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**Oral history interview with Douglas W.
Hollis, 2010 May 20-24**

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Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Douglas Hollis on May 20, 2010. The interview took place in San Francisco, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the GSA Archives of American Art Oral History Project.

Douglas Hollis 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

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Douglas Hollis on May 20, 2010 for the GSA Archives of American—GSA Archives of American Art Oral History Project at his home in San Francisco, California. This is disc number one.

Let's just start at the beginning and move through chronologically. Could you state your whole name and where and when you were born?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Douglas Hollis. I was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1948.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was the date?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: April 21.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And so, I grew up in Ann Arbor. In fact, my family is from Ann Arbor—I mean, they kind of like are original settlers there, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, my family goes back all the way to the beginning.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you have a big extended family there?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Very interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, many, many relatives.

MIJA RIEDEL: Grandparents and cousins and aunts and uncles.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Great-aunts and great-uncles. There were probably 40 or 50 people, at least.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what did your parents do?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: My father was an architect as well. He graduated from U of M [University of Michigan] just before World War II and actually went to work for Boeing as a draftsman during the war. He worked on the B-29 and other planes.

And then when the war was over, he started practicing architecture. He was sort of in business with a developer—it was back in the early days of subdivisions, you know, before they were the horror that we know them to be today.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Back when it was the idea of building—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, well, it was—

MIJA RIEDEL: —reasonable housing for communities.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —reasonable housing for normal people, yes. So—

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that primarily what he worked on was subdivisions?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, and unfortunately he was killed when I was three, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, dear. I'm sorry to hear that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —he didn't get a chance to practice too long. He was 36.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. But he continued to be a big influence on me.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I look just like him, so—in fact, I'll show you a picture of him later.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. What was his name?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Bob.

MIJA RIEDEL: Bob.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Robert.

MIJA RIEDEL: Robert Hollis?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm.

MIJA RIEDEL: And your mother—her name?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: My mother's name was Betty and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Her maiden name was—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Wilder, which is my middle name.

MIJA RIEDEL: And did she work?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, she was a stay-at-home mom. And, you know, obviously when my father died she had to try to make a living to support us, but pretty much she got remarried about two or three years later because it was just too difficult for her to raise—

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —two boys and try to hold down a job, things we don't think too much about anymore but at the time it was kind of unusual.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Absolutely. Absolutely. And you have one brother.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I have one brother. He's three years older. His name is Richard.

MIJA RIEDEL: And does he work in the arts?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: He does not, no. He's retired now but he was a union electrician for about 32 years. He was kind of the stay at home, stay in Ann Arbor, have the family kind of guy. You know, he's had a good life, though—fantastic benefits.

MIJA RIEDEL: I bet. [They laugh.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Electricians have fantastic benefits. He said, I'm making more now than I was when I was working—

MIJA RIEDEL: My—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —between Social Security and his pension and—[They laugh].

MIJA RIEDEL: He timed that right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: He made a good decision, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. Interesting. Would you describe what your childhood was like? Did you—did you take art classes? Were you very interested in art?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you interested in sculpture?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, from my earliest memories I was drawing and building things. My grandfather was a carpenter—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —and I spent a lot of time with both grandparents. I mean, his wife, grandmother, and he were very involved with kind of raising us.

MIJA RIEDEL: Those were your father's parents or your mothers?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, my mother's. My father's father died before I was born, but I was very close to my other grandmother as well. So it was—but it was great because he really encouraged both of us to make things, you know. He taught us how to make things and taught us about tools.

You know, so it was—it kind of—between my father being an architect and my grandfather being a carpenter, and my uncle was also a carpenter, so I was kind of—it was kind of in the gene pool somehow to be a maker.

MIJA RIEDEL: It must be something about the Midwest. My father is an architect and his father was a carpenter, and they grew up outside of Chicago so it's interesting just to think about that. It's a different era.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Yes. So what sort of things did you make? Were you building out of wood? Were you working with metal? Were you—what were you drawing?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, I guess in the early days I was probably working with wood. And at a pretty early age I got a welding set. I think I was—was I in junior high school? I think I was either in junior high—I think I was still in junior high school. So I actually started working with metal and I had a sort of studio down in the basement and that was cool.

MIJA RIEDEL: Welding—that's—

[Cross talk.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Also, my aunt was a ceramicist, and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Functional work or more sculptural? Both?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: More kind of crafty stuff, you know. It was not very serious work, really—a lot of slip casting and stuff like that. But, again, you know, I was exposed to that at a really early age and loved it. So I got to work with clay and firing stuff and glazing, all that too, you know. So it was kind of really—I was kind of immersed in it.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds very materially rich, and you were exposed to a lot of different ways of—a lot of different materials, a lot of different ways of working. It was pretty deep.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, which is interesting because I never—actually never painted—I'm trying to figure out what we would paint.

MIJA RIEDEL: But you would draw.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Why would you make a painting? Yeah, drawing was—but drawing is like—you know, that's like the first—that's like thinking, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: For me drawing is—it's that brain-to-page kind of thing. So I've always drawn, and I keep extensive notebooks. And, you know, it's just my way of thinking. I hate working on the computer when I'm actually trying to think about things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Still?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I mean, it's a tool. I use it. I do a lot of computer modeling now, which is great to—because

you can go right from that to production. You can send it out to fabricators so they can make parts or build things for you, and things like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there anything in particular you liked to draw when you were young?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Subject matter?

MIJA RIEDEL: Pardon?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Subject matter, you mean?

MIJA RIEDEL: Subject matter?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, just I liked to draw landscape things, less that than—although, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you drawing from things, still-lives and *plein air* rather than from imagination?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Probably a combination, actually. I don't even remember what I drew at the earlier ages.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Is it something that you followed through in high school as well?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Drawing?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, well, art in general. Were there classes in high school?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, yeah. Oh, absolutely. Again, part of the luck of my life is that being of that age, you know, public schools were fantastic. So we had—we had art classes, we had music, we had shop. We had, you know, all those facilities and it was just kind of taken for granted, I suppose.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wood shop and metal shop and those things.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, absolutely. It was fantastic, you know? It's a real tragedy, I think, that people aren't taught how to make things anymore. You know, they don't have that kind of intelligence. It's all about pushing stuff around rather than—[Laughs].

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. The real practical application—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and the way of learning that comes with that very hands-on working with material.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Absolutely. It's the kind of intelligence that I think is absolutely imperative and we became so dumb about all that stuff. It's a tragedy.

MIJA RIEDEL: What about sound? Were you interested in music? Did you play an instrument?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I was. I suppose this is probably a good time to talk about the American Indian influence because from about the age of nine, I was just really interested in Indians. I don't know why. It was exotic to me. I don't know, but—

MIJA RIEDEL: Had you had much exposure? Was it something you saw on television or the radio?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Just television, watching Westerns, just thinking how cool Indians were. I didn't like cowboys very much. I preferred the Indians. [They laugh.] But I guess it started at summer camp. They had a kind of Indian lore thing going on there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Summer camp in Ann Arbor?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, just outside of Ann Arbor. And the guy that was teaching that belonged to this group of white hobbyists in Ann Arbor, and so I guess I was about eight—seven or eight at that time, and I joined that group, and that's where all the exposure started to come because there were a lot of groups like that in the Midwest, probably 10—some on the East Coast but quite a—

MIJA RIEDEL: And what kind of group was it?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was basically an Indian lore enthusiasts group.

MIJA RIEDEL: Called white hobbyists?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah. I mean, we were not Indians—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —but we were all really interested in Indian lore.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And so we made things, you know, learned how to do beadwork and quillwork and all that craft, you know, and make costumes and learn dances and singing and songs, and we'd do performances.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was this primarily for children?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, it was quite a mixed group.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, senior citizens and school groups and other kinds of—you know, other kinds of groups.

MIJA RIEDEL: Would Native Americans come to teach these crafts or would you take trips to visit reservations?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, well, this is what happened, really, is that each of these groups, every year each one would sponsor as their powwow in their town—

MIJA RIEDEL: Did they each—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —and all the other groups would come for maybe a long weekend, you know, maybe three or four days and camp out. So it would be a big gathering of these white Indian lore enthusiasts.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did they identify themselves as anything other than sort of random groups that had a loose affiliation with each other? Did they fall under an umbrella of anything?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Not really, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It just was a very popular—I mean, I don't know how widespread you would say it is, but it was—there were a lot of groups.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So when we would get together there would be, you know, probably a couple hundred people at least. And very often we'd hire Indian singing groups to come to sing for these things. And that's when I first met this family that I started to visit in Oklahoma.

MIJA RIEDEL: They were singers. Musicians or—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They were—yes, the old man was a really prominent singer and his sons also sang.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was his name?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Lucien Rice.

MIJA RIEDEL: That sounds familiar for some reason. And he lived in Oklahoma?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, he lived outside of, well—

MIJA RIEDEL: You told me what tribe—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —Meeker.

MIJA RIEDEL: —what tribe he had been a part of but I can't remember.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, he was Prairie Potawatomi, which is the Mascoutin Band, and Kiowa.

MIJA RIEDEL: And how old was he? Do you have any idea at the time?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, he seemed like an old guy.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm sure he did. [Laughs.] You were a—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: He was probably in his 50s, maybe early 60s. I mean, I knew him from—let's see, I probably met him when I was nine, maybe 10.

MIJA RIEDEL: And would you—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So that would have been '58 and I knew him up to, oh gosh, at least up through—I think he passed away when I was in high school, maybe early college. So you know, it was something like 12 years or so, I'd say.

MIJA RIEDEL: And did you go to these events with your mom or with relatives?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, I went with the group.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And your mother was fine with—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, she really encouraged it.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's great.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: She thought it was great. And one of my closest friends, Ben Stone, was very close to him. And so I traveled with him to these various things as well, as well as going to Oklahoma as often as we could get down there.

MIJA RIEDEL: So how did that develop? How did it develop that you would go to these campouts, really, once a —

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Powwows—

MIJA RIEDEL: Powwows—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —in the summer for—half a week? Or a week?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They'd be throughout the year, actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, so this was a regular part of life for you as a child—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —every few months.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It seems like it, yes. I mean, probably more in the summer than the rest of the year, but they'd be in the fall or even in the winter and they'd be held indoors in those cases—

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you learning—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —which is not unusual either. I mean, down in Indian country they have indoor powwows as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure. And were you learning Indian songs, were you learning craft, all of that?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: All of it, yes.

[Cross talk.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So leatherworks, ceramics, basketry, that sort of thing?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Not so much ceramics because the Indians that I was involved with didn't really do ceramics. They're more prairie people—woodlands, prairie, plains.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So beadwork, quillwork, other kinds of ribbonwork, weaving and things like that, because we were always making our own costumes. So yeah, it was cool. And my aunts were great seamstresses, so I learned how to sew when I was really young as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: How interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So—

MIJA RIEDEL: So how did it transpire, then, that you—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This is really interesting. I haven't really thought about this before.

MIJA RIEDEL: Good, good. How did it evolve that then you would go in sometimes, by yourself, in Oklahoma with Native American families—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, the Rice's, you know, basically we got to be very close and they'd say, you know, come on down and visit. And so, I started traveling down there with—I think the group went down there once but I went down there with Ben a lot, and then—

MIJA RIEDEL: Just the two of you?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, the two of us, and there might be a couple of other people that would go with us, and we'd just drive down anytime it was enough days to warrant the journey. [Laughs.] So we would get down there maybe two or three times a year.

And then when I was about, I guess, 11 or 12, I started going down on my own and I spent some summers down there with them. And in the summertime it's like every weekend, I mean, everybody is on the move. You kind of leave the house on Thursday and go get a campsite and set up and so forth, and then Friday, Saturday and Sunday is the powwows.

And you go home Monday and do your laundry—[Laughs]—you know, and the next Thursday you're packing up again. So it was fantastic, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: And all of the Southwest, all over—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: All over pretty much Oklahoma, in my case. There were other groups, other people that had more of an affiliation with the Northern Plains—with the Lakota people and Northern Plains people, so they would go up there. I never really—I had been there but at that point in my life it wasn't really a destination. It was Oklahoma.

So you know, that's really—it's because of Lucien and being around, having that kind of access to the drum circles, you know, to the singers that I got particularly interested in the music, in the songs. So that was sort of the heart of it, really. That's more—it literally was the center of it. You know, it's the oral history of the people, right?

So learning all these family songs and special songs, as much of the language as one could. I don't really speak it but I know what the songs say. So yes, that's really an important thing.

Then, I guess—I don't know if that's really influenced my interest in working with sound or not, but it certainly is such a fundamental part of me that—and I suppose it started then but I really became really interested in world music, so I was listening to a lot of African music and music from other parts of the world, what we'd call folk music or world music now. And I loved oral—I loved singing, or voice, in particular.

MIJA RIEDEL: You've talked about that time as being very formative to your work. Can you speak to that a bit?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. I very seldom made sort of direct references to Indian things per se but—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Was it an environmental sensibility to—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It is, yes, and it's always been a hard thing to describe. Being among Indian people, it's like—they have ancient minds, which is not to be confused with primitive at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And when you're with them, you realize that you don't have one of those, you know? [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So as close as I ever got to people, I always knew I wasn't Indian, you know. And it's not that they reminded me I wasn't; it's just I knew it. So I've just accepted that. But it's fascinating to be around—at least, you know, especially when you're really immersed in large groups of Indians, to be kind of a witness to that.

And I think that's about as close as I can really come to saying that that really embedded itself in me. So even though, admittedly, I don't have the ancient mind, I think there's a kind of perspective about their relationship to the Earth and the rest of nature that got into me at a fairly early age, and I think that is manifest in the kinds of things that I've tried to work with in the work.

MIJA RIEDEL: By "ancient mind," do you mean really a sense of personal history of being very much a part of history and a longer history, or what exactly are you—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, very much so. They have a very deep memory for their lineage.

MIJA RIEDEL: Generations.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, many, many generations back.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I think it has to do with the fact that they, virtually with no exceptions, there was no written language, so it was all oral history—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —and storytelling.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was singing. It was— and I think there's something so much more visceral about that than the capturing of history on a page.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It becomes a living—it is a living thing. And it has to—it's like *Songlines*; you know, you have to keep singing the world into existence, in a way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's that general—that same notion that Chatwin talks about in his *Songlines*. I loved when I read that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. That is a wonderful book.

Just thinking out loud, the way you describe these powwows and gathering on Thursday and then departing again on Monday and coming together. And I assume that among the singing there was also dancing. It seems like there was almost a space created by sound, by music—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: —by dance and storytelling. There is a space created and then everybody went away and that space dissipated and it would be assembled again someplace else—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That's right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —at another powwow.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that, to me, does not seem dissimilar from a kind of energy that exists in some of your installations, something created or conjured by sound and whatever the elements may be that gather through there, pass through there and then go on their way.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That's a fair observation.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, that kind of almost ephemeral—

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, I agree. Yes. And you can see it really easily, especially in the early work. I was really devoted to—particularly when I, you know, first began working with sound, which was not until I moved out here in '73, but this idea that art was too visually dominant, or vision was too dominant in our—I thought the other senses were getting a bad deal. [They laugh.]

And even when I was in art school, I was actually making sculpture that was meant to be touched—

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —because I hated this idea that, you know, this is fantastic surfaces and it's taboo, right? So I made things that were intentionally to be touched and then started making environments that were meant to be entered and interacted with.

And so much of that early work was temporary too, so it was—they were kind of like essays, kind of like you would go find a place and then you'd figure out what that place was asking to be— what about that asked to be celebrated.

So I've tried to continue that. I think it's sometimes more difficult when you're dealing with permanent—so-called—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I don't even use that term, actually. I say long term—short term and long term—

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —because nothing is permanent—

MIJA RIEDEL: That's right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —and I'm really discovering that over the years since some things that were supposed to be there for a long time have—

MIJA RIEDEL: Became more temporary.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, became more temporary than I thought they would be.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. We will definitely talk about that later. I want to talk about your college experience, but before we move on to that, I just wanted to address high school. Was there anything else in high school, any significant teachers or anything that was particularly significant?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I had really good teachers and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Public high school you said, in Ann Arbor.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, and junior high school and high school. And even in elementary school my teachers were very encouraging, so my little ego got flattered at a fairly early age. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: That's great. They encouraged you.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Because, you know, I made things, right, so it wasn't such a—I thought three-dimensionally. And so, by the time I got to high school, before then, I knew I wanted to either be an architect or an artist. And so, I guess, the last two years of high school I spent at least half my day in the studio.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what was the studio then? Was it an art studio or—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was an art—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —the art department, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So drawing and sculpting?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Metalwork—there was welding and making metal sculpture or casting, ceramics and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Were you making your own molds?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. I learned how to make molds.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I have another relative, my uncle Carlton, who was my father's uncle—yes, my father's uncle. His son is named Doug as well. He was named after my uncle.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: But Uncle Carlton was a sculptor, and in fact he made that—see that black puma up there?

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah-hah.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That was a maquette he did for these two larger ones that are outside the University of Michigan Museum of Natural History. And he spent his whole career there making dioramas. He made these fantastic animal dioramas.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, how wonderful.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I didn't—again, he died before I was born, but when I—I think it was when I got to high school or when I started art school at Michigan, my uncle gave me his tools, which I still have, so, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. So there's a real family legacy and tradition of the arts—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I love having—I have some of my father's tools, I have some of my grandfather's tools and I use them all the time. So again, it's an interesting relationship to what we were talking about with the Indian thing to have these kind of visceral memories, you know—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —of handling these tools.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It keeps that alive.

MIJA RIEDEL: Probably as close to an ancient land or an ancient sensibility as—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Maybe.

MIJA RIEDEL: —you're likely to get. Yeah, interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So I spent a lot of time—I took all my study halls. I was the student tech, so I'd mix all the clay, and the cleanup and, you know, do whatever I could do.

MIJA RIEDEL: And so, you were mixing clays. They weren't bags of clay. You were actually mixing them?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: We were actually mixing them, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that's—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I always liked it.

MIJA RIEDEL: So very hands on and really—from the whole process of making the material, to making the work, to firing—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Yes, loading kilns and watching—you know, doing the firings and minding them and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Light the kilns—gas kilns?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, we didn't have a gas kiln. They were all electric. I think there were two or three. No, it wasn't until I got to Michigan that we started—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, the gas is a little bit dicier.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And the raku kiln.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, yes. Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Those were fun.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

So when we were talking on the phone yesterday, or a couple days ago, did you say that you first met Milton Cohen while you were still a high school student?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: How did that happen?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, he had this ongoing work called *Space Theater* in his studio, which was near campus. Every—once a week, actually—I can't remember which night it was, maybe Thursday night or something—he would have an open invitation for people to come and see these performances that he was always kind of—you know, he'd kind of make a new piece every year and then he'd kind of work on it all year and develop it and change it and so forth.

And there were kinetic elements and film elements. And he worked with Gordon Mumma on getting special sound mixes and things that would go along with it.

So yeah, I met him—I heard about this thing and it sounded really interesting, so my girlfriend and I went one evening and met him. So I just—from that point on I just—I got to get into Michigan; I got to get into Michigan so I can work with Milton.

MIJA RIEDEL: How exciting. So you were only 16, a junior or something like that?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I was probably 16, maybe 17.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what he was doing was basically—really resonated with you.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, I loved it. It was so—well, it was really experimental at the time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: There weren't that many people doing abstract theater then.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So it was—and, you know, that along with the activities of the ONCE Group, which I was also exposed to even before I got to college. It was like, wow, this is far out. [They laugh.] I like this. This is good. Even though I did continue to make sculpture, it did increase my interest in sort of building environments and having multi-sensory, experiential kinds of things develop in the work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it must have given a very expanded sense of multimedia and what could be done. It was certainly no longer a singular discipline—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: —a singular material.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, and the culture in Ann Arbor at that time—more than the art school per se, it was more of the art scene in the late '60s. It was just a real—it was very much more about collaboration than it was competition. And I saw so much—I was involved with so much interdisciplinary kind of work: musicians, filmmakers and dancers and visual artists and scientists. It was just a wonderful mix of people working together to do these wacky things.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, in collaboration—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: To be immersed in that as an artist or art student definitely set me up for kind of a trajectory.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you've talked about collaboration as being such a significant part of your work as a way of

thinking about working. I know it's something that you've talked about in terms of your teaching as well. It seems like it really—can you trace it back, do you think, to—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —these experiences?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, it sounds like it.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it was—

MIJA RIEDEL: It must have been so exciting for someone so young to be—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —in the midst of that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And, as I said, it was a real—it was a real culture. It was like a—I mean, I always think of it as my second family. You know, it's like—I think that happens to a lot of people when they go to school. They meet the other people that they sort of belong with.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They meet the kindred spirits.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And they usually stay with you for the rest of your life—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —which has been my case. That's very true.

MIJA RIEDEL: So would you describe what your experience was like at the University of Michigan?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, it was the roaring '60s.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So it was sex, drugs and rock and roll.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And obviously Vietnam was raging and SDS was a big—had a lot of prominence and we had a lot of protests going on. So that was a wild time as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And mostly we just worked our butts off. There were some—people just worked really hard in the studio all the time. We were reluctant to go to other classes but did. But it was such a great scene at the art school, you know, with all these people. And then this surrounding art community, which was the people with ONCE and Milton and other people.

And the music scene was great. There was some really good dance work going on there at the time and a lot of new music.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you working primarily on sculptural pieces at the time? Were you working on sound at the time?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I really wasn't working with sound at that point.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Not in the conscious sense, anyway. I didn't really think of it as a medium quite in the way I subsequently did—do. But, yes, I was primarily making sculpture and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Large-scale, to be—

[Cross talk.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, because I took a lot of classes with Milton and he taught "Light, Sound, and Motion." That was his major class, as well as 3-D design and so forth. I took every class I could with him and then special studies, worked in *Space Theater* with him as an assistant.

MIJA RIEDEL: What did you do?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, I sort of moved these kinetic screens around that kind of activated these films and lights that were being projected on them. It was kind of impromptu kind of—

MIJA RIEDEL: Part of a performance?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it was quite—I participated in performances for a couple of years. And then I started working—and Ann Arbor was one of the first—the early research in lasers took place, and it was actually where the first hologram was developed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And there was a physicist in town. His name is slipping my mind right now—Lloyd Cross. And he sort of really was interested in trying to make that medium accessible, affordable for artists who worked, so he started—

MIJA RIEDEL: Which medium?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Holograms.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And he also developed this kind of kinetic laser projector that would react to sound input and do these sort of, you know, drawings in space, if you will.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I worked on a big exhibition at Cranbrook. Probably it was about '69. I was starting to do inflatable environments at that point, so I built a big, huge sort of room-sized inflatable structure with these other inflatables inside it, and it was used as a projection surface, a kind of three-dimensional projection surface for this laser projector.

So I worked with a group of people to do that. And, again, it was quite consistent with the general scene—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —that was going on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So I got away from the kind of stand-alone object—not completely; I kept sort of making sculpture, but I started to drift off into more environmental installation kinds of thinking and making. It just seemed more interesting to me, to have this kind of dynamic condition that people—it really engaged people physically.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it sounds like you were working on your own projects as well as working collaboratively, too.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So I was in the sculpture studio all the time making things, and some ceramics. I never really got upstairs to the painting studio but I did a lot of drawing classes as well and actually really honed my draftsmanship a lot during those years, more than I had previously. It became probably a much more facile tool in terms of this thinking/drawing thing that we were talking about earlier.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Really involved as a way—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —to develop your ideas.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. And when you think about your experience with Milton Cohen, is there anything in particular that you would cite as especially significant, or was it just the general experience over time, the way of working, watching him in action?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Watching him—yes, I mean, he had a—he was a fantastically generous man and I thought he had a wonderfully kind of exotic life, actually, because he would always go—usually Europe but sometimes other places—in the summertime and that's when he would do his filming and photography that he would then bring back and utilize in *Space Theater*. But I never had known anybody had been that sort of international before.

MIJA RIEDEL: They were part of the Venice Biennale in the early or late '60s, right?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That was another charming thing about hanging around with him because, you know, he'd been to Italy and he'd been to Greece, and I didn't get to Europe until—well, when I was first married, we went in 1970 for about four months and stayed with him. He had left the university the year before. He got fed up with the politics. [Laughs.] So he moved to Crete. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, how wonderful.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So Ruth and I went to Crete. We actually took a Greek freighter from New York. It took us three weeks to get to Piraeus, and then we took a ferry to Crete and spent, well, the better part of a month with him there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where in Crete?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Chania.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, how wonderful.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

[Cross talk.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: There's a really interesting group of ex-pats there, and Dorothy, she owned both houses that were used in *Zorba*—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —both the widow's house and the one that's out in the country. I can't remember. There was like the old French woman and then there was the widow, right?

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. I'm trying to think. I went to that—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The French woman's house was the house in town—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes, and she died and—

[Cross talk.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —and the widow's house was her house in the country.

MIJA RIEDEL: Way out in the country, right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: How extraordinary.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So that was a trip.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. Absolutely. So you maintained a friendship with him for a long time.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, yes. Until he died.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was reading about ONCE before we met, and there was a wonderful quote, I guess by his wife Caroline Cohen saying that—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: [Laughs.] Caroline. Crazy Caroline.

MIJA RIEDEL: She was talking about ONCE evolving into a true reciprocity of music and action, and I just think that that was such a lovely, succinct way of describing sort of multimedia, interdisciplinary, experimental theater, and that reciprocity, that back and forth, and almost an implied space that comes out of that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And within a contained period of time as well. And it seems to me that that is what you've been talking about and is something that you've continued to explore for decades.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: You know the book *Expanded Cinema*?

MIJA RIEDEL: I don't.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It came out many years ago but there is actually a chapter on Milton in that book. And I don't have it anymore for some reason. It got away from me.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Inaudible.] So you finished in Ann Arbor at the university in 1970?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: '70.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what inspired you to move to New York?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, my first wife, Ruth Reichl, her dad was a really well-known typographer and book designer, and she'd just finished her master's in art history and I'd just graduated with my B of A, and we didn't really have any plans.

And so he said, well, why don't you just move to New York and work with me for a while, you know? That will let you live in New York and I could use the help. And that turned out to be three interesting years of being in New York in the early '70s, which was a fantastic time to be there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It didn't ultimately stick, but we can talk about that later. But—

MIJA RIEDEL: What didn't stick?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Ultimately, for various reasons, we just needed to get the hell out of New York. It was a little bit claustrophobic family-wise, although I loved Ernst. We got along just absolutely fabulously. I never felt like I worked for him; I just worked with him. So again—you know.

And I had a kind of a knack for it. I'd never really done that much graphics before, but I wound up doing all the dust jackets and some of the cover design and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —picture layout and so forth, and then he would kind of deal with the insides more. But we did a lot of—we did Joyce Carol Oates' early books, and he had done the first American edition of *Ulysses*—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —the one with the big U.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And he was pretty much freelance but he worked a lot with Random House, and Holt in particular, Vanguard.

MIJA RIEDEL: Completely different than what you'd done before but actually a kind of wonderful job to—

[Cross talk.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, he didn't pay us that well but it was—you know, we had a loft down on Rivington Street.

MIJA RIEDEL: Over in the East Village?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Lower East Side, right next door to the Bowery Mission.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness. [They laugh.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And it was a really raw—this is like pre-SoHo—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —virtually. I mean, people were just starting to move into SoHo.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: But we couldn't even afford that so we wound up—we lived with Pat Oleszko. Do you know her? She's a performance artist.

MIJA RIEDEL: I don't.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, you should.

MIJA RIEDEL: Pat Oleszko. Who did she—did she have her own company or did she work with somebody?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: She worked solo—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —still does, pretty much.

MIJA RIEDEL: Pat Oleszko.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: We went to art school together and she's a very wild woman. I'll loan you a couple tapes if you want.

MIJA RIEDEL: I would love to see. So is that how you became familiar with—you mentioned earlier Steve Paxton, that he's—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, Steve was around Ann Arbor quite a bit.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay, he was?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: I didn't notice that. Go ahead.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, Steve was around, Pauline Oliveros was around. And because of Anne Wehrer, who was one of the ONCE Group people—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —she was really—she was a good friend of Warhol's and she was actually in *Bike Boy*. And she knew a lot of the pop people and they would come out, so Oldenburg and Rauschenberg and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —as well as John Cage and Merce Cunningham and David Tudor.

MIJA RIEDEL: Would come to Ann Arbor?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, and do performances—

MIJA RIEDEL: And you were exposed to them then.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's wonderful.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So New York wasn't the primary—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, how could I forget that? [They laugh.] Oops, sorry; a small detail left out of there. That would be education.

MIJA RIEDEL: So I thought that those things had happened in New York but it came way before that—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —when you were still in Ann Arbor.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So that community was even much larger than—

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —what I had previously described.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: So then when you arrived in New York it must have felt very familiar in certain ways.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was in a way, yes. Yes. And the dance scene was fabulous—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —and the Grand Union was cooking, and Paxton and the other contact improv people were going at it. It was early Phil Glass and early Steve Reich and early Bob Wilson. And they were all kind of emerging at that time, all those people. So it was a great—it was a great time to be there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And it was much better than going to graduate school.

MIJA RIEDEL: You described —[inaudible]—at graduate school. There must have been something going on just about every night, all of the time.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Yes, it was—it was very thrilling.

MIJA RIEDEL: So would you go to a lot of performances?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm.

MIJA RIEDEL: Would you work on any of the performances?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, I never really did that—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —but we went to a lot, yes. And of course Pat was doing her performance work as well, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: Was it along the lines of Grand Union or kind of—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Her work?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. Or Tricia Brown came later after—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, Tricia was—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —was part of that too.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. And Deborah Hay and Yvonne Rainer and—what's her first name? Well, I'll think of it in a minute.

MIJA RIEDEL: So very much experimental dance—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and contact improv and—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Happenings.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, and extraordinary sets and music.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oldenburg was doing happenings. And, you know, that also, to some degree, started me being exposed to sculpture in a way I hadn't been—like, wow. I mean, Ann Arbor wasn't, like, really big on—well, there wasn't anything called public art. We had a couple of significant modern works on campus.

What are you doing there?

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, unfortunately that just stopped. Oh, no, we're good. We've got 58 seconds.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh.

MIJA RIEDEL: Perfect. So we'll just stop it here.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Okay.

[END OF TRACK AAA_hollis10_1646_m.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Douglas Hollis on May 20, 2010 for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project in his home in San Francisco, California. This is disc number two.

Before we finish up with New York, I wanted to touch briefly on what your own work was like, or not like, at the time.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: What I did or didn't do. [They laugh.]

I was kind of in a rut, in terms of my own work at that point. I just—I guess I felt like a kind of fish out of water. And it was great living with Pat, but she was—she can kind of intimidate one with her level of production, which is extremely intense. [Laughs.] But I was doing sort of wooden structures at that point, and—

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you have a studio, or were you—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, we had a loft that the three of us shared, and so that also was a little problematic, in terms of the level of mess one could make without getting in everybody else's hair. And so I kept it pretty simple. I did do a lot of drawing, and just small—kind of small sculpture, really—small, wooden things. It was really that in-between time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were they kinetic at all? Were they—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Not even kinetic at that point—well, I'll take it back; there might have been some aspect of that, but that, again, was almost something that—one of the things I'd done in Ann Arbor and then didn't really bring it across, you know, with me to New York, really.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mostly wood. Were you able to weld at all in this space?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, no. I really had almost no shop to speak of. I had a few power tools, but nothing like shop tools. So it was kind of what I could do with hand tools and so forth. It worked okay. It didn't bother me that much, actually. I mean, I didn't really feel like I was squandering my time.

And you know, along with building the loft [?] out, and then at some point, I was pretty—probably the last half-year I was there, I stopped working with Ernst, and Ruth was starting to—she had stopped working to start writing the first cookbook, and which we did as kind of a group project, as well.

So I was doing a lot of illustrations for that, and we had, probably, eight other people—friends of ours—that were doing illustrations for it. And Pat did some special costumes and things that were photographed and used.

MIJA RIEDEL: In a cookbook? [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I'll get it for you.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'd love to see that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Interesting. Yeah, a very worn copy. So this was, like, the—

MIJA RIEDEL: We have this wonderful book here in front of us, now—*Mmmmmm: A Feastyary* [Ruth Reichl. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972]. So did—how long did this project take?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: About a year. And it was a very unusual project. Holt had never done—kind of released the production to a group like this. So they printed the galleys out for us—they set all the type—and just gave us the sheets. And then we did the whole paste-up on the entire book. We had the layout sheets and we just did the whole thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: It feels very much like a '70s project—a very creative '70s project.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And that's Pat.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] This is wonderful. Oh, this is really wonderful. I've never seen this before.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's a collector's item. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, I'm sure it is.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They only printed—I think they did 10,000 copies hardcover and maybe another five [thousand]—or 10 soft cover.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, and that was her very first cookbook.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. But it was a great project, actually. Buster Simpson, who was also at art school—when he graduated, he went out to the East Coast and was up in Providence and met Dale Chihuly. And Dale was just starting Pilchuck [Glass School, Stanwood, WA].

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And it was—so he invited Buster to come out and work with the students, because there were no places—there were no shelters; there was nothing. It was—[Laughs]—just out in the woods.

MIJA RIEDEL: Camping. Yes, yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So Buster came out. I think he was out there the first year, and then the second year, he asked Ruth and I to come out. And so I worked with him and the students, you know, and Ruth set up a communal kitchen and I was working with students to build shelters and—

MIJA RIEDEL: At Pilchuck?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's fascinating. I had no idea.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, yes. Apparently, there's a history of it out now. I haven't actually seen it, but—

MIJA RIEDEL: So who else was there that summer?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Jamie Carpenter was there. I don't know who else.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was William Morris there, yet?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Maybe he came later.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: He was later.

MIJA RIEDEL: Or Dick Marquis?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, Dick was—he visited. He wasn't actually there for an extended—so we literally—I mean, we finished the paste-up and drove it up to Holt, dropped it off, and then kept going and drove out to

Pilchuck for the summer.

And then after we left Pilchuck, we came down here to see Nick Bertoni and some other friends of ours. Bob Ashley moved out here to—he came out in '70, I think, to kind of revitalize the Center for Contemporary Music [at Mills College], which Pauline [Oliveros] had started a few years before that. And it was—and Robert Sheff, who is better known as "Blue" Gene Tyranny—[Laughs]—came along with him, and Nick came out to be a technical director.

And so we came down to visit and I just loved the scene. It was just great, you know. It was kind of like being back in Ann Arbor, in a funny way, in terms of the kind of activities that were going on. And the music scene at Mills was fantastic. It was later known as the seven years of crazy love. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, was it?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And it produced so many incredible—I mean, the students were, you know, Paul Dresher, Paul DeMarinis, John Bischoff, Maggy Payne, many, many others.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So it just felt much more comfortable to you—much more where you were —

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, and we were getting—we were actually getting really tired of being in New York at that point. You know, it was just getting a little claustrophobic. And so we just decided to move.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that was 1973?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Seventy-three, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So had you come out with the idea of relocating?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I mean, we went back to New York after—but I think we were pretty convinced by the time we got back to New York that we needed to get out of there, you know? It just seemed so appealing out here.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you came out in '73, and it was a couple of years, I think, before the Exploratorium residency. Did you—where did you settle in the city? Did you have a studio? Were you starting to work?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: We actually lived in Berkeley. We had an apartment for about three months, and then Nick Bertoni and his girlfriend, Martha Wehrer of the Wehrer family, they were faced with either buying the house they were in or moving out. And it wasn't—they really kind of couldn't afford it on their own, so we started talking about it and thought, well, maybe we should just try to rent a big house together. And before we knew it, we had bought this 14-room Victorian on Channing Way in Berkeley—[Laughs]—for \$30,000.

MIJA RIEDEL: Those were the days.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, sure was. We got really lucky on that one. So it was kind of a commune, actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: It sounds like it.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, with Ruth and I and Martha and Nick and Jules Bacchus and then, usually, a couple other people.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sounds about right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It seemed like every night, there was a big group that would show up for dinner. We cooked communally and you know, went to the Cheese Board Collective and all that sort of righteous Berkeley stuff. So I was there till the early '80s. And it was great. We had a two-car garage that we had as a workshop. And that's when I first started doing work with—initially, with camera obscuras.

And I had a big, green van that I turned into a camera obscura. I built a wall behind the driver's—there were no windows in the back of the van, and so I built a wall behind the driver's seat and I paneled the back end with white-painted plywood and put a hole in that front wall. And I'd drive people around and put them in the back in these beanbag chairs and drive them around. And so it was, you know—it was a moving camera obscura. So you get this whole projection on the whole back end of the walls in the back of the van.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sounds like a mobile happening, of sorts.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it was, kind of—yes. And I was looking for kind of a real-time soundtrack analog that would kind of go with that beautiful simplicity of a camera obscura, and this magic that happens when you put a

hole in the wall. I mean, I didn't use any lenses. It was strictly—it was, like, a pure thing. So it was—no focal length—so you know, it was kind of upside-down and backwards and soft—you know, almost impressionistic, in a way.

But it was a really wonderful experience. And I was talking to Clay Feer, who was another one of the Mills students at that time. He told me about these things called Aeolian harps. [Laughs.] And that was the first time I knew about those, so I actually tried to build one for the roof—using the roof of the truck as a soundboard, so that the sound of the harp would be a direct correlation to the speed that the van was moving.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, how wonderful!

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So I mean, you'd get this kind of real-time, live soundtrack inside to go along with the images.

MIJA RIEDEL: How did it work?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Eh, not so good. [They laugh.] But it was during that time that I started doing these kite performances.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, right. I've read a little bit about those.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And that's an image of one of the ones that I did. I was doing—down at the Berkeley Marina—the landfill down there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is that the same as the Emeryville Mud Flats, or is that another space?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, it's north of that. If you know where the Berkeley Marina is, it was just north of the Berkeley Marina—just north of the university.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And it was a landfill—you know, active landfill at that point. But there were some areas that they had capped, so that's where I was doing these things.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you would build the kites?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I built the kites. Yes, I built a lot of kites. And that turned out to be an interesting connection, because I realized that the lines I was flying the kites on were making these really amazing sounds. And so that was really the beginning of the whole idea of soundscapes and creating these kind of sonic architecture works.

MIJA RIEDEL: So these would be performances with the kites—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Night performances, probably half-a-dozen kites with lights attached to them. And then I was acoustically amplifying them with these horns that used to be on Kezar Stadium—[Laughs]—that I got from an old sound supplier here.

MIJA RIEDEL: So they were somehow attached to the kite strings?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So I had these little diaphragms on the small end of the horn, and I'd hook the strings onto that. And then the horns would sort of be these amplifiers for the sound that the lines were making. And some of the lines were this kind of flat, strapping materials, and they didn't need any amplification because they were really loud. They had this kind of bull-roar kind of quality to them—woo, woo, woo.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, so they were kind of impromptu. The first time I did a performance—

MIJA RIEDEL: Would it be '73, '74?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This would have been '74, I'd say. I actually had the temerity to send out invitations. And of course, so there's like—you know, 50 people show up—and we had a big vat of mulled wine and made baked potatoes that people could use as sort of edible hand-warmers. [They laugh.] And of course, there was no wind. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: One of the two days in the Bay Area every year.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Exactly, right. But it was a fantastic evening, because there was this very quiet, kind of—people were talking in these kind of hush tones. And actually, "Blue" Gene actually made a wonderful recording

of that non-event. [Laughs.] So it turned into something other than what I had intended, but at the same time—so the next time I did it much more impromptu, just kind of like, "it's happening tonight." You know, this looks like—okay. So word of mouth, we just kind of used the phone-tree technique. And the next one was—the next couple ones that I did were quite a bit more up to what I was hoping they would be.

MIJA RIEDEL: And would you explain what happened?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, I just launched these kites, you know. They'd be down there and these box kites are so stable, you don't need to do anything to them, you know. And they were big. They were six-foot kites and they had a hell of a pull. And so I had to actually have the anchors to tie them off to.

But they'd just go up and hang out. So you didn't need to be flying them, per se. And then there was this sound that they were creating below.

MIJA RIEDEL: And then the lights on the kites above—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And there were these—I kind of thought of them as, kind of, custom constellations, in a way. I used those cold—what are they called—those lightsticks.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: You know, those—they're like chemical light sticks.

MIJA RIEDEL: You break it and they last for a while, exactly.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, I had a—I did one with a strobe. I was also doing—making films—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —with the kite. I built a camera-holder—a special kite with a holder that I mounted my Super-8 camera on. And so I was making these kind of aerial, kite's-eye-view films of the Berkeley dump. [They laugh.] Short, you know, pre-video, right?

This was like half-inch backpack video days, right, when Optic Nerve was hauling all of this equipment around. But so the kites were really—that was a great, kind of, connection for me. It was like this real—again, I guess, a collaboration, but this time, with this incredible natural force.

And it's like—it's really like this extension of the body—a kite is. If you're holding this line, you can kind of feel it, you know, feel the air and the wind.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you engage people to hold the kites, or did you just launch them and tie them all down?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I had to kind of tie them down, but people could certainly grab onto the lines.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it looks like there were, what, eight or 12?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I had about half a dozen kites.

MIJA RIEDEL: And were you beginning to experiment with the string or the rope or the filament that would hold them, in order to experiment with the sound quality?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: With the sound, yes. So it was at that point—Pete Richards was a friend at that point and came to one of these performances. And he went back and talked to Frank Oppenheimer about it and said, you know, Doug would be an interesting person to get over to the Exploratorium to do something.

And so I went and I had a meeting over there. And I went over and picked Frank and Pete up and put them in the back of my cinema obscura, drove them over to Marin to Frank's house. And it was a real gas going through the tunnel. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, I bet.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So we got over to Frank's and we sat around for a couple hours talking and he said, you know, just come up with a project you'd like to work on and you're there. So we talked about maybe doing a cinema obscura piece or some kind of camera obscura thing, but ultimately that wind harp was something I was becoming more interested in—through the research with the kites, and just thinking that would be a great thing to find out more about.

So I spent a year-and-a-half there researching—

MIJA RIEDEL: Seventy-five to '76?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, building numerous prototypes, a lot of which didn't work very well. And ultimately, I developed the first harp that's over the entry. 10 years later, it was damaged in a windstorm so we got a chance to rebuild it. Maybe it was even—let me see, maybe it was even 20 years later. I think it was about '95. So I knew a lot more about how to build wind harps than I had during the original residency. So I redesigned it. So the one that's over there now is the newer version that works a lot better.

MIJA RIEDEL: Would you describe the Exploratorium in those days, because it wasn't even 10 years old, yet. It must have been an extraordinary time there.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, it started in '68, '69, yes. And Pete doesn't agree with me about this, but I think I was one of the first artists in residence that actually had that official caveat that was linked to an NEA grant that they got to subsidize those residencies. But Bob Miller had been there, and Pete, of course, had been there, since the beginning. Yes, it was fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: Had he done his wave organ, yet? That came later, right?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, that was later. That was about 10 years later, even. So yes, it was a great scene,. Well, I wasn't the only artist there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Who else was there at the time? Do you remember?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Maybe it will come to you.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, I could think about that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Different than any other, sort of, lab or studio, I'm sure.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Absolutely. And again, it was like—for me, it was very familiar. It was like yet another part of my family, because here I was, once again, with technicians and scientists and other artists, and everybody was working on cool stuff. It wasn't just the artists that were making exhibits. There were a lot of development of many, many different things. And we were trying to grow the place.

There wasn't much—I don't know if you've seen the original photograph, but it was like this enormous, empty building. [They laugh.] And Frank opened the place right away—said, let's just build a few things and open the doors and take it from there. And so it was just this ongoing process of developing exhibits, and it was great to be part of that. Those were really the great days, when he was still around. It's not like that anymore. It's very different, much more institutionalized.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was it like then? Did you have a studio space? Did you have people who helped you get materials?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I worked in the shop with everybody else. And I was up on the roof a lot, too—[They laugh]—setting up different mock-ups and tests and so forth. So it was kind of like—but the shop wasn't enclosed then, like it is now. So it was just a simple, low fence. But so we were really immersed in the museum all the time. We never really—sometimes, it got a little too much.

MIJA RIEDEL: Would people come in and talk with you about what you were doing? Was there that level of interaction?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They could, yes. Yes, there was—and Frank really encouraged that. He wanted people to not only see things being built, but actually be able to talk to the people that were building them. So that was so important to him, again, to have that kind of intelligence that comes from making things and knowing how things are made and knowing about materials. So yes, it was wonderful. I kind of stayed with them a long time. After that first residency, I went back and did another one and built the water vortex piece that's there.

MIJA RIEDEL: And when was that? When did you go back?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was probably '78, something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, okay. Was that another residency, or—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Kind of, but once I'd done the first one, I was over there a lot. I'd just go over to make something if I needed a metal lathe or a milling machine or something like that. I'd just go over and —so when I

got the commission at Lawrence Hall, I actually built the piece at the Exploratorium. So yes, it was an awesome — once I had that set of relationships there, it was an ongoing thing where I could always go back and ask for help solving certain technical problems or whatever.

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you have a separate studio, or was it your studio for a period of time?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The Exploratorium?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, I had this shop at the house. This is when I was still in Berkeley. So I had that studio. So that was good. So I kind of split my time. I wasn't over there like every day, by any means.

MIJA RIEDEL: After that first Aeolian harp, there were a couple of wind organs. Did they evolve from the Exploratorium piece—first Berkeley and then in Omaha, yes?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, well, the first project in Omaha was temporary. That was a wind harp structure. And then I did a wind organ, that's still there, a couple years later. I went back and I did that. So that was kind of, you know, trying to utilize the knowledge that I'd gotten from building that harp at the Exploratorium.

And the first thing that happened was Rae Tyson, who was the director of Artpark, was out visiting, kind of doing a talent search. [Laughs.] And he just happened to be there the night that we had the opening for the wind harp.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really? So that would have been '76?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: '76, yes. And my friend Anne Wehrer, from Ann Arbor days, had subsequently moved back to New York and was living with Alan Saret. And he had been at Artpark the year before or, maybe, two years before. But I think it was just the year before. And Anne had been there with him and then, when Rae came out, she kind of was helping him find artists that might be interesting to invite to Artpark. So that's how that happened. And so we went out to Artpark in '77—for the summer—and it was during—it was for that project that I developed the first wind organ pipes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So I hadn't actually done wind organs prior to that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. That was '77, right? Yes. And you were out there for the whole summer?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: There I am, the young lad with his harp.

MIJA RIEDEL: So this was on the top of the Exploratorium, right, because there's the House of Fine Arts behind it.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That's spectacular. How wonderful to see that. Maybe we can get some digital images to send along with the oral history. It would be wonderful so people could see the images that we're looking at.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Sure, absolutely. This is the finished harp.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, I've seen an image similar to that, but the one beforehand, with you standing on the roof, I haven't seen that before. I think the Exploratorium has a photo of that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. So this is Artpark.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And this was called *Sound Site*, is that right?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: *Sound Site*, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So many artists have talked about Artpark as such an extraordinary experience, and it sounds like it was the same for you.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, for me, it was fantastic. I mean, the Exploratorium had been great, but I kind of thought, okay, now I'll just keep making cabinets and try to enjoy life and whatever. And this really put me on the national scene, really, in a big way. Because a lot of people saw that and, having seen this piece, invited me to do a lot of the other temporary projects that I did in the late '70s and the early '80s.

MIJA RIEDEL: Would you talk about the evolution of this project?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Sure. They flew me out there to do a site visit, and I found this trail that goes down the gorge, down to the river. And because the Niagara Gorge is kind of a natural wind tunnel at that point—the wind really comes down that gorge—and because I was obviously still interested in these wind instruments, I kind of based the whole proposal on creating a harp—a wind organ—and I had some other elements that I wanted to do that I didn't get around to. So I basically went there and fabricated all the elements and then installed them on the site.

It was really the idea of trying to make a place that was more discovered by your ears, rather than—these were like the early days of trying to make an emphasis on other senses. So the idea of hearing it first—kind of discovering it through sound—and then being able to actually experience that sound tactilely, was really interesting to me.

MIJA RIEDEL: There is some place where you talk about sound as "taking the invisible and making it palpable." And I think that was such a nice description, and how there is such an interesting access to an emotional sensibility through sound.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that something you were thinking about at the time, as well?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I was. These were the early days of really thinking about that. It's sort of—I mean, Artpark started so much, and it was such a catalyst, in terms of the whole idea of public art. It really didn't exist then, except for Donald Thalacker's attempts to put big sculptures around. A thing called "public art" just was not a term being used.

And on the other hand, a lot of us were beginning to explore site, so the idea of making site-specific work was something that was definitely beginning to evolve at that point, obviously from the work of Morris and Smithson and so forth, and the Earthworks people were definitely an influence. But these were people like Mary Miss and George Trakas and a number of us were really just beginning to explore making works in place that were in response to the site.

And so this was really my first—I didn't really consider the Exploratorium—at the time, I didn't think about it as being a site-specific work. It is, of course. But it wasn't really until Artpark that I really started to think about not just environmental sculpture, not just site-specific work, multisensory work, but also this sort of dialogue with the public, because people were walking around and they'd stop and talk to you.

So for me, it was quite important because—you wouldn't know it from the way I run my mouth—but I was really shy, actually. And so the idea of working in public and so forth was not, initially, something I was that comfortable about. But it's through these kinds of interactions that really started to open me up and I started to think about this whole notion of audience and participant and viewer, and what were those differences.

And I think it was so important to public education to have places like Artpark doing these kinds of projects because it gave more of the general public a deeper appreciation of the process of making art, as opposed to just witnessing the final product. So I emphasized the process.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it also allowed, in many ways, it seems, the public to be a participant in almost an experimental-theater work.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Exactly, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: It was an environment created and they could participate with it.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And of course, I had witnessed that back in Ann Arbor, when I was doing the inflatable things to some degree, and I liked that part of it. But it took some years—I'm probably not done figuring it out, yet, but it really started to feed in this whole idea of really interactive work.

And obviously, the Exploratorium—even though my wind harp there isn't particularly interactive, the philosophy of the place of really engaging people with all their senses was something that, you know, soaked into me when I was there, too. So there's been kind of an interesting consistency in my growth regarding that.

MIJA RIEDEL: How long were you at Artpark? Was it a two month, one month—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: We were there about two months, I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: And was there lodging? Was there communal meals? How did it work?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, Ruth actually ran a communal kitchen there. She was doing cooking demonstrations,

but in the evening, when the general public wasn't there, we'd have a kind of communal cooking scene that happened. And we just lived in the van. We'd just sort of back it up to the gorge and open the back door—great view.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Who else was there that summer? Do you remember?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Martin Puryear, Alice Aycock, Laurie Anderson, who actually made a wonderful recording of this piece for me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Which I just digitalized. The University of Buffalo is doing a retrospect on the first—I think it's the first 10 years of Artpark—this fall.

MIJA RIEDEL: That sounds wonderful. University of Buffalo, did you say?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Anyone else come to mind?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Houston Conwill was there. Joe Hobbs from Texas had the Artpark ranch piece. Newton and Helen Harrison were there. Bob Stackhouse was there. Yes, it was kind of a wonderful, community thing. It was good.

MIJA RIEDEL: There seem to be communities of artists that have been significant parts of your development and your experience throughout your life, really.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: And has it always been, for the most part, a collaborative, cooperative sensibility, rather than a competitive sensibility?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. I've never—I still don't feel competitive, even when I'm doing a competition. I just compete with myself, really. You know, it's like—it's not about beating somebody else to the gig; it's just do the best you can and if they like it, they'll go with it. And if they like something else, they'll go with that. I think so much of the work has continued to be collaborative, as well. So we'll get to that in a while.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you talked about Artpark as, really, leading from more regional projects to more national projects. What happened that summer that allowed that transition?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Partly, it was the people that came to see Artpark, and some of them were art people—people like Ed Levine, who was—I guess he was teaching—I think he was still in—was he still in Minneapolis? He was in Dayton at one point. Maybe he was still at Dayton. I think he was there before he went to Minneapolis.

Anyway, he saw it and he had been asked to recommend artists to do a temporary project in Omaha for the Joslyn Museum. And he really loved this piece and just, you know, put me forward. So I was there with Steve Antonakos and George Trakas for about two weeks. We didn't work together on a project; we each did our own things. But we spent time hanging out together.

This is the wind harp I did in Omaha. This is the most Indian-like thing I think I've ever done—[Laughs]—although it has nothing to do with teepees, per se. But it was meant to be an enterable structure. So it was about 25 feet high and maybe 35 feet in diameter, and there was, I think, maybe three or four strings on the east side that were left out. And this is another interesting example of this kind of ethereal quality that I was trying to explore, of this non-visual experience.

MIJA RIEDEL: The visual is certainly secondary.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: From 100 feet away, you can hardly see this thing, but as you approach, you'd start to see these highlights and it would kind of start to become, and then as you got closer, you'd start to hear it. And then people would walk into the interior of it, and they invariably would put their hand on that center pole. Then they heard the harp internally, like a bone phone. [They laugh.] You could feel the vibrations, and the vibrations would come into their bodies, so it really embraced them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This feels like it's the first very specifically experiential piece, in terms of not just sound, but participation —

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, Artpark was quite participatory.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was it, as well? Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: People used to like to go down and lay down under those aluminum soundboards. [Laughs.] I saw that more than once. There was that tactile aspect of that piece, too. And they've got some pretty interesting visual effects that changed as you walked around it or as the sun moved.

MIJA RIEDEL: These are beautiful photos. Have you taken these?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, it would be wonderful if maybe we could get a disc of these to send along with the—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I could make a copy of this PowerPoint. That's probably the best thing to do. And then another temporary project that happened—this is—I guess Omaha was '78, and this might have been '78 or '79. It was right in that zone. And it was a project in Dayton that, again, Ed was instrumental and invited me to do that.

And I was there with Jackie Ferrara. And Dickie Fleisher was supposed to be there, but had some problems and wasn't able to do his installation until later. But I got to know—that's when I really met Jackie and got to know her really well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Now, what's this piece called?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This is called—let's see, what is this called? *Mirage*.

MIJA RIEDEL: *Mirage*. And this was temporary.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This was a temporary project. This is a point of land—there was a confluence of two rivers, and so it was sort of a sonic corridor. And this flat strapping is the material that I was talking about earlier that I'd used for some of the kite performances.

But I loved, again, the sort of really ephemeral, phonetic quality that it had, both visually and the sound was fabulous, because these things would sort of turn, like, in the—you know, as the wind struck them, they'd kind of do that, so it was more like energy, rather than physical material.

MIJA RIEDEL: They're fascinating, the way they appear and disappear in the light. They break into—they almost look like lasers or flashes of light.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, they really seem more like energy than material. So people would come in and walk down this corridor, and the sound would sort of come up from the ground and over their head, and then come back down again, as they would reach the point. That was about—I think those were 20, 25 feet high, something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: 25 feet high?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah, and about 120 feet long.

MIJA RIEDEL: And how long was this installed for?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was up for, I think, most of the summer. This was spring when we did the construction. And this was a pretty interesting example, because I actually didn't figure out what I was going to do before I went. So the first couple of days I was there, I was kind of looking around for a site. And then I found the point and I liked that, and basically figured it out—figured out the form and then the material and just did it.

MIJA RIEDEL: It seems like that was not an unusual or isolated experience for you, but that was a way that you worked, especially at the beginning, was to go to the site. I think you described it, at one point, almost as a blank slate—and wait to see what was there to be written.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That's right.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that certainly seems to have changed, but there's still influence from the site, though you probably go with an idea. [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Less often than you might think, actually. Yeah, it's not unusual for—I mean, the process is longer and I have longer to think about it, but I always need to do the site visit at the beginning of a project and then kind of soak up what I can and then go away and think about it.

So it's kind of the same process; it's just a little bit more extended. And obviously, when I'm working on—with a team, you know, let's say of architects or whatever, then there's that whole process of mutual or group conceptualization and analysis and so forth that goes on. So actually, it's not unusual at all for me not to know what I'm going to do ahead of time.

MIJA RIEDEL: So it hasn't changed really that much at all?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Not much, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I mean, occasionally, there have been times when—I'm trying to think of one, actually. [They laugh.] I honestly can't.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, well, that's interesting to note, yes. And so this was—what year, again, was this?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was '78 or '79—somewhere in that zone.

MIJA RIEDEL: How did the Olympics piece come about, the *Field of Vision*? That seems like it was quite different than anything you'd done up to that point. Or are we getting ahead of ourselves?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, not really. I think we might even be up on that—there's this work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This was called *A Venue*. It was done for the Albright-Knox.

MIJA RIEDEL: And was this the first one that actually took place in water?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, floating sound structure. It was articulated. And this was really pushing the physical engagement idea, because I really wanted people—this whole "singing bridge" concept was about a musical structure that would change not only with the velocity of the wind, but with the location and weight of the person on the structure.

MIJA RIEDEL: This was temporary, as well?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This was temporary. This was up for the summer.

MIJA RIEDEL: And where was this?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This was for the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo. And I had—I'm trying to think if they—I think they brought me out to do a site visit and then I went back and developed this idea. But I loved the idea of doing something on water. It was interesting to me, because of its—this sounds stupid—but its fluidity, and the idea of being able to make an articulated structure that would respond not just to the wind, but also to the water.

MIJA RIEDEL: And I'm sure the water would change the quality of the sound, as well.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, to some degree. So we built these all in the parking lot of the gallery and then took them over on one of the guys' boat trailers, and launched them. [Laughs.] I put an outboard motor on them and sort of sailed them over to where they were connected together.

MIJA RIEDEL: And how long was it?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This was about 120 feet, but it's 10-, 12-foot sections that were hinged. I really liked watching people interact with this piece. They would really get into rocking it and getting it really moving.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting that it's on water, and how water does become so much more significant in your work later on. And who knows whether that's direct or indirect? And that whole concept of waves—sound waves, waves of air—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Exactly, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you have these works now on the river, so you can see how things are beginning to come together.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So it's not just metaphorical, but waves, as a real investigation of all their manifestations and the relationship between sound and water and air, the kind of turbulence that's either created or happens, as a result of the sympathetic resonance things, whether it's the person's movement or the wind or whatever.

MIJA RIEDEL: It goes back and makes me think, too, of what we were talking about earlier—the distinction between the abstract and the more conceptual, and then the real hands-on, physical sensibility of a thing. And this seems to somehow embody both, constantly going back and forth between an abstract concept of wave and sound and the experience of it, and then the very physical sensations. Well, it was completely—oh, now what's this?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: [San Francisco] Art Institute.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, yes, of course.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This was up a lot shorter time than it was supposed to be. [They laugh.] We put it up on a Friday and we took it down on a Monday, because the neighbors were going crazy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They said, "It's beautiful, but it's driving us nuts and we can't sleep." So this was an important lesson, again, in terms of the power of sound and where you do sound works and where you probably don't want to do sound works.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right in the heart of North Beach. [They laugh.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: But it was fun. It was a lovely piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's beautiful. One of the most temporary installations, I take it?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. [Laughs.] And then this was done in 1980 for the sculpture conference that was in Washington, D.C. that year—the international sculpture conference. And this is the most successful one of these strapping pieces, I think. It was just—it did what it was supposed to do and—

MIJA RIEDEL: What was it supposed to do?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, just, it's the most refined notion of these sort of ephemeral planes that—I talk about them almost being like kinetic drawings, in a way. Really, these surfaces just beautifully articulated the wind blowing across them, and the sound—all of the surfaces are proportional to one another so that there was actually—the resonance coming off of it was harmonious, if you will, as opposed to some of the other ones, which are somewhat more random, in terms of that.

MIJA RIEDEL: So there's a real sense of scale.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Are we done?

MIJA RIEDEL: We are.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: God. That's Lloyd Hamrol laying down underneath it. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: All right—

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MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Douglas Hollis on May 20th, 2010, for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project at his home in San Francisco, California, disc number three. We're looking at *Ghost Town*, you were saying here—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. And this was built in—should I say what I said before?

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure, please.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's called *Ghost Town* because when I went to do a site visit before making the piece, Washington seemed like sort of a giant cemetery to me.

MIJA RIEDEL: Why is that?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Just monuments and, you know, just one thing after another that seemed very—

MIJA RIEDEL: But they felt dead.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, kind of dead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I don't really feel that way, anymore, but it seemed like that, at the time. But this was actually in the National Arboretum, which is a beautiful place up in northeastern D.C.

MIJA RIEDEL: And this was up—I'm sorry—for how long?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I guess it might have been up for a month, or so. I don't actually remember. But you know, the exhibition was basically, I think, throughout the summer. But I didn't go back to take the piece down, but one of the things that this piece represents, as well as some of the other ones—when I was doing these temporary, or short-term, pieces, I had a concern about the recyclability of them, and I tried to make them with that thought in mind.

This actually became a lighting grid for this alternative theater space that Jock Reynolds was directing in D.C. at the time. The strapping wasn't really recyclable, but all the pipe was. And they then used—when that came out, the Buffalo piece, one of the crew that had helped build the pieces actually used the lumber to build a garage. [They laugh.] So I really liked that. That was really good.

So in 1980, this was a very unusual winter Olympics, vis-à-vis what was done art-wise. [Laughs.] And I was, of course, very proud to be invited to do something. I'd gone out earlier in the year and did a site visit and I was initially going to, actually, do a piece on the lake—in the lake. And I had some structures that I was starting to think about. And then it was one of those "a-has" after I got back, where just, this idea for this piece called *Field of Vision* just kind of came to me.

MIJA RIEDEL: After you'd visited the site.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I'd been out there and I'd come back, and I'd already proposed this whole other project, which was fine with them.

MIJA RIEDEL: How did that commission come about? How did that invitation come about?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I don't remember the woman's name that was, sort of, organizing that, but I guess her advisory people must have been really good and said, why don't we do something really serious, for once, in terms of a commitment to doing art, as well as sport? So you know, this amazing group of people—Elyn Zimmerman, Mary Miss, Dickie Fleischer, gosh, Bob Irwin—yeah, it was quite a crew.

So they flew me back out there, actually, when I got this idea, to find a different site, because I hadn't actually seen this—this was a golf course in the summertime. And it was right on a main road that went out to the ski jumps, so it would be very visible from the road. And the concept is really trying to—again, it sort of relates to this sort of kinetic drawing kind of idea that I was working with. So this isn't a sound piece, per se, but just this very simple gesture of this DayGlo red-orange wind pointer.

And there were about 950 of them, something like that. Of course, that was about 100-by-100 feet. And they were all carefully set at eight feet above the ground, so they created this phonetic plane that was essentially a kind of ghost contour of the ground below. And then, as it snowed, the snow would blow into it in its own way, and create a kind of secondary, harmonic surface. So it was—it was really quite beautiful, the way the wind would blow through this, because it was really a field, and not a bunch of individual things. And it was, again, space that people could enter. Cross-country—

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there any sound at all?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No. I couldn't figure out how to do it simply enough for this scale, and it was enough work as it was.

MIJA RIEDEL: The shadows must have been particularly interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, they were beautiful. And the tailpieces are actually a translucent, plastic material, so it did this whole other thing with the sun—when you were looking with the sun behind it. I liked that part of it very much. So yes, that was exciting.

MIJA RIEDEL: The color seems more predominant in this piece than anything else to date.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it was one of the only pieces I've ever really used color. But it works so that—most people think about DayGlo as kind of this tacky thing. But it's so elegant, the way it sort of absorbs light and then kind of, it's almost a re-emission of the sunlight that it takes in.

MIJA RIEDEL: And especially in this context.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Right, with the white snow and the—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] What was the response? Do you have much sense of what the community response was?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I think it was really popular. People did cross-country skiing on this in the wintertime, and obviously, it was visible from the road, as well. AP ran a photograph of it with the caption, "Slalom nightmare." [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: That's pretty good. [They laugh].

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And the other interesting thing that happened was the coach of the U.S. ski jumping team came and borrowed about 12 or 15 of them and set them up along the ski jump so he could watch the way the wind currents were running. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Nice practical application.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: There is this couple whose name escapes me again, but their project is to do a videotape of the Olympics, and they actually focused on this guy in particular. And so I've got this wonderful, funny tape of this guy talking about how he liberated some of these—"some wonderful artwork, and I kind of liberated a few of the pieces to look at the—" So I thought, that's good reuse. That's a nice tie to the whole thing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So there were a few other temporary projects after that, but things were starting to be more long-term, in terms—and this was a wind organ piece that I did for Lawrence Hall over at Berkeley. And it was kind of the first commission for permanent work that I'd gotten.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. This would have been late '70s?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Early '80s, actually. This was '81 or '2 [1982]—'81, I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: And the '80s really were the start of a number of significant, permanent installations, yes?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And you started hearing the term "public art" used more commonly, too. And there were public art programs that—and again, these temporary projects like Artpark and even the Joslyn project—they were all wonderful stimulus projects, because of this—it was great for me, because they were like essays. You know, I got a chance to explore things. It wasn't so important that they be able to last a long time, because they weren't going to.

And so I didn't have a lot of the sort of structural engineering issues and this and that and even public safety issues, to a large degree. And as I said earlier, with the Artpark project, beginning it was this ongoing dialogue with the public. So where was I going with that? I'm not sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I think we were transitioning from these temporary, experimental labs, where it was sort of taking things more over into more permanent—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. So there were really—it was a wonderful sort of learning curve to going through those that I developed a vocabulary, and I also developed this kind of an appreciation for place. And it was also great because it was timely, because these things were leading to what has now become public art. That's where I was going.

You know, it influenced a lot of places—certainly, Seattle, in the first place. They kind of started the ball rolling with Patricia Fuller and Ann Focke and Richard Andrews. But many, many places were sponsoring either temporary projects or even starting to commission permanent works.

Obviously, the GSA was evolving along with that. After Thalakur, they became much more, I'd say, site-specific and integrated, even, into either the architecture or landscape, when it occurred. So I feel really lucky to have kind of been where I was, when I was, because it was kind of all being created at the same time I was kind of

creating what I was interested in doing. You know, the two things were very parallel with each other.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. I liked your description on the phone when you said, "one thing just sort of led to the next, and it was like breadcrumbs." [They laugh.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Just follow the money. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So was it after this that *A Talking Garden* happened?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] There it is.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, at the Oakland Museum.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And this was another international sculpture conference, so this was intended to be a temporary piece. And it was much loved. Did you get a chance to see this?

MIJA RIEDEL: I didn't. I wasn't actually—I just—I hadn't quite arrived here, yet.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So this would have been '82, and I did this with Richard Turner, who was an old friend from Ann Arbor. And I'd gotten an artist award from the Oakland Museum, so I utilized those funds to build this piece with Richard.

And it was really, really fun developing it. And George Neubert was the director at the time, and I still think it's incredible that they let us do this, you know? I mean, this was the main art gallery underneath, right, and we flooded their roof with three inches of water.

MIJA RIEDEL: I had to read that a few times to believe it. [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was the only roof on the museum that didn't leak, actually. [They laugh.] And we proved it. [They laugh.] But it was a very popular piece, and it was a real, sort of—it was intended to be a kind of contemplative refuge for people going to the conference, so they could kind of get out of the conference hubbub for a while and chill.

MIJA RIEDEL: And these two pavilions were meant to be one for rain and one for wind—is that correct?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes. So the one—the *Rain Pavilion*—had a corrugated metal roof and it had a perforated pipe along its crest so the water would run down, fall off the upper roof onto the lower roof, which made a certain sound, and then off that lower roof into the pool, which would make another sound.

And then the *Wind Pavilion* had a white, fiberglass roof with sort of a wind harp secondary roof above it. So that was more periodic. So the white noise of the water was more of a constant, and then punctuated by the wind harp sounds, as it occurred. So it was kind of—Richard's very interested in Asian art, and that, combined with our mutual interest in architecture in general—and this kind of shares some of the sensibility of Japanese architecture, but at the same time, it's very common, in terms of its construction. It's not, like, fancy joints and—we tried to make it very straightforward and simple.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's the most obvious visual reference to shelter, too, that I can think of—there's a very visceral, visual, direct reference to shelter.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And part of our concept for this—we were talking it through and it was all about, sort of, proximity and the scale of things and the proportions of things, and really trying to develop this dialogue—this idea of a dialogue, which Richard and I were having—and make it manifest in the work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interestingly, it feels like a dialogue operating on so many levels. There's a dialogue, sort of, between light and sound and water, as both sound and as light, reflecting material. It seems like there are many conversations going on there quietly at the same time.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So it was supposed to be up for—I think it was supposed to be up for two months, and everybody loved it so much, it was up for over two-and-a-half years. But because we had not really designed it to be a long-term structure, it did start to, kind of, erode. And so we eventually had to take it down. But we were very, very happy with this. [Pause.]

So this was sort of the prelude to *A Sound Garden*. This was '83. And Richard Andrews was working with a facilities director at NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] up in Seattle, in Lake Washington. They were building a new research facility up there, and Richard encouraged them to—what would have been a GSA project, but NOAA wasn't happy with the way GSA was running the job, so they kicked them out and ran it

themselves.

And because of Richard's involvement and him encouraging them to try to commission a number of works that were environmental, and that had to do with various aspects. So he just called me up. It was fantastic. [Laughs.] I was still in Berkeley at that time. And he called me up and he said, "We've got this project up here for NOAA and we want you to do a piece for it." And it's like, you know, no competition, no proposal; just trust. [Laughs.] Such a refreshing and unusual thing, anymore.

So I said yes. And it was Martin Puryear, George Trakas, Siah Armajani, and Scott Burden, and me. And it wasn't intended to be a collaboration, per se, although there was some ill-placed notion that George was going to collaborate with Siah and Scott on something. But everybody—it's a very resonant project, in the sense of, there's a lot of harmony between things.

They seem to be not working against each other, in other words, that George's piece really addressed the lake in a beautiful way, and Scott sort of did his, sort of, terrace with rock chairs, and Siah did his bridges, which were both utilitarian, as well as sculptural, which is his shtick, you know. And then Martin did this sort of, beautiful, abstract kind of concrete dome piece. So that it's a very wonderful walk to go there and to stroll through this. It's a great landscape.

And so in contemplation of what I was going to do, I came up with this idea, called *A Sound Garden*. And when I was beginning to think about what that meant, I started to think about furniture that would be part of the overall piece—places where people could sit and listen to what became this wind organ.

MIJA RIEDEL: And you were fairly clear at this point you wanted to do something that involved sound?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, absolutely. Oh, god, it was almost immediate because it was, like—NOAA is like the U.S. weather service. It's like they do what I do—[They laugh]— they have these weather towers and they have, sort of, these, like—it was such a fantastic opportunity to pay homage to early kite-flier meteorologists and all of that. So it was perfect.

But I started asking myself, well, what would furniture in *A Sound Garden* look like? And I kind of got this idea for *High-back Windharp Chairs*. And I built those prior to actually doing the project in Seattle. And they kind of moved around. The lower-right image is the first installation, which was up in Reno for the university, and they were kind of arranged as an outdoor room, kind of facing each other. And the seats are just a little too high, so when you're sitting on them, your legs are kind of dangling a bit? And then the upper parts of the frame are strong.

MIJA RIEDEL: And I imagine the whole thing resonates in the wind, yes?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, they're wind harps.

MIJA RIEDEL: So but, when you're sitting on it, you get that sense of it, as well?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, so you're feeling it, yes. And then they subsequently were sold to IBM for—they have a research facility down at Santa Teresa, and they had a pretty extensive sculpture or art program that was part of that, back in the day. I don't know if they're still big collectors, or not, but they were, at the time, collecting a lot of work and commissioning work.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were these, then, precursors to the Santa Monica—the *Singing Beach Chairs*?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes. I started going into a kind of furniture phase, at this point, in a way. I mean, it was kind of combinations—not so much about walking or about sitting. So at IBM, they're arranged on sort of a patio, if you will, overlooking this really gorgeous countryside. And the building itself, they didn't want to—people didn't want to look up on top of this hill and see the building, so they made them kind of carve out the top of the hill and set the building down in it.

So people in the building didn't really have this view. So I kind of created this path and this patio with the chairs on it so people could sort of walk out there. And again, it was sort of a kind of meditation zone. It's where all the smokers went. [They laugh.] So I was pretty happy with those. And I've made two or three other sets of those—pairs of those that are in different collections. So now we get to *A Sound Garden*. And yes, the band did name itself after this piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was wondering if we were going to get to that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They were bunch of, you know, Seattle teenagers and they used to hang out up there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Are you serious?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. I read an interview in Rolling Stone and they said, "Well, yeah, we named it after this really weird sculpture up at Sand Point that we used to hang out at. It made all these strange sounds and"—so—

MIJA RIEDEL: That's wonderful.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Nice spin-off.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So I created this—this is probably my most fully orchestrated work, at this point. And I was actually able to form the land to create this sort of rise—this kind of wave of land—that would basically lift you up into the air, as you walked up this secondary path that I created. And it was all about sort of proxemics. So it was about how you approach something and how things kind of manifest themselves as you approach and as you enter, and what it's like to approach or be inside of.

And it was also the first kinetic wind organ—the first one that had the ability to actually reorient itself into the wind. Earlier ones were all fixed. So if the wind wasn't blowing in the right direction, you wouldn't—but these just track the wind. And it's quite beautiful, because they have a very stately quality to them. They move—kind of a gentle way—there's enough mass so that they don't jerk around in the wind. They really—[wind blowing sound]—and it was nice to see the whole field kind of orient itself as the wind shifts direction.

And it sounds different, too, oddly enough, because the qualities of the wind from the South are different than the qualities of the wind from the North. They tend to be higher velocity and sort of more blustery coming out of the North. So when that's happening, it gets kind of screechy and kind of scary. And when they're coming out of the South, it tends to be more mellow and kind of soothing.

And then the path that I—well, I'll say one more thing about the towers. They do reference weather towers, but it's my own kind of proportional version of that. And there's—so there's the outward pipe, with its tailpiece, but there's also another wind organ pipe hanging down the middle. So there's actually a pair of pipes for each tower. And those two pipes were tuned so that they were harmonic to each other. And there's several pairs of pipes—in other words, pipes that are the same length—throughout the field itself.

And what happens is, because the specific quality of the wind is slightly different at one location than another, you get these really interesting—they're called acoustic beats. When two frequencies are very close, but not exactly the same, you get this kind of "wah-wah" thing going on, and that happens in this, too. So it's really got a lot of sonic stuff going on, and you really do feel like you're inside a place made of sound and wind when you're there.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's really an interesting point, and I think this piece has that sense—this space created by sound and by wind. I think that's a very interesting concept, and this piece seems to really illustrate that very well, maybe because it's permanent, maybe because it's so isolated, maybe because there's such a strong sculptural, structural component to it, as well. And the fact that there now are very specific harmonics. Were you figuring that out by trial-and-error, or did you have really specific dimensions—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, I knew if I made two pipes the same length, they would have the same fundamental frequency. But you don't really hear the fundamental with these. What you're hearing is, you know, probably the third or fourth overtone up, because you can't—the fundamentals would be almost too deep to hear. So you're hearing the third harmonic. And then they change, depending on the velocity of the wind. They'll jump from one harmonic to another. So that's how you get this kind of warbling character to it.

MIJA RIEDEL: How hard are they to maintain?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Very simple.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah. I mean, this has been up over 25 years. They changed the bearings about, I don't know, five or six years ago. They probably could use a paint job. But other than that, they're fine.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's great. I'm sure the exposure's extreme.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I tried to—also, I wanted the structural towers to be more ephemeral too, and I wanted the organ pipes themselves to be, kind of, the dominant visual thing. So those are anodized aluminum, which is a lovely—again, a kind of soft, reflecting surface. But I painted the rest of it a color I called Seattle-sky gray so that it would kind of disappear.

And you can kind of see in these two shots, that it kind of comes and goes in a nice way. So you're basically just

seeing those pipes and, to some extent, their perforated tails moving. And the tails are two layers of perforated—so you get the sort of Moray visual, Moray thing happening as the pieces are moving in the wind too, and it's, again, a kind of energy kind of thing going on.

MIJA RIEDEL: It feels very much, in this case, also like a dialogue between the visual and the sound.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes, this was a real attempt to go full sensory. So I developed this special brick paver. I call it a Bucky Brick.

MIJA RIEDEL: A Bucky Brick?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: [Laughs.] And the interstices are filled with gravel. And it was very intentional, that I wanted to make people sort of aware of their own walking. So I was trying to create a surface that they would be starting to use their ears as they—before they actually got up into the main sound garden. So there's this kind of "crunch-knock, crunch-knock, crunch-knock" sort of sound going on.

And then the benches are, again, a kind of homage to Alexander Graham Bell, who was a big kite guy after he got rich from inventing the telephone. He had this big research facility up in Nova Scotia. And he did a lot of work with tetrahedral kites in the attempt to invent a flying machine, and—quite wonderful. So these are all—the benches are, sort of, loosely based on a tetrahedral kind of geometry. You might have seen that one down on the deck—

MIJA RIEDEL: I did. I noticed it when I came up. It's how I knew I was in the right place. [They laugh.] There was the number, but then I saw the bench and the perforations and I thought I was in the right place.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So it really was something that engaged all the senses, in terms of your experience. And I think it was probably one of my most successful pieces, still. We probably don't need to talk about every one of these projects.

Oh, this is kind of important because—this, of course, is Candlestick Park. It's important not for itself, so much, but it was really the first full-blown collaboration that I did with George Hargreaves and Mark Mack. And the three of us teamed up to do this. George, actually, invited Mark and I to join him on this thing, and it was a fantastic process of designing. We developed all these methods of working together that we still use, actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: Such as?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, I'd worked with other architects on some other things that hadn't really gotten built. And what I didn't like is the way they kind of draw at each other. You know, it seemed kind of aggressive to me, and I was trying to figure out, well, how can the three of us work together in a kind of non-aggressive sort of way? And so I suggested we build a sandbox. [They laugh.]

So we built a big—I guess it was about a six-by-six-foot sandbox in George's office, in his studio. And the three of us were able to work simultaneously, you know, just by forming the sand. And we could try out ideas and run strings around for pathways and so forth. And it was great. And then we could photograph it and then we could just go on with the next idea and we'd photograph it again. And so it was great fun. And George's kids would kind of be there playing around, too. So it really broke it down.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's amazing! Would you work—you would collaborate all together at the same time?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Really interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What year was this, that you started working together?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This would have been '84, I think—'84, '85.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's interesting that both of them were—thought that was a good idea and were willing to go along with it.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, Mark's fantastic. He's an unusual architect, in that sense. And George was—not an architect. [They laugh.] George—he's always kind of—likes to think of himself more as an earth sculptor, right. So the idea of actually working in a sculptural medium, rather than drawing, really appealed to him. And subsequently do drawings and so forth, but that initial investigation was—it was a very good tool for that.

And the other sort of rule we made for ourselves was that every other time we got together, we'd do it at the site. And that was kind of my initiation, too. It's like I wanted to keep us going back there, because again, designers tend to—you know, they go to the site and they go back and design a project.

And they're not refreshing their senses about what the place is, and this has got some pretty amazing dynamics going on, in terms of the wind and the tidal action and so forth. So it was good. Then by doing that, we could observe how we behaved on the site, which helped us to inform what we'd do to facilitate how other people would use the site.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you were able to experience the site—especially one like this—in all its different weather, which is extreme—different seasons, different times of day, I'm sure.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So the whole orientation of the Great Lawn is on the major wind axis. So it comes right down through this venturi gateway piece that actually has some wind organ components cast into it. And then the other thing was to try to bring the bay into the site. So we dug these tidal channels that could express that motion, as well—that timepiece.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was this done around the same time as the piece in Seattle—that tidal piece—or did that come later—the Port Townsend—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, Port Townsend came a few years later. I should have printed out my résumé. I have trouble—

MIJA RIEDEL: Here you go.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, is that me?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, good. Oh, is that off the website?

MIJA RIEDEL: It is. This has—the permanent installations are here and the temporaries behind them.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Okay. Huh, it actually says '92. Okay, I'll believe that. Well, by the time it was finished—

MIJA RIEDEL: For Candlestick?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes—but we had started it a couple years before. So these are all finish dates. The other thing we did was cook for each other. We had each other over for dinner so that it wasn't just always in a work situation, in the office, in the studio, but we had some social time. We did that quite a bit at the beginning to get to know each other, so we're operating on more levels with each other. And it was extremely successful, even though the project is a fantastic urban ruin now. [They laugh.] Have you been down there?

MIJA RIEDEL: No.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's—the area is kind of like a really interesting rubble dump. They had a lot of curbstones and broken concrete and stuff. Leonard Hunter and a bunch of artists did a number of projects down there. And this is kind of a rubble gateway piece that David Ireland did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Hmm, I could see that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And Roloff did a project down there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, he did?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I took my graduate landscape architect students down there about five, six years ago. It was really very interesting to see it. I hadn't actually been down there in a long time. And it looks pretty good as a ruin. It's just too bad that it's not really accessible. I mean, you can walk in, but it's kind of used by crazy people and dog walkers.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I'm thinking that the next really significant piece might be the *Rain Column* piece. Does that sound right to you?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that is really significant for a couple of reasons, but one is, it really represents a shift, in many

ways, in material, for one, and just a way of thinking. It seems like there had been a real emphasis for the first 10 years, or so, on sound and the development of sound and sound in relation to everything else. And the *Rain Column* seems to signify very much of a shift.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, for one thing, it's almost the only piece I've ever done inside. [Laughs.] So being me, I wanted to bring the outdoors in, in some metaphorical way, anyway. So—yeah, that was a curious project because I actually developed a whole other concept prior to that, which they didn't like that much. The architect actually really hated it. [They laugh.]

But then all of a sudden—this is really kind of like another one of those "aha" things. I had gone out to New York, which is where the architects were, or the developer was, I guess, to make a presentation. And I didn't really have a new idea, and on the plane out there, I actually thought about, what about a rain column? And so I was staying with Oleszko and I actually did a drawing of it in her studio the evening before the meeting with them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. Had you been to the space already?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I knew some—I knew enough about the space—they were still under construction, but I had a sense of the volume that I was dealing with, and the fact that we had a 100-foot-high space with this glass skylight, and that the sun was going to be coming down through that.

And so really, the idea was to make a kind of phenomenal screen to catch that movement of sunlight through the space, like you see those sort of sun sections cutting through the column at different times. So again, it's dealing with time, as well, kind of an awareness of the passage of time. And also, the attempt to do something—I mean, they really did want something with water. They specifically requested that I do a water piece. They wanted a water piece.

And I just thought the sound that this would make in that space would be just a lovely—this wonderful background. So we were talking about the tyranny of noise earlier and how dangerous working with sound can be, if you do it in the wrong place. [Laughs.] So I thought a lot about, you know, how to hit the right level, in terms of decibel level and so forth. So anyway, I went into this meeting and they absolutely loved the idea. It was like a—you know, this is a Tamara Thomas project.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, sure, sure. I was going to ask.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This is the first project I worked on with her.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. She was in New York?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: She had come out for this meeting because she was the art consultant that they were working with.

MIJA RIEDEL: And who was in New York?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The developer, I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you remember who that was?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I can find out. I don't remember.

MIJA RIEDEL: But everyone was enthusiastic about this idea?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Very enthusiastic, and then the next thing they said is, "But, is it possible?" [Laughs.] Because they were thinking, "How can you drop water 100 feet and not have it just go all over the place?" I said, "Trust me." Well, they wouldn't trust me, so I actually went back to the Exploratorium and I built a half-scale mock-up.

And I made a tray and I hung it as high up in the museum as possible and they all came down there one evening, and we looked at it. And yes, it works, and it doesn't splash all over the place, because they're individual water drops, not a big mass, right? So they don't have much force, because they have low mass.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right. Exactly, exactly. And did you know this from a previous project you'd worked on, or were you hopeful?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, just intuition.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So once we did the mock-up, then they were totally sold on it and we moved ahead and did it. It was good. We had to figure out how big to make the pool that it falls into, because that's the splash zone. So that had to be kind of calculated from—and I probably couldn't have done that without building some kind of a mock-up near to some kind of real scale.

But that's—you know, it's an interesting part of the development of these projects, too, is that process that I go through more than I used to when I was doing, kind of, temporary things. That was more, like, seat-of-the-pants, fly-by-whatever. You know, you just go out and sort of figure out how to do it on the spot, whereas these projects sort of require a little bit more evidence of feasibility, right, and for myself as well.

So the whole idea of making models and mock-ups and so forth really became a lot of the process that I work. So they're not just computer projects; they're not just computer models, or something. I really have to see—especially with water—there's no way to scale it. Water doesn't scale.

So you have to build a piece of the thing to see how it behaves or how it reacts with certain materials, you know, in terms of flowing off or catch—you know, all that kind of stuff. I mean, I can anticipate a lot of things now, since I've had a lot more experience. But you know, initially—and still, I'd say even now, I often need to model things physically and try it. And when they're dynamic, I have to mock a piece of it up and see how it works.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you've got this wonderful, little workshop outside.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it's very useful for that. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Complete with wind. [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So is there still—do you find a real back-and-forth between the development on the computer and the actual hands-on development of the idea, or does a lot of it happen in the drawing?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The sketching is sort of step one, because that's the kind of thinking—notation of thinking. But quite quickly, I'll move to building a physical model, which is what all these guys are—you know—because I learn a lot about how to build something from building the model. And I like building the models.

And since I don't really fabricate the final works so much anymore, it gives me a chance to keep my hands on things, you know. So I use the computer as a tool, but reluctantly, and I never use it as a conceptual tool. It's too distracting, has too many rules. As [Joseph] Campbell would say, it's like an Old Testament God: a lot of rules and no forgiveness. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, right, right. [Pause.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This is—you've seen this one.

MIJA RIEDEL: We have, but maybe we'll talk about that a little later, because I'd like to talk about *Water Songs* before that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Absolutely. Sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, the—in Santa Monica, the *Singing Beach Chairs*—is that what we're looking at?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Those feel like—that feels like a real sense of humor in those pieces, more so than anything that I've seen—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. It's the Santa Monica Beach, you know? [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I guess you're right. So the site dictated—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Indeed, yes. And they've got these lovely, old deco buildings with these kind of great pastel colors and stuff. And these are actually modeled on East Coast lifeguard chairs. They're totally unlike the lifeguard stations that are actually on the beach there.

And I wanted to make them—they're kind of like micro-environments, in a way. You kind of climb up them, and you're not really on the beach. You're kind of out of the kind of kinetic activity of the beach itself. It puts you in more of an observational mode and kind of a connection more with the ocean and the horizon, in a way.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's interesting, because you're part of it, but you're separate from it at the same time.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And then the fact that they're big enough for friends to sit in together—it's great.

MIJA RIEDEL: And something I know you've talked about repeatedly is a sense of personal space, too.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: A very personal space in a very public area. Those were '87, right—1987?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, '87. We don't have to talk about this one.

MIJA RIEDEL: What is that one?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It is a 19-aperture camera obscura.

MIJA RIEDEL: Where—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This is in Pittsburgh.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay. I haven't seen that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They have a thing called the Three Rivers Arts Festival every year, and they commissioned me to do kind of a major work at the festival that year. So this was something I'd been wanting to do for years, and I thought because of all the kind of wonderful views from this point, I thought it would be a really good opportunity to try this out.

So people would enter into that sort of chamber base, if you will, and it was a kind of a corridor piece that brought you to the interior and left the light outside. And then there were cloth screens stretched across facing the base of each of those pyramid forms, and then an aperture in the truncated top. So you'd walk inside and you would just get this kind of kaleidoscopic view. It was called *Points of View: Reconsidered Landscape*. It was pretty popular.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'll say! [They laugh.] And how long was that installed for?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That was up about—it was just up for the festival, which I think is about two weeks, something like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that the first temporary installation you'd done after a series of more—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, for a long time, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So it was very difficult to photograph the interior. You get—it was kind of a passing idea.

MIJA RIEDEL: It must have been a relief and kind of fun to just do something like that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was a lot of fun, yes. It was something I had wanted to do for a long time and it was just fun. It seemed like it was a good venue to do it. It had kind of a playful, festival kind of quality to it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Totally different than what you'd been working on, but similar to some very early ideas, circling back around to explore that again.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: You know, as I've taught periodically over the years, and I always set up—I find a room somewhere and I always make it into a camera. And we spend the whole class in the camera. And it's fantastic. It's so calming and it's so interesting. I mean, you want to kind of just play with it, you know? Again, it's just a hole in the wall; there's no lens. But just trying different—catching images with different screen materials, and things like that, or spraying water into the beam and getting this kind of three-dimensional image in the mist.

MIJA RIEDEL: So it's a wonderful teaching tool?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's great, yes. It's so magical. It's so simple and yet, it's so magical.

MIJA RIEDEL: Seems like a very important part of your work, that there was a real simplicity to it, but there is an inherent magic in just taking the materials at hand and making some slight alteration that then allows you to see things in a completely different way.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. I mean, I just—I'm so thrilled with all of this phenomena, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Are we done again? God.

MIJA RIEDEL: All right. Let's stop here.

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MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Douglas Hollis on May 20, 2010 for the GSA Archives of American Art Oral History Project at his home in San Francisco, California. This is disc number four.

So let's start this disc with a conversation about—this is the first GSA project you have worked on, correct?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: The one up at USGS in Menlo Park that— isn't it called *Water Songs*?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. And how did this commission come about?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Susan Harrison called me and said, "We want you to do the project."

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh. [They laugh.] That's pretty straightforward.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, that's great. Yes, I love it when that happens.

MIJA RIEDEL: There was no proposal process or anything like—well—[inaudible, cross talk].

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, but I was already—I was chosen to do the project prior to making the proposal. And I mean, this is like NOAA in a sense, that it was kind of a no-brainer: rocks and water—doesn't get better than that. [Laughs.] So it was wonderful to—first of all, it was kind of nice to have it be local, which, as you know, most of them aren't. And it was great doing, kind of, doing the research up to the point of making this conceptual proposal to them, because I got to talk to all these really cool scientists and geologists and hydrologists.

The building was pretty far along but the architects—and I can find out—I can't remember their name now. But they were extremely accommodating. This building was kind of like the IBM lab that I was talking about in that they didn't want it to have a kind of looming presence on Melville Road [sp], so they actually excavated and put the building down a story so that it's only two stories about the street level.

So they had created—which is actually the main entry—this entry on the back side of the building, the west side, that was this lowered condition, which was great because it gave me a slope condition to work with. And these were our—we didn't talk about some of the other projects where the idea of sort of sustainability and climate modification started to kind of inject notions into the work.

But this one definitely provided some stimulation to me in that regard because the idea of having—it gets pretty hot down there—and the idea of having this sort of lowered area that I could have running water, sort of as part of, gave me a possibility to get some evaporative cooling activity happening. And that cool air would tend to stay in that lowered area, so it made it more comfortable than it might be otherwise.

So the idea of doing a kind of streambed was pretty easily arrived at. But it's really a series of interconnected water elements. There is the main stream bed that parallels the stairway to the front door and that's flowing with some rigor. And it kind of—the idea really came from, kind of, experiences of walking along streams and hearing these sort of songs that occur—I think of them as songs—because of particular groupings of rocks interacting with the water in a very particular way.

So in some kind of more miniature version of that, I was trying to very carefully arrange the natural rocks that are in the streambed in a way so that they would elicit a series of different tonalities, so as you descended or ascended the stairway, you would sort of have this experience of like walking along a streambed.

At the top, above the streambed is a sort of source pool. The water comes right up to the very top of this black granite cube and then flows over the edges so the whole cube is wet. So it kind of catches light and it doesn't really make much sound. I had to kind of fine-tune the flow on that one so that it would just grip and—grip and cover and not get away. So the surface was important, the surface of the stone, how that was finished. And how the joint details were done was very critical and then being able to adjust it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was there a reason for choosing that particular type of stone?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's Academy Black [granite], which comes from California, down near Fresno. So I wanted to reference local geology to the extent I could. The stones are all from local sources for the most part.

MIJA RIEDEL: The Academy Black—if I'm not mistaken—also figures in the Fresno courthouse piece. Does it not, on the outside?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. It's all Academy Black. And kind of for the same reason: It's 10 miles away.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. It references the area.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: And there is an oak tree around which the seats are built. This was existing, clearly.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: There was an existing oak tree and they took great pains to preserve it. And I thought it made a really lovely area for—because they have, you know, school groups and other groups of people that come and they have seminars and things like that. So I thought it would be a nice place for groups to meet and have a discussion or listen to a lecture or whatever. It's kind of like Louis Kahn's idea of the first teacher, if you know that one.

MIJA RIEDEL: I don't.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The first school was a tree. And the first teacher was somebody describing his experience. The first teacher was somebody that didn't know he was a teacher describing this experience to other people who didn't know they were students. Something like that. [Laughs.] It's in his [*Between Silence and Light*] catalogue.

MIJA RIEDEL: Just visually it's so striking, that semicircle of seats all facing that oak. And then the way the light hits on the material.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So they needed to have this fence piece that actually originally they were going to extend that wall up, but we changed that. But they obviously needed some kind of a guard condition there, as well as along the straight edge.

MIJA RIEDEL: And why was that?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So people wouldn't fall off the edge.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, the slope you mean.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Just for—yes, because, you know, this is like—this is not code. You have to have a guardrail here because this is—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, I see. So that—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This is more than 30 inches.

MIJA RIEDEL: —that wall was existing.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They were going to raise this—well, it was part of the new project. But it was because of the tree that that wall took the configuration it did. And rather than building it up so that it provided the guard rail component, I took that over and we lowered, kept it at grade and then I built the combination fence and seats as an alternative to that.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to ask what logistical concerns there were that had to be addressed as you—that sounds like one of them. Anything else?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: In terms of code, you mean?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes—well, or in terms of just things that you needed to design around or incorporate into your designs.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, that's why I was saying the architects were very accommodating in terms of changing their drawings and helping me facilitate what I was trying to do there. So the notion of having these perforated seats.

And then the long—the long, straight fence piece that runs along this edge is obviously also a safety consideration, but it's a double perf, where you get this sort of interference pattern going on. And then this is a

seat wall with a water runnel that comes off the side of the source cube and flows down so you're sitting next to the water, so you've got this sort of—

MIJA RIEDEL: Stream.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's this kind of channel. Right. It's a kind of channel of water, so that's doing something different than the streambed does. It's doing something different than the source pool is. And then it terminates in this perpetual vortex pool at the end.

MIJA RIEDEL: Have you seen those railings? Have you been to Spain at all and seen that—have you been to the Alhambra? They have railings that are carved out that water runs through.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Yes, I have.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think those are just spectacular. For some reason, it comes to mind looking at this. So how long was this piece from its initial—from the initial—let's think, not the phone call but from the time you put the proposal together perhaps—to completion?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, probably close to two years. I think they had already started initial construction, at least excavation, when I came on board, but they hadn't—and I think they might have even completed the drawings for the building—but they hadn't really—hadn't done anything in terms of the landscape that was unalterable.

MIJA RIEDEL: So how did your ideas evolve from initial conception to the actual final piece? Can you kind of walk us through that working process?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, initially it was, you know, investigating the site itself and obviously talking to the people that work there and finding out what they do and so forth. And so I kind of evolved this notion that in terms of just being kind of aesthetically pleasing that it had some utility to it, that it have—and so the idea that this, for instance, this streambed is actually a real analogue for a streambed and that there are certain configurations that rocks will take given the angle of repose of the streambed.

And I got a lot of that information talking to the hydrologists and so forth. And when we were laying the stone in there, they'd come by and kind of say, "Well, you know, it wouldn't probably really do that and you might want to think about this." And so it was kind of engagement of them.

And also they kind of, if they have instruments that they need to calibrate, they bring them out and—like thermometers and things—and put them in this as a way of calibrating them, which is kind of cool. I mean, I hadn't really thought about that initially, but in the process of building the work, this is something that they told me they were doing—or thinking about doing, and subsequently did do.

And then of course the notions that I talked about earlier in terms of this kind of climate modification, which, again, is a kind of an ecological expression in a way that actually affects the physical environment, and makes it, in this case, potentially more pleasant to be in and to have this variety of water expressions going on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is there any lighting that goes along with this project?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Not that I did. There is lighting along the stairway.

MIJA RIEDEL: But it wasn't part of your design?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No. It was pretty utilitarian in that respect.

MIJA RIEDEL: And was that something that—I mean, certainly that you've thought about how things are—well, I guess none of the work has really been lit up to this point.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I've never really been that interested in doing dramatic lighting on the work. I kind of like what happens with ambient light and there was plenty coming out of the building and the surrounding area. So it's like *Waterscapes* that way; it's like, yes, we lit it. I mean, there are intentional lights to kind of create somewhat more drama, if you will, or theatricality to some of the water expressions in that. But what I really love is just the ambient light from the street and the building just reflecting off the surfaces it takes on.

MIJA RIEDEL: And off the—right—off the water.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: And is—because certainly we've mentioned the sound of the streambed—is there sound anywhere else? Do any of the other elements emit sound?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: You can hear the water in the channel and the vortex definitely makes a kind of a gurgly—[gurgling noise]. [They laugh.] People like to soak their feet in this in the summertime. They come out here for their lunch and sit there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. In the vortex. It's kind of a Jacuzzi for—

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Retired GIs.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I never saw any of the GIs do that. [They laugh.] Been walking around in those heels all day, feels great.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's right. Does this installation involve any unusual artistic concerns or elements that you really hadn't explored before?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, I had never really worked with stone prior to this. So that was an interesting new experience for me. It's both dealing with dimensional, architectural stone and then working with the real rocks that are in the streambed. That particular sonic expression is something that I had thought about but never had a chance to actually do before. So I was trying to just work with the, kind of, existing conditions both physically and in terms of what goes on there. You know, the work assists on several levels and is helpful.

We would spend a lot of hours laying these stones. Anna [Valentina Murch] helped me on this one and it was like—the other thing was—and apparently it's—[Laughs]—now almost a permanent condition, but at times when the water is turned off because they're not taking care of it. That's a real peeve of mine.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, and we will talk about that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: But that it looked beautiful even if it was dry.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So the stonework is actually really gorgeous. It's like a tapestry, with these kind of punctuations at these larger groups of stones.

MIJA RIEDEL: And those are all permanently placed?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] One by one.

MIJA RIEDEL: Wow.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, they were actually—the bigger stones were actually doweled to the slab, the sub-slab, so they don't move.

MIJA RIEDEL: And there is a whole series of valves and timers, are there not? That create a variety of sound?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it is on a time clock so the rate of flow is also—thank you for mentioning that. So the flow rate varies. So again, it's not just the same all the time, but it changes with time and so as you go by day after day after day, maybe you're hearing a slightly different sonic expression because the flow rate is down or the flow rate is up or whatever. So yes, that was an intentional orchestration.

MIJA RIEDEL: So you have the actual sound of the rocks, of the water on the rocks, and then additionally, the flow of the water.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And it's not just a question of there being more or less sound—which is, in fact, true—but—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, quality.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Because it impacts the stones in a different way, you get a different collection of sounds out of it that doesn't—because of the—it's more about the cavities between adjacent rocks, you know? There will be these little chambers that the water runs through or over or—you know, whether it's flowing over it and creating a kind of empty space behind that's almost like a little resonator.

MIJA RIEDEL: How did you compose that?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Trial and error. We put the big ones out first before we did the river stone bed and just ran the water and kind of moved them around and tried to compose kind of on the fly, if you will. And then once we were happy with the way it sounded, then we set those and then we worked all the smaller stone around those so that they seemed to sort of be embedded in the bed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Can you hear water when you're sitting in those chairs facing the oak?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Besides from the streambed?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's where the sound comes from?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, that's the major sound. The other sounds are fairly subtle, so it's really kind of coming upon them, if you will. It's more—it's an adjacency thing. When you're next to them, you are aware of them and less so when you're not.

MIJA RIEDEL: And there are very different qualities of water to be experienced in this space from the streambed to the channel to that little whirlpool..

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And the flow coming off the face of the source cube too. And the top of that is really quite still. It's not real active, so it becomes a mirror of the sky. So it's bringing the sky down in a kind of way into the work as well. I couldn't quite get a rain piece in here for some reason, so—[They laugh]—but I was—you know, it is a kind of an attempt to talk about the hydrological cycle as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: Would you say a little bit more about that?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Just the fact that there—that we have these sources that—many of which come from underground, and they kind of well up and then manifest themselves as streams and eventually rivers and so forth. So I mean, I had a very quite limited space, so trying to really talk about tributaries and confluences and all that was kind of beyond the scope. But I think that at least conceptually, I think there's an intention to talk about the behavior of water as it moved from one place to another.

And of course, the vortex is this, kind of, again, a kind of magical form that's beautiful and mysterious and quite unique, really. I mean, just—it's water behaving as water does in relation to gravity. If it's left to its own devices, it just sort of would be a big ball. [Laughs.]

If you could put water in space—this is my NASA project, actually—I want to make a huge ball of water in space because it loves itself. It wants to stick together. It has extreme forces that compel it to want to stick to itself. And it's only gravity that transforms it into all these other manifestations that we see.

So even raindrops, it needs a seed to get going. It has to have a little dust particle or something and then it will kind of gravitate to that and because it loves itself, it forms a sphere essentially, which, of course, is distorted as it falls through the air and so forth. But still, it's the essential nature of that fairly unique fluid.

It's really—water is a very unusual thing, the fact that it is densest in its liquid form, which is almost a unique thing to water. There is virtually nothing else that doesn't get denser when it becomes solid. But water doesn't and it's because the hydrogen bonds that make up the molecule, the way they connect to each other creates—when it goes into an ice lattice, it actually creates space. And so it's only nine-tenths of its density when it's in its liquid state because it has these spaces in it that don't occur when it's in its liquid state.

MIJA RIEDEL: Just hearing you talk about that makes me think about one of the goals you have talked about repeatedly, which is making us—giving pedestrians or participants in those environments a heightened sense of these natural elements or these natural phenomena and this sense of water showing it in all these different forms—a quietly running channel, a vortex, a rapidly rushing brook—does really heighten our perception of the material itself.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I think so.

MIJA RIEDEL: And also how it appears and disappears. You know, it gives us the sense that we see it above ground but that it's also below ground frequently. And I have that sense from this piece, that it seems to appear and disappear in different locations on the site.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I also wasn't able to have a kind of manifestation of the ocean. [Laughs.] But you know, at the lower end of the streambed, it does kind of flow and disappear into a reservoir at the foot of it there. And then the pump station is directly underneath in the chamber.

That was part of this project too. I mean, I had done the *Rain Column*, but I hadn't done that many other water pieces until I did this. So I was still learning about mechanical systems and filters and water treatment procedures and all that kind of stuff. So it was a good kind of foray into the world of plumbing. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Did the project progress pretty much the way you had anticipated? Were there any big surprises?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it went on fairly well. There were some issues with contractors, where we were kind of a nuisance as far as they were concerned. We were kind of in their way and they were kind of concerned about—I think we put the work in probably sooner than we should have and they were kind of concerned about it getting damaged and who was going to be liable and all that stuff.

And it was not untypical of construction sites where the general can be pretty contentious to outsiders being around their project. But we finally got along okay. And we wound up kind of helping them out at the end because they had this big USGS, kind of a three-dimensional graphic sign that was supposed to go over the front door to the library and they couldn't find anybody to fabricate it, so I got my fabricator to do it for them. [Laughs.] Which gave us a little extra income, which we needed at that point because we had so many hours in this.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine. And so were you actually on site working for a large part of this project?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Certainly when we laid the streambed, we put many hours into that. It was a couple of weeks' work and we were doing at least 10-hour days. There's some hundreds of hours in there.

And then I was working with various subs. My fabricator Matt Gail that I worked with on a number of—on a lot of projects actually. He built the *Singing Beach Chairs* and he's done a lot, a lot of the other projects for me. So I was working with him and a couple of people from his shop. And then I had to work with the granite people to lay the—you know, get the stones set properly.

And there was a wonderful old guy named Chuck Schardt that was a sort of mechanical engineer. But he had been involved in doing a number of water features over the years and so I worked with him on this one. He was great, unlike many other of his ilk that I've met subsequently. [Laughs.] They want to design things.

MIJA RIEDEL: What was his name? Chuck Schardt?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Schardt. S-C-H-A-R-D-T. He came out of a, kind of an irrigation background, did a lot of golf courses and stuff like that. And then they started wanting water features on the golf courses and so he started doing that. And then other people started asking him to do their mechanical design on water features and so he kind of transitioned into that. But he never really cared much about trying to design things. You know, he just said, "Just tell me what you want and we'll figure out how to put it together so it will do that."

MIJA RIEDEL: Sounds like a great balance.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it was terrific.

MIJA RIEDEL: Were you aware—was there any community response as this piece was being put in place or afterward that you were aware of?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: There wasn't really any public to speak of. During construction, it was because it was a construction site. But obviously there were some of the scientists that were coming in and out. I've talked a little bit about that, that dialogue that we had.

MIJA RIEDEL: They were really excited about it, no?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, I think really. They thought it was really a homage to what they do.

MIJA RIEDEL: That must be really gratifying.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It is. Yes. And it's so easy when you've got a great group like that. You know, I mean, it's not like you're working for lawyers or something. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: As you were creating the installation, did you have to give much thought to how it was going to be maintained? And does it require a particular kind of maintenance?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: We tried to design the water system so that it was really easy to maintain, which is one reason I'm really annoyed that they have stopped doing that for some time.

MIJA RIEDEL: What needs to be done that isn't being done?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's just the— water features are machines, so they have to have maintenance. The filters have to be cleaned; that's the major thing really. The water needs to be tested to make sure that it's clean. And other than that, that's about it. And it's probably a matter of a couple of hours a week at most, but for some reason, they felt like it was beyond their capabilities to do these things.

MIJA RIEDEL: So does it show—are there problems because of that?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's less maintenance than a swimming pool; let's put it that way.

MIJA RIEDEL: Are there any parts of it that are supposed to deteriorate or age with time?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, not really.

MIJA RIEDEL: No algae on the rocks?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: There are certain things that like to grow in the source pool. They do get some algae growth there, but that can be really easily removed. I think it's kind of interesting anyway. The streambed doesn't tend to do that just because the water is running fairly rapidly.

And I originally thought it would be really nice if I didn't have to have the stones actually physically connected, that there might even be some movement so that you could see some kind of erosional kinds of operations going on. But again, that was—that would have been a difficult thing to maintain because you would have eventually had all the rocks at the bottom. [They laugh.] And then you would have to take them back up again. So it's a Sisyphusian kind of—[Laughs]—activity.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. And continually recalibrating the tonal qualities.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Exactly, yes. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So this was completed in '97?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Seven, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. So that's quite a while ago. Do you have any, you know, 10 years or more down the—later, do you have any thoughts or reflections about this particular piece?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Just my disappointment that they're not maintaining it. And I just expected better from GSA and from USGS.

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that in the contract that somebody was supposed to maintain it or is there some discrepancy about who is supposed to be maintaining it?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I don't think so. I mean, GSA knew they weren't going to be doing it because they weren't going to be doing the maintenance on the building. It was turned over to USGS and so they just kind of unilaterally decided not to maintain it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Which seems odd to me.

MIJA RIEDEL: So it's an actual decision? It's not just negligence.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: As far as I know, there was a decision. I don't—maybe it's benign neglect or laziness or whatever. But I never really heard a convincing argument as to why they weren't—Don Douglass was supposed to get on their case about it, but knowing Don, I doubt he ever did.

MIJA RIEDEL: So the main problem is it's just not—the water is not operating the way you would like it to.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Or at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Or at all?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I think it might be turned off is what I'm saying.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh. Completely? There's no water running through it? That would be really a tragedy.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it is. [Laughs.] No, it's that—one of the major fallbacks or weak spots, I guess, of doing these pieces that are performative, it's—they need some maintenance. They need to be looked after and it's really hard to make people do that if they don't want to. And I can't spend my life nagging everybody about why they're not taking care of my work, you know?

MIJA RIEDEL: Is that addressed at all in contracts or it doesn't really matter one way or the other?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It should be, but it's always difficult because my contract was, obviously, with GSA. And one presumed that USGS and GSA had some agreement about the fact that they were going to have to maintain it. But GSA hasn't, as far as I know, taken any responsibility for trying to get them to be responsible for maintaining it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is that a frequent frustration? Or from time to time?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: From time to time. I mean, like Rincon [Center] takes very good care of that [*Rain Column*]. Although it's extremely easy to, it still, you know, it needs it. Periodically, they'll even run a scaffolding structure up so that they can maintain the tray, clean the tray up and stuff. Sometimes they have parties in there and balloons will get—helium balloons will get caught in it and so forth. [They laugh.]

But they've been very good about taking care of it. We actually did a major renovation on it about four or five years ago. There was some trouble with the structural capacity of the membrane that was in the tray, so we rebuilt the tray. But they were totally proactive about picking up the cost of that and I gave them my time for free, of course.

And as far as we know, *Waterscape* in San Jose is being very well taken care of. Haven't heard anything one way or the other about Fresno. I knew they had some problems because the mechanical contractor used some parts that should have been a different material so there wouldn't be any sub-corrosion. But I think they fixed that fairly easily.

Yeah, and it's difficult because one tries to design these things so that they are easy to maintain, they don't create a lot of headaches, and they'll last a long time. But they are what they are. It's always nice to end on a down note, isn't it?

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Let's pause this for a minute.

[Audio break.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So yes, let's talk about the second GSA project in 2004, *Star Field*. In Oklahoma City?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oklahoma City.

MIJA RIEDEL: Now, that's interesting. That's like a coming full circle from our conversation first thing today.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It is. Yeah, in several ways actually. Yeah, I had actually been on the jury to pick the final proposal for the memorial, which was an extremely interesting process. Quite emotionally charged.

MIJA RIEDEL: I imagine.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And there were actually people from the community that were on that jury that actually knew Lucien [sp]—[Laughs]—which I thought was pretty amazing actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: That is amazing. And he was, by now, long gone.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But no, it was great—it was wonderful to be on that and to go through that and then to be asked to work on the new campus that was replacing the Murrah building was, you know, there was kind of a nice continuity in that. And so I got kind of all patriotic.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I had several parts to this project, but the star benches were the only piece of it that ultimately made it through the filter.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see, okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Because we had a rather obstreperous architect we were working with. She just kind of

pretended to be supportive and then did everything she could to cut the legs out from under us.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you know what the reason was for that?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Just ego I think. I was doing too much to her project.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see. Not a collaborator.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. No, not at all. So that gnomon up there was also part of this original—was going to be a gnomon that—a marker for a sort of very large sundial piece, which is what these indicate.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: These were stars that were going to be set in the ground and then this was the gnomon here for the sundial.

MIJA RIEDEL: That makes a lot of sense. When I saw the benches and I saw that that was the entirety of the project, I wondered about that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So this would have been lit internally and so it would have kind of projected a star-shaped column of light up into the sky.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, ah ha. Another five-pointed star. How tall was that to be?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was about 50 feet, something like that. It was fairly high. Not outrageous for the sort of scale of the site by any means.

MIJA RIEDEL: But the architect eventually decided that was not to be.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Yes. And the other part of it was this *Anthem Road* piece, which relates to the scored road concepts that we didn't really have time to talk about. But it's an old idea of mine. Maybe I should just—yeah, it's easy to get back there. This is the original concept drawing for this series of works, none of which I have ever been able to actually build yet. [They laugh.] But I may now. We got a new shot at it.

It probably occurred to me during one of those long, endless drives across Utah or something. And it's about physically scoring the road at very specific intervals so that as you're driving over it, it actually sings to you. You can actually score music.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah yes. Yes, yes. That's a great idea.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So that was the kind of original score for that. You can see at certain distances apart, at a certain speed, you'd get a certain frequency.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. With a certain thickness and varieties in thickness and space between.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Sure.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's more about the distance between successive grooves.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, than anything else.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Than anything else.

MIJA RIEDEL: And so there was going to be a road in Oklahoma? A scored road as well?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This is another version. This was going to be applied to a new concrete bridge that was going to replace this old iron grate base bridge, which is a singing bridge.

MIJA RIEDEL: Ah, I see. Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And so this is scored for left and right wheels and it's around—it's *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is it really? [Laughs.] You're serious?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's wonderful.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And it could be played from both directions, so it makes a good song for that purpose.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. On a bridge. But that did not happen yet either.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, that was a proposal for a project that didn't happen.

MIJA RIEDEL: And where was that to be?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Brattleboro, Vermont. And then this came along and I thought, well, maybe I can do, kind of—so it's the first stanza from the national anthem.

MIJA RIEDEL: I was wondering.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Which I thought was kind of beautiful—[inaudible, cross talk].

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely, what a great idea.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So because it was a two-block site, as you know, with this road running through it. So I thought that would be nice to just have that occurring as people were driving back and forth through the site, so you'd have that, again, kind of patriotic—

MIJA RIEDEL: And resonating on multiple levels.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that's really an interesting idea.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And then the star benches was the third part of that. And there's 46 of them because Oklahoma is the 46th state. And originally I wanted them to be—wanted to have uplights underneath them.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, I could see the designs change from your initial drawings to these pieces.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Because I loved the idea of these kind of illuminated stars being out scattered across the landscape. And they vetoed that because it was too much like the chairs in the memorial, which I could kind of understand, but at the same time, I still think it would have been a nice thing to do.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. And did you locate these chairs as groups or was there some sense of random placing?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I wanted it to kind of be random but to have, again, sort of relationships from one to another so that there was, again, this kind of proximity notion that I work with. And so it's probably not ultimately quite that configuration, but it's sort of close. But I actually went out and just sort of staked the site with where I wanted them to go and then we placed them and then we adjusted them and figured out what the orientation was going to be and so forth and then they were installed.

MIJA RIEDEL: And I know they're perforated. Did you locate them based on time of year and time of day and what sort of shadows might be cast?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, not the benches.

MIJA RIEDEL: And are they actually bolted down or can they be moved?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, they have little footings that they're bolted to. I did try to place them in relationship to the trees, so that there were certain conditions of in the sun or in the shade of a tree when these trees eventually get to be big enough to cast shade. And so there was some thought in terms of that. Again, this kind of microenvironment, kind of personal environment thing. And I like the fact that they're sort of a back-to-back thing so two people could sit on the same bench and kind of do a—

MIJA RIEDEL: They feel very animated. And for some reason they make me think of some of our conversation earlier and almost stage sets for experimental theater pieces.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: The pedestrians passing through are the participants.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, they feel like they could have been part of an early New York performance some place.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Maybe not quite the stars, but—

[Cross talk.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: [Singing.] "Would you like to swing on a star?"

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: [Singing.] "Carry moonbeams home in a jar."

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So not the most pleasant experience. I'm happy with what turned out. I wished I could have gotten more of the elements in. And not had a—

MIJA RIEDEL: It must be frustrating to have—yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And not had a jerk to work with like that.

MIJA RIEDEL: It feels like there was potential for three dimensions and you were able to nail down one.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Does that happen frequently?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, I wouldn't say frequently, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: But more than once?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I mean, I'm usually able to make a case that it's not three separate things or four separate things but is working as a totality in a kind of performative sense. And you can't kind of take a piece out without kind of at least diluting or compromising the overall concept. In this case, I just couldn't sell it. Ed—what his name? Ed—he was the chief architect at GSA. Ed is a funny guy. Shoot, I can't remember now.

MIJA RIEDEL: We can add it later.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: He loved the scored road piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I was actually surprised that we couldn't pull it off because it's not like it didn't have support from them, but again, I think—and it might have been budget too. I mean, when I got into it, I realized it was going to be—it was going to cost more money than I really had to work with on this project. So I might have had to edit it out myself.

MIJA RIEDEL: How are these being maintained?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Fine. And I guess it looks—yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: When it comes maintenance, any sense of how these are faring?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I have no idea. There's really not anything that needs to be done except, you know, cut the grass and maybe power wash them every once in a while.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. And I remember that the five-pointed star was also a reference, wasn't it, to the seal of Oklahoma and five of the major Indian tribes in the state?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes. Five nations.

MIJA RIEDEL: So that really—it's interesting how that comes full circle from your early experiences in Oklahoma.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I forgot about that one. Thanks for bringing that up. I don't read my own history very much. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I think we could stop here for today—we've got just a couple minutes left on this disc—and pick things up again tomorrow. Or, Saturday?

[Cross talk.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That's fine. Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, great.

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MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Douglas Hollis at his home in San Francisco, California, on May 24, 2010 for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project. This is disc number five.

And we're going to start this afternoon with a conversation about some of the more recent pieces.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Specifically Unspecified—*Unspecific Gravity*?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: *Unspecific Gravity*, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] This was in Tampa in Florida in the late—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This is the University of South Florida in Tampa. And I can't remember the year right off hand.

MIJA RIEDEL: Late '98 maybe—'98, '99?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Could be. Yes, it would have been. So this was an interesting project. It's sort of this ongoing association I seem to have with scientific kinds of situations. This was the University of South Florida at Tampa. They built a new bioscience research facility there. It was located on a sort of quad surrounded by other science buildings. And so I was given this whole two-and-a-half-acre quad to redo. It had been kind of neglected and there were kind of desire-line paths cutting across it and these beautiful 12 or 13 laurel oak trees that were on the site, so that was a great existing feature of the site.

But I started to talk to some of the researchers there and got really interested in all this modeling, all this molecular modeling that they were doing, the various kinds of tools and forms that they used in order to do that. Of course, now most of it is done with computer models, but if you remember your early science classes where they had the stick-and-ball models and the various kinds of physical models for—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —whether they were sphere-packed models or these stick-and-ball models or diagrams or whatever, so I just got really interested in how we can invent these communication systems, if you will, for investigating and talking about stuff that we actually can't see. [Laughs.] And kind of based on that, I went off and started studying things about the periodic table and that led to other projects later on actually.

But in this case I limited it to sort of focusing on water. So the central element of the landscape is this water-powered kinetic water sculpture consisting of a dozen of these chrome spheres that are organized like H₂O molecules. And there's mist nozzles embedded in the surface of each of those. And so as these things—so these things rotate because of this water turbine element that's at the base.

And then as they mist, they put out this thing that's almost like a—I think of it as kind of like an electron cloud around the whole group. So it's very much a kind of celebration of water and water structure and the mist actually has the practical value of irrigating the native grasses and other plant materials that I planted in this area.

And then I sort of paved the desire-line paths, made those more formal and then made these sort of circular areas around the drip line of the 12 trees. And then I also came up with these seats, they're hemispherical concrete forms. And I picked about a dozen of the most common elements from the periodic table and made these sort of diagrams using brass and terrazzo to make these panels that were inlaid as the seat of the benches.

So that was a kind of nice part of the project too. I actually worked with a group of students from the sculpture department at the—and so we actually made those in Tampa working with the students to do those.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh great. What a nice—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So that was a good part of it. I liked the fact that that could, you know, you get a sort of—that kind of involvement with the students and it gives them an experience to be involved in a large project like this.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. And one that they're going to observe over time and really live with.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Give them a whole different sense of what it means to create an experiential place, experiential space.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] They look in many ways almost as precursors to the seats that were then designed for Fresno, sort of that half-boulder shape.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: [Laughs.] Funny. Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: I mean, the surface is completely different, but—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: These are like big half-atoms basically. [They laugh.] So you've got the protons, then electrons and then the neutrons.

MIJA RIEDEL: And which elements did you choose? Do you remember? And why?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This is a test. What's that one?

MIJA RIEDEL: Fe, isn't that iron? I think it is.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, good. And then carbon, silicon and calcium.

MIJA RIEDEL: Very nice.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And then I arranged these seats so they weren't all just individually placed around the site, but I grouped them in simple molecules. So again, there was a kind of, "hmm, what is that" kind of—so there was salt, there was—sodium chloride, and other things like that. So there was kind of embedded knowledge if you will.

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly, exactly. And it's nice how these work on so many layers just conceptually and physically then.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, the students seem to really like the project a lot. It was voted the most popular place on campus I think the year it was finished.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And it's a very pleasant place to be because of the trees and the water and—

MIJA RIEDEL: The water cools it down.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So again, that H₂O fountain had a kind of evaporative cooling function to it as well, though in Tampa—[They laugh]—being as humid as it is, evaporative cooling is not as nearly as effective as it would be in a drier place.

MIJA RIEDEL: I love this piece. This is the San Jose Repertory Theatre, isn't it?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: What was the title again?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: *Oionos*.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. And this seems very different than any of the other ones that you've done.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I know, people say that and I think I probably agree. And it's probably because this project came on very late in the project. In fact, they had been working with another artist for a couple of years and for various reasons I don't really understand, it didn't work out. So they kind of called me at the 11th hour and asked if I'd like to do a project. And so there was no way of influencing the architecture. In fact, they almost proscribed that it had sort of a stand-alone piece out on the plaza. And so I said, "Okay, I can."

The name comes from a mythical Greek bird that was a sort of fortune-telling bird that one would get auguries from it. And it's also my ongoing homage to Alexander Graham Bell. He named one of his very big kites, "Oionos," so, for that reason—

MIJA RIEDEL: Really? Interesting, I didn't know that.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So again, I mean, this sort of ties to what I was talking about with the Tampa project in that I got, in this case, interested because the Rep actually commissions new work from play writers. So I stated think about that whole idea of language and the tools that we develop for recording language, for writing language down to communicate over time and space with each other. And so I came up with this kind of large writing quill. It's sort of high-tech in a way. So some of the—

[Inaudible, cross talk.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: [Laughs.] And there's actually a light in the tip of the pen, so it's a double light so it shines out through the tip of the pen and up through the body of the pen as well. And it has two modes of motion. It can rotate 360 degrees.

MIJA RIEDEL: The pen or the cone?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The pen.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: As the wind catches it, it swings it around. And then it also has another secondary bearing that it's balanced on that allows it to sort of do this sort of motion.

MIJA RIEDEL: Rise up and down.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So when it's moving, it has almost this illusion as though it's sort of writing on the air.

MIJA RIEDEL: Writing. Yes. And the cone itself doesn't move, just the pen?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, the cone doesn't move. But the skin of—that perforated metal skin on the cone has an inscription cut out of it and it's intentionally backwards because the idea was that the sun, just like a gobo, really. As the sun comes through that, those words are illuminated on the pavement.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. This is Shakespeare, isn't it?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, exactly.

MIJA RIEDEL: "We are such things"—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: "Such things as dreams are made on." Yes, from *The Tempest*.

MIJA RIEDEL: That just seems perfect for that place. It works on so many levels. Very intriguing. And it's so different from you in that it is a sort of single, stand-alone piece. And it makes sense now that I understand that it was something that came at the last hour. But it's interesting to me still how fully integrated it feels conceptually, even given limited space and time.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes, I think it's kind of a nice icon standing outside the theater.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. What was the date of that piece?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I don't know. You've got the—[Laughs].

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's see. It was earlier a little, wasn't it?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I want to say '94 maybe?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That seems right. Yes, it's—'97.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: '97. Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That was one of those also enjoyable projects. I had kind of—I felt a sense of—kind of a sense of freedom on it in a way because I could just kind of work on my own. It had to be done really fast, so it was just like, you know, idea, drawings, fabricate, install. It all happened in about five months, I think.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm, that is extraordinarily quick.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So that was—because a lot of these other projects take, you know, two, three, four years. Even longer sometimes. We can pass on that one. This was a project that I did called *Wind Ensemble*. This was down in San Pedro. You go to the cruise ship terminal and this is a whole field of 30 kinetic stainless steel works.

There were some wind organs, a couple of wind harps and then the rest of them were these just very delicately balanced pieces that were about 28 feet long. And they had a tail piece that was shaped in a particular way so that it would get lift as their wind came around. So they could turn and face into the wind, so not unlike *Sound Garden* in a way—the whole field would sort of turn in some kind of unison motion that was very choreographic.

And these things would just—with the slightest breeze, they'd just go into this sort of almost a swimming motion because the tail pieces actually looked like tails and they kind of function in the same way. So because of that really delicate balance, they just will just go into this—so it's almost like a pod of whales or something.

MIJA RIEDEL: And was this—you said there were wind organs involved with this as well?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Are these structures also the organs?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, the ones—

MIJA RIEDEL: Do they generate the sound or is there something else?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The dancers, if you will, don't make sound, but then there's a number of—the lower left corner is one of the wind organ pieces. And in the lower right is—the central right—is one of the wind organs—wind harp pieces.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. So the organ has the long, vertical pipe?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. And would this be—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: There's a—

MIJA RIEDEL: Sorry, go ahead. Please.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Go ahead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Would this be an appropriate time to talk about the obituary list?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, not yet.

MIJA RIEDEL: Not yet? Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's still there at this time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, this one is—which is the one that's being taken apart? Which is the one that's—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: *Mountain Mirage* [Denver International Airport] is going to bite the dust and Port Townsend [*Tidal Park*] is also going to bite the dust.

MIJA RIEDEL: I thought there was in the L.A. port area that you had said was going, too.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay. All right. Well, then good. That's great news.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Not that I know of. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Don't tell me another bad story.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So this was a new waterfront park and I worked with EDAW on this. They were the landscape architects. Tamara Thomas was the art consultant on this as well. Again, I was brought in fairly late. I didn't really get to participate in the design of the park, but they had this one zone that they really wanted—they saw an opportunity for something to happen there.

And Tamara and this guy, Steve Hanson, who was one of the principals at EDAW, kind of—they were in a meeting together and they just kind of looked at each other and said, "Let's get Doug." [Laughs.] So it was a nice project because I got to work with Tamara, I got to work with Steve who had been at *Hargreaves* some years before, so I knew him. And they were very supportive.

I got together with the people from the port. And it wasn't a lot of money, but they did a lot for me in terms of the infrastructure. They put in the foundations and main support columns, which probably cost at least as much as what they gave me to do—they said, "We just want you to use the money to make the art, and we'll provide the armature and the support for it." So this all happened quite quickly as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: It is reminiscent of *Sound Garden* and in some ways, even the very early Olympics piece.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And I think it works really well because—and it was really intentional to try to do something that would be a mediator between the surrounding environment—which has huge infrastructure going on; it's like big container port and this huge bridge right there—between all that and people. And I think somehow as delicate as these things are, it actually accomplished that. You actually, when you're there among them, they have a kind of presence that sort of makes the other stuff recede into the background both sonically and visually.

Okay. Now, you had interjected that this might be a good—no, we were going to talk about obituaries at some point.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, we wanted to mention that, raise that, but we can wait.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: We can wait a little longer on that.

MIJA RIEDEL: We want to talk about *Waterworks* as well. Would you like to talk about that now?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: That was 2005 in Seattle.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: In 2005 it was completed?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, completed. Took us nine years from beginning to end on that. That was a wonderful project. I really—I love it.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was a big project too.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. There was a—this is five acres. It was called Lincoln Reservoir at the time because it was an open reservoir. It had been built around 1901. It's actually in Olmsted Park. For various reasons, including the fact that the old reservoir was leaking like a sieve, and they were doing a lot of sort of water quality things to their reservoir system in terms of lidding and so forth—mostly soft covers because most, believe it or not, are not really in public places.

This is Capitol Hill, which is the sort of center of Seattle, residential Seattle. And the Seattle Public Utilities people wanted to just build a new reservoir and throw a lid on it and put a fence up around it. And the neighbors were incredibly well-organized on this one. They said, "No way. We want a structural lid and we want a park." [Laughs.] And they got it. They were really—they just pushed and pushed and—

MIJA RIEDEL: And it's quite a park. It's an elaborate space.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's a major park in Seattle. Now, we did the top two-thirds of that plan. The bottom third had already been done and that's athletic fields. Highly used. And we dealt with everything to the north of that. And I worked with Jeff Girvin, who was with the Berger Partnership—was very good.

Jonathan Morley was the other person we worked with on that. Very successful collaboration right from the beginning. He was delighted that I had gotten chosen to do the project and we went up and had a beer after the interview and started drawing. [They laugh.] It was great.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's a lovely beginning.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. So it took a long time primarily because it was such a big infrastructure project, just the construction of the new reservoir, including its structural lid and all that they had to do with rerouting the water that had been coming through it because it had to still continue to be a functioning reservoir system.

MIJA RIEDEL: So were there numerous unusual constraints to this project that you hadn't dealt with before? Or had you really seen most of it before?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I didn't—not really. You know, the structural lid was extremely strong. So obviously there were issues about where trees could be and where they couldn't. That's always an issue. But we worked around that. It wasn't really that difficult.

MIJA RIEDEL: So they're mostly around the periphery, it seems?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes. And then there was this existing pump house, a historic pump house that is here—there.

MIJA RIEDEL: Between the athletic fields and the rest of the park?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And that still has function in terms of the operation of the reservoir as well as being historically significant as a building.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is that the single original feature that remains? Other than some of the trees, I'm sure.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes, yes. Yes, the trees—the older trees that could be saved were definitely saved. So we developed this whole sequence of water elements beginning with this source cone that's about 35 feet in diameter and 16, 17 feet high. And water kind of gushes out of the top of this. It's almost like a water volcano in a way.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it looks like a—that's exactly what I was going to say. [They laugh.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. It has a cladding of four-inch granite cobbles, square cobbles set on the surface, so it really rips the water up in a beautiful way.

MIJA RIEDEL: The water—the overall appearance is almost of beading, which feels different than anything I've really seen from you before.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] The cone is not a right cone per se. It's kind of off-set. So it's a gentler slope on the outside than it is on the inside. One of the subtleties of the sound component of this was that it would be a softer sound as you were coming into the park and then as you came around it into the park, the sound would become louder because the surfaces were steeper. So again, it's kind of my old trick of sonic Pied Piperism. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Right—and borders.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's a fairly quiet neighborhood so it wasn't really a traffic modifier per se, but it was—and then there is a trough that comes out of that cone that has a very vigorous water course flowing in it. And I made some bronze flow diverters.

I mean, the main thing that was so great about this was even though the reservoir was going to disappear from view, a lot of my initial ideas had to do with sort of making people aware that it was still there, that there would be at least poetic manifestations of the fact that the reservoir was still underneath.

And I even had some ideas called "reserviewers." I wanted to have these kind of reverse periscope things so that people could look through and actually look at this five-acre body of water and actually hear it too. I had these sort of listening devices that I was trying to—but 9/11 kind of completely X'ed those out. [Laughs.] They got concerned. But I thought it would have been wonderful to be able to listen to that huge chamber of water kind of sloshing around and doing what it, you know, just acoustically it would—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, five contained acres of water would produce a sound, I'm sure, that most of us would be completely dazzled by, unfamiliar with.

[Cross talk.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: But I wanted to do it acoustically and not electronically.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. And that has been true throughout your career. Has there ever been any electronic sound?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Very, very little. Almost not at all. No, I like just keeping it—you know, it's like the camera obscura. I just love the hole in the wall. I never was interested in using lenses to rectify the image.

MIJA RIEDEL: Very simple technology—or in some aspects, very simple technology in using what is present onsite.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, amplifying the site rather than bringing something else to it.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Simple methods to talk about very complex phenomena, really. I'm very proud of this project. I should probably just describe the other key elements before we leave it.

MIJA RIEDEL: And also, what in particular about this project are you proud of? What resonates with you?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, I love the kind of community component of it, you know? I love being on the right side, if you will. [Laughs.] I love the activism that went on to make sure this thing happened. It was a real honor to work with a community to get this thing done. And from the second it opened, it was mobbed. And it's become probably the—certainly one of the most popular parks in Seattle.

MIJA RIEDEL: Enormously gratifying.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's in, like, *Seattle Time Out*, I think or one of those—what are those guides called? You know, they're published for most major cities? "Things you must see" kind of thing. And this park is in that now.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's interesting because it is so much about water on such a big scale. Water really—it's like a leading role.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It has a huge presence there, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: And the opportunity to explore it in so many different forms, from the cone to the tunnel to the—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The sort of texture pool that spreads out and there is kind of a dissipation of turbulence.

MIJA RIEDEL: And then a reflecting pool.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And then that turns into a reflecting pool up against the old pump house.

MIJA RIEDEL: So I imagine you'd like to see a few more projects exactly along these lines.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I'd love it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Who funded this?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This was a combination of Seattle Public Utilities [SPU] and the Parks Department.

MIJA RIEDEL: There weren't budgeting problems with this project? It seems like the finances were—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, they found the funds to do the park. I mean, that was just a commitment they made to—you know, SPU did the reservoir and Parks did the park and then the public art component paid for my involvement as—on the design team and then finishing the cone out and making the flow diverters that were in the chute.

MIJA RIEDEL: Seattle is fairly unique in that—what's the word I'm looking for? That program of—I can't remember what the percentage is for art, but it seems like that has allowed them to really create a number of large, successful public art installations unlike quite a lot of other cities.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. No, they are extremely visionary. The thing that we now call public art was really first conceived in Seattle by Richard Andrews and Ann Folk and Pat Fuller. They wrote the original sort of guidelines

for their program and that became a model for the rest of the country.

And they haven't always stayed in the number-one slot, but they've done pretty well. And they do take on—they do have a bigger picture about their projects than a lot of cities do. And they still very much encourage the kind of collaborative, integrated sort of approach that we were talking some about that the other day.

MIJA RIEDEL: Are there any other cities you enjoy working in equally?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's varied. I guess I like Seattle a lot because of both of the park and also *A Sound Garden*.

MIJA RIEDEL: And Anna has had at least one project up there, *Skytones*—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: She has two up there, two-and-a-half. So, yeah, Seattle has been good to both of us.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, it sounds that way.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's a great town. Let's see—where are we going from here?

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you want to talk about *Mist Tree*?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: We can do that. So *Mist Tree* is a kind of iconic water sculpture that's in Houston, Texas. It's part of a new 12-acre park in downtown Houston [Discovery Green]. This, again, was a project I worked on with *Hargreaves*. They asked me to be on the team when they did the RFQ for the project and then we got it and so I was involved from the start with the entire design of the park. And then as these things tend to do, they sort of settled out and I came up with this concept for this hyperbolic lattice form that both rains and mists. It's about 26 feet in diameter and 16 feet high.

MIJA RIEDEL: The mist is spectacular. It feels like the fog arbor a bit.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah. But this is mist as opposed to the fog, so it's a coarser spray. And the good thing about that is that you can actually get rainbows. The fog is too fine to create rainbows.

MIJA RIEDEL: I see.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I kind of always wanted to get that part of it in to one of these raining, misting projects.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, that's marvelous.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's on a sort of a sequence timer so that sometimes it's off, sometimes it's just raining, sometimes it's just misting, sometimes it's doing both. So there is a kind of a element of surprise always possible for people when they come here.

This has also been an incredibly popular project because downtown Houston prior to this tended to be a pretty dead zone. People stayed inside a lot. They have these sort of indoor parking garages with these tunnel systems that connect the buildings, so there is hardly anybody on the street and very little residents down in this area.

But in an effort to get some new life downtown—that's actually the convention center in the background. But there's a number of vacant parcels around the park that they are very interested in developing into a mixed use kind of condition. You know, a combination of residential/commercial.

Also the way this park came about was fairly interesting—I guess kind of Texan in a way, but it was completely paid for by private money. There was this group of people—very wealthy people—[Laughs]—who obviously had some self interest because some of these development projects that were going to be going on around the perimeter were things they would be involved with as investors as well.

But they came up with the—probably about \$30 million to do this 12-acre park. And both the *Mist Tree* and this other *Listening Vessel* piece that I did in this park were each paid for individuals that decided they wanted to have their name on it. And so it was kind of fantastic, actually.

I mean, I've never been in a project where that kind of—that source of funding came through with so much not just economic support but real passion for doing this project. And it's got like a four-star restaurant. It's got a toy boat basin, a spray ground. It's an extremely green project; it's all solar-powered.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. What's the name of the park?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Discovery Green. It's worth having a look at the—I've got a couple of other publications on it too, if you want to see some of the other parts of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what was the timeframe for this piece, from start to finish?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This would have been three years ago now, so '07. It took us a couple of years from start to finish. It's a really nice structure.

MIJA RIEDEL: Is that meant to be a bench as well at the base?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes. So people can walk inside the rain curtain and just sit there and look out through the rain curtain if they want to.

MIJA RIEDEL: And is it dry inside?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: If the mist is off it is. [They laugh.] That's the thing; it varies a lot. See if I—I thought I had another shot in there. I'll have to change that before I burn this for you. I had a couple of shots of people—kids and other people playing in it and so forth.

MIJA RIEDEL: It feels very different too in that it feels very centralized.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: In the sense of?

MIJA RIEDEL: Just a singular structure. I think oftentimes of your environments involving multiple elements and this feels very centralized.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes, it's contained, but it was also really carefully located in the park. So it has its own space and it occupies a kind of portion of the site that really allows it to be, as I said, a kind of beacon or icon for the park. It's very visible from the adjacent streets.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. How tall is it again?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's only 16 feet, but it's—because there is quite a bit of space around it, it really does have its own zone.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what is the top diameter?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Twenty-six feet.

MIJA RIEDEL: Twenty-six feet.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: A lot of people would ask me, "How did you curve those pieces?" [They laugh.] I said, "Oh, it was really hard." [They laugh.] It's quite an illusion, isn't it?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It was based on an earlier—I figured this out actually for an earlier project where this was actually going to be inverted as a roof of a pavilion. But I didn't get to build that project. But that model over on the wall there is the kind of original idea for that. It's a fascinating structure.

MIJA RIEDEL: It is.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's actually self-organizing. I didn't realize—I built one model on—I fought it all the way and then I woke up in the middle of the night one night and said, "Oh, you just have to let it do its own thing."

MIJA RIEDEL: It feels very basket-like.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It is.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's sort of Fibonacci-sequenced.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So I figured out a way to let it just kind of do what it wanted to do and it came together very quickly.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, it does feel very much like a basket pattern.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I'd like to produce these as hats.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, it would be marvelous.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: You could put your pigtail up through the top and—[inaudible, cross talk].

MIJA RIEDEL: Exactly. It's very Audrey Hepburn, isn't it? Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: It's absolutely beautiful. I keep admiring that for the past few days. It's nice to have a closer look. Do you have a photo of that as well?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Of the model?

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm. [Affirmative.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, but I could take one.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that would be nice to include.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That's a good idea. So let's see—

MIJA RIEDEL: I think we were going to talk about *Rotations* as well in Ann Arbor?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I think we could probably let this one slide unless you want to talk about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: *Sound Cycles*?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: This is up in Portland. It's a new park. We just actually—literally it's just finished. Two-acre park, again with Hargreaves. And they're so bicycle-crazy up there that I decided to do something to kind of celebrate that whole bike culture. So these are sound pieces that are based on bicycle-wheel structure. So they're spoked rims that are about nine feet in diameter. And they spin in the wind. The wind-catching balls are from IKEA. [Laughs.] They make these beautiful little stainless steel—eight-inch stainless steel balls and they were perfect, you know.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Lightweight but strong. And quite inexpensive. This was a very low-budget project. But again, I got the foundations, the lighting and so forth in the base construction of the park part of the budget, so I just had to build the pieces. So there are five of these located in this particularly windy part of the site.

And I don't know if you ever did this when you were a kid, but we used to take a clothespin and a playing card and clip it on to the fork of our—so it would be plunked by the spokes. And these have a somewhat more sophisticated striking mechanism, but they are sonic in that sense. There is this kind of chiming quality that they have.

MIJA RIEDEL: So they're not a harp and they're not an organ; they're something really quite different.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it's a chime. Yes, right. And the area they're located in is kind of a more wooded area. There's more trees in this area than in other parts of this small park. And when we were sort of first talking about this, coming up with a concept for the whole park, I said, "You know, we should really—I've always wanted to do an enchanted grove," which would be made up of different species of trees that have different sonic qualities to them. Much like I was telling, I think, about our eucalyptus tree and the pine tree?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Which is where that kind of initial notion came from. So we did that as well. So these trees are very small now, but when they became more mature, I like the idea that there will be this combination of tree sound and the sound of the bike sculptures.

MIJA RIEDEL: Have you done many indoor spaces?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: No. Have you been interested in doing any?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Seattle and *Rain Column*. I mean, not Seattle.

MIJA RIEDEL: San Francisco, the Lincoln Center.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Denver.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, Denver. Yes. But Lincoln too.

[Cross talk.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you have any interest in doing a sanctuary sort of space or a hospital space at all?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I would. Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. I would think that that would be something that would appeal to you.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The opportunity has not really come about, but yes, I'd love to do some kind of permanent version of the camera obscura actually. That would be a wonderful meditation space. I don't know if other people would think that or not. [They laugh.] Because it does take a little while for your eyes to adapt, so it might freak people out a little bit. But once your eyes adjust, it's so wonderful. I think it might have very therapeutic possibility.

And *Rotations*, which is my most recently—well, actually *Sound Cycles* finished a little later, but this came along after that. This is at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor. And it was a commission intended to be a sort of celebration of six men who were killed in an accident there. They have a big very active transplant—organ transplant program there. And these six guys were out on a retrieval mission and they were coming back flying over Lake Michigan and their plane crashed. So it was a huge tragedy.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. When did that happen?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: About three years ago.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, that's just awful.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And they had already spent a lot of time with the family members and the other doctors and nurses that these guys had worked with and so forth. So they had gone through a kind of grieving process and had kind of—you know, had gotten away from the idea that they wanted something kind of literal and figurative.

Because when they first called me up and told me what the project was about, I said, "You know, are you sure you're calling the right person? Because I kind of don't really do memorials." And they said, "No, no, no. We're kind of past that now." So I went out—and of course, I'm from Ann Arbor, so I was extraordinarily pleased to finally be asked to do a project for my town and my university—and came up with a very simple piece that actually utilized this existing curved foundation.

There was a small, two-foot-high retaining wall that had been part of this little outdoor garden adjacent to the hospital lobby where people wait when people are—they're waiting for somebody that's in the hospital. So you can look out into this space. So it creates a nice sort of enclosure, this small garden area, separating it from the main driveway up to the entrance to the hospital.

And it's composed of 450 very simple perforated metal S-shaped wind rotors mounted in a simple stainless steel grid. It's about 60 feet long and about 12 feet high. So as the wind comes through it, it goes into this amazing kind of kinetic quality. It almost becomes liquid. And so you can see through it even if it's still, but it gives you both a kind of sense of privacy and at the same time a view because it's got a high ground there. You're kind of looking out across the river valley.

And the other thing is that the helicopter pad is right across the street from this, which is the Medevac helicopters' thing. So when they're taking off and landing, the piece gets a little bit more active. So again, in a very abstract way, that was my kind of homage to the point of the commission as well.

MIJA RIEDEL: This piece is also very much about light and reflection and refraction it seems.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: And shadow too, I would think.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it does some pretty amazing shadows. I like this piece so much I actually am trying to continue to sort of use the same vocabulary in some other places. This project I was telling you about in Council Bluffs, Iowa—the big 100-acre park I'm working on.

MIJA RIEDEL: Does this have any sort of sonic quality to it at all?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No, it really doesn't.

MIJA RIEDEL: So no sound and no water?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: No sound and no water. I'm back to working with—I told you I was tired of plumbing. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, that's right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I'm trying to get back to working with the wind again. This is actually a very old idea. I actually was doing something vaguely similar to this when I was a student at Ann Arbor. Kind of my transition into working with kinetic sculpture and—you know, because I've worked with Milton—you know, just—I started building things that would fit in windows that would be activated and so forth and working with color, and color and motion, reflection.

MIJA RIEDEL: And this does seem to create that sort of oasis-like space that we were talking about before I turned on the disc. It does seem to create—I mean, it does create physically, but it also creates in a very—somehow in a spatial sense that—a sense of an oasis and a quiet place of respite.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Spectacular when the sun changes too.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It's beautiful. And this was late in the day. Yes, it's quite beautiful when you're sort of driving down the street too. It just is almost like a mirage over in the corner of the building.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And then constantly in flux on so many levels.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: It's very modular in a way that seems different from much of what you've done.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, I do tend to do—

MIJA RIEDEL: Contained.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I do tend to do sort of groups of similar things. So if you think about *Field of Vision* or even *Sound Garden*.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's true. That's true.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: But this is sort of vertical in a way that a lot of the work tends to express more of a horizontal kind of experience. This is more of a vertical.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. I think there's also maybe more positive space in this. There is so much positive/negative space in some of your other pieces.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: And this just feels much more massive though it's not.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: But it has a really nice balance of being kind of ethereal, ephemeral and yet—

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I love that edge. I love trying to hit that edge of—you know, is that energy or is that material or is it—and how do those two things sort of interact with each other?

MIJA RIEDEL: And shift back and forth.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: These are beautiful images. It would be nice to include those with the oral history.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, for sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: So this was completed last year—2009?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, I guess it was last year when we actually—when it was dedicated anyway. So it would have been finished last year, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: So what's next?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, there's a lot of things in the pipeline right now. The most interesting project that's been going for about a year-and-a-half now is this one in Council Bluffs, Iowa, that I was mentioning. I'm working with a fabulous team from Sasaki [Associates] out of Boston. It's a group of young women that are just really smart and really fun to work with and they love me. [They laugh.] They venerate me. [They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: How nice.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Which I don't mind a bit. So we're working on this riverfront park. It's right on the Missouri River. About 90 acres of the 100 acres is in the flood plain and then there's a 15-foot levee that runs along—it's an earth levee—that runs along the edge of that floodplain and then there's about 10 acres on the dry side.

And they have recently completed, filled in a pedestrian bridge from Omaha over to Council Bluffs. And Council Bluffs was being ridiculed a bit because they kind of kept calling it "the bridge to nowhere" because you kind of come over and it hits the landing, hits the levee and there's a trail along the top of the levee, but there's really kind of nothing else there. There is kind of a one-story residential neighborhood there and some playing fields and you know, but that's about it.

So they decided they wanted to do a major urban park on this site. And we got selected to do that. I was actually chosen first by—there's an organization called the Iowa West Foundation and they are essentially the nonprofit community development group that receives its funding from the casinos, the Iowa casinos.

And they do a lot of really good projects there. You know, all kinds of clinics and schools and park rehabilitation projects and other things like that. But they also because of Todd Graham, who is the director, has a particular interest in public art and so they have begun this very ambitious public art program as well. They've got several major pieces that they've already done. And you know, good people.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's unusual in this day and age.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It is. It's really kind of a breath of fresh air for me because so many places seem to be going the other direction. And it's big sculpture for the most part. But Jim Kaneko did this wonderful sort of plaza with a whole number of his kind of monolithic ceramic pieces.

MIJA RIEDEL: Sundials—[inaudible, cross talk].

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. And other elements. That's a good one. So they invited me to come out and talk to them about getting involved in this project and then I was able to make suggestions about landscape architect teams that they should consider interviewing for that part of the project. And I, of course, recommended Hargreaves.

[END OF TRACK AAA_hollis10_1650_m.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Douglas Hollis at his home in San Francisco, California on May 24, 2010, for the GSA Archives of American Art oral history project, disc number six.

And we just—we were talking about working with Sasaki and how you were pleased with how that's developed.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, yes. No, I mean, I've enjoyed working with Hargreaves over the years and we've done a number of things. But I also enjoy expanding the field of people that I work with, especially in the landscape architecture area.

So it's been just this fantastically joyful process of—and also that—I was talking about Iowa West, and those people are great; and then the guy from Council Bluffs parks department that's running the park side of the project, Larry Foster.

And they loved to party. [Laughs.] First of all, the Sasaki team really is into gambling. So we always stayed at Harrah's, which is adjacent to the site, so that's our excuse. And we have our—there's a public golf course across the street and we have all of our design meetings in the club house of the golf club. And we're able to go out and walk the site if we want to, or use the golf carts if we need to get down there. So it's been a lot of fun in that way. But just very proactive clients, and just a lot of good energy, in terms of the process.

So it's a big project. And, of course, the economy went south shortly after we began this thing. So they've kind of been scrambling to figure out how they're going to fund this project. And it is going to have to be phased over a number of years. If the economy picks up again, they will fund it more quickly than they're thinking they might be able to now.

But they want to proceed with the design work so that—you know, so that each of those phases is ready to go as

soon as they can fund it. So they're already doing the first phase of it, which is a kind of a major, great lawn element in the middle of the project.

It's a fantastic site because the Army Corps did some revetment work along the original shoreline many years ago, and it's a kind of series of structures that actually accumulate silt. So they're actually building land on that side, which is the—which is the placer side of the river, as opposed to the cut bank, which is the Omaha side.

It's a fantastic contrast to the Omaha side, which is very urban. They have flood walls—structural flood walls. There is virtually no green on that side at all. And so that was the primary motivating concept behind our thinking for what this part should be, you know, that it can be green, it can be greened. [They laugh.]

And the more northern land has pretty much been left completely alone. So it's become a really wonderful habitat with great bird populations and other animals. So we're trying to preserve that end.

And it's almost—we're almost sort of using a kind of "spectrum," if you will, from this kind of central place, this great lawn area where there'll be an amphitheater; the weather tower piece that I was showing you the other day with the major water feature—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —which will serve as an outdoor skating rink in the winter. And it's where the bridge lands is right there. So that's—so that's kind of there, what we're trying to make—there at that point. And that will be where the big festivals happen, and, you know, more casual recreational—

MIJA RIEDEL: Is there a projected start date, or not yet?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: They already started to do some of the clearing.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So they're moving. This summer I think that they'll get a lot done. I think that probably looking at sometime early next year to have that first phase done. And if the funding becomes available, they'll just keep moving.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it just sounds like it ties into so many of your interests, that it's real ecological design. It sounds very green. You've got lots of opportunity for water I assume, given the fact that the river is right there. And do you have any plans for any sonic elements?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So to create access to the river in a way that the Omaha side simply doesn't have at all. It was a wonderful opportunity. So we really pushed that, sort of, attitude, and even to the extent of trying to get people out over the river on a kind of a pier that could potentially be a location for a work.

MIJA RIEDEL: It makes me think of that very early temporary installation you did on the river. Was it in Buffalo?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's a powerful river, though.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And it does flood. Although it doesn't—it's not like the deluge now, because of the way the land is formed and so forth. The river pretty much just rises. The site gets wet and the water goes down and the land dries out.

But it's an interesting process to figure out how to design in a flood plain. And all the players that you have to kind of be involved with—the Department of Natural Resources, the Army Corps of Engineers, of course, as well as other people in the city, and the general public. As a process piece, it's been also fascinating and educational.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So one of the things Iowa West asked me to do, in addition to working with the design team, was to identify opportunities where other artists might be able to do things. So that was kind of an interesting—I've done a little bit of that in the past.

But it's just an interesting envelope to work inside of, to think about what kind of work might be encouraged,

given the kind of philosophical underpinnings of the design of the park; the idea that, almost going back to Artpark, in terms of concept of doing—getting artists to do annual temporary projects in different parts of the environment, so that they're—it's not just permanent work that's just there, but work that could—so they're getting that kind of activation of the site that a place like Artpark had going on with it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely. Did the flood plain itself inspire any site-specific designs or thoughts?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The fact that it does flood?

MIJA RIEDEL: Does, yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: In a sense.

The other big idea that I have for the site is a tree-canopy walk that would take off from the top of the levees, so you're already at 15 feet. And it would go out through that more wooded area to the north, up through the canopy of the trees, of the forest there—probably 1,000 feet or so, and kind of bring you out to a viewpoint overlooking the river.

And that's part of a, sort of—I think of it as a three-dimensional trail system that we developed within the park. So at a point along that walk there would be a kind of spiral ramp piece that brings you down into the flood plain, and then that would join into the trail system that's actually on the ground there.

MIJA RIEDEL: I would think that just seasonally, and in terms of time and change, that that whole seasonal, tide-related sense of evolution that happens in the park would be really rich material for you.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yes, they actually have real seasons there,

and it changes dramatically. I've been out there almost every season and it really changes dramatically in the winter. It's kind of beautiful because it's—the trees are all bare, and there's snow on the ground, and ice in the river. And then it's just totally dense in the summertime—just goes green, green, dense conditioned.

Yes, so that's—and part of the canopy walk actually, in thinking that through, is, you know, how great would it be, when it does flood, to be able to sort of walk out above the flood plain and actually see the water doing what it's doing below you. You can see that somewhat from the pedestrian bridge already, but still.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] A real chance to observe.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, at a kind of proximity to—

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —to the forest.

It was actually inspired by a canopy walk in Kew Garden in London that we first saw a couple of years ago. It's a nice experience and it's really nice to— that was one of my favorite things when I was a kid was climbing trees. We lived by a lot—there were a lot of woods in Ann Arbor and within a stone's throw of my house. So I spent a lot of time in the woods and a lot of time up in trees—apple trees, as well as bigger trees.

MIJA RIEDEL: Larger trees have quite a presence.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'd like to talk briefly about teaching.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Oh, sure.

MIJA RIEDEL: And I'd also like to talk briefly about the projects that are disappeared. Which would you—which would you like to address?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, let's do that first, so we don't end on a down note.

Well, I think when we were first talking, I made some distinction between what I used to think of as permanent work and long-term work.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Yes.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And, you know, it's come about that over the years several of the projects that I've done, and thought were going to be there a lot longer, turned out not to be for various reasons.

Mountain Mirage in Denver was in the main terminal of the Denver airport. And they're doing an extension, which means they need to extend their subway—light rail, people-mover thing. And the pump station is right in the way, and there's no place they can relocate it to—they say—to be able to preserve the work.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's really too bad.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. So that's going to get demolished.

MIJA RIEDEL: That seems like—well, that's one of the few indoor pieces.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. It's one of two.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. I can just—everything about that seems so perfectly placed for such a busy airport.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, it worked fantastically. And it was a real environmental piece. It just did marvelous things for the quality of the air, a lot of negative ions, and the sound was fantastic.

MIJA RIEDEL: An appropriate place for an oasis. [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes. Indeed. Indeed.

MIJA RIEDEL: And Port Townsend, what is the—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That's been a kind of contentious project for several years now. It's one of the situations where—and it's kind of an odd town. They have what I call a "Miss Havisham" complex. They had expected the railroad to come up to Port Townsend and it went to Seattle instead.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And so in preparation for the arrival of the railroad, they kind of built up the town. So even to this day some of the third stories of the downtown buildings have never been finished out—

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —so it has that kind of—and a lot of kind of odd balls like to live there.

So this woman, Ruth Seavey Jackson, left her estate to the city to commission a work of public art to commemorate the contributions of her family to the city. And she said in the event that the city was unable to decide on an appropriate commission. The entire estate was to go to Dogs of the Desert.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Leader dogs—[laughs].

MIJA RIEDEL: Dogs of the Desert?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, which are like, you know, like dogs for the blind, basically.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Or rescue dogs—

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Thinking that, you know, if they were going to be that blind, maybe they needed dogs instead of art.

So right from the beginning there were a lot of people that just had their nose out of joint about this whole thing, and they weren't going to be happy no matter what we did. And the city basically neglected it. You know, it kind of died of neglect. They said it was dysfunctional, which it wasn't really. If they'd tried to do a modicum of normal, sort of, maintenance to it—

MIJA RIEDEL: It's interesting, because it makes me think of the way we were just talking about, the project in Iowa, *Tidal Park*, at least in terms of that marking the changing tides, and the sense of seasons by water.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So you can see, even in the Google Earth shot, it's looking a little rough.

MIJA RIEDEL: So is this an example of a project that has not been maintained because it wasn't clear who was to do what? Or is it because people simply weren't interested in maintaining it?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I think it's—I think it's just that they weren't interested in maintaining it. You know, it was like too—it's just too tough a piece for them.

And, you know, rightfully so, though. The tide clock element does tend to catch various flotsam and jetsam that comes down the sound, which they have to get down and clean out. And that's one of the things they were complaining about is the—and Chuck Fahlen and I, who I did the project with, we consulted with them several times about various ways they might be able to address that problem. They never did anything about it. It was just kind of wasted conversation.

And then the pilings that the Wave Gazing Gallery are built on top of—we had them actually tested before we went ahead with the project, and they seemed to be fairly sound. There were a couple of them that showed some signs of dry rot, and so forth, but apparently a few more of them have now continued to deteriorate. And so that becomes a fairly expensive proposition, to replace those under the existing circumstances.

So they've had that closed for a number of years for, they think, a public safety issue. So most recently they tried to consult with us about some ideas that they had for "renovating" the work—their term [laughs]—which would have completely, sort of, ruined it, as far as Chuck and I were concerned.

So we kind of made our opinions known, and they decided to go ahead anyway and do their—I don't even know what they're going to do now. Knowing them, they might not get around to doing anything about it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right. Are those the two—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: But we got, you know—we got a fairly good run out of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: That was completed in—what, late '80s?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. So almost 20 years.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Almost 20 years. That's not bad—too bad, but not bad.

So the other project was the first—one of the very first ones I did for—that one over at Lawrence Hall of Science, the first permanent wind organ. And the problem there was really kind of not their fault. They did need to do some repairs to the work. And the problem is that when I did the project, ADA was not really enforced the way it is now. So it's really not really accessible to the handicapped.

If they did the renovations to the work, they would have had to comply with ADA, and it was just virtually impossible, economically as well as almost physically, to do that. So they just decided to deaccession it.

I'm looking for a new home for it. [Laughs.] I was going to try to put it in down at Aquatic Park at one point—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: —and I haven't had time to ever pursue that. That would be a nice location for it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. Absolutely.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: My old friend Nick Bertoni, who I lived with in Berkeley, started a group—about 10 years ago now, called Tinker's Workshop. And it was kind of a grassroots, community workshop idea where people could come in and learn how to use tools and build stuff. And part of it got extremely seriously involved with bicycles, and building bicycles, and repairing bicycles, and all that.

So apropos of that, they have one shop facility on Channing Way, kind of mid-flatlands. But they also acquired a portion of one of the buildings down at Aquatic Park. And they got it from the city for—you know, like kind of a dollar-a-year deal, if they would do the renovations on it to bring it up to code, and so which they did. And then the organization kind of came unraveled for various reasons we don't need to go into.

So that facility is down there, but Nick's not really involved with what's going on at this point. I think there's some bicycle-related group that's kind of doing something down there now. But it doesn't seem as—it still seems like an appropriate site for the wind organ, but it doesn't seem as an appropriate context now. And I don't actually know anything about who's down there and running it now.

Anyway, that's—that's not too bad in 30 years, I guess.

MIJA RIEDEL: I thought it was going to be much worse. [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Don't make me think too much. I probably will come up with a few more.

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's talk a bit about teaching, because over the past 30 years you've taught quite a bit in a variety of schools. Were you ever interested in following a path as a—at a university, or that was not of interest to you?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It really wasn't, no. That's one reason I only got a bachelor's degree in fine arts, because it—at least at that time, maybe it's still true, probably is still true—if one wasn't interested in teaching, getting a master's didn't make a lot of sense. So since I wasn't, I didn't.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. But you have taught quite a few university—you've taught at universities for a semester, or —

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —a term, you've been involved in all sorts of conferences and forums—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Absolutely.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm thinking of—I know you've been at Harvard, at Berkeley, San Diego, the University of Virginia.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: The University of Virginia, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: What is it that you are interested in teaching when you're at these schools for a semester or so?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Well, what's interesting to me is that I don't teach in art departments or at art schools. All the classes I've done have been graduate landscape architecture studios. And I suppose—I'm trying to think now—I'm trying to think. I co-taught a design studio with Hargreaves at Harvard at the GSD [Graduate School of Design].

MIJA RIEDEL: The Graduate School of Design?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, and that may have been the first time, actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: And when was that, roughly?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That was probably '88, or so. And I enjoyed that very much. Actually, it was an architect that was the third-person part of that teaching team.

But, first of all, it seemed kind of like motivated self-interest since I seemed to be working more and more with landscape architects and less and less with artists or in art contexts. It's almost as if I could—if I could work with these young, soon-to-be landscape architects, and sort of get a different sensibility going in their minds about how they approach what they did. And try to create a more heightened awareness of environmental dynamics, and how those things should be thought about and considered, and included in their concepts about places that they make.

All the stuff that I work with really has been in invisible forces and the whole idea of time, and the whole, sort of, kinesthetics of how people move through places, and what they experience in the process of doing that. It's, I mean, it might sound ridiculous but it's just—it's probably being taught more now than it was, but it really wasn't part of the, kind of, curriculum. Landscape architects just, in general—I'm over generalizing of course—but they tend to think differently. They think more graphically almost, and less experientially.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So the studios that I have done have tried to really engage them in building things, for one thing; finding sites, interpreting the site; doing things that are—become, sort of, mediators, or explainers, or articulators of that site, some component of it. And to really think about all their senses as being important tools to bring to the design process, and not just their brains. It's not a "neck up" activity.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Not in my studios, anyway.

So it's been a lot of fun. And Anna and I went back to Harvard in '98 and did a semester. They had a very

popular studio there.

San Diego—Adèle Santos, who's an architect that I've worked with in the past, had started a school of architecture there, and she wanted the—she wanted it to be a very, sort of, interdisciplinary, visiting faculty kind of thing, similar to Harvard. You know GSD, there's probably 25 percent are permanent faculty, and then almost everybody else they bring in. They're professionals that take a semester and—

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MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Douglas Hollis, on May 24th, 2010 for the GSA Archives of American Art, Oral History Project at his home in San Francisco, California, disc number seven.

So by way of summary, I have just a few final questions. The first is: How do you feel your sources of inspiration have changed over time. Or do you feel they really have not—do you feel that it's the same—the same things that motivated you 30 years ago are what motivate you now?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: You know, I really do feel that. I feel like it's really been a continuum. It's been a constant education, which is, I think, the best thing one could say about a life's work, because I never have gotten to a point where I know enough. [Laughs.]

And I think it's been an extraordinary period of time to have had this career in, because of the—because of the kind of evolution of the work that I cared about doing, and its increasing acceptance. And even though public art is still somewhat of a hidden movement to a lot of the art world, I don't really care that much about that.

Oh, I periodically think maybe I should make more of an effort to have a sort of gallery, museum. Sort of a presence to myself, of myself.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you do, from time to time—

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: [Inaudible.]

MIJA RIEDEL: —have gallery exhibitions.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: From time to time—rarely. But it just—I never really had a kind of body of work that was something that would kind of go that direction. I mean, I've done drawings and made small sculpture periodically, and so forth.

But, I don't know the business of gallery, museum, art-world stuff. It's just not—it's not something that's really attracted me. And I've just been having such a good time doing the other work, and it's so much more of a challenge to me to have this broader engagement with built space, and real places, and people, and—real people. Dare I say, "real people?" [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: And the site itself is often such a source of inspiration and motivation, a catalyst for the work.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So I don't think—I don't think the sources have changed much; they've just grown. And I think the—again, a kind of a growing sensitivity to ecological design, sustainable design, and all of those issues. It's so much more in all our consciences now than it was 15 or 20 years ago.

So, that's another aspect of things, that I feel—I feel like there's new information coming. And there's a lot of people thinking, and talking, and acting on these issues. And to be part of that is something that I find fascinating, going forward, because I think it's just going to get richer.

And I don't know, we'll see what happens to things like the commissioning of public art, how that evolves or devolves over time; what effect the economics, the economy have on whether programs are stalled, or closed, or whatever, and what impact that might make on my ability to get new work.

But I've been through several of these things—maybe not such a bad one as we're experiencing right now. But usually it's the periods where most people are hurting the most have been sometimes my most productive times. And I think it has to do with a time lag that's a part of these projects. They take a long time to do, and once they're sort of launched they usually have a kind of momentum that allows them to carry through.

So I start to feel the lean times just about at the point when the recession ends, and then the next wave starts.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And I've always been busy. I've always had at least two, three, sometimes more projects going on at the same time for 30 years now—or 25 [years], anyway.

MIJA RIEDEL: How has your work been received over those 25 years? Has it been—it sounds like it's been fairly consistent throughout.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: I think so. I hope eventually to get some kind of more substantial publication on my work done. That hasn't happened yet.

Would you like to write it?

MIJA RIEDEL: Love to.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Let's talk about it.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Anna and I talked about that, actually. Because, it's—these interviews have been so terrific, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, great, great. They've been really inspiring for me as well, really interesting.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So if we had another project of that nature, you're certainly somebody we would love to approach about that.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'd be very interested in talking with you about that, absolutely.

So when you look back on your career, do you see it in terms of distinct episodes, or do you see a few through lines that connect everything?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's—

MIJA RIEDEL: Or both?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: It's been much more of a continuum, in a sense. I feel like one project is going to float into another; that even the ones that haven't gotten built for whatever reason, still are a part of the creative activity and research that might find a manifestation at a later time in another project. So yes, the work is always very site-specific, but there are ideas that can find a happy home in more than one location.

So it's kind of like random logic, in a way. I mean, I kind of feel like—I feel like I'm kind of moving around in some kind of three-dimensional, four-dimensional matrix, where everything's kind of informing everything.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: And so I don't feel a sense of, sort of, peaks and valleys the way some other people might. Because, there's always—if something isn't happening over here, then I'm switching my attention to something that *is* happening over here, and something else is influencing both those things. And so it's—yes, it's more choreographic, Sisyphusian.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] That's good news.

What about the work, in particular, matters to you?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: That people find it useful in their lives; that it makes some difference to their everyday experience; that, hopefully, it enlightens.

So we were mentioning something about if there's a spiritual quality, or—and I mean, those words are always fairly tricky. But, yes, I think it's fair—I can say it about myself that I feel some powerful, sort of, intangible quality to my experience, and what I try to do as an artist with that experience.

And then, coming back around to the beginning, probably came a lot from my early days, spending time with American Indians, and other things that we talked about. But, yes, I think things that provoke an emotional, non-intellectual, I would say even, kind of experience for people, and that they can—they find it beneficial, that makes me very happy.

And usually if I like it a lot, it seems to carry over, for the most part. So much of it is process, though. You know, it's—we were talking about how to be inclusive. And as a project that's sort of coming together, and all of the discussions we've had about, you know, community input, and all of that. It's, you know, it's important, in terms of the success of a project—that kind of ownership issue that we were talking about.

And I don't mind feeling that kind of co-authorship, even though I usually get all the credit. [Laughs.] But, you

know, it's important for me to know that it wasn't—that I didn't do it by myself, that it was, it was a collaborative venture on many levels. And I like that. I like that very much.

MIJA RIEDEL: Because it reflects a larger vision?

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Yes, and it's a condition that allows me to grow and stretch as well in ways that I don't think I would do if I were sort of a more hermetic artist, working in my studio all the time and just sort of listening to my own mind yell at me—[laughs]—or whatever.

MIJA RIEDEL: It makes me think of that very early description you gave of working in the sandbox, and just that back-and-forth that happens so easily in that medium. But that seems like an interesting example of that kind of process, that evolving form.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: So as I said earlier, I'm just very happy that I seem to have been at the right place at the right time, to be part of this—that sensibility, whether it's CCM at Mills, or Exploratorium, or even Headlands, as well as the projects. It's that kind of—I feel better about what I do, because I feel like it does have that sort of community component to it, and both in terms of the input and the outcome.

MIJA RIEDEL: It's very much the evolution of the times too, it seems, for the earth artists, and light and space—all of that public art, environmental art. You're very much with that wave.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Lucky me.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] Thank you very much.

DOUGLAS HOLLIS: You're welcome.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]