on archeological sites—young guy, a very good mold-maker, and he said, "Well, you know, there's already a copy made of *The Dog from Pompei*; it's in the Vesuvius Museum in present-day Pompei."

So Pasquale asked the museum—the Museo Vesuviano in Pompei—present-day Pompei with one "i"—and they said yes. They gave us permission, and the local tourist board gave us permission to make a copy as long as it was done by this one fellow who had done it before—had made molds, so many molds, of other things. I think they found a certain advantage to having a mold made because then they could keep it.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So they said it was fine and they got permission from the government to do it. So Pasquale financed the making of a mold from the copy of the dog. Now, I figured, what's the difference? The original dog disappeared in 79 A.D. The mold disappeared in 1874.

The copy then lasted until the '50s or something when they made another copy to give to the museum Vesuvius Museum. So it was even more interesting to me that it was a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy, but still had the exact same form and still carried with it the sadness, because it is a very sad object to look at unless you're used to it. I'm used to it now; I'm very jaded but, boy, I couldn't even look at it when we first were working on it.

But they made the mold. They made a plaster mold, which is much more complicated than a rubber mold because it had to be made of, I don't know, 50 parts? Then they made a cast from that and they shipped me the cast, Pasquale shipped me the cast.

And then I sent the cast to a mold-maker here that I had been working with. I sent the cast to Nathan Lieb, who had been making molds—surrogates in *Perfect Vehicles* for me. He is an excellent mold-maker, and he is an artist himself.

So he made a copy of—made a new production—what you call a production mold from the other mold, since it was made of 50 parts, and he didn't even send me that mold. It certainly wouldn't qualify as a production mold. It would take days to make one copy, so he was able to make, I don't know, a rubber mold where he could make two or three a day from HYDROCAL or something.

So, anyway, he started making me copies and the John Weber agreed to do an exhibition. I can't remember how many we made. I think in the end I made just around a hundred, maybe a little more than that, and we filled the whole gallery with them. After that, John Weber showed them at his gallery in Madrid, which was also owned by Brooke Alexander and Pepe Cobo, and it was called the—what was that gallery called? Weber, Alexander y Cobo Gallery. [They laugh.]

That was in 1991. So they took the show—and then it's been shown in a number of different places since then, like the Sprengel Museum in Hannover and recently—and the Villeneuve d'Ascq Museum in Lille, France, and it recently was shown in Murcia, Spain in a show organized by Nicolas

Bourriaud.

Anyway, so part of the history of my thinking of that object, I was expecting to paint them to be each a different color because I had always been doing that with everything. I painted one of them and it was so gross and disrespectful to paint the dog that I had to rethink the whole thing and realized that it was so sad to repaint the dog and so gross and so disrespectful of the animal that I would just make an indefinite amount of copies of it just as it was and show them altogether as a group.

Okay, I'm trying to remember the name of the American photographer from California that did the horse running.

AVIS BERMAN: Muybridge.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: [Eadweard –AM] Muybridge. I started to realize that there was something in connection with the Muybridge photos and making duplicates of the dog. I liked that. I liked the reference to photography. And there are people—I think one friend said this to me, or I don't know where I've heard this, that fossils are like the slowest—like photographs that take the longest to develop. [They laugh.]

And so there was a relationship between fossils—the Earth making copies and human beings choosing to make copies with photography, and Muybridge was somewhere in that mix in my brain and I was interested in maybe reproducing a little of the feel of a series of Muybridge photos at the same time. So there was a reference to photography, a reference to mold-making, a reference to—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also motion, of course, which is in here too.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: He's frozen. Yeah, the dog is frozen in time.

AVIS BERMAN: But it's also—but you could see it was in the throes of moving. I mean, it's different from *A Perfect Vehicle* in that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Absolutely, yeah. It's different than a fossil of a dead dinosaur too because that you've just got the bone that— yeah, no, it was like a three-dimensional photograph captured in 79 A.D.

Yeah, all of those casts from Pompeii were people in the midst of doing something when they died—covering their heads or trying to protect their possessions and all smothered to death with ash.

AVIS BERMAN: It's an extraordinary experience to go there; there's no doubt about that.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: I also was sort of amazed at these little houses with bars on every corner. I don't know; it kind of reminded me of Greenwich Village. It was like New York, the way the people—I could see these short, dark people hurrying around and the way everything was in their little apartments. I really thought, this is Manhattan.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly, even the grooves in the streets where the carriages used to go were all intact and everything. It's fantastic to walk through Pompeii.

But, my fascination with that doesn't come close to my fascination with museum objects and

copying in general, you know? So I didn't really—and what I found odd—and this, I guess, leads up to other things—is that I expected the people in Naples to be wonderfully pleased and fascinated with my show. [They laugh.]

Well, they weren't. They had seen the dog all their life and they, like, well, who cares? Somebody from New York copies the dog. Big deal, you know? It was much more dramatic shown in New York or Germany or France and the other places that I've shown it, or Spain, but in Naples nobody bought one. I don't even know if there were any reviews; I don't remember, but clearly my impression was, this is not interesting to them.

That registered with me, that here I was, a tourist, in their minds, some tourist from New York who took something that they already knew was interesting and that they already had valued and that was part of their heritage and so forth and—

AVIS BERMAN: Show me something I don't know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, exactly, so that was interesting to me that I felt like, okay, I had all of these other thoughts that I think I was right about, but I wrong in thinking they would be interested so much. The guy who made the mold was really interested in it all because it gave him a job and he loved the idea of molds and all of that. I'm sure there were a few people that liked—were interested in the process. But in terms of the viewing public, it was no big deal.

Okay, so that same year, in 1991, coincidentally Lynne Cooke, along with Mark Francis, was curating the Carnegie International, and I had known Lynne since the late '80s. Maybe 1988 she had interviewed me and she had done a catalogue text on me for the show I had had in Eindhoven in Holland at the Van Abbemuseum.

So I had met her in London and we liked each other and we had a few meetings and an interview, and then she wrote this long, nice text and so forth. So when they invited her to come curate the Carnegie International, she moved to Pittsburgh and frequently visited New York, because she designed this really great, big show that was quite advanced over some of the earlier internationals in terms of contemporary, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I saw that show.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You did?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, because I was working for the then-nascent Andy Warhol Museum.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh.

AVIS BERMAN: So I used to go to Pittsburgh one week a month.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So you know Mark Francis and—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah, very well. I worked there when Mark was curator there.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I'll be darned.

AVIS BERMAN: I like Mark.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I haven't seen him since then but I really liked him too.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, he's now in London and works for Gagosian Gallery in London.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: He works for the Gagosian Gallery?

AVIS BERMAN: In London.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'll be darned.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, he had gotten some other job but then he went there and his wife Sheena I think had an exhibition at the Tate.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Wasn't he involved with the Warhol Foundation?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, well, he was working for the Warhol Museum.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, okay.

AVIS BERMAN: He was curator of the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But he was at the Carnegie in ['91 –AM].

AVIS BERMAN: Right, but that's part of it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They're part of the same thing?

AVIS BERMAN: In other words, the Carnegie owns the Warhol Museum.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I didn't know that.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, yeah. It's part of—it's one of their branch museums.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I'll be darned. See, I don't know the history of all that. Well, he's quite special, I thought.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: And very human—very down to earth. I think he—I don't know the details but I thought it was really great that he got Lynne involved.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. That was a very—I'm just saying, yes, that was very different from anything they had had in a long time.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly, yeah. That's what I understood. I think it was sort of a reawakening of the Carnegie International.

But because Lynne and I had a friendship, she was—and I think she was more than willing to help me with whatever I wanted to do, as she was with, I'm sure, many of the artists. But I went out there and visited and I said—you know, I discovered, I guess, prior to meeting out there—meeting Lynne out there I discovered that, of course, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History is in the same building as the Carnegie Museum of Art.

In fact, there is one room that separates the two where they have these sort of classical sculptures, and if you go through one door you're in the Museum of Art and you go through the other door

you're in the Museum of Natural History.

So I visited there—well, maybe I think—I don't remember if I visited there first or just asked Lynne first. I said, "Do you think we could work something out with the Natural History Museum where I could make copies of dinosaur bones," because they have you know, one of the original American collections of dinosaur bones. I'm not sure if that museum came to be before the Field Museum in Chicago, but certainly—

AVIS BERMAN: I'm not sure.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'm not sure, but they're both historical museums in terms of natural—dinosaur.

So, she said, "Well, gee, you know, I've never been through that door." [They laugh.] I'm sure she'd seen the displays but she'd never met the director, she'd never met the curators of the natural history department, because she was new there—

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right, but—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: —but they're different wings, you know. And so we laughed about that. So she contacted the director, whose name was Mary Dawson, and Mary Dawson is a very well-known vertebrate paleontologist and a very well-spoken, wonderful woman. So, she and Lynne—Lynne loved her and I did too, and she said yes, we could discuss this.

So I went out there to Pittsburgh and met with their preparator, but met with Mary Dawson very briefly and then she delegated it to her preparator, whose name was Norman Wuerthele—W-U-E-R-T-H-E-L-E—and he was a mold-maker. Every museum of natural history that deals with paleontology has a mold-maker. I mean, that's what they—the preparators in a museum of modern art would not necessarily know a thing about making molds, but if you're in a museum of natural history, that's one of the main things you do.

I was learning more about this as I went along. Almost every dinosaur skeleton you see in any museum, the bones are made up from different digs. They very, very seldom discover the entire skeleton of one dinosaur in one site. Often they have everything but the head, and they'll have to get the head from somewhere else, or they have everything but one of the legs or some of the tail is missing or whatever.

So they're always having to get bones elsewhere or buy copies of bones from other museums that have the same femur that they want from another dinosaur and then they'll pay. It's actually one of the ways museums of natural history make money is by selling molds—casts of their objects. So this became interesting to me too, and then I discovered through—

AVIS BERMAN: Bone exchange.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes. So then I discovered very quickly—it doesn't take a lot to find this out—that Andrew Carnegie, who basically invented corporate philanthropy—before Carnegie, philanthropy was based on individuals who have a library made in their name because they had gone to school at the university, or whatever. There wasn't such thing as like a corporate department called philanthropy and he invented this.

And kind of a worldwide thing—so, however complex a man he was, he contributed a huge amount to philanthropy—concepts of philanthropy. The funny thing that he did was that he was very self-

promotional and promotional of his business and so forth, and he read about a diplodocus that had been discovered somewhere, which is one of the largest dinosaurs.

He decided that he wanted to find the world's largest dinosaur. So he started financing digs and paying paleontologists and financing their research and so forth. He actually—there was a dig that was discovered in Utah outside of Vernal, Utah, and he actually paid for railroad tracks to be built going out to Vernal so he could bring—I mean, going out to the dig so that he could bring bones back to the regular railroad line and ship them back to Pittsburgh.

And so he made—they made many, many discoveries and got many, many fossils, and they're still unwrapped and sitting there in the basement of the Carnegie Museum because they—natural history museums have no money. I went to a vertebrate paleontology conference once back then to sort of learn about how they thought and stuff, and there was a meeting for artists—paleontological artists at the conference, so I went to that. It was really fun.

I remember the guy saying that they had added up all of the funding that had been gotten for paleontology museums over the whole year. It was about a million dollars. That was all, over the whole world.

That's why they promote dinosaurs so much because people love dinosaurs, but most of the research has to do with mouse teeth and—[Laughs]—as Mary Dawson pointed out. She said like 99 percent of paleontology has nothing to do with dinosaurs. But that was around the time the book *Jurassic Park* came out, and they were really trying to capitalize on dinosaurs in that period.

So, anyway, Norman and I went through the bone collection and we picked out 15 bones, and he and—I had to pay for it all. It wasn't like—I think the museum—the Carnegie would not pay for the production of artworks unless they were not subsequently going to be for sale. So they would pay for performance or something temporary but they would not pay for the production of an art object.

They did put up \$5,000 to build bases, of which wound up being one extremely huge wooden base, but they couldn't pay—it wasn't part of their budget. So I remember this was the first big project I paid for totally by myself because I had been selling lots of plaster surrogates in that year or the previous year, but I did the math wrong. I'm not great at arithmetic and it wound up costing—and I carried a number wrong in my arithmetic and wound up owing \$50,000 more, or something like that, than I had thought. It was unbelievably stupid.

I designed this huge installation based on bad arithmetic and had all the copies made and only slowly began to realize I'd figured it wrong as I was taking money out of my savings account and everything, and it was a killer, and everything financially fell apart not too long after that, of course. [They laugh.]

But, nonetheless, it was exciting that I could make these objects that could be read as "old" even though they were copies. Part of my interest was—part of my research on this was I took a trip out to Utah because I wanted to see the Carnegie dig and I wanted to pick colors. In the end I painted them all and then we put numbers on every one like acquisition numbers, but each one has its own number, which was hand-painted meticulously by the artist Amy Adler, who wound up being well-known herself, a painter out in California.

So Amy painted numbers on all of them. She was my assistant at the time. But anyway, and Nathan Lieb, the same mold-maker, made all the molds. And my assistants, Misoon Whang and Resja Campfens, especially Misoon, wound up governing all of the painting of them and so forth, and the

production of the dogs—Misoon. She worked for me like from 1988 to 1990—actually, I wrote it down here.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: She worked for me from, I think, 1988 to 1991. Then while she was working for me, she turned in her notice but continued to work for six months, and we hired Resja Campfens and she worked for me from 1991 until around 1999, managing so many things.

Anyway, so I wanted to choose colors so I went out to Utah and my visit to Utah, while I didn't intend for this to happen, it led to a completely other new project after the dinosaur bones. What happened was I checked into a motel in Vernal—you go into Vernal, Utah—there's no flight there so you rent a car in Salt Lake City, drive to Vernal, and they have big dinosaurs—models of dinosaurs on the signage, dinosaurs—the Dino gas station, the Dino motel.

So they're the gateway to the Dinosaur National Monument, which is the national monument that the Carnegie dig then became later. It later was taken over by the government and they maintain a visitors' center and—

AVIS BERMAN: So it's a national park now?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So it's what?

AVIS BERMAN: A national park now?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't want to say exactly a national park but it's funded by and maintained by something national.

AVIS BERMAN: So it's a national historic site.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, something like that. I forget exactly what department of the government runs it, but it's a historic site.

So I was checking into the motel and the woman behind the desk said, "Oh, you're from New York," and I said, "Yes." And she said, "Well, whatcha' doing here?" I said, "Well, I'm making this project with the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh and I wanted to see the original dig so I'm going to Dinosaur National Monument."

So she gave me this kind of dirty—like I don't know what you call it, narrowed her eyes and looked at me, and she said, "Oh." And she said, "We don't think much of Andrew Carnegie out here." And I said, "Well, why?" She said, "Well, he came here in the teens and he took away all the dinosaur bones before anybody knew their value. He basically stole our heritage."

So I felt self-conscious and I said, "Okay," and I went and checked into my room. But then I kept thinking about what she had said and I thought, why would a person think dinosaurs were their heritage? And, okay, I'm from the Southwest. I'm from the West Coast, but I have an understanding of how difficult it can be in the area of America where there is no European history—there's Native American history but it's not so documented enough to really fill the minds of the European colonists, you know?

And there's colonial history but it's sparse, but most towns out there have had to—the European towns, they have to establish an identity on their own. They have to come up with symbols, they



have to come up with names, and all over that area things are named after rocks; you know, rivers are named after things that have nothing to do with history.

You know, there's a section of LA where I grew up in called Eagle Rock because there's a shape of a rock that makes a shadow that looks like an eagle and there are all kinds of names of towns like that in Arizona and New Mexico and California, and probably all over America. So, it isn't only the first mayor or things like that; it's also named after geographical—geological oddities, geological phenomena and so forth.

So the idea that this little town would have identified itself with dinosaurs and then subsequently called it their heritage was really intriguing to me because it was about meaning, about collectibles, about objects, about history, about time, but mostly about identity. I started to see parallels between how a town or a group of people might find community significance and personal significance in geological objects in the same way that art collectors or artists or people in my art world mentality find meaning and create identity based on what kind of paintings they collect or what kind of art objects they like and what their tastes are and so forth.

I guess I felt that they were very parallel and you couldn't really understand one without the other because there are ways—and because all peoples have to find meaning in their lives and identity for their communities and identities of themselves within their communities, and it all is based on choices that they make about where they live and so forth, or they invent symbols or they decide that mountain is a symbol of our community here, or that river or whatever.

It's especially an American or a new-world phenomena, I think, at least in terms of recent history. I'm sure this happened a thousand years ago in the jungles or 5,000 years ago, but for me, it feels like an American phenomena.

And so on this trip to Utah, I'm driving around bemused by this—and I went out and looked at the fossils and looked at the colors, and then I decided to drive down and look at other beautiful parts of Utah, which is an incredibly beautiful state.

I went through this small town called Price, Utah, which is about 10,000 people, and it's in Carbon County. It's basically a town that emerged in the context of coalmines, and there are many coalmines near Price, Utah and its history is all wrapped up with them. I mean, it's called Carbon County.

There was a prehistoric museum that was part of the community college there, so I guess I read about that or something so I decided to go to see that museum, and it was actually quite large considering it was part of a community college in a small town, and pretty impressive.

So I went in there, they had lots of dinosaur bones but what I noticed when I got there was there was a kind of object I'd never heard of before and that was natural casts from dinosaur tracks. I had seen dinosaur tracks in museums before where they find an imprint of a dinosaur footprint hardened into stone and then they chip it out and collect it, or they rope it off and it's a site for visitors, or whatever. So, dinosaur tracks are a common thing.

I had never thought that there were natural casts of dinosaur tracks, which are like three-dimensional objects in the shape of a dinosaur footprint, so it was very similar to the dog or the—to the dog. And what happens is the dinosaur would have walked in a bed of peat and left footprints and then the footprints would have been filled with an overflow of silt, and then the silt builds up; it builds up over thousands of years and turns into sandstone with the pressure, and the peat turns

to coal and it forms a cast of the footprint in the coal.

So, what happens when they dig a coalmine in Utah is that little by little they've discovered that there were the reverse of a footprint on the ceilings of the coalmine because the casts created by the sandstone created a three-dimensional version of the footprint, which would then wind up on the ceiling when they took the coal away.

What happened was that coalminers started chipping them down as souvenirs and putting them in their front yards or in their living rooms or whatever, and this has been going on, I don't know, the whole century. There have been people who tried to—actually, there was one fellow—I can't remember his name—who brought out dinosaur experts from the Field Museum, I think, to analyze which dinosaurs were represented by these footprints.

And there's really nothing they could say. Once they're taken down from the trackway, you can't tell

—  
AVIS BERMAN: You've destroyed the context.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You've destroyed the context, so they're really just oddities and they have almost no value in terms of scientific study of dinosaurs. But I remember reading somewhere that they tried to be really sweet to the local people and say, well, this must have been a so and so, but all they can basically tell is was it a three-toed or four-toed and they don't know much else or how big it was.

So, the local museum collects them but not with a lot of scientific interest. It's community outreach interest, and people, they sometimes—they even have a rule, at least they did back then, but they won't even pay more than \$50 if somebody tries to get them to buy one, but most of them are donated.

I went through the registrar's records later because I made an arrangement with them to do copies, and I went through the registrar's records and many of them are donated in the name of our grandfather, who spent his life working at the such and such coalmine.

So there is a great parallel to me between the way people give things to art museums and the way these dinosaur tracks wound up in—casts wound up in the College of Eastern Utah Prehistoric Museum.

So I was so entranced by—because they had about 40 of these objects, all different sizes, from like one inch square to like two feet square, you know, or even bigger—two feet by three feet, the biggest one. And they had them all on display.

So, okay, going back to Pompeii, though, and the Vernal—the Carnegie story—oh, I didn't finish the Carnegie story. Let me go back to that for a minute.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Carnegie did discover the largest diplodocus that had been discovered at that historical moment. I think there's been larger dinosaurs discovered since, but he discovered the largest diplodocus. He had all the bones shipped to Pittsburgh for this entire diplodocus sculpture, or skeleton.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, or reconstruction. Yeah, it's a skeleton.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, the skeleton. And, okay, this is what I loved about what he did. He brought all the bones to Pittsburgh but instead of immediately assembling the dinosaur, which is now on display, he made molds of every one of the bones. I don't know how many there were but 200 bones or I don't know what.

He made molds of all the bones. He made duplicates of this diplodocus and donated the diplodocus—copies of his diplodocus to the British Museum, to the museum in Berlin, to a museum in Frankfurt, to museums in Japan, museum in Spain. He ultimately made—I think in his lifetime he made eight donations to other natural history museums of this fabulous—

Then I think soon thereafter—I don't know if he was still alive—there was four more museums later that they wanted them, and even today the molds went to—they were bought by a paleontologist in Utah, whose name I've forgotten right now, and he started making copies. Now you can still get copies of this dinosaur for a certain amount of money because they will make—and they made new molds from that.

So this dinosaur had been mass produced, basically, and sent all around. I love this story. Although the copies of the bones I made were not from the specific dinosaur. They were connected in my mind to this story.

Then of course *The Dog from Pompeii*, a very elaborate story went along with that, from the history of Pompeii to the writers who, at the time, wrote about it, to the history of the 1800s when it was found and when they started on—it's a huge, very rich story, the history of—discovery of Pompeii. And you don't really understand what the dog is unless you know that story.

So I was starting to realize how important stories were, and in fact the sentence hit me that the strongest structure in the universe is a "story," you know? I realized—I was starting to seek out objects that have wonderful stories too. It wasn't just the idea of a copy, the idea of identity, the idea of time, the idea of collectibles or valuing objects; it was the idea of the stories that went along with objects. So it was the whole complex of how objects wind up having meaning, which always included stories.

Okay, going back to the CEU Museum, the College of Eastern Utah Museum, I loved the story of how the local people had given their grandfather's dinosaur track cast to the museum and the museum had put it up for display and so forth.

I think—I had done a little reading about cultural anthropology in those days, and I remember the—I guess it's a—is it a Claude Levi-Strauss concept—probably way before him, where they talk about master narratives, where anthropologists would be living in some tribal society, or whatever, and they would write all of the stories that they heard, but then they would try to reduce them to a master narrative, and all the stories were just versions of this master narrative. It's one of the ways they would try to analyze a culture. It could be done to any culture.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, impose consistency, whether there might be an SO [ph] or not. But, yeah, exactly. Well, it was selecting in order to convey something.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What do you mean?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I mean, they couldn't—they weren't going to tell all the narratives so they had to select it or distill it in order to communicate—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I suppose, yeah, but I think they also thought that it came close to defining a

basic philosophy of some kind.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't know if it was the best way to analyze a culture or not but there are millions of American stories where people start out poor and wind up rich. That's clearly a master narrative that we have—[They laugh]—and many others. You know, you wind up happily married or in our fairy tales you always ascend the throne, you know? So there were these—the proto-structuralists. [Like –AM] they're very interested in the so-called master narrative.

So, anyway, I started recognizing—and this going to sound silly, but when I started thinking about these dinosaur tracks and how they—I thought of, okay, this has a parallel to the way we think about what artists do. We imagine artists going deep into their unconscious and coming up with some idea or object which they then produce physically, and then it has all this meaning and then it winds up being in a museum.

Then I thought, that has a weird parallel to people going underneath the earth to the coalmines and finding a beautiful, treasurable object and bringing it up and it winding up in a museum. I thought, this is very interesting because it parallels one of the ways we think about what artists do.

So that was another part of the interest in the story, was how it paralleled how we—because I have a certain mistrust for the way we mystify our artists, and I thought it was interesting to—the way we imagine what artists do being so special, but you can also say what these coalminers did was special in a similar weird way.

I don't know; that captured my interest, and the objects themselves were incredibly beautiful. They looked like these goofy sort of Giacometti, maybe Duchampian casts of—or Arp. They had these strange shapes that were all sort of crudely shaped into something, and I guess more Giacometti than anything, but they looked like art objects already.

I took a lot of pictures and then I thought about it, and I realized I've got to try to do something with this museum because of all of those things I just said—the beauty of the objects, the story that went along with them.

I somehow found out the names of the director and the curators and I wrote them. It turned out the director was actually from California and he had studied geology but also his degree was in art from USC, University of Southern California.

He was responsive enough to turn it over to his curator, who was named Pamela Miller, and her interest was more in the Native American history rather than geology. But of course out there they're connected because many of them—Native American history is submerged in geological specimens and so forth.

But anyway, so I said, "I'd love to make molds of your collection of dinosaur track casts." So they were a little bit stunned. Pamela said to me, "Nobody has ever shown interest in these objects before. They're not really considered that important in terms of national treasure or whatever." She said that you don't learn anything about dinosaurs from them, and she thought it was really funny that I was interested in them.

She very much was pleased and said, "Well, you know, we've never really thought of these in that way, the way you're thinking of them, before, and this is really giving us a new view on this collection." I loved that, that I was bringing something to them. It wasn't just me taking something

from—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what did they think—it's like all of a sudden someone from New York with some reputation wants to come and do something with them, because that isn't anything probably they ever would have ventured.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They ever what?

AVIS BERMAN: They ever would have ventured themselves.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, they wouldn't have. Well, actually, they had made some molds of the dinosaur tracks, the little tiny ones, and were selling them in their gift store. There were very few of them but they had thought of them as objects that people might like as souvenirs and of course there's only the little ones because a souvenir you have to be able to put in your purse when you are visiting Price.

So, and they value them. They had a mini—they had these wonderful displays, little jokes about the track club, as if, it was about running track, and jokes about—they had certain people's collections of dinosaur tracks with the name and a certain display that was the such-and-such collection of dinosaur tracks and so forth.

It wasn't that they didn't see them as significant locally; they just hadn't thought of it beyond—I don't think they thought, why would someone want to show these in Europe and make bright-colored casts? I don't know.

But what really turned—what really, I think, made them pleased to do the project with me was that it gave their preparator, who is a mold-maker—it gave him a job to do over the winter because they were only able to pay him for the season that the tourists were there. Well, maybe I got the seasons wrong, but whatever it was, there was one season during which they couldn't afford to keep their preparator employed.

He was this wonderful, wonderful guy who had been a coalminer. He was really smart and he knew how to make molds, and he also managed one of the digs—out in the middle of the desert, one of the quarries. So he had started off interested in geology and had wound up a preparator at the local museum, and he teaches courses in geology and so forth.

He was very helpful, gave me a tour out in the middle of the desert of things I had never seen before, fossil-type things that you can just find out in the desert, you know. His name is John Bird—.

So John, his son—it was one of those times—it was a thing in his personal life where he wanted to send his son on a—what do you call it when you're a Mormon and you send your—

AVIS BERMAN: A mission.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: A mission. He had to send his son on a mission but he needed money because it costs money to send your son on a mission because it's usually in another country and so forth. So he was like—oh, this is so good because I can work during the season I normally don't work and I can help with my son going on his mission and so forth.

He worked really hard, he and his assistant at the time, whose name was Maurice Evans. They spent I don't know how many months making 44 molds for me. It was a big job. I don't think he had ever made so many molds until then at any one time.

Okay, so that all happened. I went out—I went and rented a U-Haul truck and drove all the—now, nobody was financing this either, not even the bases or anything. There was nothing. I was spending money out of my pocket. It was crazy.

AVIS BERMAN: You were losing your shirt?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What?

AVIS BERMAN: You were losing your shirt.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I was losing my shirt because I had already done the bad math on the dinosaur bones but I had been selling my other work, so I was thinking—and there was also kind of a boom at the time but it was slowly winding down, where people were stopping buying art but I was very slow to recognize that.

The gallery, John Weber Gallery, owed me a lot of money, which I assumed was coming and in the end never did and he went bankrupt and so forth and I lost my shirt and lost my studio and everything and wound up in 10 years' lawsuit with John Weber, who had basically—took my money.

So, in any case, so I went out there and rented a U-Haul van and brought all the molds back, but the molds were not really production molds. They were made—they were two-part molds but there was no way to fit them together in any predictable way because they were slippages and they couldn't be used for production in terms of making—each one would have to be prepared so many times to make it work and—

AVIS BERMAN: Why did it go so wrong in terms of the mold-making?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Why did—

AVIS BERMAN: Why did it go so wrong in terms of the mold-making?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, they just made as many as they could at a time. I'm not sure what you—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, the way you were just saying it sounded as if they were faulty.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, they were not—I found the same case with the dinosaur bones. When I got all the molds, I had to remake new molds. So what I had to do in both cases was work with Nathan, and we would take the mold that was made by the paleontological preparators, make a cast as well as we could, then get rid of all the seams, which were always a quarter of an inch off or whatever, because they don't make molds to mass produce.

They make molds to make one at a time and then they—they're not—they know how to make molds but they don't make professional—as molds that would be functional to make lots of copies. So, in both cases I found that I had to make casts from the mold and then had new molds made that were more designed for production in quantity.

I'm not sure what you mean about the question about time. I mean, they use—because I said it took a whole season for them to do it?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, not so much that but you said they were really good mold-makers and that they seemed to be trying so hard and they were experienced—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —and it's not as if you got poor molds.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I don't want to say they were poor but they were just not functional for what I needed. They were perfectly functional for what they would normally use in their business.

AVIS BERMAN: So they didn't understand your requirements very well, or—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't think I gave them any requirements. I think I didn't—I wasn't going to stand over them and say—you know, and I don't think—I think they did what they would normally do but they wouldn't have had the time or the experience maybe to go as far as I wanted—as I needed to go to make more copies.

You start adding—for one thing, most dinosaur copies would be made from, say, fiberglass, which doesn't have a lot of weight to it, but if you start making them out of concrete, like what I wanted to do, they're going to have a lot more weight, so you need the mold to be 10 times as strong as they would normally use, so I didn't want to lumber them with all of these criteria that they weren't used to or, you know—

I think I sensed I was probably going to have to do that before I— even when I started. So they knew how to make molds but they were not production engineers.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So in both cases I had to remake—make one cast, chase it, work on it and then have a new mold made that would carry 200 pounds of plaster or whatever. So, anyway, with the dinosaur—oh, with the dinosaur bones I made, I think, 75 colors—or, no, 50 colors and alternated them and 15 bone shapes and then alternated them so I wound up with 750 unique objects that any one of the same bones wasn't the same color. That was like a whole lot of trouble but there were no two alike.

So, with the tracks I made eight collections of 44 and each one I chose a very bright color. I didn't want to make them—the dinosaur bones I made all shades of brown, kind of like similar to the landscape of Utah, but the tracks I made like bright colors like *The Perfect Vehicles*, bright red and bright purple.

And then showed them—I didn't mix them all up. I just would show—I showed them, and all the purple ones together, all the red ones together. I don't know; I was trying to make it substantially different than what I've done before, I guess.

But, okay, what I'm leading up to partly here is that I wanted the story to be known, so the project was designed to show objects, the copies of the dinosaur tracks, but also to have an educational feature to it.

Now, this was the year I bought a computer and learned how to use Microsoft Word as well as I needed to. What I did was went to the library, went to the Natural History Museum library and found—went and bought books and found every text I could find that seemed relevant to the idea of dinosaur tracks found in coalmines, and some that were just relevant to the idea of casting and dinosaur tracks in general that was related to copies and so forth.

I wound up with about 20 texts, some of them just one page, some of them like 10 pages, some of

them historical, some of them recent. But there are paleontologists in the world that focus mainly on dinosaur tracks, and there are entire books—there have been entire conferences on just dinosaur tracks. There are paleontologists that just study traces as opposed to the bones themselves and they just study the traces of—fossil traces.

So I found about 20 articles or texts or chapters, whatever you want to call them—excerpts—and I formatted them in Microsoft Word and turned them into handouts, and each one was a different color. I was able to title these *Reprints*, which was kind of a joke because they were about footprints.

The show itself—this is for the first time—I talked earlier about supplements, how the projects like the *Surrogate Paintings* and the plaster surrogates had supplements— photographs taken off of television and so forth—to contextualize the objects themselves.

So this was the most—so, with the dinosaur track casts—by the way, the series is called *Natural Copies*. I'm not giving you the titles of things, am I? The bones was called *Lost Objects*, which is a reference to Freud. Interestingly I think, looking back, I started the project right after my father died, so there was a lot of interest I had in loss and knowledge you can't recover, and *Lost Objects*, in a Freudian sense, would have been about losing what you love and losing the object of your love.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, isn't that a pretty pervasive theme in your work, of absence and filling space?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I think so, but I don't think I would—yeah, the idea of using the title *Surrogate* was about a reference to things that were not present and took the place of something that you might wish were present.

AVIS BERMAN: I think it's an ongoing theme—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: —that you revisit a lot—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, it is.

[Cross talk.]

AVIS BERMAN: —or you look at it from different ways.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I think even still. But the fossils, of course, were really—*The Dog from Pompei*, the dinosaur tracks are really an extreme reference to what's lost.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What was I saying? Oh, yes, so they were called *Natural Copies*. That series was called *Natural Copies*, the series of dinosaur tracks, because they were about copies made by nature. Then I made the reprints to go with the natural copies, which were stories reprinted out of books and magazines.

So the show itself, the presentation in the gallery, at the John Weber Gallery, where I did the first show, there was a special table along with all of the objects and letter boxes—20 letter boxes where you could take out these texts for free when you left—when you went home and you would learn about the dinosaur tracks.



Then, while we were doing this, Resja and I—Resja was managing all the painting of all of this—her husband, whose name is Ron Wakkary was kind of a recent graduate from the art school in Halifax. What's it called?

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I know what it is but I can't—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I can't either right now.

AVIS BERMAN: Not Nova Scotia something or other. I don't know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's in Nova—yeah, it's the Nova Scotia School of Design or whatever [University Nova Scotia College of Art & Design]. So they had just moved to New York and I had met him through her. He is an expert on web design. At the time this was very new. The Worldwide Web just only barely existed in 1993 or whatever it was and I knew nothing about it but he sort of taught me a few things about it, and I had never made a website or a webpage.

I wouldn't even have known what that was, but he was starting a website and he somehow wound up working at Dia [Dia Art Foundation –AM]—I forget what he did there, as a guard or something—but he wound up helping them with their website, and he started his own website called Stadium.com. It's still housed at Dia. They still host it.

So they had helped finance, I guess, this website called Stadium, and he did collaborations with artists on Stadium.com, and he proposed to me that we put all the handouts online, which I thought was a fantastic idea, and then he designed this website where you could go online and download PDF files of these handouts. So—

AVIS BERMAN: That was really early.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Pardon?

AVIS BERMAN: That was really early.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I guess it was—when was that project—1992, '93.

So Ron took all my handouts and translated them into html and designed this kind of sweet website where you could either read the text online or download them as PDF files, and he worked really hard on it.

It was fun being involved with him, and he did it all for free and his wife was my assistant, and so—well, they weren't married at the time but I think more or less. They're still together. And the site's—I've worked on it since then because I learned html and it kind of went—it was based on coding that kind of no longer functioned so I've kept it updated because I've learned. Now I know not as much as he did but I know enough to do that.

So, anyway, what happened was I not only had a show of objects that I thought were interesting and had handouts for people to take, it then served an educational function for people all over the world, or high school teachers who might want to teach their students about dinosaur tracks and so forth, and it wound up being linked to a number of websites that were all paleontological, had nothing to do with art.

To this day, people can download these stories about dinosaur tracks and coalmines, and there's some references to art in this as well but it's mostly about dinosaur tracks.

So that became a model for me. Okay, now, the idea of something of an art project also serving another function that had nothing to do with art, like in this case educational. And, okay, but the surprise to me was I couldn't find anybody in Utah that wanted to show this project, so it was a little bit like the Pompeii dilemma.

I mean, of course—and I proposed a show in the Salt Lake City Art Center and they were really nice and they thought about it and they costed it out and then they didn't want to do it. Shipping things like this is very expensive. They are big, concrete things, or HYDROCAL objects that are very heavy, and so it's not cheap to do a show of these works, or of any of my works, really.

Anyway, that disappointed me, and I didn't find a huge amount of follow-up interest coming from the CEU museum. Once they made the molds, their interest was kind of—waned, I think. I didn't feel that I had done enough to intrigue them. I didn't feel like I had given enough back.

I didn't feel rewarded enough either in the other way around because I did all of this huge project—the works were shown—where were they shown? They were shown at the Centre Pompidou, they were shown at the Xavier Hufkens Gallery in Brussels, they were shown Sprengel Museum in Hannover, Germany, and they were shown at Petzel Gallery in New York and the John Weber Gallery in New York.

So I basically took the tracks and stories about them and promoted them all over the world, but in all frankness, this doesn't help them at all. This doesn't give them—this, I doubt, got them one more member, one more donation—nothing. It gives them nothing. Maybe it's sort of fun for them to—maybe they use some of this data when they're looking for local patrons, I don't know, but it really doesn't help them.

You know, it helps me more than helps them. So I'm learning this as I'm going along. Okay, this is just more tourism on my part, in their mind probably. So now—so—

AVIS BERMAN: I guess maybe we would be—but you were still very interested in doing it. There was something you did called, for example, *The Event: Petrified Lightning [from Central Florida. – AM]*

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yes, okay, so my interest drifted—what I learned from those previous projects that were vaguely committed—oriented in my mind but didn't seem to really involve the community enough to really stimulate or trigger—I didn't know that they were getting as much out of it as they might have, and I was actually kind of hurt that I didn't feel that much interest coming from them after the fact, which is silly but I felt that.

I wasn't quite sure who my audience was at the time, and I'm still not. And so, right around—after that project—and then I went through a huge amount of—I don't know how much I've talked about my legal problems with John Weber Gallery—

AVIS BERMAN: No, you just only mentioned it—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Today?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, a few seconds ago when you said that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay. Well, John Weber, for all of his virtues, had no sense of money, as far as I could tell. He was kind of like this spoiled rich kid that really had never really—and loved art and contributed a lot as a dealer and a gallerist but he didn't keep track of his money very well.

His wife, at the time, he'd dumped all of the financial burdens on her to take care of, and frankly she was incompetent. I don't know how far I'm supposed to go in an interview in saying mean things about people but, I mean, in this case—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, if he's dead, you can't libel the dead.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I can't what?

AVIS BERMAN: You can't libel the dead.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That's true. Well, she's alive. But they sold something—over 40 artworks of mine and then spent the money on other things and didn't give it to me, and I only slowly realized this. It happened from late '89, through '92 to where I kept thinking money was coming in.

That's why I was doing these projects and taking money because I thought there was more money coming in. I made the down payment on a studio and so forth that I worked out of to do these large projects, and slowly realized they weren't sending me the money.

Finally, I confronted them about it and they weren't completely honest, and little by little they finally admitted, "Well, actually we were paid for all these works but we had to spend it on other artists." And of course what they didn't talk about was how they'd bought a condominium in Tortola and redone their house and bought a new gallery in Spain and all this.

AVIS BERMAN: Of course, yes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Then when the market crashed, they hadn't put any money aside to pay their artists. I wasn't the only one affected by this but oddly I was the most affected by it because the other artists in the gallery were mostly older and they weren't going through a career boom at that moment. So they wound up owing me about \$480,000, which I was so happy thinking, this is my retirement fund.

I got them to sign a debtor's promise and I got them to sign a contract that they owed me the money and they would pay me so much per month over time, and we agreed on an interest—that they would pay me interest, but they just didn't pay me even after that. So then I had to sue them and take them to court.

It didn't get resolved until 10 years later, and then when it was finally resolved and agreed upon—I compromised and gave up some of the money they owed me, he still didn't pay me. So then it wound up a judgment against him in superior court and he still didn't pay me; he just went bankrupt. So I wound up with some artworks that he had given me as a collateral to hold, which I didn't own, but I held them on my property because—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, but you would have had title after this, I would think.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You would think, but what happened was—I did. Legally I had title because I had had them in my possession for nine years, but when you go bankrupt, what happens is the government hires an attorney to try to extract as much money as possible, and the woman—their attorney, the bankruptcy attorney, did everything she could to try to get that work back from me.

We had to go to court and the judge kept saying, you can't take this from him. He's had it for nine years or whatever. Then she would try it again and she would try other avenues. Finally my attorney said, "You have to pay her some nuisance fee and she'll shut up but she's not going to let you resell

it until to you do something."

So I wound up paying her \$8,000 but I had already spent \$90,000 in legal fees over the 10 years. And Weber was not honest. For instance, I had three Daniel Buren paintings that were worth nothing unless you got these authentication documents. He wouldn't give them to me. He told the government that they could use that against me to try to get the works back because—and then Daniel was just furious and he made new authentication documents for me.

Sol LeWitt left the gallery when he heard what they were doing to me. He stopped working with them at all because they had actually given a work to him that they had promised to me as collateral to pay the money they owed him, and when he found this out, he couldn't believe it, because he had already donated it to a museum. They were not honest, to be frank.

And so why am I talking about all this?

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, because obviously it had a huge impact on your life.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, it had a huge impact on my life. I lost my studio. I wound up owing \$100,000 on my credit card that I'd used to pay for the dinosaur trip project and all that, and so I had to sell the studio—resell it and get the money back, and I was able to make a down payment on a little storage building out in Brooklyn. I put everything there, which stayed there for about 10 years before I even—I couldn't even look at it, I was so upset and it just stayed in this little building.

So I think that contributed to my interest in doing projects that didn't involve art sales, that didn't involve galleries, that didn't seem to require—that didn't have the dream of selling.

AVIS BERMAN: Or the dealer involved, yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, or having a dealer involved. At the time, Friedrich Petzel started working with me, but he was more interested in me historically than he was in doing new things at the time. Now he is much more—he's doing better and he's more supportive of new projects, but at the time he didn't want to interfere with my problems with Weber but I left Weber and I did a couple of shows with Friedrich, and I still work with Friedrich.

But I spent I guess the period from 1995 to around 2005, maybe 10 years, doing almost nothing but these little community projects, which a number of them I got funding for. Up until then I had never thought about getting funding from communities or any other purpose but sales because I'm not an—I didn't go to college so the idea of getting grants just never even entered my head. I wasn't used to other people paying for—unless they were making a profit, like a gallery might.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But anyway, so here I was; it was about 1996 at this point—'97 or '96, I don't know. I guess it was '96. I had become more interested in the Worldwide Web and I was on vacation—I took a vacation to Florida because I like Florida—I guess this was '96. What had happened? Let me see. Let me tell this whole story.

In 1996—no, I guess it was '95—I did a show of *Perpetual Photographs* in Berlin with Thomas Schulte Galerie. Oh, no, no, wait a minute; this was before that. Okay, yeah, this must have been '95 or early '96. I was in Florida. I was driving around Florida. There was this small town I liked to visit in Florida called Cassadaga. It is a winter retreat for the spiritualists who live in Lily Dale, New York.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I know all about Lily Dale.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You do?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What do you know about it?

AVIS BERMAN: I've been there.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Get out; I've never been there.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, you've got to go. There are readers all over the place.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, it started in Lake Cassadaga and then they founded their own town, Lily Dale. And then—

AVIS BERMAN: That's in the "Burned-Over" region.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That I don't know about.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well—they were so hot that that's called the "Burned-Over" region because of the flames of the religious movements.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, not geographically burned over but spiritually.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, yeah, I mean, north—I have always been interested in clairvoyance and I've visited clairvoyants many times in my life, even when I lived in Los Angeles. It was when I had friends who were clairvoyants and who had grown up—I have two good friends whose parents were—whose mothers made their living as clairvoyants. So I've always thought this was a really interesting—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah, you go up to Lily Dale and you stay in a little bed and breakfast and you go around having your—read.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'm sure. I mean, so I knew about—so they started a winter retreat in Cassadaga, founded a little village of Cassadaga, which they named after the lake that's up by Lily Dale. So I visited Cassadaga, Florida four or five times, and sometimes I'll go there when—as I say, I take a month off and I'll go to Florida and stay in some little motel somewhere, and then I'll say, oh, this Sunday I'm going to go to Cassadaga and go to the spiritualist church meeting where—

They have these meetings where somebody will do a sermon but then afterwards a local medium will get up and deliver messages to members of the congregation, including strangers. Like once they gave me a message because they don't even know me; I was just sitting there in the audience. Then they do healing afterwards, laying on of hands and things like that.

So I love the history of spiritualism. It's connected with the history of feminism, as I'm sure you know, and the history of—even the Mormons started in Upstate New York.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I think something like either Geneva or Canandaigua, one or the other. Joseph Smith was either from—from the Finger Lakes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, but they moved to, I think, Illinois after that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Then they got kicked out of Illinois and then they went to Utah and started their own state. So, yeah, and then there's the Rap sisters, and there's a long history of interest in spirituality and clairvoyance especially in New York. It's not only the spiritualist movement but it's also, yeah, the Mormons and others.

So that has been, in the back of my mind, an interest, so I connected that with Cassadaga, Florida. If you go to Cassadaga, which is a very small village—I don't know how many people live there; probably 200, if that—and the houses generally were owned by people that lived in Lily Dale but they spent their summers down there—or their winters down there, I think. I mean, I don't know. Maybe they live there permanently now.

But they have a hotel and they have a bookstore where—there's a whole wall of cards of the local mediums that you can go talk to who will talk with your dead mother or whatever. They'll give you—do we sign that contract or not, or you can ask for advice and help. I'm assuming it's the same in Lily Dale, although I'm sure Lily Dale is much bigger than this little tiny Cassadaga place.

Anyway, I was off to visit Cassadaga, and I'm driving around in this kind of—what do you call it when you're open to things and you're driving around in Florida? I was driving through De Land, Florida on the way, which is very close to Cassadaga, and there's—Stetson University is there, which is one of the oldest universities in the country.

I passed this place called—I wrote it down—I passed this little museum called the Gillespie Museum of Minerals, and they had a sign out in front that said, over 20,000 objects or "Over 20,000 Mineral Specimens." So of course I had to stop.

I went in there and there was this one beautiful object that I happened to find myself interested in that was called a sand spike. It was like a ball with a pointing finger coming out of it—a ball with a point out of one end. The label said it was a sand spike and that they were created by lightning that hits the ground and turns it into glass, and then you can dig them up.

I took some pictures of it and it looked, again, much like a Giacometti or a Duchamp, especially the long, penile sort of—or the pointing finger look to it, and it looked like something that was made with—especially because it had a point. It looked like it had intention, and it looked like something made by a person but it was made by nature.

I thought, this is really a beautiful thing, and I started thinking about these objects. So when I got back to New York, I joined the *Rocks and Fossil* listserv, and I asked if anybody knew what a sand spike was or knew more about them, and all these geologists responded. Rock collectors basically responded.

I found out right away that sand spikes had nothing to do with lightning. This was a completely wrong label. [They laugh.] There are objects created by lightning but they're called Fulgurites and they are the same as it said; the lightning hits the ground and continues under the ground, which you don't realize, creates a path—a crooked path that copies the path of the lightning, and then the lightning will diffuse when it hits groundwater or a pipe or whatever. And then it stops when it's grounded, but in the meantime, the path to that area is defined by, often, a path of glass, which is very, very fragile and then over the years it falls apart and nobody—but if you know where the

lightning strikes and you dig them up, you can find these shapes, which are very fragile and you have to paint them with lacquer or something to make them stay whole, but people do collect them.

So, anyway, I found that out and they're called fulgurites. There are people who collect fulgurites. There are also people who collect things that are called sand spikes but the sand spikes are sand concretions which are formed by the action of groundwater in the desert by this particular mountain called Mt. Signal or El Centinela, which is near Mexicali.

It's right on the border. It's like 99 percent in Mexico, 1 percent in California—99 percent in Baja, California. So, the mountain has—it's called El Centinela—El Cerro de Centinela in Mexico; it's called Mt. Signal in California.

But anyway, so I learned all that and I learned that the mountain itself had a local significance. It was in all of the—it was in the county symbol. There was a restaurant called Mt. Signal Restaurant. It's this very small town called—a little area called Imperial Valley, and there's Brawley, El Centro, Calexico, Holtville.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's all the area where the earthquake just struck.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly—exactly where it just struck. There was another earthquake there I think in the '50s that was equally destructive. Occasionally they have these earthquakes. Yes, exactly.

It's also the area where the farm—what we talked about earlier. What is it, the farm administration sent people out to photograph—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, the FSA, the Farm Security Administration.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, they did a whole photographic essay of that area—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: —which included pictures of the mountain sometimes, this same mountain.

Okay, so I wrote a couple of notes to people out there trying to find out more. I wrote a note to [Sheila Dollente –AM] a woman who taught one art class in the Calexico—San Diego State University has a little tiny community college in Calexico and there was a little art gallery there, and this woman ran it. I wrote her and bought some of their—she was interested in a Fluxus so she had helped publish some books on Fluxus, so she—

I contacted her, and I had contacted another woman [Anastasia Vellas –AM] who wrote poetry who lived in the area and she had written a poem about the mountain, or something; I can't remember that. Anyway, I had made some minor contacts with e-mail and I had found an article about fulgurites in *Discover Magazine* about this well-known lightning expert in Florida who ran this place—who did lightning research near Gainesville, and he was chairman of an electrical engineering department but he was one of the world's experts on lightning.

His name is Martin Uman and I had read about him because he collected fulgurites and studied them a little bit, because not many people study fulgurites. They're like the dinosaur tracks. It's like you don't learn much about lightning from looking at a fulgurite. You don't learn much about atmospheric science but you do collect them.

He also collected, I found out later, telephones that had been hit by lightning and somebody had died when they were on the phone. And he collects objects that related to lightning. He's also an artist and did paintings that involved the sky. He was an atmospheric scientist.

Anyway, so I never met him, of course, at that point but I had both of these things in my mind because they were related because all due to an inaccurate label at the Gillespie Museum of Minerals, and they were both objects made by nature that had a certain feeling of looking like they had been produced possibly by humans. They were "made." In the widest sense, you can call them fossils because they are traces of things that happened and copies that result from geological events.

So, okay, so it's 1995 and I go to Berlin because I'm having a show at the Thomas Schulte Galerie of my *Perpetual Photos* and I wind up at a dinner event afterwards and I'm sitting next to Andrea Zittel. Andrea is just a young artist at the time. Well, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: —I don't want to say she's old now but she's—

AVIS BERMAN: She was younger then.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Younger then, and I got to talking with her and found her to be an extremely interesting artist, just from conversation, and she told me she was from San Diego [County –AM]. I said to her, "Oh, you know, I wonder if by any chance you've ever been to the Imperial Valley"—because it's the next country over towards Arizona—I said, "because I'm interested in this mountain called Mt. Signal and these objects they find around the base of the mountain which are called sand spikes."

So she looked at me like she couldn't believe I'd said that and she said, "My grandmother and my whole mother's family helped found Imperial County at the turn of the century." She said, "My mother is like a fourth-generation from Imperial Valley. They live in Holtville and my grandmother is an artist and has painted many paintings of Mt. Signal." [They laugh.]

She said, "You know, it's like a local icon." I said, "Yeah, yeah, I know." And I said, "I can't believe that," I said, "because one of my plans is to try to organize a show of paintings of Mt. Signal that—to go out there," because I'd never been there, "and organize a show, and I've already been in touch with a few people out there, and organize a show of local artists who painted Mt. Signal as part of a larger project."

So that's when she said, "Oh, my god, you know, my grandmother"—who I think at that point had passed away but Andrea had a painting by her grandmother of Mt. Signal. So anyway—I can't remember if her grandmother had died at that point or not. I think she had.

So, I got all excited because I'd met this interesting young artist who I thought was really attractive and interesting. So she's living in Berlin but she came back periodically to her studio in New York. We dated for a while, and one of the things that we did was go out to Imperial Valley, and she showed me the little farm where her mother had grown up and her uncle still owned the property.

Then she showed me another little—and then I showed her the local museums because she had never been to the Pioneers Museum—because I had learned about the local museum. We found a picture of her aunt in high school in the local museum—they have some displays of the high school's kids.



We went to Ocotillo and looked at the site where they are building another museum. Anyway, we sort of learned—I taught her things I knew; she taught me things she knew. We took pictures of Mt. Signal and went out and found some—not sand spikes but other sand concretions around the base of the mountain and I became very interested in that.

Okay, it's interesting how, as I'm speaking, I hadn't quite put this together in my head how she played a role in both projects, Andrea, because she brought—one day she brought over a friend of hers named Jade Dellinger. Jade was a young curator at the time—still is, an independent curator—who had graduated recently from NYU in arts administration, and he lived in New York. He was roommate with Keith Edmier and they had both known each other—they're about the same age.

So she brought Jade over because she thought we would like each other, which we did. So, okay, then I went to Florida again, so this must have been '96. At that point, Andrea and I were not dating anymore but we were still friends. So I was in Florida in Siesta Key, which is [50 miles away from –AM] Tampa, but Jade had moved to Tampa, I think, at this point—moved back [to the west coast of Florida –AM] because that's where he's from—and he was talking to the director of the University of South Florida museum of contemporary art—Contemporary Art Museum, whose name was Margaret Miller.

I had met Margaret years before because she had done a project with Matt Mullican, who was a friend, and I had met her at a party for Matt. So, as it turns out, Margaret had been contacted by the Museum of Science and Industry—the Hillsborough County Museum of Science and Industry, MOSI—because they had built a new building and there was a percent for art requirement, and the director was not into contemporary art so much.

His name was Wit Ostrenko. Wit had approached Margaret and said, "Can you think of a contemporary artist that would be interested in doing a project that's connected with the building—with science?" So she had mentioned it to Jade Dellinger. Jade had looked me up in Siesta Key, came down to visit me and told me about all this while we were swimming in the Gulf, I remember. We were out there in the water and he's saying, "There's this project that might happen that you might be interested in."

Okay, so this is like a big coincidence, and I said, "Oh, my god." I said, "There's this fulgurite thing. There's a guy, Martin Uman, in Gainesville who's an expert on fulgurites and runs a research station where they trigger lightning with rockets—little rockets they send up into the clouds. When there is a lightning event about to happen, they measure it and they know it from measuring the electricity on the ground, which is the opposite of the electricity in the clouds. They realize when a lightning might happen and they send up a rocket and the lightning hits the rocket and then comes down a wire, goes to where they want it instead of randomly hitting something."

So I said, "You know, I've heard of this guy so maybe we could make a fulgurite—create our own fulgurite or do something to do with fulgurites," because Florida is the lightning capital of [North America –AM], which they make a big deal out of, the Tampa Bay Lightning, which is the hockey team, and that it could be almost like—there would be a community interest in this maybe.

Somehow he and Margaret got me to make a presentation to MOSI, and in the end they approved. So at the same time, Margaret decided she wanted to do a show at the museum that coincides with it. So the MOSI project involved helping finance a show at the museum, helping finance us to produce a fulgurite, a display in the museum itself of the whole project and some fulgurites for their collection and stuff like that. So it didn't become like a public sculpture outdoors; it became a project that wound up being an exhibition and a few things in their collection.

So they both coincided in a way, these two projects. I worked on them—I think the project in Imperial Valley wound up happening after but my development of it began at the same time. The project in Imperial Valley was finally produced in, I think, the year 2000 and 2001. There were four shows involved with that, all in Southern California.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, 2001, yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, well, it started in 2000—

AVIS BERMAN: Right, but it was organized in 2000, yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes. Well, it was also—part of it was shown in 2000, I believe. Anyway, I don't know which to talk about first because they were happening at the same time. I guess I'll talk about the fulgurite project first because that was shown first.

So, I got the approval to do the fulgurite project, so I said to Jade, then Margaret—I'm going to call her Margie because that's what I call her because we're friends now. So Margie organized it in such a way that Jade, who is an independent curator, would be the coordinator of the project. He didn't work at the museum but he is independent, so he coordinated this particular project. He got all involved with it for that short period.

And they contacted—I was too shy to call up Martin Uman because he's like this famous lightning expert and I'd seen him on TV. So Margaret and Jade contacted him and asked if he was interested in helping us with this. He said yes and they negotiated on and on about the money.

But, anyway, I went out and visited—Jade and I drove out to—it was quite a ways. It was in Starke, Florida. Oh, no, it was in Gainesville, which is a hundred miles or so from Tampa. But the lightning research field, where he managed—I don't know if he literally manages it but he's in charge—the International Center for Lightning Research and Testing is in Camp Blanding, Florida, which is on the outskirts of Starke, Florida.

Camp Blanding is a military base but they rent part of their base out to the lightning research center and for other things—for mining and different things because they're nowhere near as big as they were during World War II.

And so, it's like a square mile of land that they rent in Camp Blanding near Starke, and that's all they do. They have a number of different little setups to send rockets up. The rockets are like three feet high, if that, and the little, tiny, skinny little rockets, almost like toys.

Then the wire they attach to the rockets is copper covered with Kevlar so they don't break but they unfurl as they send the rocket up. So it can go thousands of feet up and unfurl the wire as it goes up.

So, anyway, this lightning center, they do two things. They contract out with corporations that want to test if their products can survive being hit by lightning. Sometimes government projects, like for NASA, will want to find out if something that they're using on a rocket—if it's hit by lightning, sometimes airplanes. They want to put things on the outside of the airplane but they want to know how they would respond to being hit by a 50,000-degree lightning bolt.

Or people who do underground pipes want to know what happens—or people who do, electrical—companies who make electrical boxes that go on telephone poles; what if lightning hits it? So they want to test.

So, 50 percent of what they do involves private or government testing for objects. The other 50 percent is pure academic research. People who are interested in atmospheric science from all over the world will come—from Asia, Europe, the Americas—will come to this center and have testing funded.

They will often do measurements on the same lightning bolt that a corporation has triggered to test something but they'll measure how it affects the atmosphere as it passes, or something like that. So there is all this going on at once, so at any one moment there is like 12 people or 12 institutions or various groups that want to study lightning and it's basically for six weeks out of the summer because that's the rainy period when they expect lightning, and you can't predict when there is going to be a cloud overhead.

So, anyway, they agreed on some amount of money. I think it was like \$10,000. I think Martin expected like three times that but then when he realized, oh, well, okay, we'll do it for less, then—because he just was interested in it personally. He loved fulgurites.

He had a friend named Dan Cordier. Dan was a geologist paleontologist who had—a very artistic guy, really a cool guy, who worked off and on doing geological research for people who did mining and stuff like that, but he also collected fulgurites and he also had worked on digs, paleontological digs, and he had a lot of expertise in a lot of—and he was kind of an artist himself, as was Martin.

So, I think they gave—I don't know what they—finances I don't fully understand but I think Daniel was paid something and he helped organize all of the experiments that we did to try to create a fulgurite, because they had never used—they had never set up a rocket to create a fulgurite. This was not anything—so I worked with Dan.

But anyway, we went out there, Jade and I, and set up—we went out there a few times. First we went to Gainesville to meet Martin. Then we met Dan and then we, at one point—I think we visited Starke a few times, but at one point we stayed out there six weeks in a motel waiting for the lightning bolt to happen because—and then it would come and then it would be—the manager would say, "No, no, this has to go to this Japanese scientist. He's the one that gets this lightning bolt. You have to wait."

So we set up a number of experiments, Dan and I and Jade, and one of them, we used PVC piping, which for some reason Dan Cordier loved PVC piping. He used to make furniture out of PVC piping. He was a very creative guy. We figured out—and I don't want to say it was all Dan's doing because I did a lot of the thought too.

We made a long PVC pipe that was like 40 feet high. It had never occurred to either of them to create something above ground to create a fulgurite. They always would dig them up. So I said, "No, let's make a pipe and fill it with sand." So they went, "Yeah," but then—okay, there is a local—DuPont Mining did a whole lot of sand mining nearby.

Now, the thing about sand, which I didn't know—local sand—what people do is they refine sand. They dig up like a bunch of sand and then they'll put it through these refinery tools that work on gravity or magnetism or whatever, or water or whatever, and they separate out all the different kinds of sands like maybe sands that have more metal in them, maybe sands that have more silica in them, sands that have—I can't remember the name of the sand we finally chose but there's a lot of different kinds of sand.

They would dig up the local sand and produce maybe six products that DuPont then sells for

different reasons. So we wanted to test all the different kinds of sand so we would make a big, long pipe about eight inches in diameter but 15, 20 feet high, and then we filled it with different layers of different kinds of sand and then we would direct lightning through a rocket, through that to see how the lightning affected the different kinds of sand. Then we would check which one we liked best and so forth.

Let me back up a little bit. Because of my experience in Utah, where I had felt I wished there were more local interests, with this project I designed it from the beginning to be open to what would other people get out of this? Which is why I—and this was more in my head when I went to this.

As much as I could, I tried to involve the interests of local people like Dan, like Martin, but others, like the guy who worked at DuPont Mining. In the end, for instance, Margaret was able to get the Tampa Bay Lightning to donate money for the announcement card, for instance.

We got a guy who worked at the Natural History Museum in Gainesville—instead of me making the mold, we had him make the mold so that his interests were involved. He made the mold of the fulgurite we finally produced that I liked best, which was made in a trash bucket filled with sand as opposed to the pipe.

We found a—you know how they make souvenirs out of sand in Florida where you can get a starfish or something like that—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: —made of epoxy and sand? We found a little factory—a little company that made these sand objects near Orlando and we worked with them to make molds of the fulgurite that we created and produced 10,000 of them, which I felt was to their interest because they were having a lot of competition at that point. The souvenir makers in the U.S. are having lots of competition with China, even with Canada— it's not the greatest moment for souvenir makers. Most souvenirs you buy are made elsewhere now.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, they're all from China.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: No matter what it says, they're from China.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I assume they make sand things too. At the time, their biggest competitor was Canadian, but they would—Canadians would make Florida souvenirs. So these fellows, they were having—so they needed money. You know, they liked the job. So I had their interests [in mind. –AM]

—  
I was working around, trying to say, okay, who can I—then there was a local journalist in Tampa. They typically would produce, once every few months, a supplement that went in the Tampa Bay newspaper. I think it was the Tampa newspaper [*Tampa Tribune*]. They would make supplements that would go out to school children to help them make decisions on what to do like when they went to college or whatever—different reasons.

But they decided—because I had this long discussion with a journalist and she came up with the idea that we would interview the fellow who—the geologist—and we would interview Martin Uman, the lightning expert. We would interview the photographer who took the pictures that went along with the project, because we did a 500-frames-per-second film of the actual lightning bolt that

created the fulgurite.

They would interview the paleontologist mold-maker in Gainesville. They would interview the fellow who made all the molds for the mass production of the objects, whose name was Dennis Dunn—D-U-N-N—and the company was called Sand Creations. [They laugh.]

We also got DuPont Mining to donate the sand of the particular type we chose to the project, which was shipped over to Orlando so that Sand Creations would use actual sand from the actual site because I was thinking a lot about site works at the time, that this was a site work that wasn't about simply the sand or the dirt or the area, but it was about the interests of the community.

Okay, so one of my—I talked about the master narrative that I thought of along with the natural copies. With this project, I realized there was another parallel narrative that was about an object being created that wound up in a museum, but this was about what came from above, not below. It was like inspiration—about inspiration from above, in a sense. It paralleled that concept as opposed to going deep into your unconscious.

So they interviewed all of those people and put the interviews in this little newspaper. They printed 100,000 of them and they went to every high school student in the whole Hillsborough County, interviews like, "Well, what if you want to be a curator?" "What if you want to be a museum director?" "What if you would like to be a mold-maker?" "What if you would like to be a geologist?" So, it was it all these little interviews that like—and it was basically about the fulgurite project, but all of the different interests that went into it.

One of my analogies in my head was a lightning bolt is seen from people from miles around and they're all different and they all give it different meanings. But the event—and another interest in why I called the project *The Event*—was that the event happened in a fraction of a second but all that was left was residue.

Okay, the other part of the project—I talked about the reprints with the natural copies. The second part of this project, which was parallel to the 10,000 fulgurites, was to produce, again, an educational complement, which were called—I forget what I called that half of the project that—the supplements.

I spent all my—a huge amount of months finding articles on fulgurites, texts on fulgurites, again went to the Natural History Museum library, looked things up on the Internet, got books on lightning.

Martin helped because he had written a few books on lightning, and I took some of his chapters and we made basically 66 booklets, which were then produced, a quantity of each, at a local printer and made 13,000 copies. So there was room filled with the fulgurites, another room filled with 13,000 booklets.

Then there was a reading room that you go in and read the booklets, but the books also—following up on Ron's stadium thing, I decided that all these would be online also. So you can download the booklets on the history of fulgurites and study of fulgurites, and some of them are even in foreign languages. Even Darwin wrote a section on fulgurites. He had discovered them in one of his trips.

There were 13,000—so I balanced—I tried to balance the room full of 10,000 fulgurites with a room full of 13,000 booklets so they would be equally interesting or not. [They laugh.] The fulgurite booklets were all different colors so that that would have a color, and the objects, the fulgurites were all very bland and almost looked like something you would find in a cat box. They were the

most banal-looking things but there were so many of them.

The analogy for me was sort of about memory because when an event happens in the present it disappears instantly and all you have is residues, memories, stories, theories, you know, ideas. You don't have the event. The events are not savable; you only have residues or commentary. It's the same with art, you know.

When you put the value on the artist's touch, he's gone, or she's gone. That happened long time ago, if only yesterday. What you have is a residue. So how you put meaning into residues was interesting to me, and what I was trying—I was interested to focus on, on that.

Okay, and one interesting thing to me was Dan Cordier had, because of his interest in fulgurites—he and Martin had once unearthed the largest fulgurite than anyone had ever unearthed in the history because people don't go for unearthing fulgurites. It takes so long to make them hard, to put the lacquer on them, to preserve them, but Dan likes doing this stuff so they had found the largest single fulgurite or something like that, that was in the *Guinness Book of World Records*, as I had read before I even met them.

Dan had done some models of the earth and what it looks like if you were to dig a side view of how the fulgurite—almost like what you would see in a natural history museum. He had done a few of these models and they were in his garage but he never knew what to do with them and so what we got to do was he got to take the models from his garage and put them in the show at MOSI and develop a kind of an interest in what he did.

Martin also collected photographs of lightning strikes, and so we were put in the reading room at the museum—at the arts museum, in the reading room, we had photographs all on the wall that he went to special trouble to frame them. I didn't even ask him. Somebody just showed up with these—I can't remember who it was. I don't think it was Martin himself but he sent them by a car. Somebody just showed up: "Do you want to use all these photographs," because they were his collection of photographs.

So those ended up getting shown. There was a sense in which it was like out of my hands. The Museum of Science and Industry put together a theatrical show for children of my whole project—somebody playing me, somebody playing Jade, somebody playing Martin, which, you know, Gainesville is a hundred miles away. They did a whole thing about explaining to kids how this project happened, with sound effects and all that.

Then they had a display that was up for a couple of years of the whole project. I didn't design the display but we helped provide them with some materials, visuals and stuff, but it was out of my hands. I came up with the idea and got involved in the production and all of this and helped direct it all, but a lot of it happened by itself.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it also seems, though, that it is the most extraordinary reach out to the public of any piece that you have mentioned so far.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. Well, by far, yeah. Yeah, the newspaper thing especially with 100,000 [copies for –AM] all the high school kids. To this day you can download all those booklets one at a time.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, and really moving out of the studio and—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Totally.

AVIS BERMAN: —in so many different ways.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, were you—on some level were you formulating a definition of public art, or a new definition for you art that would be public from this experience?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't know if I thought like that exactly. I think what was more interesting to me was the idea of site work and how I could expand that idea. In terms of public art, no, I don't think I had gotten to thinking about the so-called statue you see in the park type of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, maybe redefining it. I think that's the older model of the statue in the park—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —how artists such as yourself or other artists of your generation, how you could approach that and not—make public art but not have it be something plopped on the plaza.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I don't think that—because I hadn't come from an interest in public art originally, I don't think I was thinking of it in those exact terms, although you could easily describe it in those terms. I think my interest in that became much more expressed in the Mt. Signal project because that did wind up with some permanent things that wound up outdoors and it did involve more public participation, much more than the fulgurite project.

But clearly it was in my head. I don't know if the word "public art" was something—I think I was naïve about what public art was. I think that it led me to thinking about public art, but I think that the time I wasn't thinking in that phrase exactly.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, you are more thinking about site-specific art or enhancing the site or exploring the site?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I guess so. I guess that was where I started but I was also interested in culture and meaning, and that there was no such thing as a neutral site, that sites develop meaning in terms of our culture speaking. I suppose I was thinking about that.

AVIS BERMAN: Or maybe—did you feel that meaning had been taken out of a place and you were helping to restore it?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't think I felt like that. I think maybe more I would have been thinking about the arrogance of the art world in thinking that it had some kind of, what do you call that, corner on meaning, you know? [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: When I said what I said earlier about, say, the way people value geological objects or the way people value souvenirs, for instance, I think I became more interested in the concept of a souvenir, for instance. I was working with a souvenir company to make those sand objects, and the parallels between souvenirs and art collectibles became significant to me.

It's important to point out that just because your souvenir cost you \$10,000 and somebody else's cost them \$3, it's still the same damn thing or very similar. I don't know if that's called public yet.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I'm not sure—but it's certainly involving—in other words, it looks like that you have become more and more purposeful in involving the community, which certainly—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, definitely.

AVIS BERMAN: —certainly seems to be an aspect—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That's definitely—

AVIS BERMAN: —of a public—of making a work.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, but the—

AVIS BERMAN: Pretty active.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What?

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, just the activity of the participants in the community.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, but that, oddly—as you say that I'm thinking one thing that I thought back then. It wasn't to the total public. I would tend to focus on those who were interested in lightning or, in Imperial Valley, those who were interested in rock collecting.

Not everybody in Imperial Valley knew what a sand spike was. The rock collectors all knew what a sand spike was. So while I was interested in community, I was also interested in specifics. I wasn't trying to please everybody, which is a little bit different.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I don't know if that's possible anyway.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, of course, especially for a contemporary artist but it's an issue. You know, you want to please as many people as possible, but I also—to come into a town from out of town and think, and be arrogant to think, you can do that is one thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: To come into town with an interest in something very specific to that community that even maybe they don't all know about is another thing. I don't know at what point the term "public art"—it's an interesting term, "public."

AVIS BERMAN: Well, exactly.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: And everyone has different ideas about it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, on *The Event*, the Tampa piece—do you think it was effective or successful, and why?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I think, for me, yes, very successful. Financially? Zero. I mean, nobody ever bought any. I did wind up bringing the show to New York. The interesting thing to me about that—because I brought it to New York I forget when, a couple of years later where I showed it at the



Petzel Gallery. I don't know when that was; 2000, something like that. I had to come up with a different press release than I had used when I was in Florida. [They laugh.]

That was when I got more into what I talked about—memory, the philosophy of the moment—whereas in Florida I had tended to talk about it in terms of the identity of the lightning capital of the world, or science, science and art, working with scientists and so forth.

That was interesting to me that—of course I had had two more years to think about it and I had become more and more interested in different ways of discussing it. But back in Florida I was more concerned with, like you say, what the general community would think. But, of course, the general community doesn't go to contemporary art museums [very often, if at all –AM]. They don't even all go to science museums.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think when—in other words, I think what an audience is, it's never everybody in the community anyway—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, right.

AVIS BERMAN: —but beyond—I think you got beyond the art world audience, if there was such a thing there. So—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, it's almost—of course that's an impossible dream, which in itself is interesting and which people who are interested in community art, like the Miwon Kwon text on, well, what do you mean by "community," you know? I'm sure that many people have thought that about what I'm doing.

I've had that issue come up more recently when I have actually done so-called public projects that are funded by the city and stuff like that. You have to be expected that people are going to complain that that has nothing to do with me or my history or—and it's our public tax money and so forth.

AVIS BERMAN: Is there anything you would change about the Tampa piece, looking back?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, if I did it now—I don't think so. I mean, I love—I don't know. I might have thought of ways to make money. [They laugh.] I which I wasn't thinking about then. I might have wanted to make something I could sell but the—I don't think so.

I'm very happy with the website where you can download the—one of my favorite memories is there was a student who had done her term paper, her thesis paper on fulgurites but she was long gone, and they had a Xerox of a Xerox of a Xerox of it. We made a booklet out of her paper, but I found her. She was in Knoxville, Tennessee teaching at a community college or something like that.

I found her online and wrote her e-mails and she was really happy that I was doing this. This was like—had been 15 years before. So I got personal pleasure out of pleasing different people in different ways. I don't think I could have done anything differently. I think Margaret came up with so many ways to fund it. I learned a huge amount from working with Margaret Miller because she's the director of the museum. She's exactly my age and we're both from California. We had a lot in common.

I had never thought about fundraising as a concept, but I watched her do all these different things like making the newspaper thing happen, talking to the Tampa Bay Lightning, seeking out who might have specific interests and offering them did they want to help and here's what you would

get out of the—we put your name on the announcement card if you help finance the printing and all that kind of thing. I hadn't thought about that stuff. It's the thing museum directors think about all the time. That had never occurred to me. It became much more interesting to me watching her do that.

Don Fuller, the fellow who organized the website for us and helped do all the printing and formatting of the texts, he told me not long ago that the fulgurite website has more hits than almost any website that they have, so people all over the—because it is, I am proud to say, the greatest resource for information on fulgurites anywhere, believe me, because I had to look for information on fulgurites and there was no central, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Fulgurite clearinghouse, no.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No. But you had asked me some—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I was also going to ask you if you also felt—if you were happy with the results of the Imperial Valley piece and—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I haven't described that project yet. Do you want me to talk about that first?

AVIS BERMAN: I think that would be a good idea.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Because there was much more than what I have told you already involved in that project, because when I started to do that project, I didn't know where I was going but I had certain ideas that changed as time when by, and I have learned a lot from Margie, and I had learned from that project certain things.

So, I didn't have any funding for that, so I had gone out there—I went out there with Andrea and then I went out there later by myself and decided to just leave myself open to who might be interested or not and what their interests were, and then how that might turn into a project. I came up with a general idea—some general ideas and I wanted to see if anybody else was interested in them. So let me say what I did, if I can think back.

I had contacted the woman [Sheila Dollente –AM] who ran that little gallery in the school in Calexico, and I had come up with the idea of making a large sand spike that would be a roadside attraction as a possible thing that might happen.

I came up with the idea of making a large model of the mountain and I came up with the idea of making a website with poems that local people had written about the mountain and photos that people had taken about the mountain, and ways people had used images of the mountain in their little businesses or in the town government or whatever, and coming up with, as I said before, a show of local people who painted the mountain.

Another train of thought I had was finding local collectors who collected sand spikes—local rock collectors. I had mentioned this to a friend of mine I'd been to high school with who had gone on to—his name is Jerry Tomlinson, and Jerry, as an adult, had started managing a crystal fair in San Francisco. So three or four times a year they have a crystal fair called the San Francisco Crystal Fair, and it's held in a number of different places.

They will have 40 participants that come from around the country—whatever—who sell their clairvoyant crystals or their fossil collections or whatever. Most of it is kind of mystical. And he's a

funny guy and we had been best friends when we were 15. He had contacts, so he found me people who were selling sand spikes.

Over the couple of years there I bought maybe around 90 sand spike concretions from various people around the country. So I had my own collection at this point. I went out there thinking, okay, let's find some other people that collect sand spikes too.

Okay, so I took the plane, got a car, went there and kind of decided I was going to hang out until I met people. I already had met Sheila Dollente, who was the woman who ran that gallery. I had met her on the Internet and I had talked to one of the poets who had a website herself on the history of the community, and her name was Anastasia Vellas. She had been living in Imperial Valley. Anastasia—Stacy we called her. So Stacy had been—her parents had been working on farms in that period of the '40s and she had grown up into a songwriter, an artist, a photographer. She had taught 4th grade her whole life and she retired at this point. But she was an extremely creative person, a really good songwriter, and I liked her quite a lot. She was in her 70s I think. I had contacted her via e-mail but I had never met her.

I went out there but that was basically my two contacts. But I went to the Pioneers Museum, which is run by the Imperial Valley Historical Society, and it's a very interesting museum, which intrigued me. They funded themselves by involving, I don't know, 15 or 20 local ethnic societies like the people with Japanese heritage, the people with Filipino heritage, the Irish heritage. They all have these little clubs.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So they got each of these groups to put up \$20,000, I believe the figure was, and then each of these little groups had their own bay in the museum, and then whatever extra money they could pull together they built the building, and they had a central area that was basically the history of Imperial Valley, but all of these local societies also participated and they had their own area.

Basically the museum itself, at that point, I think they only hired two people and everyone else was a volunteer, and then they hired clean-up people, or something like that and that was it. And then they had this parking lot and, I don't know. Historical museums are so interestingly non-funded in small towns. It's just amazing, the dedication of the people that manage them—way beyond what the art world would consider—

One story I remember was I was talking to Norman at Carnegie and I told him how the art museum was not funding this; I was having to pay for the molds myself. And he said, "You've got to be kidding." He said, "They have tons of money over there across the hall, you know." I said, "Well, apparently not; not for this sort of thing." And he said, "Come on." I said, "What makes you think they have that much money?" He said, "Oh, they build new walls all the time."

Then I said, "You don't do that here?" And he said, "We haven't built a new wall since 1911." [They laugh.] And he wasn't joking. I thought, oh, my god, there is so much financial difference between different kinds of museums, and historical society museums basically have no funding.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, if you go down even here in New York City—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'm sure.

AVIS BERMAN: You know the old Merchant's House, the Seabury Treadwell on, what, West 4th

Street or something? It's an old rich merchant's house from the mid-1800s and it is an absolute shoestring in there.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: It's like everything is worn and—the house is quite magnificent because this was an aristocrat of the early 19th century, but it's—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay. Yeah, I guess so. I mean—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, see, here you have never heard of it and it's—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I've never heard of it.

AVIS BERMAN: —walking distance from your house.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Really?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think it's on West—or East 4th Street.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, in the East Village.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, yes, I have heard of this.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah. It's a typical place where—yeah, okay. Oh, no, maybe I haven't.

AVIS BERMAN: No, because Ms. Treadwell, the last descendant, lived to be 90 into the '30s and '40s so it was pretty much kept as it was.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I'll be darned.

AVIS BERMAN: But now it's pretty threadbare—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But then again, and I'm sure the Historical Society Museum of New York City doesn't have the money that the Met has.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, no, no—no, but they're better off than what I'm talking about—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —the small ones, yeah. No, of course it doesn't.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But say a small—I have met hundreds of small museum people at this point, including one in a town of 27 people and believe me, even though it's the main museum in town—

AVIS BERMAN: Of course.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: It can't be supported, unfortunately, the way it should.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right. Anyway, so I went over to this—I went out there and I found—and I sort of went to the Pioneers Museum and just looked all around and hung out, and it actually turned out they had a sand spike on display but they didn't know what it was. They thought it was a Native American tool. They thought it was a pestle from a mortar and pestle. I couldn't believe it. I'm thinking, they don't even know—because there are so few curators there that they just try to do what they can.

I got to talking with a volunteer who was hanging out in the little gift store they have, or something like that, and I told her my dreams of doing a show about Mr. Signal and the sand spikes. She didn't know what a sand spike was but of course she said, "Oh, well, one of our founders, Virginia Ryerson, who is married to—her husband was involved in the history of creating the irrigation canals and a concrete company—she has painted many paintings of Mt. Signal. She is an artist."

Sure enough, there was her name on one of the—on the donor wall. So I thought, oh, well—I wrote down her name and her phone number, whatever they could find for me. Then I went to the local art association, which was kind of in this little tiny shopping center, the little tiny office building—storefront.

There was one woman in there. I think they were doing classes that day in watercolors or something like that. This was in El Centro, whereas the museum is in the town of Imperial. So this place in El Centro, this little storefront, I went in and I decided—there was a woman there and I started asking her questions. Turns out it was Virginia Ryerson. [Laughs.]

I said, "Oh, I know your name from my"—you know, blah, blah, blah. She and her husband had helped found the Pioneers Museum, and they were both retired. She was from Minnesota but she had moved there years ago, and she was an artist and she had done the windows of the local church, the stained glass windows. She was a painter. She sold her paintings at the gift store in the local museum.

She just got very excited about this project. She knew nothing about sand spikes but she had many friends who were artists because she ran the art association—she happened to be the president that year of the art association—and she was on the board of the Pioneers Museum. We had very little in common—[They laugh]—except we loved the mountain and we liked each other a lot and we had a lot of fun talking and working. She was so helpful.

Then I thought, okay, I've got somebody who's helping, and she was just as interested as I was because she was interested in local history, she was interested in showing her paintings, she was interested in showing her friends' paintings, she was interested in developing an interest in art locally, she had a lot of community interest.

And so that established and then I met with Sheila. We had lunch or something like that and had a meeting, and then she slowly became interested in doing a show. I thought, oh, okay, I could do a show at the Pioneers Museum with Virginia's help—Ginger's help—we called her Ginger—and Sheila, the one also in Calexico, which is a 10-minute drive away. So that happened.

So I had that going. I thought, well, that's a limited thing but I can do this, and I'll have those people's help. Then I went back to New York. I was talking about this to Lilian Tone and I was talking to Andrea Fraser, a friend, and artist who had been my assistant at one point. We're old friends.

Andrea and Lilian said, "Well, there is this Brazilian curator called Ivo Mesquita". Ivo is curating *inSITE2000* this year, and he had curated *inSITE97*. Now, the *inSITE*, do you know what it is? It's

sort of a public art program that's a collaboration between San Diego—the city of San Diego and the city of Tijuana.

It was established by a fellow named Michael Krichman and Carmen Cuenca. Now, Carmen is from Mexico. Carmen—and Michael is from San Diego. Michael's history is in law. Carmen's history I think is more in art. They have been doing this for years, I think since '94. Every two years they do this, or is it every three years? I think it's every three years. They do this citywide, Mexico—yeah, Tijuana, San Diego, and they invite artists internationally.

Ivo is an extremely interesting guy who helped establish the curatorial studies program at Bard, but he only would spend half a year here and another half a year in Sao Paulo. So he's curated—he has worked on Sao Paulo Biennial a number of times. This last year he was the curator for Sao Paulo Biennial and he has worked on it many different years.

He's a very interesting guy who is interested in international curating and doing—biennials is a big thing now. It wasn't like this hot thing back when he started doing it. International biennials were not quite the same as we think of them now where there's like too many of them, you know?

But he had done the '97 biennial and had invited Andrea. He had also gotten her involved in some Sao Paulo projects, because she also lived back and forth between Brazil and U.S. Lilian had gone to school, I believe, with Ivo and had known him since the early '80s where she now is [a curator – AM] at MoMA, but she started out working at biennials in Sao Paulo.

Both Lilian and Andrea said, "You've got to meet Ivo because he's curating the next *inSITE2000* and maybe you can get some funding," because they have—you know. So I went to the CAA conference, I think it was in '99 or something—'98, '99—and met Carmen Cuenca, who was doing a talk.

I went up to her after the talk and I said, "I'm Allan McCollum. I'm an artist in New York. I have this idea. I know you do this *inSITE* and I know it's about Tijuana and Mexico and about the border. Have you ever considered the border between San Diego County and Imperial County and Imperial County and Mexicali and Calexico?" She was like, "No, we've never done that but maybe that's interesting."

So I applied—I sent her a proposal, which, she gave me her address, and she and Michael and Ivo wholeheartedly ended up approving. It took a while but they both really—even though it wasn't in the town; it was like in another county but it allowed them—it gave them the opportunity to expand their interests. I think one of the other artists I think had done something that wound up in Imperial County too, but it was not an Imperial County public project. It was some sculpture he made.

So then they allowed for a certain budget, so that's when I went—I talked more to Ginger and I went out—okay, so *inSITE* invited me to a symposium that they did like a year prior to the show, to the biennial, and I met a number of the other artists. They invited curators from all over the world to do talks and lectures and so forth.

There was this student from Bard who was one of Ivo's students, and she was from Mexicali. Her name was Sofia Hernandez Chong Cuy.

She went on to become curator at Art in General. Now she's a curator in—she's had a number—since then she has gone into very interesting positions, but at the time she was a student. She was all tickled that I was doing this Mexicali project, and she had all these contacts because her father

taught at the university and he had been a senator at one time. She was, I don't know, 22 years old.

She got involved in helping me. So she and I went to Mexicali, and she had a connection with a university museum which is a regional museum, not an art museum. She had somebody she knew there and she introduced me to local people that she knew because of her father too, and they offered to do a show of Mexican artists who did pictures of Mt. Signal in the regional museum in Mexicali.

Then I had funding at that point, so I worked out—Ginger and I—Ginger knew somebody who could do big models. You know, she did big objects for local zoos and things like that. She lived near Imperial Valley and she had done some work for the museum. Sofia's museum friends, they didn't have any money to do it but they had plenty of volunteers and they would know how to make a big model of the Mt. Signal.

So I got some data from the government to give them and then paid them out of the funding, and they bought all the materials but they donated the labor to make this beautiful model of the Mt. Signal, which was like eight feet by four feet by three feet high. The model that the woman made of the sand spike, it was like 14 feet long.

Now, here is what was in my head when I went out there. I said—this is how I set it up in my brain: I'm going to do everything so that I have as many people to thank as possible when the thing is over, which meant I would even involve people to get their permission to do things when I didn't even need their permission, but I wanted to be able to say thanks to so and so afterwards. So I wanted to be involved somehow.

There was a very funny experience when I went to that symposium. There was this Mexican artist, whose name I don't remember, and he did a talk on his work, and he said, "You know, I do these community projects and I go live in the community and I get to know people. I hang out at the barbershop, I have dinner in local people's—I get to where I am like almost like a member of the community and then I do a project based on how I feel about them."

Okay, I'm going to forget names. Okay, then there was this pair of artists. One of them is Brazilian; one of them is Swiss—Mauricio Dias and Walter Riedweg. I can't spell them for you, but they do collaborative projects that are about marginalized people in different communities.

Mauricio gets up—I had never met either of them—Mauricio gets up and says, "That's funny." He's talking about the previous guy. He said, "We do all these projects in communities also but we never imagine ourselves a member of the community. We come in as complete strangers and tourists and that's how we define the distance, and our work is about that distance." He had a completely opposite way, and I found both of them to be so interesting, that they would have this opposite way of—

I took that with me and included those trains of thought, and like, okay, I'm a stranger, I'm a tourist. There's no way I'm ever going to be a citizen of Imperial Valley. I'm coming here as an outsider. They're going to think of me that way. That's the role I'm going to play. And, you know, if they're interested, they are, and if they're not, they're not.

Anyway, the woman who did the big model of sand spike is named JoAnn Dutton and she did things for zoos. She did the big—okay, I took a sand spike from their collection, which they didn't know was a sand spike, at the Pioneers Museum. I didn't have to do this, but I thought, I'm going to involve the Natural History Museum in San Diego and have them make the mold. I don't know why—because

inSITE was involved and I wanted San Diego.

I took it all the way to San Diego. They made the mold. I brought the original back. We blew it up to make a big one, JoAnn did, and then I made molds, and some plaster souvenir makers in Tijuana made about a thousand copies.

I also had made a model—in the motel room I did this—of the mountain itself, and we made molds of that, and they made about a thousand molds of the—little souvenirs of the mountain that had the Mexican name of the mountain on one side and the California name on the other—the English name on the other. So I was developing more and more sides to this project. I made booklets that were all about the history of sand spikes, in Spanish and English, and they helped translate them.

Then Sheila introduced me to this young woman named Bibiana—Bibiana Padilla Maltos. She was like a young Fluxus artist type of—follower of Fluxus. She got—the government of Mexicali was kind of like—they didn't seem to care that much, so Bibiana put her energy into everything and got more artists than I had ever thought about—

She and Sheila worked together and they found I don't know how many, 30 Mexicali artists, because it had kind of fallen by the wayside. The director of the museum had changed to some other director, but Bibiana got it all back together.

Then, she and I went and dug up sand at the base of the mountain to put actual sand from the sand spikes on all of the models. She helped me paint all the models of the mountain. She and Sheila and Ginger, and her granddaughter—it was kind of like whoever was interested I let—

Then I went and joined the local Rocks and Minerals—I had joined them from New York. They didn't know why a New Yorker was joining the Rocks and Minerals Society. I went to one of their meetings. I met those people. A number of people had collections of sand spikes.

Ginger borrowed them for the show at the Pioneers Museum. We got a whole room and we did all of the local connections, my collections, and painters that were all of Ginger's—she knew them all. Then we did more—a whole bunch of other painters that were Mexican. All these shows opened on basically the same weekend.

The show stayed up for five weeks, or something. Then afterwards we, inSITE, and their main guy, whose name was Michael Golino, he coordinated the fabrication of all the molds and the souvenirs and helped in every possible way, including getting a truck, coming all the way out to Imperial Valley, which was like 110 miles away, and dragging those huge things all the way back to San Diego.

We put them up together. A curator named Tina Yapelli, she managed the university museum at San Diego State University, and they put up a show where everything that had been in the other three shows came together. That's why there are two different dates. One of them was in 2000 and the other one was 2001, I believe. InSITE opened in 2000 but they had a two-part thing. Then they reopened again and had more events two months or three months later, or something like that.

Tina and I and Bibiana, we installed the whole show, and got the Mexican artists together with the American artists, together with the giant—JoAnn Dutton's—with the big model of the mountain, the big model of the sand spike, all these souvenirs I had collected and bought on eBay about—images of the mountain and the booklets and everything all wound up in one big event.

All the inSITE people came. Artists came from Mexicali. Artists came from Calexico. Artists came



from the Imperial Valley, drove all the way to San Diego to the opening and all that, because for many of them they'd never had a show outside of the local area. A couple of them were actually much more well-known and were known mural artists or something like that in Mexico. So, anyway, it became an event for everybody.

AVIS BERMAN: And you were also, not just an artist but you were more like the producer of this whole thing.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I didn't know what to call myself. I didn't even know what to call the project. One of the things I called it periodically was a boosterism project because I thought of the role of, well, what happens when local people decide to have a local parade to booster community involvement and get—I did a talk at the Kiwanis Club and, yeah, I was like the producer.

I did make the molds for the small [mountain –AM] models, but outside of that I was a curator, producer—I don't know what you call it. I managed—I did a website with 101 images of Mt. Signal done from—taken from all possible sources. I got permission from the county, from the city to use their logos, from local businesses, farm people, a guy who made postcards. His logo was the mountain.

I got permission from all these different people to put stuff online, and I did framed works that were in the Calexico show of local graphics designers and stuff who would use the mountain in various images. So it was about the mountain and the sand spikes.

There was this funny movie called *The Sunshine State*—

AVIS BERMAN: I guess I haven't seen that.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You've never seen it?

AVIS BERMAN: No.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's a John Sayles film about the history of how a town is going through renovation in Florida that becomes more like local people are selling their property to build condos for whatever. It's about kind of the way—the destruction of the history of a town, but also the people who were making money based on all this and the conflicts they have internally and externally and so forth.

There is this one character. She's the wife of, like, the Republican guy who is involved in development, and she's trying to start this parade called—this day called the pirate day, or something like that, that never existed before and she's organizing a parade and all these dinner events and costumes and all of this, but she's not getting any response from the local people.

There's this one point where she breaks down into tears—it is hilarious—and she says, "Nobody understands how hard it is to start a tradition." [They laugh.] It was really hilarious, this movie. It's a wonderful movie.

Anyway, I said I felt like—I thought of boosterism, the promotion of—and Ginger's whole interest was very much like that because she was interested in bringing interest about art in the community, about interest outside of the community. I mean, you ask people in San Diego about El Centro or Imperial, they say, "Oh, I've never been there. It's in the middle of nowhere," you know. And they know that out there. They know that they're not thought of as important to the big city people and all that. There's a lot of stress about that—conflicts over water supply, for instance, that are hugely

vital. San Diego has bids on the water to water their golf courses, which means a hundred people lose their jobs picking lettuce in Imperial Valley. I had to learn all that stuff.

So is that public? I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it seems—when the Christos did it, that would be—part of what they did was all of what you're talking about, to a different end, in terms of his work.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: But there was certainly an administrative web and winning people over.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Absolutely.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, they always considered that part of the art.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I would say I think—in fact, I would say—if I wanted to choose one person whose work I felt most inspired that direction in my thinking, it would be Christo because I believe he is actually quoted, or his wife—I believe they are actually quoted as saying, "The art really isn't the final object. The art is getting all the permission from all the different townships to do what we do. That's where the art is."

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's the involvement, the social human interaction.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Then the other thing that they do because—Christo always said, because he had grown up in a communist state, he would never take a dime of government funding because once you get money from the state, the state gets to tell you what to do, and it wasn't so much—but he didn't want anyone to tell him what to do—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Ah.

AVIS BERMAN: —so to this day that's why they would raise all the money and—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: From private funds?

AVIS BERMAN: From selling his drawings—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, right, right, right.

AVIS BERMAN: —and from the other things. That all went to support the art because they—their permissions are one thing but they didn't want the funder to tell them what to do, which is really—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right, okay. I wonder if that's always—he's always followed that word for word.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, for a long—you know—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That is interesting.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, well, I'm sure there are private donations too—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —but he never—Christo would never do a Percent for Art program—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Really?

AVIS BERMAN: —because he didn't want to be bossed around.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So even his Central Park project didn't involve city funds?

AVIS BERMAN: That may be the only one by now that had, but that's like the—but all the other ones, no, they raised the money for *Surrounded Islands*, for all the other big—for the *Wrapped Reichstag*—they raised it all through private donations—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Wow.

AVIS BERMAN: —and selling art.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: As famous as he is, I think he's underrated for that, and he's an inspiration.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, they did it before almost everybody else—did *The Running Fence* and all those projects—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, that one especially where he had so many different counties and townships to get approval from or he couldn't have done it. It wasn't just one—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: —you know, it was like a whole host of different interests, and it takes years to get the permission from all these different—it's interesting.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's it. They never lost—and they were so tenacious, and I think with—I can remember, of course, Giuliani and Koch turning them down.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Really?

AVIS BERMAN: It was really only the Bloomberg administration that would ever have considered doing that.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Really?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, there were a lot fewer yahoos in there, culturally speaking.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: You know, the mayor is not afraid of art or culture. He certainly, as soon as he got in there, that little Legion of Decency that Giuliani established, that was gone.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It was not one of his issues. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah. [...-AM]—

AVIS BERMAN: Well—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So the website for that project is still up. I have added pictures to that website as recently as this month—last month because I get sometimes—a woman wrote me from El Centro or somewhere and wanted to put her brother's images online because he had done a painting of the mountain. I said okay and we put it up. There is a whole page of poems, the stories about sand spikes. That's all still happening online. I still maintain it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's great because it doesn't die. Unlike so many other pieces, it really keeps going on when people find it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, that's the wonderful thing about websites is that you can keep them going on perpetually, I suppose.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: The one on the *Imperial Valley Project* and on *The Event*, the fulgurite project, are still online and functional, and *The Dinosaur Track Project* is still online and functional and updated periodically.

I'm sure that those shows played roles that I don't even know about with those young artists who—local artists who—Ginger told me there had never been a show that was only paintings of Mt. Signal, ever. It was the first time that had ever happened.

Andrea Zittel lent me her grandmother's painting of Mt. Signal for the show also, whose name was Opal Eshelman. Her painting was in the show; just tons of people, from contemporary avant-garde people to really traditional landscape painters.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's what it has to be if it's on this one theme or one motif.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: It can't be all—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: So you sound as if you are very proud of this.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I loved that project. Again, it was a project where I never will make a dime and spent—I got some funding from inSITE but it was nowhere near what Ginger and I—all the money I spent on things and all the time both of us—it was like a project that went on over five years or something like that. It was really—

AVIS BERMAN: And you just after awhile, okay, and you just lose track of what is outgo on a certain level because you have to keep it going.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, no, I never kept track of that. I was so disgusted with the Weber situation, and I just turned my back on the whole idea of commerce at that point, as much as I could afford. For those years I had saved money from the late '80s, and by the time 2002 came up I was completely broke and had spent all my savings and all of that. It was awful.

Then I had to say, wait a minute; why am I not making salable artwork? Oh, it's that son of a bitch

John Weber, that's why, because I had such a bad experience with that gallery that I didn't want to open that door in my mind about art sales. I'm trying to—now that I am retirement age I realize I'm trying to think, okay, what can I sell; what can I sell, but at that moment I was in a dream about turning my back on that.

I was very happy to get the funding from inSITE and the funding from the museum in Florida, which were totally helpful and I didn't have to spend everything out of my pocket like I had for the Carnegie and the Price, Utah project.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's really shocking about John Weber. It's really disgusting.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I was able to feel sorry for him until he tried to hold back the Daniel Buren certificates because when you owe taxes and you go bankrupt, they will still try to collect the taxes from your personal money. All the other debts get washed away.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you have to bankrupt too?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Huh?

AVIS BERMAN: So you—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I didn't have to go bankrupt.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. Right, right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, but when one's corporation goes bankrupt—he owns a corporation.

AVIS BERMAN: Of course, because that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So your private funds are protected but not if you haven't paid your taxes. So they were trying to collect taxes from him and that's when he started saying, well, let's get it from McCollum, that guy that I owe half a million dollars to, or whatever, and that was when I lost complete respect for him. Up to that point he had been apologetic, he wanted to do right but he didn't care enough to really do it, and that really—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, well, those people also never sell their houses or never do—they never sell their personal property to help you either—never.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, some might; I don't know, but, I think he sold his personal property long before to take care of his own issues, not mine. But that's why you have a corporation, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: It protects you.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, I think this is a good time to stop today.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, thank you.

[END OF DISC THREE.]

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Allan McCollum for the Archives of American Art, GSA oral history project, on April 9th, 2010, at the Archives of American Art in New York. And what we're going to start talking about today is the process and the logic of *The Shapes Project*. So anyway, why don't we talk about how it came about?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay. Well, what I titled *The Shapes Project* began in 2005, but the logic of it started developing in the early '80s. Especially with a whole sequence of, I guess what you could call combinatory projects—projects where unique, individual things were created out of combinations of other things in such a way that there was never a repeat.

So that happened somewhat with the *Plaster Surrogates* series, using different colors of frames, different colors of mattes, different colors of sizes so I didn't repeat, and different quantities in the collection. But it was much more expressed in the project that was called *Individual Works*, which were over 30,000, so far, that I've made, of these little things, about two inches in diameter, maybe two to three inches long, and they're made of little parts of objects you find in drugstores and so forth, and on the street—little objects. So I've talked about those before.

But that led me to start thinking about, well, a number of things. One of them, which I've mentioned before, is you'd look at a table with 10,000 objects on it, each unique, and there was no—in a way, there was no one artist; there was no one person who did it. Because they were made of thousands of little objects made by other people, mostly designers or industrial engineers, that wound up combined.

It sort of fractured the idea of the individual artist in a certain way, on a certain level. And because of the quantity, I sort of was trying to get away from the singular, unique object and thinking more about things that were the kinds of things you find distributed in large quantities, like in department stores, or the things you buy with coupons in magazines. I was especially interested, back then—well, let me get to the next project.

The next project after that was called *Drawings*, which I've talked about. They grew out of an interest in heraldry, and the way families, towns, cities, countries invented symbols to represent themselves or represent the group they belong to. But I kind of turned that on its head and made a system where there were produced thousands of unique things to represent each individual, so that both, it was a single system for a large group, but unique objects for the individuals that belonged to that large group, perhaps. There's different ways to look at it.

But the question that I constantly was playing around in my head was, how does this interact with the idea of distribution? Because the history of modernity is based on radical changes and growth in ways of distributing objects—from, I would say, most dramatically with the railroads, but of course, before that, with international shipping and so forth. But railroads, cars, airplanes—things that created incredibly different ways of distributing goods, objects, be they art objects, be it food, be it tools, whatever. The modern world is defined by new methods of distribution, obviously.

There's a part of me that's really interested in that—the history of packaging, the history of railroads, the history of corporations that—businesses that put themselves together like Nabisco, for example. I bought a whole book on the history of Nabisco once, because they put together their corporation based on hundreds of little bakeries all around the country, but they were able to do that because of the railroads.

The Fig Newton, or whatever, was—somebody was making those in Connecticut and somebody in Kentucky was making—I'm just making this up—the Oreo cookie was made somewhere else and—

but they got everybody to join or they bought the companies or they invited the—and they formed a large—and then started distributing them by inventing new forms of packaging that could keep things fresh long enough to get them out to Colorado, or whatever.

So this is a very interesting part of world history. But I think in America, we embrace it more because it coincides with our development as a country—the railroads. So I feel like I'm getting off track, but I don't think so, because the idea of distribution and exchange and trade became a preoccupation of mine while I was working on these projects where I was, in a sense, "mass producing" things. It was inevitable that I would start thinking about that. One of the other things I was thinking about, of course, was how, back then, when I was younger, it was considered rude to talk about selling art.

An art gallery was supposed to be like a shrine that you went to, sort of, bow down to your genius, hero artists. It wasn't where you went to if you want to negotiate, I'll give you this for that, or—it was considered apart from that, in some way. Of course, that didn't stop it from happening amongst the elite, but for the average person, it was rude to talk about, well, how much does that cost?

So my idea about the *Individual Works*, for instance, was that they buy them as singles, which the gallery wouldn't let me do. [Laughs.] I said, okay, we'll sell them in quantities of 144, and they wouldn't let me do that.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, is this Weber—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Weber?

AVIS BERMAN: In other words, which gallery wouldn't—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: This was John Weber. They were very pragmatic. They'd say it takes as long to sell one as it would to sell 10,000. You have to write out just as much paperwork, blah, blah, blah. Plus, then the work's divided up and you can never show it again. They gave me a long, very valid argument about, this is not the way artists work.

So I was disappointed because I had wanted to get into that exchange. In fact, when I decided—we decided to sell them in lots of 144—I had made that public. There was a group that started putting their money together—a group of younger artists that I knew—that were going to buy 144 and then each take six, or something like that. They had actually started putting their money together, because it had gone on for weeks, the story that I was going to do this. And then in the very end, after they were installed, I had a meeting with the gallerists, and they said, Allan, you can't do this. This is not a good idea. [Laughs.]

My friends were disappointed about this, because I finally went along with the gallery. But—the idea of exchange—being able to give something to someone else and get something back—or just the idea of gift-giving, was a preoccupation. Well, there's a dilemma in that, say, in the art community, in the art world, if you produce more than is expected, you don't sell anything, or you have to move to a different kind of market. Maybe you move to making prints or limited editions, or maybe you start making posters or you start making souvenirs, or you get defined as something else. You're no longer a fine artist.

So no matter how good of an artist you are, if you decide to make 10,000 of something, you're in trouble. A collector who's worried about his investment will say, well, I'm not going to buy this because it's never going to go up in value, because there's too many of them. It's a dilemma that I think artists get stuck in, and it's really awful. It's really a matter of definition—of how we define

things.

So for many, many years, I refused to restrict the quantities of what I was making. Like, I wouldn't do limited editions, even though I would do—like, when I did the *Individual Works*, I would put them in groups of "over 10,000." I wouldn't call it "10,000"; it was "over 10,000." People would say, are you making more? I'd say, maybe. I don't know. I wouldn't say, no, that's a limited edition. I continue to do this to this day. I don't put limits on how many I'm going to make, and I figure if that bothers an art collector, that's just too bad for me, and him or her.

But I was fairly regularly being asked to do prints, limited editions, by people who published art. I'd always say, no, I don't do that. Occasionally, I would do it when I was collaborating with another artist, as I talked about. Because they'd have no problem with it, so I'd say, okay, well that's your side of the collaboration is that we're doing a limited edition, but that's not my interest.

But around 1997, at the time I was working on those community things that we talked about before, Susan Inglett, was producing multiple under IC Editions, is her company, she wanted me to do something. She asked me three or four years in a row trying to get me to do it. I'd say, no, I don't do it, no, I don't do it. But there had been this idea that I'd had since the early '80s of making a little object that had one word on it that said, "thanks."

It would be carved into the object like a little souvenir and it was like a thank-you card, but it was an object, and you'd give it to somebody. And it had the word, "thanks" written into it, or carved into it. It finally occurred to me, okay, I guess I could do what's called a multiple as long as they're meant to give away—as long as the idea of exchange is embedded in the object—that it maybe doesn't have any meaning until you give it away.

I said to Susan, look, would you be interested in doing that? I don't want a limited edition, number one. Number two, we give about 25 percent of them away ourselves to our friends that we feel thankful to. So she thought about that and finally, liked the idea and she agreed.

So we made, I don't know how many, a thousand of these little things. They were about seven or eight inches-by-two-by-two. They were shaped like a—I don't know what you call it—like a bar of gold or something, but they were made from concrete. And it had, "thanks" carved into it, which I made a prototype, which took a long time, and then Nathan Lieb made all the molds, who's the same fellow who had worked before for us.

I gave, I believe, [100 –AM] away to people I felt thankful to. Susan gave [100 –AM] away to people she felt thankful to. But we still had 800 left to sell, or something like that. They were six different colors, and so forth. So that was a pretty successful project. We ran out rather quickly and they were for sale individually. It sort of corrected the problems I'd had 10 years before with the *Individual Works* series.

It brought in the idea of exchange, and I talked about this before with the Imperial Valley project, I was basically creating what you might very well call a souvenir. It's just that I tried to organize—I showed, I think, 800 of them in a gallery all stacked on a table. So it had a kind of monolithic impression. Well, there were six tables. So it looked very much like an art gallery exhibition. But the manner of distribution was played with.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, because you could just sell one at a time so your friends or other people went and—



ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah. Or you could buy six. You got a discount if you bought one of each color, which was the standard way people usually bought them. Because they were only \$50 each, as I remember. And then—but I think if you bought six, you'd get a little bit of a discount, or something. So many people bought a set of six.

To my great shock and surprise, a lot of the people I gave one to went in and bought more. So I realized, oh, this is marketing! [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: It was the loss leader.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: The loss leader?

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's a term in marketing, like, with grocery stores in that they have some ridiculous sale like steak, 69 cents, and you come in and you get the steak, and then while you're in the store, you buy all this other stuff.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That's called loss leader?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, loss leader.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, so it's a leading object that—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, so you sell one thing at a loss, because once you have the consumer in there, they'll buy all the other stuff.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I know. I do that at the drugstore down the street. I go in and buy just those—I know they're not making any money on their two packages of cereal for five dollars, or whatever and that's all I buy. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Exactly, but most people aren't that way.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. But then, of course, sometimes I have to buy shaving cream, because I'm there and, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, that's exactly what they count on, which is that they not be on sale.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Loss leader—okay, I'll have to remember that term.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, grocer's daughter here. I understood it. [They laugh.]

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So yeah, yeah. Okay, so at the same time—and I guess what I would jump to from that experience—that and the heraldic drawings and the idea of distribution—was that—I was invited to do a number of public projects, which were defined as public projects. One of them was for Montpelier in France, and I made some duplicates of some of their statues that were way on the outside of town that you very seldom saw, but they had been vandalized and eaten away with acid rain, and they were just lumps. They'd been there since the 1800s.

I made copies of them and we made little souvenirs of them that were handheld souvenirs. We put the copies—bright colors—in front of one of the main buildings in town and then gave away souvenirs. I think they made 2,000 of them, and all—you know, same colors that I had used. So I did this public project, but at the same time, there was a giveaway of souvenirs that went with it.

In those years, also, I did—well, I followed through with the idea of stories, because I was invited to

do a project for a sculpture park in Knislinge, Sweden, at the Wanas Foundation. I made a mold from a tree stump that had died due to Dutch Elm disease, which is an incredible story—the story of Dutch Elm disease. It killed every elm tree in the United States in the last century. So every town has an Elm Street with no elms on it. So that was following through with my interest in stories, but I only made 12 of those. That's the only thing we had money for.

But while I was there, the reason I'm talking about that particular public project was that I was invited, through the contacts of Marika Wachtmeister, who ran the sculpture park, got me—introduced me to a situation in Malmo where something like, they were developing a new neighborhood that had formerly been an industrial park and a place where the ships came into unload things. And they were building, I don't know, 25 new buildings—mostly apartment buildings—I guess all apartment buildings.

They had a percent-for-art situation where they invited five or six artists to do public works. And they invited me. But I kind of was not interested in producing this singular, monolithic statue that people pass by. That is not something that interests me, even though I was doing something similar in France—but I found it didn't interest me too much. So that's why we had to make souvenirs at the same time, which they found weird. [They laugh.]

So in this case, this is like a bridge between the *Drawings* and *The Shapes Project*. The idea I came up with, which was based on the combinatorial systems from the drawings project—because in Sweden, they have a lot of these kind of emblems you see around, and heraldic symbols that represent each town and so forth. I came up with a proposal where every building would have a symbol, and within every building, related to that symbol, it would be a symbol for every apartment.

That wound up being, I don't know, over 1,000, 1500 unique symbols. If you looked at one of the apartment symbols, it had the same bottom as the building symbol, but a different top. So you could tell, from looking at any one symbol, if you knew the system, which building it came from. That in a way, it was like an address or a phone number or something like that, but it was a shape.

AVIS BERMAN: It was like an icon, almost, of a preliterate society in which—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Of a—

AVIS BERMAN: Preliterate society.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah. I guess so.

AVIS BERMAN: I don't know if you've ever been to Mexico City or been in the subway, but because so much of the population—maybe it's changed—could not read besides the colors and—they all have icons, pictures so you can recognize—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Often related to the history of Mexico—those pictures.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. But you can—so people who can't read can recognize it. That's just like in medieval churches.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, it's like in an airport with a picture of the woman to show you where the bathroom is. [They laugh.] Yeah, I mean, they were, in my mind, related to that. Also, I guess more importantly, in my mind, it was related to fun for children, because I was thinking, okay—the buildings weren't even built yet, when I came up with this scheme. But I thought each—children would grow up wondering—first of all, you wouldn't even notice those things. They were just little,

metal symbols on the side of a building or above your door. They were about, like two inches by—no, I guess maybe four inches by two-and-a-half, or something like that, and made of brushed aluminum and glued on, really, so you couldn't get them off.

I thought, well, the children would grow up and some of them would figure the system out. They'd go, oh, look! I get it! This is my building and this is my apartment. Then I figured the children could use them in games. They could write notes to their friends and put the symbol down, instead of their name. Or they could start a club with the symbol. Or businesses could use them for business cards or logos. Or lovers could send notes to each other and put the secret symbol and all that. I just thought, I wanted to worm this system into a community that was just starting, because there was nobody living there then.

As the buildings got built, we installed them. To this day, I don't know if they all finally got installed. But we made them all and all the rules on where they went was all determined. I left every building manager with a notebook with floppy disks for the computer with vector files so that, if anyone wanted to reproduce the shape of their apartment, they could go to the building manager and get the shape to do their t-shirt, or whatever. So I have no idea if any of this ever happened.

There's a young woman named Cassie Wu, she is doing her proposal for her doctoral dissertation on my work and she went all the way over there to photograph them all a few months ago, and sent me all these pictures. I know they're all still up there. Anyway, it was very complicated, I discovered, doing public projects, because both of those I just described—the Malmo one—it took years to get paid. They went bankrupt at a certain point—the whole development project. It was a mixture of public and private.

The thing in Montpelier went for—it kept changing hands, who was in charge. A year went by and nothing happened and I had forgotten all about it and given up on it. And then suddenly, there's a deadline. And you're going, what? I thought that wasn't happening. So I didn't find it hugely satisfying in a day-to-day sense—very exhausting, emotionally. I'm kind of a sociophobic loner and I didn't work well in those circumstances.

But I love the ideas, and I love the Malmo project, which was called the *New City Markers*, was the name of the project as a whole. The project in France was called *The Allegories* because the ruins of the statues were already allegorical, and then I made new allegories from the allegorical statues. Not only were they allegorical because they were Roman goddesses; they were allegorical because they were ruins, which is another level of allegory. So anyway, I was having fun with that, sort of, conceptually, but not in a business sense.

That project that I just described—the *New City Markers* project—let's see—oh yeah, okay. That led me to—that really started me on the road to what became *The Shapes Project* in the end. But the real transition from that project to *The Shapes Project* were two other projects. One, I'll describe very quickly—well, those two, I'll describe very quickly. They involved names of people. Because I started to get into larger and larger quantities. I was invited to do a show at Barbara Krakow's gallery in Boston.

And I decided to follow—it was very related, in my mind, to the *New City Markers* that was happening around the same time. My assistant, whose name was Charmaine Wheatley and I were very involved in these systems. She was really good at it and really excellent at managing these kinds of repetitive projects with other assistants. So she and I came up with this idea that we called *The Small World Drawings*, and it had to do with community and [quantity –AM] production and identity, but in Boston.

But we, of course, didn't live in Boston and we weren't going to go hang out there, so what I wound up was, I asked Barbara Krakow to give me every name on her mailing list—her gallery's mailing list—that had the zip code that was the same as the zip code of the gallery, and I wanted to see how many people that was. I don't remember how many people it was, but I took all the first names—we got all involved in this system and we took all the first names, combined them with one another as pairs, and came up with thousands of possible pairings of individuals that were in the same zip code that the gallery was.

Then we made, using Microsoft Word—that feature where you can do addressing envelopes—, where it reads names and then puts them—we did the combinatorial thing, where it would say, "Bob and Mary," "Mary and Jeff," and all the possible combinations, and chose, I think about a thousand of them because we ran out of money. I just would write the name down. They printed them out and then I would trace them on a light box, because they looked very neat—"Todd and Susan" with a plus mark so it wouldn't have an English word in it.

We framed a thousand of them and the gallery showed all 1,000 of these little, tiny drawings of people's names. It was successful conceptually—not financially, at all. I mean, people would come in and if they saw their name, sometimes they'd buy it. People who didn't find their names got upset, because they weren't in the right zip code. Barbara said she had to act like a psychologist through the whole show, trying to make people feel better because their names weren't on the wall.

She and I did another—well, that led to another project that was about names. I took the 1200 most popular census names from the 1997 Census and Margaret Miller and I just made prints of all 1200 names. So it was like six portfolios of, just, each portfolio had 1200 prints in it—600 women, 600 men.

AVIS BERMAN: First names?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, just first names. The census, for some reason, came up with the idea of making a list of the names in order of popularity. So you started with "James," or "Mary" and then went down to the 600th most popular. Like, with women, the 600th was "Janine," for instance, which I always thought was funny, and it started with "Mary." So anyway, it was another thing about quantities of population.

Okay, that's one step towards *The Shapes Project*. The other one actually had to do with population and shapes, but not shapes I had invented. It had to do with geographic shapes. I was invited by Sean Kelley, who was a curator in Kansas City, to do an exhibition at Grand Arts, which is kind of a—nonprofit gallery that finances projects. So Sean and his assistants that worked on the project—April Calahan-McDonald and Nathan Shay, we worked out a system—okay, well, let me start at the beginning. They said they could give me \$15,000, or some figure, plus the help of their staff. They have a workshop there and that I'd make a show out of that—do an art exhibit.

I thought about it and then responded—I said, well, this is what I'd like to do. I'd like to spend half of that \$15,000 making an art exhibit, like you say, but the other half, I want to go towards things we can give away that are related to what's in the show, and give away for free. And because I had worked with a couple of small museums—my idea developed into, what could I give to lots and lots of little, tiny historical museums all throughout Missouri and Kansas.

Kansas City is on the border. It's actually—there's a Kansas City in Kansas and Missouri and they're attached, and a street divides them. So even though this Grand Arts is in Missouri, I'm thinking, well, Kansas is implied because we're in Kansas City. So the idea I had was to make topographical

models similar to the mountain souvenirs I'd made in Imperial Valley to make—

AVIS BERMAN: So that would be *The Kansas and Missouri Topographical Model Project*.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Correct.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. So that's 2003.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So I found a place that made topographical models for map—worked on maps. They worked for cities—mostly for towns and cities and the military and museums. They were out in California and they could do topographical models of states and so forth—of any area in the world—because they used satellite data. They were great.

I approached them and I said, well, could we do a cutout of Missouri and a cutout of Kansas? Nobody had ever asked them to do a cutout in the shape of a state, but they agreed. So I got a bid from them and then I also came up with the idea of shapes of counties within each—there's like 100-and-some counties in each state.

So my proposal involved making drawings of every county, separately framed, and then some quantity of these models, made from ceramic, to go into the gallery as art objects that would be for sale, but then, determine a quantity of plaster ones—or actually, HYDRO-STONE, that would be made to give away to little museums that might find a use for them in their display, because the topographical models of states are not easy to find and they're expensive to make.

But my idea was that once you make a mold to do the art objects, then you can use the mold to make things to give away. And it was a very interesting way, to me, to have one project help support the other—as if you could do a show of art objects and the money you made from the sale went to a charity, or something like that. It was a model—a model for a way to use funding that I thought I would try to conceive of and dramatize. So they agreed to do all this.

They got young artists to do the drawings. Sean was—one of his friends worked for the city and they were able to get all the shapes of all the counties in 200 documents that were separate that could be traced, and very small. And I went out to California and they made those objects and sent them to me—the topographical models. And [Grand Arts –AM] made molds; they made 12 [casts –AM] of them for the art exhibit.

And then—and this was, like, equally complicated to making the objects—I wrote letters to something like 200 to 300 small historical society museums in Kansas and Missouri with a picture of what these objects would look like, and said, would you like to have one donated for your collection that you could use in any way you want? You can repaint it. You can make a map on it. You can do whatever you want.

And about 120 people responded yes, and some people responded no and many people didn't respond at all. There's like this phone book type of thing that you can buy that lists every historical society museum in the U.S. and Canada—or almost every one. It's a big, thick book. I found it and bought it. And then, okay, so they made the mold. They made all 120-some, 50-some of Kansas, –AM] 60-some of Missouri, and they painted them all white, primed them, ready to go, so that other people could paint them however they wanted.

And then I got out there—they were running out of money, and a friend that I had met many years before, named Cydney Millstein—she's an architectural historian—she liked the project so much that she agreed to trade art for paying for the frames, for all of the drawings. And she also got all involved with me. We drove around—well, she got involved in the project and wanting to be, like, a helper to me, which was funny because she's quite an expert and didn't need to be anybody's assistant, but we liked each other.

So they produced all of these objects; we rented a van and spent a month going from—driving throughout Kansas and throughout Missouri. We averaged about six museums a day. So that's how—that was a huge amount of driving. Those are not small states. So then we had to go from—drive 100 miles to another town, 15 miles to another town—and I tried to disperse them from counties so that there was very seldom two museums in the same county.

AVIS BERMAN: You never mailed them? You delivered them.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I wanted to deliver them in person. And Cydney took a picture of me at every site handing it to whoever was there to get it. And also, I mean, the fun part was—one of the fun parts was that every time, whoever received them wanted to show us the museum collection. And we'd say, oh, god, we're in such a rush. And they would walk us around, but they'd show me the three or four most famous objects in their collection, or something like that.

So I learned a huge amount about the history of Missouri and Kansas, although I can't say I remember all of it. But I mean, at the time, it was just, like, inundated with—and also experienced a few hundred people that loved their towns. Because those museums are managed by people who work on a volunteer basis. And they're not run by people unless they love their town and love the history and are interested in maintaining the history.

For some reason, in my cynical brain, I had imagined all these little museums were managed by the one wealthy family in the town, or something like that. It's not true. I mean, they are often—often, there are people with more money than others involved, but they are certainly not run by some wealthy family.

They're not run by only left-wing or right-wing or middle-of-the-road or Christians or whatever—there's no one way to define how these history museums are managed, and I learned that—that they're usually quite democratic in their organization and aiming to create a history, not only for their ancestors and older people, but also for young kids, to help learn about their town and so forth.

So we left these big models—I mean, they were, like, two feet-by-two feet. I mean, they were big, and maybe four inches thick—heavy. And since then, some of them have sent me pictures of what they've done to them—like put sunflowers all over the state of Kansas or mapped Native American trails, or put pictures of buffaloes, or—

AVIS BERMAN: So this is really participatory.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's very participatory. Some of them didn't do anything with them, but painted them so they would shine and then put them in a display case. It was meant—I was inviting others to do what they wanted to do with the shapes of their state. And so yeah, it was—so this was, basically, I guess—not basically, but it was the first time I really got very involved in a distribution idea.

The piece in my mind was more about a creative distribution than anything else. I mean, doing the

shapes of the states was simply—well, I mean, I was interested in the way communities identify with shapes to define themselves. They identify with local mountains or sand spikes, or whatever, but also the geographic shapes, which are more geological, but also political.

They're defined by government agreement, but also defined by the edge of a river. [Laughs.] If it weren't for the rivers, Missouri and Kansas would be squares. [Laughs.] Most of the counties were rectangles except for the ones that were near a river or a mountain.

I would say, the final step—that led me to start thinking about the so-called *Shapes Project*, which I had been theorizing and laying around with in my head throughout the '90s, but—and in the '80s, as well, with the *Drawings* project. But there was a funny boundary that I wasn't able to bridge, and that had to do with where do I stop—how many objects—if I wanted to create a system to make objects, how many are they supposed to produce?

Like, the drawings project only produced so many shapes—maybe a few million—but then, to make them bigger, they would become less interesting. To make more, I'd have to make them bigger and use more parts, and then they became less interesting as emblems.

But somehow, I slowly began to realize that, okay, I had to give up the idea of making them bisymmetrical, where the left side equaled the right side—mirrored it. If I started thinking, okay, if I made them asymmetrical—so the bottoms and the tops were unique and the left and the right sides were unique from one another—then I could—the combinatory thinking would let me make many, many, many more. But I still couldn't get up to billions. Because I was thinking I would like to make one for every human soul, or something like that. But somehow, in 2005, I think it was—and I remember the evening that it happened.

I was having dinner with Lynn Cooke, the curator, and I don't know why—something she and I were talking about opened a little bit of my brain somehow, and I thought next, if the top of the shape were like a head and the bottom were like the body, if I included a neck, then instead of having four parts, it could have upper left, upper right, lower left, lower right—it could have six parts. It would have a left side of a neck and the right side of a neck. Then I would be doing a combinatory system with six parts and I could get into the billions.

I don't know why that hadn't come to me exactly before. I guess it had come to me, but I rejected it. But I don't know what—it's funny. One of the—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, maybe because the word or the term, "neck," made you think of a figure, or something.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, no, somehow, I had always aimed towards a certain anthropomorphism when I would make these shapes—rounded edges. With the *Drawings* project, the top parts were smaller than the bottom parts, because I wanted them to be slightly anthropomorphic or animistic-looking. I was always interested in, what do you call it, prehistoric rock drawings and—

AVIS BERMAN: Petroglyphs and things?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, ideograms and things that often were beautifully designed to have slightly anthropomorphic edges, and stuff. That sort of invited a friendly reading. And I remember, one of my inspirations, so to speak, was Myron Stout.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, he would make these bisymmetrical black shapes, which I always enjoyed looking at and identified with as this very simplified idea of abstraction. But then, little by little, over the years, I would notice, wait a minute, they're not exactly bisymmetrical. He allowed there to be little errors—not errors, but the curve on the left side was slightly different than the curve on the right side, and that was really part of what made them beautiful. It was like they were almost bisymmetrical, but slightly off here and there. And that just tickled me. I think that—enjoying that work over the years led me to forgive myself for being—for moving out of bisymmetry. [They laugh.]

Because really, most animals are bisymmetrical. If you want to be really anthropomorphic or animal like, like a butterfly or a single-celled animal, most of us—all vertebrates are bisymmetrical, for the most part—at least, the way we look; maybe not our internal organs. But everything is towards bisymmetry. So then I had to figure, okay, now I can get into the billions; well, how many billions, and how do I limit that?

I thought, well, I could do one for everybody on the planet, theoretically. But then I thought, well, it would be more interesting if I thought in terms of human souls, and I started thinking about people who believe in reincarnation. I thought, well, okay, somewhere in the back of my mind, I remembered that mystics—or people who believed in reincarnation—actually had come up with numbers on how many human souls there were, as opposed to how many were incarnated.

My memory had it that it was 70 billion human souls while only, maybe, 6.2 billion were on the earth playing. So that made me laugh. I started researching that on Google. I guess my memory is off, because I could only find 60 billion, or something like that. But some writers claimed that they had received this information clairvoyantly—that there are 60 billion souls. I thought, okay, I'll aim for that.

So I designed a system, basically, that made—and as it turned out, it could be based on 144, which is a number I'd used over and over and over again. I had 144 upper-left, 144 upper-right parts, 144 lower-left parts, 144 lower-right parts, and then also 144 necks. That gave me somewhere around 60-some billion.

AVIS BERMAN: Combinations.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Shapes—yeah, combinations. And then you run out. But while I was producing—so I was producing these parts, and I decided to produce—instead of constantly having to work with upper left, upper right, lower left, lower right, I would combine all the lower ones and combine all the top ones, so I'd wind up with so many thousands of tops and so many thousands of bottoms that, then, I wouldn't have to think about left and right anymore; I would just think of tops and bottoms and necks.

I spent months combining them, using Adobe Illustrator, because I had designed all the parts as separate. Then halfway—or partway through these months of working, it occurred to me that unlike Myron Stout, I might want to make them physical objects, like sculptures that you could flip over, so that they—there wasn't necessarily a single back and a single front. And then I went, oh my gosh, my system includes mirrors—one which would be the same—it isn't the same as the other, but if you flipped it, it would be.

And then I got upset, because I thought, well, if I cut them out of wood, then I'm going to have to keep track of what's the front and what's the back, and I don't want to do that. So I changed the whole system and broke it down to only 30 billion. So there's not one for each human soul—



AVIS BERMAN: So in other words, there's—they can be flipped now.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They can be flipped now and they're still unique. Yeah, now they can be flipped and even if you flip it, it's not the same as any other one. That meant I had to throw away three months of work I had done and start all over again. I'm still working on it. I've finished all the top halves, but I've only finished, I think, a half of the bottom halves. There's millions more to go and it's the kind of thing you can do like knitting while you're watching TV, like working on your laptop.

And then, when I have to make a new—the system is organized so I produce these shapes in collections of 144. So if somebody asks me for a collection, it just takes—now, I've got it to where it just takes a few minutes—maybe 15 minutes or more—I don't know how long it takes. Depending on how long I have to organize it—but it's very quick.

But in order to get to the point where it becomes quick, I'll have to spend thousands of more hours and I'm hoping that by the time I die, that I'll have all of this done, so that—and one of the—I don't know if I mentioned this before, but part of the logic for the system grew out of working with Rhea Anastas. She's an art historian of contemporary art and an old friend of mine.

I can't remember where we were—I think we were on a train or in a car or something like that—and she said, "You know, you're interested in doing all these things that involve such quantity; have you ever designed a project that is designed to continue on after you're dead and gone?" I said, "No, not really." Then she looked at me like, well, maybe that's a thought.

So I thought and that was when I decided, yeah, she's right. I mean, why not? I could design a system that wasn't meant to exist only within my lifetime, but could be—now, Rhea knows me very well so she knows the way my mind works. Now, one of the things that has intrigued me for my whole life as an artist has been the idea of coming up with a way of doing something that you can then transmit to someone else. It's a basis—it's a basic principle in industrial production, and production engineering.

You design—you don't invent an object that's unique, you invent a system that produces thousands of objects that you can have other people do. That's what industrial production is. It's all over the arts, too, especially outside of the plastic arts. You write a play that other people can perform, you write a song that other people can sing, you write a symphony that another orchestra can play, you invent a—

AVIS BERMAN: You can write a book—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: You write a book that other people read and publish.

AVIS BERMAN: And also, thousands of them—that you don't make the object.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, you don't.

AVIS BERMAN: You just create the content.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, exactly. The word I'm looking for in my mind was a recipe. You create a recipe that gets published in *Family Circle* magazine and then everyone gets—or you create a knitting pattern to make a sweater from, or a shirt, or whatever, and then you sell the patterns. So in all the arts—almost all the arts—this is extremely standard. You invent things that other people can use to make more things, or sing songs. I sing songs written by people all the time, I don't even know who they are! I even sing advertising jingles and I don't know who wrote them. So there's a

huge generosity in most of the arts in that area that's gotten greater and greater the more technology creates ways to distribute things.

It's less so in the plastic arts—but it will get there. But, historically, at this moment in time, distribution of objects is given a kind of—it's kind of a second-class thing. You're making souvenirs or you're making gift items or—there's some word for them that doesn't quite jump into the fine arts the way, say, writing a play is considered a fine art.

AVIS BERMAN: Tchotchkes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What's that?

AVIS BERMAN: Making Tchotchkes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Or tchotchkes, yeah. Whereas, if you're a writer, nobody criticizes you for having 10,000 books coming out. They don't say, oh, you're just making souvenirs. They say you could be the greatest writer in the world, but the fact that there's thousands of your books is a good thing, not a bad thing, you know? It's so weird how this—in the idea of physical property—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, well, because the book is not the valuable object. It can be—people make first editions and—but the object is—but it's also the same thing, is that, in the case of the writer you're only going to make a couple dollars a copy on it, at most, which is very—the object is not precious in most of the other arts. It's the composition.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. I mean, outside of the manuscript that winds up in the Archives of American Art or whatever.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Or auctioned off. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: The Morgan Library is more like it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, okay, okay. But yeah, no, I mean, it's difficult to translate that way of—that kind of generosity of creativity into the fine arts—what we call the plastic arts—sculpture and painting and—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, it's also because the hand is not so important in those other arts, either.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That's right. Even in the area—and even in the arts since Minimalism, where the hand is equally not there, the value is still there. They're still treated as if, you know. Editions are limited as if, in order to create, almost, fake value—to make things rare, even though the hand's not there.

AVIS BERMAN: That's true. That's why, with so much sculpture, it's an edition of six to create rarity.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: To create rarity, yeah. And it's odd. I'd say, if you look at—I don't know if I said this before, but it's a paradox in my mind—the amount of money you'd pay for a Donald Judd, where his hand is not involved, compared to what you'd pay for a hand-painted souvenir on the streets of Mexico City, where the hand is involved—[Laughs]—and yet—and we say we value the touch. That's been greatly challenged by the Minimalists, in a really interesting way.

AVIS BERMAN: I agree.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. So in any case, okay, so the idea of the thing going on beyond my life, the idea of there being enough for every person on the planet—and I had to do a little research to see, well, how many—what's the most amount of people that ever will be on the planet at any one time? There's all kinds of estimates. The scariest estimate is 20 billion, but that includes assuming nobody ever dies from disease or war, I don't know what, or the birth rates never go down.

But, since all over the world, birth rates are getting smaller—every year, the percentage of birth to the percentage of population reduces. So it's estimated by the U.N. that it peaks at around the middle of the 21st century at about year 2050. Population would start going down. It reaches 9.1, 9.2 billion and then starts going down, if the birth rates continue to decrease as they have been. So that's the estimate—9.2 billion or 9.1 billion. So I thought, phew, okay, well, then—30 billion—I'm safe. [They laugh.]

But of course, you might want to have a different one from your great-great-great-grandfather. But considering that it will probably—they'll probably never get finished—I think I'm safe. In terms of the idea of a recipe or a script or a score—the Fluxus people used to love writing what they called scores—things that could be done in five minutes on a stage—a score as if it were a film score or an opera, but it was just for, like, washing your hands in front of the microphone, or something funny like that.

Right at this moment, what's being printed in Belgium is a two-volume book, each with about 600 pages or something, with the entire script of how to produce the 31 billion shapes, with all of the separate parts. Each part has a separate page—so 600 pages of just the parts, because I—even though the upper left is just the reverse of the upper right shapes, parts, we gave them each a page.

The second volume is another 300 or 400 pages of all the rules to follow in order to never repeat. Because as simple as the project is on the face of it—and it's incredibly simple; it's something a child could invent—the complicated part, and the annoying, is keeping track so that you don't repeat. It's easy to do that if you're just making a few hundred, but if you're making billions, you have to have a strict system to where you don't repeat.

Okay, so that's the initial thinking for *The Shapes Project*. Then it was, of course—the question was, in what form do I construct these shapes? The choice for me was Adobe Illustrator making vector files. Now, I had done a collaborative project with Matt Mullican, and he's like a very old friend of mine—like from 1972.

He's a bit younger than I am. But he and I did a collaboration—I don't have the date in front of me. Not that long ago—in 2002, something like that. I can't remember when exactly. It was a system of—an oracle system where you could throw dice and get a reading of your future or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, *Your Fate*?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: *Your Fate*. Yeah, it was called—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, that was 2004.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, that late? Okay, 2004.

AVIS BERMAN: At the Christine Burgin Gallery.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So his assistant, Annie, taught me the very basics of Illustrator because Matt does symbols all the time—signs and symbols. So she, his assistant, was kind of a graphic designer amongst many other things and she had a certain knowledge of how to make black shapes. So it took her maybe a half-hour to teach me how to do this and I honestly don't know anything more about Adobe Illustrator than what she taught me in that half-hour.

But making little, simple, black shapes is pretty simple with Adobe Illustrator. You wind up with what's called a vector file. The advantage of a vector file unlike, say, a bitmap file is that you can make it 10 miles wide or one-eighth of an inch wide and it's the same mathematical—mathematically, it's the same formula. So you can take a vector file and enlarge it and make it huge or make it small or whatever you want to do with it. But I've been making these shapes as—the final objects are always vector files.

Okay, so that was—the reason I wanted to do it that way was I aiming to—

[Off-side conversation.]

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: In a way, similar to the *Kansas and Missouri Topographical Model Donation Project*, I wanted to invite as many possible iterations of *The Shapes Project* as people wanted. In other words, and this is still my hope and wish, is that before I get really bored with the project, other people come forward and say, hey, I'd like to make jewelry out of your shapes. Can you consign me or sell me or give me a thousand shapes to make jewelry? And then I'd say yes or no or we'd talk about it or whatever. And then they could use a laser cutter and they could make—everyone would have their unique necklace or whatever. Or people might say, I want to make gifts to give away to raise money for this charitable foundation and can we do prints or CNC routing or whatever.

So I've designed it using vector files and tried to—and the projects I'm using it for, I'm hoping to invite the imagination of others little by little. A lot of it depends—the way I do it also has to do with my needing money and wanting to have it in some way generate some income for myself. But it could also—in my fantasies, if I ever have enough money to retire and feel safe, I could do things where it didn't make money. And sometimes I do. I do things that don't involve making money. But I have to balance it all the time.

I started out making prints—just little, tiny, 3.5-by-5 inch prints—and made about 7,000 of them. The logic behind that was I was in Chinatown and I found this little picture frame that was only \$1.50. It was just this beautiful little frame that held a 3.5-by-5 inch picture print. But nobody makes 3.5-by-5 inch prints anymore. They make 4-by-6 inch prints. So that's the standard. But so I think people who have produced 3.5-by-5 inch frames, they're not doing that well. They've given up and started making different sizes.

So this, there were only three of them and they were beautiful little things made of metal. But one piece of metal instead of joined together at the corners. And it was so perfect-looking that I bought all that they had, which is five or six, I guess. It wasn't three. It was a little more than that.

I looked up the label on the importer in New Jersey and called them and I said, I'd like to buy some more. And they said, well, the factory doesn't make them anymore; they don't exist anymore. But we happen to have about 9,000 of them but they're going fast. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. [They laugh.]

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I said, well, how much would you sell them to me for? So they gave me a price. It worked out to about 50, 60 cents a frame, which is an incredibly good deal. So I bought all 9,000 of them for about \$4,000. At the time, I was really broke, too, and this was a big commitment on my part.

They shipped out, I don't know, 60 boxes. I can't remember how many was in each box—72, I think, so however many boxes that was. They were imported—very inexpensive things—and so many of them were damaged. But I did wind up with seven or 8,000. I guess seven—I wound up with a little over 7,000 usable frames after sorting out the ones that were broken.

So I decided that my first *Shapes Project* would be—and this was a year before I did *The Shapes Project*. I'd bought them thinking I was going to do a *Shapes Project* but then I figured out how I could print four per page and cut them up and sign the backs and make 7,000 framed prints and did a single exhibition with Friedrich Petzel. The person I put in charge of that was a friend named Anna Craycroft, who is an artist—a young artist—and she took over for that project for me and managed it, coordinated it.

AVIS BERMAN: And so just—would that be this little—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That was the show.

AVIS BERMAN: This was the show—this picture that's in the *Times* review.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It was in the *Times*—the *New York Times*. Yeah, it was showed on a stair-step base that was huge. It was very hard getting all 7,000 shapes in one space but it looked really remarkable and it was a very large quantity. They were sold in groups of 144.

I was finally able to do what I had wanted to do in 1988 with Weber Galley. But with Petzel, it was okay. [They laugh.] It was a different kind of project.

AVIS BERMAN: And is this a—this is just another—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That's the *Drawing* project. That was at the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva. That was one of my favorite shows where I showed maybe over 2,000—some—I can't remember the quantity—framed drawings. The frames were financed by Lisson Gallery in London. He paid for all the frames and then I paid him back later through sales. All those drawings were done by hand. You can't tell from the pictures but they're done by hand.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, exactly, because there's almost a cut-out because of the silhouette quality of them.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, but they were done with stencils that I told you about that I made, and then all done by hand. So *The Shapes Project*, the *Contemporary Shapes Project*, at the same time as we did those prints, they were—Margaret Miller made them from wood in Florida. They were about 7 inches thick and about 2-foot-by-1.5-foot. We made them in Germany. A dealer manufactured them in Corian. So there have been a number of different iterations. The most recent of mine was—okay, this is—we're almost right up to the exact moment now.

I had done a project in the Southwest at Imperial Valley. I'd done a project in the Southeast in Florida. I'd done a project in the Midwest in Kansas and Missouri. Then I felt to myself, I haven't done anything in the Northeast except live in New York and I haven't done anything in the—and I tried to get a project going in the Northwest but it failed. It wasn't accepted. But I thought, okay, I'm going to

try it—I want to do a project in the Northeast.

My assistant, Marcie Paper is from Maine. She was born in Maine. Her mother's family is all from Maine. She talked about Maine quite a bit as we were working and it occurred to me, okay, I've been to Maine for two days once but I don't really know Maine.

But it's interesting that because of the Internet, that one can get involved in places that one has never been to, so my interest in distribution and an interest I'd always had in home-craft—what people do at home and then sell in craft stores—was connected to my work in my head and to my childhood because in a working class where everybody works in a factory in the '50s, you usually had a little woodshop in your garage or something.

I started looking on the Internet for people who did shape-like projects but in their homes. I specifically was looking for people who worked in their homes. And I found—ultimately decided on four of them who responded well to my e-mails.

One of them made hand-cut silhouettes that she—like at weddings and things like this. Then there was a couple that made cookie-cutters, a couple that made ornaments for Christmas trees and so forth, and a couple that designed rubber stamps that they sold at craft fairs and in craft stores. All of these things wound up being shown in craft stores usually.

I had an interest that I am still pursuing, is the feeling of walking around in a craft store. When I talked about creating recipes for others to follow or writing songs for others to sing, I find extremely interesting that there are hundreds of creative people out there making, designing objects that other creative people are to buy and use to make their own creative things.

And you walk through a craft store and I thought, it's a very funny in-between kind of experience. That you're supposed to buy this thing that some creative person made, then do your own creative thing. I like that feeling. There's a feeling of generosity and sweetness to that and community.

So the experience of walking around in craft stores, I keep thinking that one day I want to do a craft store in a gallery where I do exactly that. I probably never will. But this was a step in that area because these people all make their living selling things—well, not the silhouette-cutting person but the other three make their living at craft fairs or selling things over the Internet.

The couple that designs rubber stamps—they, I think, once a month, go to a rubber stamp fair. There are fairs all over the country and all over the world where you—designers who make rubber stamps and sell them and sell them to stores or get contracts. I have always been influenced by trade fairs and that kind of thing.

So all four of these people agreed over a period of time to—I say okay, I want however-many unique rubber stamps; each one has to be unique. And they figured out how to do that within their system. The fellow who cut wooden ornaments, it was no problem for him to make all different ones because each one is cut by hand anyway and he enjoyed that idea.

I got to know them but not in person. Ultimately, I met the silhouette-cutter. She came to the opening where I had a show in an art gallery of all four of these craft people and put up a publicity material on their businesses in the front of the galleries and had handouts, so if anybody else wanted to order custom-cut cookie-cutters, they would just know who to call and so forth.

It was kind of a promotion thing for these people as well as a promotion for myself and my ideas and a subtle invitation to others to come forward with ways to collaborate. It was saying, look, these

people I'm collaborating with, what do you think, you might want to do something, you have an idea? I haven't got a huge amount of response since then but some.

And okay, during this period, I had been invited by the Art in Architecture people in Washington to propose something for the FDA headquarters building—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, now, were you on any kind of registry or anything? Had you tried to get on any FDA—any of these government lists?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Absolutely not at all. I think my name just came up in the panel of people who were recommending people. I know I spoke with Miwon Kwon at one point. We ran into each—oh, I was doing a speaking engagement and she had, I think, been involved in inviting me up in Vermont. She mentioned that she had, had a—I don't know if she came up with my name but she had been very supportive and had hoped that it worked out. The other two people on the panel, I had never actually personally met.

So I don't know to what degree they—but I guess the Art in Architecture people, they invite professional people who are interested in public art to sit on the panel and make recommendations. So that's how it happened.

I had no idea what the—well, I sort of had worked with the Art in Architecture department once before in the '70s, but I was working for another artist at the time. Did I tell you that?

AVIS BERMAN: No.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, yeah. When I first moved to New York, I had jobs all the time and I was—I had experience in art-handling. Somehow, through Paula Cooper, and I can't remember how, but I wound up hearing that—how did I hear that from? I wound up hearing that Jennifer Bartlett needed somebody to coordinate a public project that she was doing for the GSA. I volunteered with Jennifer. She hired me to just coordinate this one project which involved doing a—making all of these metal plates that she used and ordering them and designing the installation technique because I'd been an art installer and managing the shipping and then going down there and installing the work in Atlanta, Georgia, in this—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, is that *The Swimmers*?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. You know so many things! [They laugh.] Yeah, I installed that in Atlanta at the courthouse. So that was, like, a six, eight-month, nine-month job or something. I found the GSA to be rather difficult to work with at the time and—

AVIS BERMAN: Because?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, the Art in Architecture people were great. Well, it's very specific what happened. [Laughs.] And uncomfortable because we had had a meeting with the architects and the GSA and the Art in Architecture people and Jennifer and myself. We flew down to Georgia and we had a meeting with everybody where we came up with a final agreement on what we were doing and I had made these diagrams of how it was going to be installed and everybody looked at them and agreed that it was great and so forth.

We spent all this money working out this system of how to install them. Then once I was down there installing them with another fellow, everybody was really nice that worked with the—one of the contract people that was involved in the building—because the GSA is different from Art in

Architecture. They're the contract people that have to answer to the government for why the money gets spent and so forth.

One of the things I noticed, for instance, was—just to depart a little bit—they had done no outreach in terms of community, so at the time, this was—I think we were going through a recession. This would have been 1979. There was a great deal of hostility towards them putting contemporary art in a public building in Atlanta.

There were some people who loved it but there were people who hated it. There were people that came in and said insulting things to me as I was installing. One of my assistants watched a guy come up and spit on the Sam Gilliam that had been installed around the corner. Somebody came in and scratched Jennifer's work with a key when we weren't there.

I felt during the time, well, the Art in Architecture should be doing outreach. They should be inviting the public to be involved in the decisions. They should make presentations. There should be brochures so people would know—because the people would hear how much money was being spent on this and they have no idea.

Jennifer, as she said, she would have made more money as a dishwasher doing this project because you spend so much doing these things but, to the public, \$180,000 sounds like you're getting rich—but you're not, but to them. You know, the amount of work that went in on that. So that was disturbing to me that they hadn't done outreach, exactly.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, prepared people so that they would understand or had—and also, this was a courthouse, right?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: This was a courthouse. Very public place.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, and also what happens in courthouses is, did the judges meddle? Because the judges have so much power.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I have talked to artists that have had judges meddle with their courthouse projects. I don't remember being confronted by a judge.

AVIS BERMAN: Because it's very different. And the artists I've interviewed, if you're doing something for IRS, nobody meddles, or in general. But the judge has all this veto power—and aesthetic veto power. I mean, why, because he or she isn't going to be there forever. But they have much more power than most other officials.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They're also much more arrogant. [Laughs.] I know there's one artist I'm thinking of that told me about a judge that came down while he was in a courthouse— This was somewhere in the South—and said that if his work involved anything about civil rights, he was going to be kicked out of there.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, I don't know about that but Tom Otterness had a big problem.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Who?

AVIS BERMAN: Tom Otterness.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: He has, yeah.



AVIS BERMAN: Yes. I mean, they actually want—because they told him. Now, I don't see how, if you've seen Tom Otterness's work, you can ask for justice with a white robe. [Laughs.] But that's what they seem to be wanting him to change but he refused to get, shall we say, scared off the project.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Wow. This was a public project in a courthouse?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, the plaza in the courthouse.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I can't imagine anybody more fun than Tom Otterness. He has managed to—he's just one of my very favorite public artists ever. I just think he's the greatest because his things are edgy and weirdly—but you can't figure out what the edge is and you don't know whether to—he's wonderful.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, and he's been actually very successful except for this courthouse project because they wanted some woman. I mean, not happening. But they shouldn't have let that artist be chosen if that's what they really wanted. Although it's the GSA who chooses but the judge thing is very different. Also I know a more traditional sculptor I interviewed in which the judge decided a year later he didn't like the patina on the sculpture and had it just changed to chocolate-brown. So they are scary. Valerie Jaudon did a courthouse in which a judge was—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Was that in New York City?

AVIS BERMAN: No, no, down South.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: In Washington?

AVIS BERMAN: No, not Washington. The other thing is, is that you have to realize that a lot of projects of the South because the senators are really good at bringing home the pork and getting buildings and I would say in my experience in interviewing for this project that the place that has the most GSA—the most new government buildings all the time is West Virginia because of Robert Byrd because he's so senior. So he gets a lot of buildings. So that's it, is that some—junior senators don't get as many as these buildings built as senior—bringing jobs. So there are a lot of people who get commissions in West Virginia.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: There's a certain kind of politic in West Virginia that needs to be pleased, I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's not just courthouse but it's just that there are so many—not all of them. Some of them are schools and some—but it's a different—I just found, like, wow, everybody has got a commission in West Virginia. Why? Because Robert Byrd is an ace at getting things built in West Virginia and so you get a percent for art.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, when I was invited to make a proposal for Maryland, there was nobody in charge—this must have been six years ago. Of course, it isn't finished yet. There was nobody in charge of that area of the country—the fellow that had to manage it was in Chicago.

AVIS BERMAN: The GSA project manager? Is that what you're saying?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't know what the name of it was but there was no specific Art in Architecture person that managed the central capital district.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, even though Jennifer Gibson and Susan Harrison are there?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't understand the—but she was head of the AIA but underneath her, there was supposed to be a sequence of people on the Southeast, Northeast, Northwest, Midwest—whatever, there are different areas of the country where the projects are managed by an individual. But whoever had been in charge of the capital district, I think it was called, had left and nobody had been hired to replace them. That went on until last year. The entire Bush administration just—they just weren't interested in this.

AVIS BERMAN: I see. Oh, now I get it, now I get it, yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They just didn't. And whatever people would recommend to be in charge, somehow, so much time would go by, the person would lose interest. It just took them forever to get anybody to be in there.

Then Jennifer moved onto some other position. Now, she's not an Art in Architecture person anymore. She's something else. She's higher up in some other—I forget what her job is now. So I don't know that the Bush administration was against contemporary art but it wasn't one of their interests.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. They weren't doing anything to forward it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right, exactly. They had other things on their mind.

AVIS BERMAN: So they asked you to—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Proposed something. So I went down there and made a proposal—or, they showed me the building. It was in the process of being built. Jennifer took me around and showed me the different areas that might be useable and so forth. I proposed to do large installations of *The Drawings Project* because this was before I'd started the *Shapes Project*. So I thought—I guess what I thought—

AVIS BERMAN: This is what I have.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, that's *The Drawing Project*. Where did you get those?

AVIS BERMAN: Jennifer sent them to me because I had asked if she had any—sometimes, they make brochures and she said, we don't have a publication yet because it's not finished.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, this is not the project I'm doing. That was the original proposal.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so this was the original—what I'm looking at is sort of—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: The *Drawings*.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, the *Drawings*.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, and so I still have lots of *Drawings* from the old days and they're all handmade. I guess I thought—well, oddly, when you asked me during our last session about public art, my first series of ideas was doing something about the shape of the state of Maryland or something to do that the public would learn from.

I thought of ideas of doing topographical maps of a local area so that the children could come and

learn about the state and so forth. That was something that would be outside or in the lobby or something. I wanted it to involve an educational element. Then, when I went out there, I discovered that, well, it's a public project but nobody from the public is allowed in this building.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I don't know—it says—I have it from here. It's the CDER building. I don't know what that stands for.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't either.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. It says they'll be installed on four wood-paneled walls on the first floor of the CDER building. Maybe that's drug research or something? I don't know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I forget what it stands for.

AVIS BERMAN: This is what I had gotten. Just so you can read this here.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah. I mean, that's this area. Well, the first proposal was for the library. And it went through a sequence of disapproval. For one thing, another area of the same building was going to be used by another artist, so they didn't want two of the artworks in the same building.

But that isn't what they told me in the beginning because there's been, I think, three or four different people in charge over the last six years and things change. And so somebody will have an idea and I would make a proposal based on that. Then someone else would say, oh, no, we don't want to do it that way; we've all had a meeting, we've changed our minds, or whatever.

I thought *The Drawings Project* would be great for a library because it was kind of about archives and it was related to the idea of the archive. I also liked the idea that *The Drawings Project* was about population and I thought, well, this is a government building where people are serving the public at large and it might be interesting to have a work that referred to the public at large that referred to quantities of individuals.

AVIS BERMAN: And why can't anyone go into this building? Why isn't the public allowed into this building?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, it's a security thing. It's a building filled with scientists working on pharmacological things. It's connected to a military base, as in the past. There's all kinds of research going on that could be dangerous. I don't know. You have to have to be invited—the first time I went in there, I think there was a guard that had to go with me everywhere. That was during the construction phase. But now when you go in there, you have to be invited, you have to have a reason to be there, you have to go through a security check.

AVIS BERMAN: So your public is the employees of the building.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yes, and the people from the pharmacology industry who would come up to have their drugs approved or whatever they're doing there.

So the library was rejected. That took a couple years. There was actually a couple years before I even knew I was invited to make a proposal. Then I made a proposal and there was another—took another year or more to reject it. I can't remember the timing of it all. So that was very disappointing because I'd already gone all the way out there and figured it all out and what the installation would look like.

So then I went out there. They had a new person in charge from Chicago. He met me and my assistant out there, Marcie [Paper –AM]. He'd come up with these four walls that were in the waiting area. And in a way, that was really nice because when people come to make their presentations to the FDA from the chemical factories or wherever they are or from other countries about drugs, they wait in this waiting area. So in a way, within the context, it's public.

AVIS BERMAN: So is it a lobby or—?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. They're like a lobby area. They're the walls that introduce you to the lobby area. I proposed the same quantity of drawings that I would have put in the library but on the four different walls. It was funny, in the gram that you're looking at here, there's a couch there.

AVIS BERMAN: Or a bench or something.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's a bench. So even though the AIA had said, these are four walls you can do something on, the architect said, we can't move that bench; that bench is part of the design of the building.

So I—[Laughs]—so he was a really nice guy but he had this idea. Okay, so I designed it to go over the bench, way up, so people's heads wouldn't hit it and made an installation of a certain quantity. That installation—and we went down there, we made a mockup and put it on the wall and showed them what it would look like and they all liked it and thought it was fine.

Then, the next year, they called together the art panel again to make the final approval. The art panel said, there's not enough, your work's about quantity, we should have twice as many—oh, no, wait a minute. I'm sorry, let me go back. I missed an era.

They brought a conservator to my warehouse to look at the drawings. The conservator, who was this great guy—he's a professional conservator; I think he lives in Georgia—oh, no, he lives in Boston. But he had actually got involved in restoration of the Jennifer Bartlett piece that I had installed, which was a really weird coincidence.

Oh, no, wait a minute. I'm getting all the conservators mixed up. Anyway, let me not get into details. A conservator came; he looked at all the drawings. He said, Allan, if these were going in a museum, you've done it perfectly. It's all archival board, you've used exactly the right kind of pencils, it's set back an eighth of an inch from the glass; everything's perfect. But this is going in a public area where people who are not art restorers will be spraying Windex on them to clean them, and this could happen and that could happen and they're next to a window and they could fade and blah, blah, blah. He just couldn't go for it.

I was disappointed, the Art in Architecture people were disappointed, so anyway, but it wasn't approved. I agreed with all of his issues. I hadn't thought it from every angle the way he did.

So at this point, I had started doing *The Shapes Project*. I had started working with Horace in Maine, making those wooden—

AVIS BERMAN: Horace?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Horace Varnum. His company is called Artasia. He'd made all the wooden shapes that I had shown in the gallery that I just told you about. So I thought, well, maybe I could put wooden shapes on that wall because they wouldn't have the same archival issues.

So I called Horace and asked him if he would like to—I came up with a certain size and he proposed certain types of wood and we agreed on certain types of hanging armature in the back and how that might work. He made a proposal and we made some samples. Then, I made a proposal for the same area but not using the drawings but putting the wooden shapes over the bench in the same way. You don't have diagrams of that.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so what has been sent to me is the old proposal, not the current.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That was rejected.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, for conservation reasons, I guess.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: This, I think, was for the library. These are all for the CDER building. Yeah, these were rejected. Those are the drawings. Those are not the shapes. See how they're bisymmetrical? Shapes are not bisymmetrical. They're asymmetrical. Those are the parts that went into the drawings.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, okay, so I guess this is what Jennifer had sent me, so this is what—the only thing she had sent me was the rejected proposal. Okay, not—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Back when she was working there.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, right. Well, she's working there but she's just—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: What is her job now?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think she's now head of the whole thing.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: She's involved in the history of public art and things that were done a hundred years ago more than just inviting contemporary.

So anyway, so then I made the samples; I sent diagrams; Marcie and I went down there to the FDA and everybody—all these people that have to approve, including the people on the arts panel, showed up. That was when they said, you're not making enough, we want more. We love your project but we want more.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, meanwhile, are they upping the budget for this because you're going from a lot fewer?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right, they did. So that was—because I was upset. I'm thinking, well, if I have to make twice as many objects, I'm not going to make any money at all and I'm going to spend six years, and yeah, yeah, yeah. But they came up with an additional amount of money to help me out, so that was great. And then I thought, fine.

But then I said, but I can't put more because the bench is there. I said, "The only way I can do this is if you convince the architect that we can move the bench." They're laughing at me, like, "How can you pay attention to this?" I said, "Well, you talk to him!" So he finally said, "I'll move the bench."

AVIS BERMAN: So was it difficult working—so the architect was difficult up to—?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Nah, he wasn't difficult; he just had an opinion. He was a nice guy. The architects actually were quite wonderful. With this project, so far, I haven't had one problem in any

way that made me angry except for billing is really complicated, which you may know yourself. I don't know if you ever worked for the GSA.

Oh, I was going to tell you about the thing with working for Jennifer. I'm in the middle of doing the installation. One of the contract guys comes down and he thinks that the way the installation is going is—

AVIS BERMAN: This is Jennifer Bartlett?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Jennifer Bartlett, sorry. This is back in 1979. So even though we had submitted all these diagrams of exactly how we were doing to do things, the little metal squares that she was hanging on the wall only had two [screwholes in them, instead of four –AM], so they were meant to wobble a little. They were meant to be loose.

This one guy said, wait a minute, this isn't secure, somebody could pry them off with a—and he starts swearing and cussing at me and telling me, if you don't get your bleep-bleep-bleep out of here and do these bleep-bleep things the way you're supposed to, we're going to sue your bleeping ass and you're going to lose millions of dollars and you're going to be in bad—and he just went on.

He was a complete mean person and he dominated the other people over there and turned them all against what we were doing. But it was based on safety and security, not aesthetics, I don't think.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, safety and security as he saw it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: As he saw it. Jennifer wasn't even there and so I came up with a solution where we epoxied them to the wall. But then I thought, but how are they going to get them off if we've epoxied, but he approved that.

But it was his foul language that got me most—I mean, his threats for no reason? There was no reason to threaten taking me to court and all that. I said, this is how we agreed. I gave you diagrams and you agreed. He said, that's not going to stand up in court, you blah, blah, bleep, son of a bleep.

God, real jerk, and he was the GSA contract person. I guess he felt you have to be mean to get things done. He was one of those kinds of guys. I've had no—nothing has even come close to that at the FDA headquarters. But then again, we haven't started the installation yet. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Do you know when you're going to be installing?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They've been open with me. We are almost—I think in another two months, we'll have finished making the objects and then we'll maybe install them over the summer or we'll see what they say.

Luckily, it's not—because everything is in process and this doesn't involve any collaboration whatsoever with the architects, it's not like we have to do something before a deadline and so forth except they want them to be done as soon as possible. So it'll probably be done this summer, I'm guessing. We're not sure. It depends on their schedule and what they'll allow.

AVIS BERMAN: Is the building completed yet?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: The building is completed. Well, as far as I know. The area that I'm installing is completed.

AVIS BERMAN: Was there any kind of interest in having any kind of reference or relevance to drugs or—when I say that, research, or what was going on there?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I was interested in that right away because when I started out as an artist doing combinatorial projects, there hadn't been all of these discoveries about the structure of DNA, RNA duplication. I started out as an artist in 1967 and I don't know when all that became discovered and made popular, but it wasn't then.

AVIS BERMAN: There was the double helix but things like the human genome have really only been in the last—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But I don't know—when was the double helix—that idea popular?

AVIS BERMAN: They discovered that in the early '50s, which pushed the science of genetics forward, but also, it's having computers that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, yeah, for the genome. But, even just conceptually, I don't think I knew about the combinatorial—in a way, it changed everyone's idea of what an individual was. Recognizing somebody by their DNA profile, when did that start? It's showed up in detective novels and on TV shows. Not in the '50s.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right, but I would say in the '70s, there was the phrase "recombinant DNA;" that they were afraid we'd get out in the labs. The '70s was kind of the beginning of when all these things began to happen, I would say.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I guess so. Then, if you're not involved in the sciences, you don't hear about them until later.

So the parallel between my combinatorial practices and the study of RNA and DNA, of course, I became slowly aware of this as time went by because it was really a new way of looking at individuality, so that it had its philosophical implications as well as its scientific implications. It completely rewrote the history of the human species and who came from where and who were the first humans on the planet and so forth. Everything had to change when they learned how to do tracings through DNA.

That was why I came up with the idea of the *Drawings* immediately because I thought, well, the only people that are going to see these are chemists and biochemists and pharmaceutical people, scientists. So I knew right way, I said, they will enjoy this from that level. So when I did my presentation, I even took an article that had been written about artists whose work could be compared to the idea of DNA research, and my name had been in the article, so I took that and I mentioned it.

But at the same time, and maybe even more importantly to me, was presenting models of mass quantities of individuals because that's what the project is sort of about. One of the things when you're involved in making decisions for other people—government decisions and so forth—is it's like being in the military.

It's like, you have a very hard time picturing thousands or millions or billions of people. How do you do that? We don't know how to do that. Nobody knows how to do that. But we pretend we do and we toss off numbers like we are—yeah, yeah, 6 billion people. We don't know what that means.

It's a recent problem, if you want to call it a problem, which I do think of it as a problem because 200

years ago, nobody had any idea that there were 6 billion people or what that would even mean. You didn't have to think in terms of billions. You didn't even necessarily have to think in terms of millions until a certain period in history. In certain points in history, you probably thought about 30 people and that was about it, and the rest were enemies or spooks; you didn't know who they were.

So the idea of thinking in terms of quantities is something we have to do but our brains are not constructed to do it and they never will be probably. So when one person says, community, they mean something different than when another person says community.

This kind of dilemma is all throughout *The Shapes Project* in my head. The idea of the difference between, for instance, saying I belong to a certain group. As individuals, we want to think we belong to a certain group, so we collect a certain kind of art or we wear a certain kind of shoe or we have a certain kind of button or we have a certain kind of church and we have a certain kind of religious symbol on the wall, or whatever. We're constantly looking for ways to belong to groups and identifying ourselves through the language of symbols.

At the same time, we always want to be individuals. We always want to say, I'm unique, I'm different than you, I'm different than other people, I'm special, blah, blah, blah. Somehow, we manage to think both these things at the same time. It's really weird. Our symbolic systems don't always reflect that more-individual side. So we kind of have to juggle all that to get to—in how we identify ourselves.

*The Shapes Project* really is an attempt to explore, resolve, think through these particular issues, especially, in my mind, how stupid we are when it comes to trying to imagine billions of people, how immature, how impossible it is for us to do that.

So if I do a show that has 7,000 shapes in it, it's—you can't really conceive of that even when you're standing there looking at it. I can't! It's about that impossibility. I don't know if you know about this but, right now, this weekend and last weekend, there's a project I designed where everybody in a township of Hamilton, New York, is getting a shape that's unique to themselves. They're being handed out at local community centers, schools, local theater, local university. So we printed up 6,000 shapes—

AVIS BERMAN: Is that in concert with something in Hamilton College?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, Colgate University.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: DeWitt Godfrey is the chairman there of the art department. He invited me to come up with a project to be a resident artist. I said, oh, I can't really go up there and be a resident artist but I can come up with a project. So I said, "How many people are in Hamilton Township?" They came up with a figure and I said, "Okay, I'll give you that many shapes and if you can figure out how to print them all out, each unique, with a number on the back."

So Jesse Henderson, his visual archives curator, came up with a database system to do that. It's like printing out announcement cards but each one is unique, based on some computer program that printers use to make books. They printed out 6,000 shapes with the actual number of the shapes—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, is that when you told me you had to go up to Hamilton to sign all those things?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. So I went up and signed 6,000 shapes maybe a month ago. Then last



week, they started handing them out. I said, the project I'm giving you and the students is to figure out how—it's a distribution project. I'll come up with the shapes, you figure out how to print them and distribute them.

So the students all got involved. They came up with slogans and tee shirts that said, "We're building a community one shape at a time." [They laugh.] They had all these slogans. They had made a badge that you could wear that said, "Hello, my shape is"—and then you would draw the shape. They created a system where if you come up to—they have these tables with 30 boxes and each one has so many shapes in it, and you give your name, and they look it up in a book. It's based on the voter's registration and stuff.

Even if your name's not in the book, you can register a shape, but for the people whose names are in the book, they say, "Well, this is your shape." Then they go on the computer and they look through the boxes and they say: "This is your shape." [Laughs.]

So people actually go in there and find shapes for their family, their husband, their wife, their three kids. And then they were taking pictures, so there are all these pictures on the Web, on Flickr, of people standing there with their shapes, or whole families holding their shapes, or a whole football team—each person holding his shape. It's hilarious.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, it sounds very successful.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's very, yeah. You don't know about it in New York, but in this town there's posters everywhere you go. It's like the shapes trying to—and I said, "I want you guys to come up with why this is a good idea." Their basic thing was a kind of an outreach between the community of Colgate University, which is always kind of isolated from the agricultural towns that surround it.

AVIS BERMAN: It's a classic town-gown thing.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly. So they were looking for a way to kind of bridge that gap, in a way, and using the shapes as a medium through which they could do that.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, kind of, art is for everyone.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Something like that, yeah. The idea of a unique, signed shape for each person in the whole township.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, that they're just given one because they're there, not because they're part of an elite or they had to buy something.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They don't have to buy them. Of course, the woman, Cassie Wu, that I mentioned, who went to Malmo, she actually flew out there to help distribute them. She said that the most disturbing thing was a couple of people picked up the shapes and said, "I'm going to sell this on EBay." [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's unavoidable. It's the American way.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I know. I said, "Well, what can you do?" It made me laugh. But you know, signed, whatever, by artist Allan McCollum. So this potential, sort of, is in *The Shapes Project* and I thought it worked very well to—in my best dream, it not only represented—at the FDA headquarters, it not only could be parallel to RNA coding, but it also could illustrate, in some small way, how—that the FDA has to represent the interests of millions of unique, individual people and

that the shapes on the wall there—I forget how many we're making. Twelve hundred? No, it isn't in that. No, can't go by that, that's the old thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, the work will consist of 1,760 unique 2D shapes cut from half-inch—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: So she's got the information. It's only the *Drawings* that are wrong.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, okay. Let me see that. Oh, yeah. Okay, this is correct, as I understand it. Where's the figure amount?

AVIS BERMAN: Let me see. See this sentence, beginning "the work will consist of"?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It doesn't have the quantity, does it? I'll figure it out, hold on.

AVIS BERMAN: The work will consist of 1,760 unique 2D shapes.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, it's written out in words, not in numerals.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, exactly.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: All right. That's probably the way I did it because I don't put numerals in titles.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, *Shapes* cut from one-half inch thick walnut wood. The shapes will be installed on four wood-paneled walls on the first floor of the CDER building.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Correct, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Each of the four wall installations will feature [440 six-by-nine unique –AM] *Shapes*.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Correct. There's some extras, in case certain ones get damaged, or stolen, or broken or something. You know, then they have extra ones. That was how we passed through—I was able to pass through the—what do you call it? The person that was concerned about safety and so forth.

It's then I said, "Well, you know, I'll provide you with all the files. If you need to ever recut them, 100 years from now, you'll have the files. You'll have the vector files. I'll give you extra ones so that you can keep them in a vault to maintain the color, so that if they fade you can see what the original color was supposed to be." That made everything so easy for the conservationists who approved them.

AVIS BERMAN: Because you would also allow someone to replicate future ones.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: If they throw one away, they can remake it, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah because it's not my hand that's making them. It's Horace and it's a skill that other people could have as well.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I would say that one important difference, I guess, from doing something for a studio or a gallery was the fact that you suddenly had to make it in new materials that would not—

in other words, stronger materials, from their point of view. Was there anything else that had to be done that might have been different than you normally would have done?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I don't think so. We chose stains that were UV resistant, but that's the kind of—ultraviolet-light resistant—but that's something I might have done in any case. But we had to read the labels on things and present that to the conservationists.

Because of my own history of working in museums, I've tended to overthink archival quality anyway. The choice of using plaster from the very beginning had to do with the fact that plaster is pretty strong. It's ancient. It lasts for hundreds of years, if you don't put it outside. And that's a concern, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, by the way, were you happy that you got to make—that they said, "We need more"?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: At the time, I was conflicted. I got upset because it was about financial. But then when they said—but I was much—yes, in the end, when they said, "Oh, no, we'll give you extra money if you're going to make more" and then I thought, okay. Then I got much happier because it would like much—it would be much more beautiful to see the walls filled, as opposed to just being above a bench.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, exactly. This was like the over-the-sofa kind of art.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly, which I had lost interest—actually, frankly, when the architect got so adamant about the bench, I just lost interest in the project. I was just saying, "Okay, I'll just do this and I won't think about it." But now I'm excited, I've been quite excited when they said they'd get rid of the bench.

I don't know why I was so—I mean, if I had been more argumentative, I might have got the architect to move the bench. But I just didn't want to bother anybody. [Laughs.] I had a million other things on my mind. I don't like arguing, so I thought, well, if they don't want them, then I'm not going to—

AVIS BERMAN: But yeah, I think they were right. I think this is the good thing about the art panel. They saw that this wasn't you, as it was being done, and fixed it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, yeah. They said they knew my work. They didn't understand why it was such a limited thing and they wanted to see something more dramatic. I wanted to see something more dramatic, but I had just run into a block there. I guess once everybody in the whole room agreed there should be more—that's very complimentary when you make a proposal and they say, "We like your idea, but we want more." That's complimentary.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, and it's also complimentary because it means they get—they want more because that's what your artistic ethos is.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly. Miwon, especially, had followed my work for many years and had heard me lecture a couple times and knew what my interests were. [And Connie Lewallen was on the new panel also; she's known my work for years. –AM]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. You know, of course you're not finished yet, and certainly you've illustrated some of the problems we've been talking about, the Jennifer Bartlett piece. But are there special considerations that you have to remember or take into account when the federal government is your client, as opposed to other—since you've also not just worked with galleries, but for historical

museums. You know, you've been in other—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I personally—I think it comes fairly automatic to me to consider the audience. But there were certain things that I wouldn't ever have thought of that I have to hear—sometimes people—like when I did the project in Montpelier, France, the fellow who was in charge, who was the head of the—what do you call it? The tramway system.

But he loved contemporary art and he was very involved in getting the percent-for-art thing going. And he just listed off—he says, "We don't want it to block the view. We don't want it to ruin the view over the landscape, of what's behind it. We want it to be recognizable from a distance. It can't weigh over a certain amount because the sidewalk is hollow underneath."

He gave me all of these funny little considerations that I probably wouldn't have exactly thought of, but I was kind of pleased to have restrictions because I'm used to working within constrictions. What I like to do in galleries—and it's pretty obvious, if you know my work—is fill them to the brim. So when I'm in group shows, I get very confused because there's nothing—there's no, I can't fill a room because—unless they give me a whole room, which is not very often. So I never know how to put boundaries on what I do.

So I guess when they come up with restrictions, there's something about it that I think, oh, thank goodness. They gave me a restriction. Because I can't make 6 million objects that just go on forever; I have to fill this room, or this wall, or whatever. But you know, there were certain things I hadn't thought of, like when the fellow said, "What about the person who doesn't know about art, uses the Windex spray on the glass and it seeps down into the frame and winds up soaking the bottom of the matboard and so on?" I don't think I would have thought of that, so yeah.

Well, I'm doing a project now of wooden shapes for the Elmhurst Library in Queens.

One of the concerns of one of the cultural council people, or one of the people that the cultural council had to answer to. One of the community board people—I can't remember who it was—said, "Well, why are we using—if these shapes are supposed to represent humans, in some way, why are they all light elm?" Because many people have dark skin and this may be a problem to the neighborhood, if you're saying these represent people, but they're all white.

So I was completely shocked at this. I said, "Well, I'm using elm because the town is called Elmhurst and was named after an elm tree." And then the guy went, "Oh, okay. That's okay, then. But couldn't you have used a darker elm?" I said, "I don't think elm ever gets that dark." [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: I guess they wanted you to stain it differently. I guess the elm was passing for white. I don't know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: It's amazing what people think of.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, and then when I gave a presentation to the community board, which is filled with just normal citizens that don't care that much about art, then there was this one group of people that said, "We don't know why we have this abstract art in a community library. Why couldn't it be portraits of the people who founded Elmhurst?"

AVIS BERMAN: Doesn't Elmhurst, Queens already—don't they have a WPA mural in that library already? Or am I wrong?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: A what?

AVIS BERMAN: Isn't there a mural there already, in that library? A WPA one?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Maybe in another Queens library, but the Elmhurst building was one of the Carnegie libraries.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Which they are tearing down, which got me upset because I was interested in Carnegie libraries. Carnegie designed 2,000 libraries and so that bothered me. But I wasn't allowed to bring that up, you know? Because it has to come down because it's too small.

AVIS BERMAN: So this is a project for a new building.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: For a new building that isn't built yet. It's been approved and so forth. It's going to happen, but I have to wait for the new building to be built. But I was going to tell you something—oh, yeah.

So these people were—one fellow was arguing about how it should be—and he was clearly an Anglo-American. He was saying we should have portraits of George Washington, or whoever it is—whichever the people were, the early Americans that founded our community, and whatever. Then another fellow stood up and argued, well, Elmhurst, Queens is more Hispanic and Asian—mostly Asian.

AVIS BERMAN: Asian, yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: So this fellow was Asian and he said, "Well, what culture are you representing, here? It doesn't seem like our culture." And so forth. I remember I came very close to—and I didn't say it, but I wanted to say, "Now, look. If you were Orthodox Jews, you wouldn't allow portraits because they're iconic, or Arabic, you wouldn't allow pictures of people because it's against Islam." The abstraction is the closest thing I could think of to cover all of our—but I didn't want to get into that argumentative.

But I can see making that argument, if it had been a more private situation, that you've got one group that thinks there should be portraits—but if you were Orthodox Jewish, you'd say, "You don't put portraits. We don't do portraits. That's representing the image of God because humans are the image of God and you don't do that. That's against the Ten Commandments." Or so forth. There would be all kinds of cultural arguments. I think this thinking has been in my brain when I did *The Shapes Project*, from the beginning, that I wanted it to be equally attributable to Islamic, Christian, Judaic—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah because they do have a heraldic-device quality, so you can project something on to it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah. I have to say, I was influenced by Mayan—or Native Americans from the Northeast, the totemic figures. I wanted to include all of that. What did you just call it?

AVIS BERMAN: A heraldic device, like a crest, you know?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, but I wanted it to be transcultural, I guess. That was part of my wish. And that never really works. But you can.

AVIS BERMAN: On the GSA project, just in terms of doing something like this again, would you make—what suggestions would you make to the GSA, in terms of, maybe, improving the process for the artist?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, my experience was especially strange because there was nobody in charge, so everything had to happen through somebody who was in another area of the country. So there was no—I don't feel in a position to answer that. I know that my feeling about the courthouse, when I worked with Jennifer Bartlett for that nine months, or whatever it was, I remember clearly thinking there should be more outreach. There should be more inviting the public to feel participatory.

AVIS BERMAN: But that's changed. I mean—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Maybe that's changed now. I just don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: I think because didn't you talk to the employees, or didn't you go down there? I mean—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, yes. We did a public lecture on my work, which I thought was a great idea. I was really happy to do that. The scientists in charge of the FDA were sitting in on all our meetings. They were invited to my presentations. I personally printed up things for them to read that might give them an angle at looking at what I did. I personally aimed to generate interest. But there was one community person from White Oak, which is an odd, unincorporated town. It's not even a town.

AVIS BERMAN: I think that's where there's a mall, or something? I don't know.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: There may be, but in terms of voting, it's part of the county. It's not a city, or something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I know. Silver Spring is in Prince George's County, right? Or Montgomery?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't know. But Silver Spring is—but White Oak isn't in Silver Spring. But there's a community there and they had a representative who sat in on all the meetings. She could be very argumentative. I liked her quite a lot. She, for instance, argued, why didn't I use white oak for the wood? Why was I using walnut?

I always thought that was a great observation. I had already thought that and I'd already looked up white oak and I didn't like the way it looked against the anigre panels. So I said, "I really wanted to use white oak, but it doesn't look good against the anigre panel." And she went, oh, okay. I'm the artist, so I get to make that decision.

AVIS BERMAN: Are you saying anigre? What is that word?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's a kind of wood, which I'd never heard of until—

AVIS BERMAN: I never heard of it until this minute. Well, it's interesting because—now, how did the

scientists feel? Was there any request for—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I can't remember their names, but no. I felt like I succeeded in anticipating what they might find interesting because I got nothing but approval and kindness from them. So I didn't have any—there was no argument of any kind. So I mean, if I were another kind of artist, that might not have been the case.

The head of the FDA, which was a Bush appointee, was giving trouble to the artists for various reasons. This made me laugh. He was a micromanager. He came in on the thing very later, after all the artists had been picked. He had opinions about absolutely everything, including which font was used for the elevator's signage and—oh, I mean, he was giving trouble to the architects and definitely the artists.

One of the artists, Matthew [Ritchie –AM], wanted to involve a lot of individuals who worked there in doing things which he then included in the artwork. The head of the program, the head of the FDA, said, "Well, you know, this installation has to be here for 100 years. And those same people won't be working here, you know?" He had this argument and it made Matthew so—he wouldn't even come to the meeting. I think he thought it was—I don't know for sure, but my feeling is he thought this was so stupid, he didn't want to get involved in the argument, so he didn't come to the meeting.

But I had to listen to all of this. But nobody criticized me directly that I know of. If they complained, I didn't hear anything about it. But what made me laugh is that when the Obama administration came in, the head of the FDA was replaced by a different person. I can't remember who it was from the AI—from the art and architecture said to me, "Thank God, she doesn't care anything about art." [Laughs.] She's not interested in art, so we can do what we—we don't have to argue with anybody.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, or while the other person is interested, you didn't get a false know-it-all. I mean, that was the—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I think—but they put it much more politically correct than that. It was like, she lacks interest in it, so that's great for us. There's no interference. But there could have been. The person who was in charge of the FDA, of course, had a say in what—in the end they can be outvoted, but it would take another level of approval.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, you have to involve the head of it somehow because, if he or she suddenly comes along and then doesn't like it, sometimes that person can—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: They can be interfering until you have to change what you—

AVIS BERMAN: Or they could just stop it, I mean, if it's the absolute—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'm not sure how the law works, I mean, but they can certainly stand in the way.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Exactly, they can impede it until they get what they want, and after you've gone so far.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: I want to see if there's another—well, I would just say in terms of watching the proliferation of public art, do you have opinions in terms of improvements? Or if you think it's good or

bad, or if there's too much of it? Or, it's so different now than from the days when there was—plopping on the plaza, in terms of site-specific art and in terms of—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I don't really feel in a position to have an opinion on that. I'm not sure what you mean. When you mentioned public art during our last interview, I've thought about it ever since and I don't even know what the term means. I guess it means it isn't privately owned?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's hard to know—maybe it's something to do with access, or maybe in the inherent nature of what it is. Maybe it's the patron. I think there are a number of things that are involved.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I guess so. It's just funny that sometimes certain terms don't ring with me, that I don't use them in my head when I think because—and when I described how you write a book, it may be understandable only by a very few people, but anybody could buy it.

Or you design a recipe that only an expert chef might be able to really do well, but anyone can try it. Or the patterns that you see in *Good Housekeeping* magazine, anyone can cut out and use. So, this whole idea of recipe-making, invention—this whole way of writing a song that other people can sing, writing a play other people can perform—isn't that public art?

AVIS BERMAN: Now, I think you're right because you're much more about—you define it in terms of distribution, I think.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I guess, yeah. I think so. Maybe that's the—maybe that's where I differ in certain ways.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. You know because so much of it is site-specific, site conditions, something that makes a contribution to a neighborhood or a community.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: You know, as a primary intent. That's what I would say.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I guess so. I guess I find that—maybe I don't think I've been involved in projects enough like that. The library project, for instance, in which I am making things out of elm because it's called Elmhurst and the area was named after an elm tree that happened to be there—but *The Shapes Project* goes way beyond the Elmhurst, so I'm sort of—I'm sort of teasing the idea to make them smile, you know? But I also want them to know this is part of a much larger project.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, as is the GSA project.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: True.

AVIS BERMAN: It's part of the larger work that you're thinking about and will be thinking about the next few years, so this is—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but these are ways to test and refine the larger idea. Would you say that? Or would you say carry out the larger idea?



ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, those words could be used. But, like I said before, the more variation of iterations that occur, then the more I'm hoping other people come up with more other interesting ways to use the project. The press release, when I did my first show, was virtually an invitation for people to propose other ways to utilize the system.

As I point out in most of my texts that I put out, I've isolated 214 million of the shapes to be used experimentally. I haven't produced them yet, but in terms of the system, there's [214 million –AM] that we can do anything we want with. Hopefully—and really, I guess, when I talked about my interest in Carnegie in our last session—and I don't think we got into his libraries, but that was another incredibly beautiful system of—what's the word?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, wide-scale education. It's a public gesture, I guess.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, and he designed a certain number of architectural diagrams that could be used in many different, many different situations. He paid architects to come up with them, so they only needed minor modifications. He had a standard that you had to promise a certain amount of funding to keep the library going.

And if you—and then he would contribute the diagrams and so much, but they had—the city councils had to vote that a certain percentage of their town's profits would go to keeping the library functioning. Then he would give the diagrams and—philanthropy was the word I'm looking for. He invented corporate philanthropy. We talked about that before.

So and it wound up—over 2,000 libraries that wouldn't have existed without Carnegie. So why did I bring that up again? I guess, that he invented a system that multiplied itself beyond his control, even. I mean, beyond his day-to-day attention. I can't remember why I started talking about this.

AVIS BERMAN: Actually, this just is a little off-subject, but I should ask you, in terms of doing these pieces, have you ever done one in which you've installed on in a corporate setting?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: For any of my projects?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, right. In other words, has a corporation commissioned you to do—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I'm trying to think. I don't think I've ever done a commission for any private—I mean, my work has wound up in corporate collections.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, but they bought that—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: At a gallery, or from my studio, or something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Yeah, but you never designed it explicitly for an environment.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I've never been invited or accepted or rejected a corporate—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, I just realized I should—because sometimes it's very interesting to contrast working for a corporate patron to a government patron.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I'm sure it's a very different thing. Probably, I'd have a lot of problems with it, philosophically. But I'm sure it would be very interesting. Oh, I know what I was leading up to when I was talking about philanthropy. When I first designed *The Shapes Project*, I started subscribing to philanthropical newsletters and things all about the logic of philanthropy because I

was hoping that the project could be turned into something philanthropic.

For instance—well, I don't think I've talked about this yet, but something that really intrigues me in the world of object-making is—what are they called? There's a special word for them. Gifts that institutions use to give to patrons. There's a word for it. Patron—I forget what the phrase is. But there are actually artists and companies who do nothing but make objects that institutions, foundations use to give to other people to get money.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, I want to say goodie bag, but that's not quite it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, yeah, it's that kind of a thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: There are artists who have dedicated their whole careers to making patron—things that go on the wall to show the name of your patrons, who are giving money to your—I forget what they're called. But the idea that these shapes could be used as patron gifts, for instance—the *Visible Markers*, which is the name of the objects that said "thanks" on them—they're called *Visible Markers*. They've been used periodically to say thank you to patrons. You know, museums have used them. Private companies have used them. Families have used them, you know, to give away to people who've donated money, or whatever. Even MoMA used some to give away.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I know. I almost want to say party favor. But a favor, you know—that kind, but not party.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's a little more—yeah, it can be used like that, but I like the more serious. You know, like, if you donate \$100, you get a cap that has such-and-such on it.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Is premium the word? I know what you're talking about. I can't come up with you either.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, donor—donor recognition gift. Donor recognition, that's what it's called. That's the—if you Google donor recognition, you'll come up with companies and individual artists who dedicated their careers to making donor recognition gifts—patron walls, things for patrons.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, in the conference room that we're sitting at, the Archives of American Art would have a benefit every year and they would honor someone. And then these various artists, over the years, would make a print that would go—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Okay, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: So that's what some of these are—obviously, Chuck Close and April Gornik and Judy Pfaff.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I was so shocked to see how many of those there were. When I looked at it, I went, how many? And yeah—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, it's for—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: It's to raise money.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, it's to raise money.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: But with *The Shapes Project*—and I always think UNESCO. You know, what if, if you sent in a dollar, you get e-mailed a shape? Or, it's like when you buy an mp3 on amazon.com for 95 cents, you know? What if you got your own shape for 95 cents? If there was enough interest, it might be a way to raise money. But I am not a computer guy, so I don't know how to make that.

But if someone came to me and said, "I've figured out a way to never duplicate the shape," and it would always work, you know, where nothing ever got duplicated and people could download it and we could raise money for UNESCO, I'd say, "Let's do that," you know? That was part of my inspiration from the beginning, was donor recognition. I have never yet been contracted to do that. But it's in my mind as a fantasy that might happen someday.

AVIS BERMAN: Despite the frustrations of having this project take so long—this is the GSA project—and do we have a title for it yet, by the way?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I don't think so. I don't think I've come up with a specific title.

AVIS BERMAN: Because I just thought, well, I should record it.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, no, maybe I should have *The Shapes Project for the FDA*, or something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: The one up in Hamilton is called *Shapes for Hamilton*.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay, just wanted to make sure. If asked, would you consider doing another project for the GSA?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I think I know enough now to where it would be a little easier than it was. I think I would be a little more patient. Because I found it extremely frustrating going all those years. And like I said, the billing, in itself—you have to have a degree in computer science to know how to submit an invoice, you know? You have to get all these numbers and approval by all this to be a contractor working for the government. It's annoyingly complicated.

But the art and architecture people are very helpful in trying to help walk you through all that, I've found. Yeah, it didn't turn me off, but it also—you have to want to be interested in the project because you don't make a lot of money doing these things. Like Jennifer said, she would have made more money as a dishwasher, considering all the effort that she had to put in. I think I'll do a little better than that, but I don't know. Maybe not. If I thought of my own time by the hour, I don't think I'd want to figure that out, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: I just wondered—well, so in terms of, I guess—so I guess the question is, what have you learned?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, that nothing's permanent, that you have to be patient, that you can't expect the same person to be in charge. That whatever you—and that in the end, everyone is fairly respectful, but they have to think like bureaucrats at the same time. And you have to learn that, you know?

AVIS BERMAN: Now, do you have a conservation or a maintenance kind of contract in with this

commission, or does that not obtain?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, there's not. I think they want to divorce your involvement as soon as they—they don't want you hanging around saying, "Oh, you have to do this and that." They have their own—as far as I understand it—their own conservationists that spend all year doing nothing but going around and checking art and architecture installations, public-art installations and coming up with conservationists' recommendations. That's a full-time job for more than one person that does that all the time.

So no, I don't think my contract involves any agreement for them to—there's laws that govern whether they can move it, or change it, or make it look differently. They can't do certain things by law. And the contract does—I think the contract approaches those things.

For instance, I had a big argument with them, which I didn't talk to you about. I saw an attorney, who read the contract. He said, "Allan, there's this ridiculous paragraph here," where it said—if, for one reason or another—I can't remember what reason—which would have included their deciding or me deciding I didn't want to do it any more, or my dying, or whatever, that they could go ahead and do my project without my involvement.

He said, "You can't sign this. They're asking you to agree that they could produce work based on your idea and put your name to it and you're not even involved." So we had to argue. It took months and months and months for them to finally say, "Okay, we'll change this sentence" because they're used to—their contract seemed to be involved—it seemed to be the same contract they would use with an architect who had designed a plumbing system. You know? Just like, well, if you don't do it, then we get another plumber to do it or something like that. I don't know what they were thinking. But it was like they were expecting me to agree to have some other artist execute my work. I hadn't noticed it, but my attorney said, "This is insane. You can't sign this." So he said, "Don't sign this because it's like they're asking you to agree to a forgery being made." [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Or usually, sometimes, they'll say, "Or your heirs have to finish it," or some crazy thing.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, maybe.

AVIS BERMAN: Which, that's just equally silly.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, I guess that involved—yeah, now that I think of it—well, of course, it's consistent with my work, anyway, but I did come up with—both projects could have been things that could have been reproduced by others, as opposed to something that depended on my human touch and my—but as long as—and that did get into my head because I thought, okay, well, I'm giving them the vector files and the size and the type of wood. They could do it. Someone else could restore them by following these. But restoration is different than—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That was really crazy. We wound up on a telephone conference and they're saying: "Well, you're the only artist that's ever complained about this before." My lawyer's, like, "So does that make him wrong?" [Laughs.] In the end, I feel they thought—I don't know what they felt. But they changed, they changed it for us. One of the other artists at the FDA headquarters took me aside once and said, "Thank you."

So clearly, it was a—I hope it improved. But basically, the contract is very fair. It's very aimed to take

care of what the artist's concerns are. It was pretty clear they had worked really hard to do it in a way that was respectful to artists. This was just one little flaw.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, they've revised the guidelines, I think, several times since those '70s and '80s.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah and sometimes involved in court cases and things where—

AVIS BERMAN: Right, and post-Richard Serra, too, and other things that happened.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Exactly, whether something could be moved or not. You know, either at—so a lot of that language was in there. You can't control everything. If they want to take an artwork down and throw it away, that's up to them. But they can't alter the way it looks, or paint it, or put it in a different location that you haven't been involved in—if you haven't been involved in that decision and that's good.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess it was good that there was no competition or anything. You were just selected. I mean, that's what I'm—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Oh, I'm sure there was competition. I don't know, I think—

AVIS BERMAN: I meant, you didn't have to enter a competition.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I had to make a proposal that I assume was compared to the proposals of others, but I have no idea. I know when I did the thing for the city here, for the library, there were a number of other artists whose works were rejected and mine was accepted. So I don't know—AIA is not going to—I didn't have to make a presentation and then somebody got up after me and then they chose between. If that was happening, I have no idea.

AVIS BERMAN: So I mean, it was limited, in other words. It was—what do I want to say? It wasn't something like—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: I was invited to make a proposal.

AVIS BERMAN: Exactly, which is different than an open competition.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, it wasn't like you were—yeah, like if the metropolitan subway line here in New York—any artist can make a proposal and then they choose. But in this case, I think, the GSA invites you to make, or the AIA invites different artists to make a proposal and then they choose based on a limited group of, I don't know—I don't know how it works.

AVIS BERMAN: Great. Is there anything else you would like to add about that?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: One thing I forgot to talk about last time that's just very quick, but when I designed the *Individual Works* project, which are all those little plaster objects, I want to give some credit to Kenny Goldsmith. [In those days, Kenny Goldsmith was –AM] a young artist-poet who had graduated from RISD [Rhode Island School of Design]. He called me, I don't know how many times. I didn't even know him. "Do you want me to make molds? I'm a mold-maker. I know how to make molds. Let me do some molds for you." Finally, I said okay.

He's the one who made all of the molds for the *Individual Works* and he made all the molds for the little parts, most of them. It was through his aggression and interest that I decided to do the project at all. I'd wanted to do it before and I was moving towards it, but if I hadn't had somebody that had

that kind of energy, that was willing to do it for me, I might not have moved so quickly on it.

This happens all the time, where, like I said, my assistant from Maine got me interested in Maine. It's quite common with me that the things my assistants are interested in—like Charmaine Wheatley was really good at organizing, making drawings that said "Thanks," or doing all those little objects that said "Thanks." She was very good at certain kinds of systematic thinking. And so therefore, I would more easily come up with projects that involved her skills.

So Kenny had these particular skills. He went on to become more of an avant-garde poet. He stopped doing mold-making. He now manages—he invented the website UbuWeb. Have you ever seen it?

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: That's Kenny. [Laughs.] But I just wanted to give credit because he made many of my plaster *Surrogate* molds. He made the molds for the *Perfect Vehicles*. He made the molds for the *Individual Works*, especially. He introduced me to Nathan Lieb, who continued to make molds for me until I stopped using molds. But I forgot to mention Kenny's name. But outside of that, I don't know what I should mention.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, you know what—is there a significance to the fact that you stopped using molds?

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Well, there was a period of losing a lot of money. A very large storage problem developed. [Laughs.] Because I made, as I said, 750 giant dinosaur bones and we only sold 15 of them. The *Dinosaur Tracks*, I still have a few hundred of those. I still have 50 [of *The Dog from Pompei* casts –AM]. I wound up with a lot of storage problems, so I think—and I lost my studio, through that problem with Weber, and since then I really haven't had a production studio.

For the last five or six years I've been only thinking about saving money, not spending money. So trying to sell things that I did in the past more than new things. Also, it's extremely expensive to ship things that are physical. I think the last show I did—it was a last, sort of, retrospective show in Villeneuve d'Ascq in Lille—it was clear to me they almost went broke, for their whole budget for two years, doing a show with Allan McCollum because they shipped so many objects and it cost them so much more than they had imagined. I think I recognized that is going to be a huge problem for any museum.

It was a problem for me, in terms of storage and shipping and production and all of that. I think I found *The Shapes Project* much more appealing, in a way—or having other people do things—and every day I wish I had a studio. I could get back into that kind of production. But until I can afford it, I'm not going to. I went way over budget on everything, spent money I didn't have, went broke, lost my studio and so forth.

AVIS BERMAN: But I would still say you thought you had it, except someone cheated you.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I thought, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, you don't seem to be the type that would spend it if there was absolutely no expectation of—

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: No, I wouldn't. But at the same time, I'm probably overly cautious now, more than another artist might be that hadn't gone through that kind of—

AVIS BERMAN: Terrible experience, yeah, traumatic, to say the least.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Yeah, I would say it was traumatic. But I also recognize that one can become overly cautious. I know my father grew up during the Depression and he did unbelievable things, like only ever buying one pair of shoes. I don't think he bought more than three pairs of shoes in my whole upbringing, you know?

So there was a way in which he seemed overly cautious, considering. [Laughs.] But so I may be overly cautious because of the Weber debacle. And sometime I've thought of making molds and selling the molds as artwork because it's like selling a pattern for a dress, or selling—did I tell you I'd made iron-on shapes at one point?

AVIS BERMAN: No.

ALLAN MCCOLLUM: Andrea Zittel did a project that I thought was really sweet. She designed a basic pattern for a smock and then she gave this pattern away to—I don't know how she chose, but there were dozens of people that she would—that made smocks from her pattern, but decorated them in certain ways, using their own cloth, or using their own patterns, or doing appliqués on them, or whatever they wanted to do.

Then she did a number of exhibits that were called the *Smock Shop*, where you would go in and they were turning galleries into clothing stores, in a way, for like three weeks. Then the people who made the smocks would get money from selling them. She asked me if I'd like to contribute a performance to her opening night in New York at the Susan Inglett Gallery. I made a bunch of iron-on shapes, using—that you could then buy to iron on to your smocks. It was another iteration of *The Shapes Project* that I had fun with.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, well, thank you very much. I really appreciate all the time that you put into this. We're done.

[END OF DISC FOUR.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]